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Tucson Has Every Right To Better Security Setup

Many Tucsonians still may not quite comprehend the extent of danger involved Monday night when this community lucked out in a near-miss with disaster. Whatever Air Force spokesmen and civilian authorities may say now about the missile fuel tank truck that overturned, luck was a major factor in this community's escape from tragic consequences. We cannot depend upon luck again.

The manner in which the situation was handled by the responsible agencies—Air Force, missile contractor, police and Civilian Defense—proved one thing. Internal security is not what it should be to guard this community and its people against possible accidents related to our national security installations.

The tank truck which overturned Monday afternoon at the intersection of Casa Grande Highway and Oracle Road was no ordinary vehicle involved in an accident. It contained 3,500 gallons of liquid fuel for Titan missiles. The liquid made that tank truck a chemical bomb. It represented a threat to human life in an area of a square mile or more.

If the accident itself, or the righting and removal of the tanker in the early hours of Tuesday morning, had allowed the missile fuel to escape, the liquid would have turned instantaneously into a lethal gas with deadly and widespread consequences. A scientific explanation of all this, in clear terms understandable to the layman, is contained in the statement by physicist Dr. J. E. McDonald carried in adjoining columns.

But such factual information was not made available—in many responsible quarters was not even known—during the period of emergency. The fact even that such trucks with such lethal contents have been, and will be, traveling around Tucson has come out belatedly.

It is inconceivable that Air Force authorities, or city and county authorities, should allow another single such truck, or any similar carrier, to travel local streets and roads without an escort and other extreme protective measures.

It is also inconceivable that a community supposedly geared for extreme national emergency operations would discover such a confusion in commands and communications when one specific emergency situation developed.

People in the danger area were told to leave their homes Monday evening. Some, it seems, were "ordered" to evacuate, others simply "advised" to clear out. Then late Monday they were given official permission to return and sleep until Tuesday morning.

During those night hours, the Air Force suddenly decided to gamble upon removal of the tank truck. Granted the odds were a thousand to one or a million to one for success, it was a gamble and the lives of hundreds of persons asleep in their beds were at stake. The gamble paid off—that time. Who is to have the authority to prevent another gamble—which might be lost—another time?

Civilian authorities may have done their best under circumstances beyond their control and lacking information which either was unavailable or withheld. But their best this time was not good enough for another time. Air Force officers may have felt they had but one job to do, and their efforts with the "chemical bomb" were successful at any rate. But they cannot fail to take the whole community of people into account another time.

This calls for greater, more reliable coordination of all agencies. It calls for more specific, reliable communications with the public by every means. Tucsonians accept the fact that 18 huge Titan missiles are being implanted in silos all around them. Those are weapons essential for national security. Tucsonians have been assured there is no accidental danger for the local population inherent in these weapons systems. This they want to believe, and are willing to believe. But the assurances must be demonstrably believable. Monday night's demonstration was not reassuring.

The near-miss with disaster proved that Tucson must have, and has every right to demand, a much better internal security setup than Monday night's experience proved it to be.

TANK TRUCK ACCIDENT

What The Lethal Threat Meant

By DR. J. E. McDONALD
Dr. McDonald is the senior physicist at the Institute of Atmospheric Physics, connected with the University of Arizona. Dr. McDonald's statement explains the scientific implications of the near disaster from Monday's missile fuel tank truck accident here. It was submitted as a "Letter to the Editor" but is published separately because of its special significance.

Readers must have been astounded that persistent inquiry by the Citizen was unable to turn up any Air Force officials fully aware of the physical and chemical properties of nitrogen tetroxide when Monday's accident with the missile fuel tank truck occurred.

To a scientist this news would seem harder to believe were it not that many are well aware of numerous instances of military ignorance of technical implications of the awesome weapons materials now in their hands. Indeed, the Titan sitting policy will serve as a familiar instance for many Tucsonians.

TO SEND TANK TRUCKS of deadly nitrogen tetroxide through populous areas without having local Air Force officials fully informed of its peculiar properties is irresponsible action from a group that spends so much effort creating the image of great expertise and concern for the citizen.

I endorse Professor Gustavson's suggestion that much more attention be given to safety factors. I would add that Air Force and Martin Company officials are remiss for not having done their homework on the elementary chemistry and physics involved. I found that it took only 45 minutes of library research on the evening of the crisis to run down relevant chemical and physical properties of the Titan oxidizer and to get authoritative descriptions of the dire physiological effects of inhalation of trace quantities of nitrogen tetroxide and its dissociation product,

nitrogen dioxide. And from these it was easy to make meteorological calculations of possible effects of escape of the tank-truck. Why, then, should the Air Force, both locally and at California missile headquarters, have been unable to immediately give the Citizen full details on properties and exposure hazards of this material they were transporting?

