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August 5, 1941

Dr. R. A. Kehoe

Dear Doctor Kehoe:

I am attaching several memoranda on the subject of using gasoline tank trucks for water service by the U.S. Army.

The first of these is a report by our safety engineer, Mr. Greenup, which gives more details than we previously had. The method of testing for lead was not explained. We had a meeting in Washington last week, at which the subject was mentioned and Colonel David McCoach asked for a letter, so he could investigate through proper army sources. Mr. Walter Samans, who is Chairman of our Engineers Advisory Committee, wrote the other attached letter to Colonel McCoach.

If there is anything further you think I should do about this, I should appreciate your letting me know.

Very truly yours,

Signed: O.B. Lewis

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Enclosures

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Albany, California

July 26, 1941

Mr. S. M. Wagner

Use of Leaded Gasoline Transportation Tanks for
Water Service U.S. Army, 9th Corps Area, San
Francisco, California.

Dear San:

In accordance with your request of June 16, relative to a complete report on the above subject, I have finally been able to obtain the information desired, and am giving you as complete information on the subject as was possible to obtain.

Orders were received by Major W. T. Wilcey from the Quartermaster, 9th Corps Area Headquarters, about May 19th to prepare four 375 gallon tanks, mounted on two trucks, which had been used in leaded gasoline service, for conversion to water service. Major Wilcey passed these orders along to Captain M. F. Weill, formerly with our Corporation before being called to active duty, who is in charge of the Motor Maintenance Shops for the 9th Corps Area, so that these could be executed. On learning that the tanks had been in leaded gasoline service, Captain Weill brought up the question as to whether they could be cleaned well enough to permit use in water service without any danger from lead compounds, and advised Major Wilcey that he would have one of our safety engineers discuss this problem with him if it was so desired; consequently Captain Weill called me and I discussed with Major Wilcey the cleaning of these tanks and advised against converting them into water service, pointing out that it was impossible to do a very good job of cleaning them since the manhole size would not permit anyone to enter them for a thorough cleaning by ordinary methods so as to make them entirely lead free.

Major Wilcey advised the 9th Corps Area Quartermaster of our thoughts on converting the tanks to water use and recommended that no attempt be made to affect this conversion. Colonel Thompson, assistant quartermaster, informed Major Wilcey that the tanks were urgently needed and to clean them as thoroughly as possible, stating that the final decision on them as to being lead free would be left to the Medical Corps.

The four tanks were steamed for about two days and then flushed three times with water, some sort of a compound being used with the water, and the last flush water being permitted to stand in the tanks. Samples were taken of the flush water and analyzed for lead content. These samples showed a slight lead content, the result not being known by Captain Weill as to exact figures.

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Due to the water samples showing a slight lead content, the request was made to repeat the water flushing. So, the tanks were again flushed three times and samples taken of the last flush water. The analysis of these samples showed no lead, and the Medical Corps advised that the tanks were satisfactory for water service.

These tank trucks were sent to Camp Hunter Liggett, used once in water service and then converted back to gasoline service. Their ultimate fate at this time is not known; they may be in either water or gasoline service. Captain Weill personally feels that a lot of converting gasoline transportation tanks into water service may be occurring all over the country.

I trust that this gives you the complete story of this incident.

Yours very truly,

Signed: H. B. Greenup

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August 4, 1941

Col. David McCoach
New War Department Building
Washington, D. C.

Dear Sir:

In accordance with your request at the meeting held on July 30, the following is a brief memorandum concerning the use of gasoline truck tanks for drinking water during maneuvers:

A report came to our Committee through the Ethyl Gasoline Corporation, whose representative witnessed the case reported. I am not sure that this occurred at the Presidio near San Francisco but that is the way it was stated.

The trucks in question had been used for ethylized gasoline, and it is probable that it was motor gasoline, but whether this was so or aviation gasoline would not greatly affect the result.

It is stated that the tanks were thoroughly washed out, and it is possible that suitable chemicals and other cleansing solutions were used so that in normal times there is little chance of contamination sufficient to cause serious illness. However, there is a possibility of sufficient sludge accumulation in corners and passageways that even the last washing out solution or water will pick up this sludge and result in a concentration in some of the drinking water.

It may be that all our fears are groundless and that you have taken the matter up with medical experts who are available to the Surgeon General. We, of course, wish to be sure that under war time conditions, this practice will not be followed unless all the necessary precautions are taken.

The medical expert of the Ethyl Corporation is Dr. Robert A. Kehoe, whose address is Kettering Laboratory, University of Cincinnati, Cincinnati, Ohio. He is understood to be in conference with the Surgeon General of the U.S. Army from time to time on similar problems, and if he approves of the practice above described, it must of course be acceptable and safe.

Yours very truly,

Signed: Walter Samans, Chairman
Engineers Advisory Committee

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