Opinion by Manlio Dinucci

A video was released on November 23 by Sandia National Laboratories that shows a US F-35A fighter- 
 flyers at supersonic speed 3,000 meters above 
 leval, launching a B61-12 nuclear bomb. The ball 
 bomb did not fall vertically but glided until its tail 
 section rocket ignation gave a rotational motion and 
 he B6-12 (satellite-guided) headed for a target and hit 57 seconds after launch. The test was carried 
 ugust 25 at the Tonopah shooting range in 
 ada desert.

An official US air force statement confirmed its “full 
success.” It was a nuclear attack simulation, proof 
 that the jet fighter works at supersonic speed and 
 in stealthy attitude with mock B61 bombs in its inter-
 nal bomb bay with the capability to evade enemy 
defenses, the air force said.

The B6-12 has been engineered to penetrate and ex-
 plode deep underground to destroy command bunkers 
 and other buried structures. The Pentagon foresees 
 construction of about 500 B61-12s, at an estimated 
 cost of 10 to 13 billion dollars (each 825-pound bomb 
costing double the value of its weight in gold).

It has been officially announced that production 
of the new bomb will begin in fiscal year 2022, 
 commencing Oct. 1, 2021. The exact number of B61- 
 12 bombs that the US will station in Italy, Germany, 
 Belgium, Turkey, and others is yet to be determined to 
 replace the current B61 is secret. Satellite photos show 
 that renovations have been carried out at Italy’s Aviano 
 and Ghedi air force bases in preparation for the arrival 
 of the new nuclear bombs, and the US air force F-35A.

The Italian F-35s under US command will be 
 armed with these bombs. The kind of situation Italy will be 
 involved in—once the F-35A aircrafts ready for a 
 nuclear attack with B61-12 bombs are deployed on the 
 Italian territory—is easily predictable.

Italy will aggravate its violation of the Nuclear 
 Non-Proliferation Treaty of 1968, in which it pledged “not to receive nuclear weapons from 
 anyone or control over these weapons, directly or 
 indirectly.”

Italy’s “nuclear sharing” openly flaunts the new 
treaty ban, which states: “Any State Party that has 
nuclear weapons on its territory, owned or con-
 trolled by another State, must ensure the rapid 
 removal of such weapons.” To throw a stone into 
 the stagnant water of a Parliament that keeps silent 
 about nuclear weapons, the current Prime 
 Minister Sara Cunial presented a “question for written 
 answer” to the Prime Minister and the Military and 
 Foreign Affairs Ministries. TH MP asks: “Does the government intend to respect 
 the Treaty on Non-proliferation of Nuclear Weapons 
 ratified by Italy in 1975? Does the government in-
 tend to sign and ratify the UN Treaty on the Prohi-
 bition of Nuclear Weapons that enters into force in 
 2021? Does the government intend to ensure, on 
 the basis of what these treaties establish, that the 
 United States immediately remove any nuclear weapons 
 from Italian territory and give up installing the new 
 B61-12 bombs and other nuclear weapons?”

While Italy is waiting to read the US government’s 
 latest test results, four hundred bombs that are under 
 development will be carried out in the US, and the 
bombs will arrive and be set under our feet.

—Manlio Dinucci is a Research Associate of 
 the Centre for Research on Globalization and wrote 
 this article for Italy’s II Manifesto.

Air Force Veterans of Plutonium Dust 
 Disaster Win Class Action Standing

By John LaForce

Air force veterans exposed to plutonium after a first-ever US nuclear weapons disaster in Spain have won 
 extremely rare recognition as a class in a law 
 suit against the Department of Veterans Affairs.

On Jan. 17, 1966, an air force B-52 bomber exploded 
 over the village of Palomares, Spain during a 
 routine airborne refueling. Seven airmen were 
 killed and the bomber’s four hydrogen bombs were 
 thrown to the earth. Conventional explosives (not the nu-
 clear warheads) in two of the bombs detonated in 
 massive explosions, one right in the village, gouging 
 massive, plutonium-covered craters and spewing as 
 much as 22 pounds of pulverized plutonium dust 
 over houses, streets and farm fields.