FURTHER GRAVE SHORTCOMINGS are involved. These are indicated by the following: By about 9 p.m. Monday the official word to danger-area residents was to return home, to get some sleep, and be out of the area again by the time removal operations were to begin next morning at 7:30 a.m. This plan was very sensible since dawn removal offered both cool temperatures—to hold down oxidizer volatility—and imminent onset of morning turbulent conditions to disperse the poisonous gas in event of any accident. But most crucial of all, the residents would have been out of the area then.

However, after officials had so announced their plans, and after all residents had turned in, the situation was then made to begin the hectic removal operation at 2 a.m. Had any break occurred in the tank or fittings at 2 a.m., minimum winds and inversion-trapping would have caught all those people in their beds, and evacuation would have been impossible before many had been lethally exposed.

THE LETHAL LIMIT of nitrogen dioxide concentration in air is about 200 parts per million. It took only a 10-minute calculation to show that 3,500 gallons of tetroxide would be capable of contaminating to lethal level about one billion cubic feet of air. This means that an inversion-capped layer 25 feet deep, 3,000 feet wide, and over two miles long could have been contaminated to the lethal 200 parts per million level from that one tank-truck. And anyone dozing would have been caught sound asleep, having been assured of no danger before next morning.

JOHN CHAMBERLAIN

Denaturing Our Culture

We make fun of the Soviets when they remove the name of Trotsky from the history of the Russian Revolution and change the name of Stalingrad to something else. But in our own way we seem to be doing our best to denature our record of our own past.



THERE IS the report coming from Philadelphia, for example, that the local Board of Education has removed Mark Twain's "Huckleberry Finn" from the public school curriculum and replaced it with an "adapted" version which has simplified the Southwestern dialect and deleted supposedly derogatory references to Negroes.

The effect of this, of course, is to deprive all the students, the Negroes included, of any understanding of the culture that forced the Civil War in the first place and brought about Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation in the second. If our school boards persist in this sort of thing, we shall end up as a nation of prime ignoramus.

MARK TWAIN WAS A MAN of his times, a Missourian who spoke (and wrote) the border state dialect and created characters that were drawn from the life around him. They used offensive expressions on occasion. But the story of "Huckleberry Finn" is a story in which the native humanity of a boy triumphs over the narrow perspectives of his time and place.

No one has ever dealt with the subject of race relationships as sympathetically as Mark Twain did in "Huckleberry Finn." The book needs no rewriting to convey its basic tenderness. And what could be less "segregated" than putting a boy (Huck Finn) on a raft with a Negro (Nigger Jim), as everybody called him in the culture into which Huck had been born) and letting them philosophize together in a warm way that had Mark Twain's obvious approval?

THE RAGE TO DENATURE products that were born of a given time and place is insidious because, once started, there

is no end to it. The same logic that is employed to compel a rewriting of "Huckleberry Finn" must make it impossible for teachers to assign almost anything of note that has been written in the past half century. Sinclair Lewis would be out because he has insulted business men and held evangelist clergymen up to ridicule. Hemingway's language would have to be perfumed and prettified.

PUSHING BACKWARD from the modern scene, Finley Peter Dunne's Mr. Dooley would have to have his language reprocessed to get the offensive Irish-American brogue out of it. Indeed, the light literature of the melting pot era in American life would practically disappear en masse. Shakespeare's "Merchant of Venice" would somehow have to be reworded without the character of Shylock. The Bible itself would have to be purged of certain lusty passages.

Then there are the history books themselves. There are unfortunate references to "Red Coats" and "lobsterbacks" in our accounts of the American Revolution. Surely these references must offend our British cousins. Southerners spoke slightly of Abolitionists in the 1850s, and the Abolitionists replied in kind. Surely any record of disparaging remarks on both sides must be eliminated in order to preserve sectional harmony today.

THIS COLUMNIST IS NOT against reasonable restraints; he doesn't think the exploits of Lady Chatterley should be made a subject for classroom discussion. But when a teacher is fired (as recently happened in Georgia) for assigning John Hersey's harmless and sentimental "A Bell For Adano" to 13-year-olds because it contains a few cuss words that boys and girls learn when they are in the first or second grade, the ridiculousness of the situation is manifest. The world would be a much healthier place today if people would (a) develop thicker skins and (b) if they would stop trying to wrap their children in cotton batting. This does not mean that both parents and school teachers should cease to stress the moral virtues. It does mean that they should try to recover the sort of preservative sense of humor that was commonplace 20 or 30 years ago.

ART BUCHWALD

My Old Kentucky Home

LOUISVILLE, Ky.—Talk about news management, there are probably no newspapermen in the world managed like the ones who cover the Kentucky Derby.

THE FIRST inkling of what was in store for me was when two men from Old Fitzgerald

I mixed a mint julep and waited for something else to happen. It didn't take long. Two distillery men picked me up and took me to Churchill Downs where the Derby is run. As I walked in the gate I was given a mint julep and over the loudspeaker I heard the strains of "My Old, My Old, My