



DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY

US ARMY MEDICAL RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT COMMAND
FORT DETRICK, FREDERICK, MD. 21701-5012

January 17, 1989

REPLY TO
ATTENTION OF:

Office of the Commander

Mr. William Wheatley
Executive Producer
NBC Nightly News
30 Rockefeller Plaza
New York, NY 10020

Dear Mr. Wheatley:

The NBC News "Spotlight" investigative report broadcast on January 3, 1989, on the Army's "brave pill," contained a number of errors in fact.

The Army has not developed and is not trying to develop a "brave pill." In response to inquiries received several years ago from within the Defense Department, the Division of Neuropsychiatry at the Walter Reed Army Institute of Research (WRAIR) assessed the potential value of behaviorally active medications in combat. Beginning in 1984, a group of scientists assigned to the division reviewed the available medical literature in order to advise the Army on the possibility of using anxiety-reducing drugs to help soldiers withstand the severe stress experienced in combat.

The group concluded that use of such drugs for that purpose was not advisable because of a lack of sufficient information on the subject, because of the potential for abuse of such drugs by soldiers, and because of competing priorities and limited funds available for research.

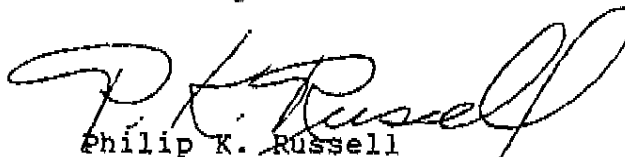
Neither buspirone nor the unnamed, fear-inducing drug referenced in your broadcast were the subject of experiments at WRAIR or at any other Army laboratory. In the process of arriving at their recommendation against the "brave pill," Army researchers reviewed scientific publications documenting research on buspirone conducted at the National Institutes of Mental Health.

At the same time they considered the "brave pill," the scientists also considered pharmaceuticals that might make soldiers smarter and stronger during combat. Those concepts were also determined to be unwise, and were not recommended.

This information was provided to your producer, Mr. Robert Windrem, during preparation of the "Spotlight" report. Mr. Windrem was also invited to WRAIR to interview Division of Neuropsychiatry staff members, and he declined.

In my view, the misinformation presented did a great disservice to the Army Medical Department and the American public. By arriving at and broadcasting unsupported and damaging conclusions about Army research, I think NBC has incurred an obligation to reassure the public regarding the Army's responsible performance in this area by broadcasting a retraction and correction of the erroneous elements of the "Spotlight" report.

Sincerely,



Philip K. Russell
Major General, Medical Corps
Commanding