On June 19, 2016, the New York Times published a 
 4,500-word investigative report about the lawsuit 
 filed in the Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims 
 by five master sergeants (USAF). The plaintiffs, who 
 were put to surveying 400 acres and washing the 
 inside and outside of village buildings. Over a period 
of 80 days they filled 4,810 barrels with plutoni-
 um-contaminated soil and filled the drums aboard a 
 ship bound for disposal stateside.

Two years after Skaar retired in 1981, he came down 
 with a blood disorder called leukopenia. He’s been 
 fighting ever since to have the illness recognized as 
 service-related. In a phone interview, Skaar told 
 Nukewatch that doctors of the veterans contaminated 
 during the clean-up are also sick. If their claims can 
 be established in court, they would be eligible for 
 free medical care and a disability pension. Sometimes 
 “clean-up” amounted to hosing the plutonium dust. 
 It was hosed off houses, streets and even a school, 
 leaving the toxic runoff to contaminate downstream 
 surface waters. When clusters of collected soil had 
 excessive radiation readings, troops blew the dust 
 off using air compressors. When testing the troops’ 
 clothing, radiation meters regularly went off-scale.

After the 2016 exposé in the Times, Michael Wish-
 nie, a Professor of Law at Yale Law School who 
 runs the Veterans Legal Services Clinic, called 
 Skaar and offered the aide of the clinic in the 
 case. It’s been a David and Goliath battle from the 
 beginning. Skaar told the Times, “First they told 
 me there were no records, which I knew was a lie 
 because I helped make them.” The air force seems 
 determined to keep denying responsibility until 
 the Palomares veterans die. In January, a Yale law 
 student, Meghan Brooks, a former Yale clinic member, told 
 the Times, “The bunk science the air force was using 
 was not just harming Mr. Skaar, but all the other 
 Palomares veterans. Mr. Skaar really wanted to fight 
 on behalf of others,” she said.

After Sgt. Skaar’s three decades of relentlessly filing 
 Freedom of Information Act requests and repeatedly 
 appealing FOIA denials, he and the Yale team finally 
 broke through. In a Dec. 6, 2019 decision the ap-
 peals court granted access to key records—but not 
 all the Palomares veterans. The court also found 
 that Skaar could serve as “class representative” for 
 as-yet-unnamed class members.

Class action status for Skaar and the other appel-
 lants “represents a major step forward for veterans 
 with long-term health issues linked to toxic expo-
 sure in the service,” the Times reported on Feb. 11, 
 2020. Then on Sept. 2, 2020, the court heard oral 
 arguments in the case and accepted new evidence 
 including a declaration by Dr. Murry Watnick, a 
 former Strategic Air Command Medical Officer. 
 (Full disclosure: Dr. Watnick is a longtime Nuke-
 watch supporter and a co-author of this action.) Part 
 of Watnick’s affidavit notes that, “The amount of 
 plutonium-239 released was estimated to be ap-
 proximately 10 pounds. The hazard to persons 
 exposed to plutonium-239 is extremely toxic. The 
 estimated release was three billion micrograms.”

Plutonium’s chief danger is from inhalation, because 
 its deadly alpha particles lodge in the lungs “bombarding 
 the adjacent cells with highly toxic ionizing radiation,” 
 Watnick wrote. Troops were issued “plu-
 tonium dust six to eight hours daily in an environment 
 highly conducive to inhalation of alpha particles.”

The class action is focused on the VA’s denial of 
 Mr. Skaar’s claim of service-related illness, and the 
 military’s “arbitrary and capricious” use of inadequate 
 radiation monitoring data which relied on shoddy methods of 
 recording and maintaining urine samples taken from 
 clean-up crew members. The veterans also challenge 
 the VA’s omission of Palomares cleanup operations 
 from its list of radiation risk activities. The appeal is 
 currently ongoing.

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