

Contaminated Nation Inhuman Radiation Experiments

by JOHN LaFORGE

This year marks the 20th anniversary of the declassification of top secret studies, done over a period of 60 years, in which the US conducted 2,000 radiation experiments on as many as 20,000 vulnerable US citizens.[i]

Victims included civilians, prison inmates, federal workers, hospital patients, pregnant women, infants, developmentally disabled children and military personnel — most of them powerless, poor, sick, elderly or terminally ill. Eileen Welsome's 1999 exposé *The Plutonium Files: America's Secret Medical Experiments in the Cold War* details "the unspeakable scientific trials that reduced thousands of men, women, and even children to nameless specimens." [ii]

The program employed industry and academic scientists who used their hapless patients or wards to see the immediate and short-term effects of radioactive contamination — with everything from plutonium to radioactive arsenic. [iii] The human subjects were mostly poisoned without their knowledge or consent.

An April 17, 1947 memo by Col. O.G. Haywood of the Army Corps of Engineers explained why the studies were classified. "It is desired that no document be released which refers to experiments with humans and might have adverse effect on public opinion or result in legal suits." [iv]

In one Vanderbilt U. study, 829 pregnant women were unknowingly fed radioactive iron. In another, 188 children were given radioactive iron-laced lemonade. From 1963 to 1971, 67 inmates in Oregon and 64 prisoners in Washington had their testicles targeted with X-rays to see what doses made them sterile. [v]

At the Fernald State School, mentally retarded boys were fed radioactive iron and calcium but consent forms sent to parents didn't mention radiation. Elsewhere psychiatric patients and infants were injected with radioactive iodine. [vi]

In a rare public condemnation, Clinton Administration Energy Sec. Hazel O'Leary confessed being aghast at the conduct of the scientists. She told *Newsweek* in 1994: "I said, 'Who were these people and why did this happen?' The only thing I could think of was Nazi Germany." [vii] None of the victims were provided follow-on medical care.

Scientists knew from the beginning of the 20th century that radiation can cause genetic and cell damage, cell death, radiation sickness and even death. A Presidential Advisory Committee on Human Radiation Experiments was established in 1993 to investigate charges of unethical or criminal action by the experimenters. Its findings were published by Oxford U. Press in 1996 as *The Human Radiation Experiments*.

The abuse of X-radiation "therapy" was also conducted throughout the '40s and '50s. Everything from ringworm to tonsillitis was "treated" with X-radiation because the long-term risks were unknown or considered tolerable.

Children were routinely exposed to alarmingly high doses of radiation from devices like "fluoroscopes" to measure foot size in shoe stores. [viii]

Nasal radium capsules inserted in nostrils, used to attack hearing loss, are now thought to be the cause of cancers, thyroid and dental problems, immune dysfunction and more. [ix]

Experiments Spread Cancer Risks Far and Wide

In large scale experiments as late as 1985, the Energy Department deliberately produced reactor meltdowns which spewed radiation across Idaho and beyond. [x] The Air Force conducted at least eight deliberate meltdowns in the Utah desert, dispersing 14 times the radiation released by the partial meltdown of Three Mile Island in Pennsylvania in 1979. [xi]

The military even dumped radiation from planes and spread it across wide areas around and downwind of Oak Ridge, Tenn., Los Alamos, New Mexico, and Dugway, Utah. This "systematic radiation warfare program," conducted between 1944 and 1961, was kept secret for 40 years. [xii]

"Radiation bombs" thrown from USAF planes intentionally spread radiation "unknown distances" endangering the young and old alike. One such experiment doused Utah with 60 times more radiation than escaped the Three Mile Island accident, according to Sen. John Glen, D-Ohio who released a report on the program 20 years ago. [xiii]

The Pentagon's 235 above-ground nuclear bomb tests, and the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, are not officially listed as radiation experiments. Yet between 250,000 and 500,000 U.S. military personnel were contaminated during their compulsory participation in the bomb tests and the post-war occupation of Japan. [xiv]

Documents uncovered by the Advisory Committee show that the military knew there were serious radioactive fallout risks from its Nevada Test Site bomb blasts. The generals decided not to use a safer site in Florida, where fallout would have blown out to sea. "The officials determined it was probably not safe, but went ahead anyway," said Pat Fitzgerald a scientist on the committee staff. [xv]

Dr. Gioacchino Failla, a Columbia University scientist who worked for the AEC, said at the time, "We should take some risk... we are faced with a war in which atomic weapons will undoubtedly be used, and we have to have some information about these things." [xvi]

With the National Cancer Institute's 1997 finding that all 160,000 million US citizens (in the country at the time of the bomb tests) were contaminated with fallout, it's clear we did face war with atomic weapons — our own.

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Notes

- [i] "Secret Radioactive Experiments to Bring Compensation by U.S.," New York Times, Nov. 20, 1996
- [ii] Eileen Welsome, *The Plutonium Files*, Delta Books, 1999, dust jacket
- [iii] Welsome, *The Plutonium Files*, p. 9
- [iv] "Radiation tests kept deliberately secret," Washington Post, Dec. 16, 1994; Geoffrey Sea, "The Radiation Story No One Would Touch," *Project Censored*, March/April 1994
- [v] Subcommittee on Energy Conservation and Power, "American Nuclear Guinea Pigs: Three Decades of Radiation Experiments on U.S. Citizens," US Gov't Printing Office, Nov. 1986, p. 2; St. Paul Pioneer, via New York Times, Jan. 4, 1994
- [vi] "48 more human radiation experiments revealed, Minneapolis StarTribune, June 28, 1994; Milwaukee Journal, June 29, 1994
- [vii] Newsweek, Dec. 27, 1994
- [viii] Joseph Mangano, *Mad Science: The Nuclear Power Experiment*, OR Books, 2012, p. 36
- [ix] "Nasal radium treatments of '50s linked to cancer," Milwaukee Journal, Aug. 31, 1994
- [x] "Reactor core is melted in experiment," Washington Post service, Milwaukee Journal, July 10, 1985
- [xi] "Tests spewed radiation, paper reports," AP, Milwaukee Journal, Oct. 11, 1994
- [xii] "Secret U.S. experiments in '40s and '50s included dropping radiation from sky," St. Paul Pioneer, Dec. 16, 1993
- [xiii] Katherine Rizzo, Associated Press, "A bombshell: U.S. spread radiation," Duluth News Tribune, Dec. 16, 1993
- [xiv] Catherine Caufield, *Multiple Exposures*, p. 107; Greg Gordon in "Wellstone: Compensate atomic vets," Minneapolis Star Tribune, March 17, 1995; Associated Press, "Panel Told of Exposure to Test Danger," Tulsa World, Jan. 24, 1995
- [xv] Philip Hiltz, "Fallout Risk Near Atom Tests Was Known, Documents Show," New York Times, March 15, 1995, p. A13; and Pat Ortmeier, "Let Them Drink Milk," Institute for Environmental & Energy Research, November 1997, pp. 3 & 11
- [xvi] Philip J. Hiltz, "Fallout Risk Near Atom Tests Was Known, Documents Show," New York Times, March 15, 1995