The American Bicentennial

SWINE FLU AND LEGIONNAIRE’S DISEASE

(From The Coming Plague)
“There is evidence there will be a major flu epidemic this coming fall. The indication is that we will see a return of the 1918 flu virus that is the most virulent form of the flu. In 1918 a half million people died. The projections are that this virus will kill one million Americans in 1976.”

- F. David Mathews, Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare
The Beginning

• January 1976 – Private David Lewis showed hallmark symptoms of the flu, and died upon reaching the base hospital at Fort Dix

• By the end of January, 300 recruits had been hospitalized
Cause for Concern?

• Goldfield confirmed that Lewis had the H1N1 strain of influenza
  – Several dozen other recruits tested positive for the same strain
  – Most of the illnesses were caused by the relatively mild A/Victoria/75 strain (H3N2)

• Kilbourne: neuraminidase protein density, antigen shift cycles

• Background rate of Swine Flu at farms
Vaccination

• March 13 – Sencer (CDC) requested $134 million for the development and distribution of vaccines
  – Memo stated conjectures as fact

• April 15 – Ford signed PL 94-266
  – Heightened sense of threat in televised ceremony
Opposition

• Technology would limit deaths caused by secondary infections
• Skepticism about the assumption that the Fort Dix strain was the same as the 1918-1919 strain
• Vaccine trials were not going well
Boo Ford…

• August 2 – Legionnaire’s Disease
• August 12 – Ford signed the National Swine Flu Immunization Program (PL 94-380)
  – US government would be responsible for claims associated with Swine Flu vaccination
Complications

• By mid-October, 40 million had already been vaccinated
• October 11 – two elderly people died shortly after getting their vaccinations
• Nov/Dec – Guillian-Barre syndrome
  – 1993: $93 million paid out in settlements
• Sencer became the first federal official fired on national TV
Does he look happy to you?