

compensation under military or safety stipulations.

An Australian royal commission first discovered the use of depleted uranium in atomic tests at Maralinga some 14 years ago, but the government failed to take any action at the time.

(source: AAP, 28 May 2001)

## **Britain used DU in 1950s 'nuclear guinea pig' tests**

SUNDAY HERALD [Glasgow]

By Rob Edwards Environment Editor

**Tonnes of depleted uranium (DU), the toxic radioactive metal blamed for causing cancers in the Gulf and Balkan wars, were blasted into the environment by Britain's nuclear weapons tests in the Pacific and Australia in the 1950s, the Sunday Herald can reveal.**

The disclosure has shocked veterans of the nuclear tests, who now suspect that DU may be implicated in the illnesses that many of them have suffered in the years since. And scientists are calling for the government to reopen its inquiry into the health of the 21,000 British servicemen who took part in the tests on Christmas Island and at Maralinga in the Australian desert.

'It beggars belief,' said Sheila Gray, the secretary of the British Nuclear Tests Veterans Association. 'They gave us the impression that DU had never been used before the Gulf war and now it turns out it was used in the 1950s. It's yet another hazard our men had to face.'

Last week the Sunday Herald revealed that the government had a top-secret plan, code-named Operation Lighthouse, to put hundreds of British and Australian troops 'as close as possible' to nuclear explosions at Maralinga in 1959 to test the effects of the bomb. On Wednesday, that prompted the Australian federal government to launch an inquiry into whether servicemen had been used as radiation guinea pigs.

Bruce Scott, the veterans affairs minister, was seeking an urgent briefing on 50 classified documents posted on the internet which outlined the planned operation. He is also investigating another disclosure by the Sunday Herald in April that two dozen soldiers tested protective clothing by crawling, marching or driving through a fall-out zone three days after a nuclear test at Maralinga in 1956.

The first confirmation that DU was present in the Pacific tests came in a private letter last month from the Ministry of Defence to a Scottish veteran from Fraserburgh, Bob Brown. 'There were quantities of depleted uranium used in the weapons tested at Christmas Island,' wrote an MoD official from Whitehall. The official said that much of the DU would have been consumed in the nuclear

explosion, but that some would have been shot upwards in a fireball and contained in the mushroom cloud. Brown, who was at Christmas Island in 1957 and 1958 and now chairs a veterans' research group known as G2, feared that DU could turn out to be the cause of much illness.

The uranium was wrapped around the core of bombs to boost their yield because it was cheap and available, said Brown. 'But they have kept it under wraps until now. I believe the MoD knew about the effects of the weapons, including DU, long before the Gulf war but they kept it quiet.'

Evidence that DU was also used at Maralinga came in an e-mail to an Australian veteran, Major Alan Batchelor, from the Australian Radiation Protection and Nuclear Safety Agency. The agency's Geoff Williams said that more than eight tonnes of uranium was 'dispersed' by explosions at Maralinga. The British government had admitted that this consisted of 7.4 tonnes at Kuli, 47.3kg at Taranaki and the rest at a series of 'minor trials'.

The uranium, which included both the 235 and 238 isotopes, 'formed very fine particles under implosion'. According to Batchelor, the British bombs contained up to 20 times as much uranium as plutonium. 'These materials, when vaporised in the fireball, would condense out as finely divided invisible oxides of these metals, potentially lethal or capable of causing cancer in the lung, liver, kidney or blood-forming bone marrow.'

The uranium from a bomb would form much smaller particles than the DU from a shell and would be easier to inhale, argued Batchelor. If DU had harmed soldiers in the Gulf, he said, 'this could have been worse for servicemen working in areas close to ground zeros (the sites of nuclear explosions), and with no follow-up action would have gone unnoticed.' However, last week the MoD argued that there was no comparison between the DU used in armour-piercing shells during the Gulf and Balkan wars in the past decade and that exploded in nuclear tests during the 1950s. Except in the most extreme circumstances, the metal posed no significant threat to human health, a spokeswoman claimed. But Malcolm Hooper, emeritus professor of medicinal chemistry at the University of Sunderland, disagreed. 'You can't distribute small aerosol particles of DU and then deny there is a hazard,' he said. 'They are trying to belittle what is a serious problem.'

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*Please note above article and following items were originally posted, May 31, 2001.*

- 2) White House says nuclear reactors in US could double
- 3) Solar Festival in Vermont
- 4) Technology Development for Sustainable Energy Generation