

Mace

anon.

1968

It's no secret that police departments around the country are arming themselves to the hilt in anticipation. They intend to get ready for anything and everything.

A couple of national magazines have even run features on all the new weapons now available.

One of the newest of these is mace, an extremely dangerous combination of chemicals which comes in pocket sized aerosol cans. A weapon specially designed for crowd control.

Basically the product is composed of 95% methyl chloroform, 4% teargas and 1% kerosene, though no one but the manufacturer knows for certain all the chemicals. However the main ingredient, methyl chloroform, has been described in a U.S. Department of Health Education and Welfare publication as a poison which causes: "headache, lassitude, facial flushing, loss of coordination, confusion, vertigo, anesthesia, severe hypotension and coma. It is capable of causing death from respiratory arrest or peripheral vascular collapse." HEW also lists liver and heart injury as other possible results.

In addition to the department's report on emthyl chloroform, Dr. Lawrence Rose, a San Francisco ophthalmologist, has been studying the effects of mace. He has carried out numerous experiments on both rabbits and humans.

In exposing rabbits to the chemical Dr. Rose found that it caused "corneal scars and permanent loss of hair." In skin tests on himself he discovered a direct dose can cause second degree burns.

When the eye specialist learned the San Francisco police department was considering purchasing mace, he urged them not to and provided medical evidence showing the damage it could do.

Needless to say, the San Francisco cops did not heed the advice, and since then they have had a number of opportunities to use the spray. One of the victims that Dr. Rose has examined did in fact incur corneal burns and scars. The victim, a Presbyterian minister, said that he was hit in the face "from about 12 to 18 inches...liquid hit me, not just a spray." They have since discontinued using the spray.

Mace is most dangerous at close range. When fired, it is in a liquid form, at about six feet it vaporizes into a gas. As a gas it causes mental confusion and loss of coordination. When Dr. Roses' patients complained of these symptoms he felt they were simply seized by fear and panic. But he is now convinced that this is not the case, "too many clear thinking people have reported this sensation."

It is this fact that has brought a protest from civil liberties groups. They argue that the rights of an individual are violated by a gas which can render him incapable of judging his actions. Victims questioned by police in such a state can neither see nor answer questions coherently.

Despite medical reasons and the possibility of violating an individual's civil liberties, cops are buying mace in large quantities. A number of companies which manufacture it, or similar products, have shown fantastic sales records. A spokesman for Smith and Wesson, manufacturer of Mace and hand guns, said, "We're selling all we can make."

In Michigan strong opposition to the use of such sprays has come from the Michigan Civil Rights Commission. They have been instrumental in getting the University of Michigan to study the chemical sprays. Consequently until

further evidence is given one way or the other, the Michigan State Police and the Ann Arbor police have suspended the use of Mace.

Unfortunately the Detroit cops have not followed the example set by the State and Ann Arbor police. William T. Morris, head of the Detroit Police Academy and in charge of buying weapons for the department said, "the department has some mace on hand, but it has not been used and there are no plans to use it."

There is at least one Detroiter who would disagree with that statement. A Denby student who walked out during the April 26 Student Strike reported he was maced, although police deny it.

Morris adds, "it is more humane than breaking heads or ribs during crowd control or riots." The problem is cops are not like that. We've seen them in action in the United States, Germany, and France. Television has exposed their violence to millions.

Having seen the vengeance with which they carry out their work on demonstrators, it is hard to believe them capable of doing anything in a humane manner. It seems much more logical that they use mace to disable a crowd only to facilitate the breaking of heads and ribs.

fifth Estate

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Fifth Estate #55, June 4-18, 1968

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