

Army admits secret testing

By Lee Davidson

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WASHINGTON — The Pentagon has concluded that Army scientists based in Utah had indeed conducted 21 series of secret, at-sea tests that may have exposed sailors to chemical and germ weapons in the 1960s.

In their extensive probe completed Monday, researchers also identified an additional 29 series of related secret tests that used similar materials on land in Utah, Alaska, Hawaii, Maryland, Florida, Georgia, Panama, Canada and the United Kingdom.

The investigation also identified 5,842 members of the armed services who were present at the various tests and forwarded their names to the Veterans Affairs Department in case they apply for related disability benefits or health care.

The at-sea tests were part of "Project SHAD" (Shipboard Hazard and Defense). Researchers found that it, in turn, was part of a larger set of tests called Project 112. Both were overseen by the Deseret Test Center, which originally was based at Utah's Fort Douglas and later moved to Dugway Proving Ground before dissolving in the '70s.

The Deseret News first revealed such tests eight years ago through data obtained by the Freedom of Information Act. Sailors had sought the newspaper's help, complaining they were suffering from cancer and nervous system ills they blamed on the tests, but the VA denied claims because the Army said the tests never occurred.

Despite the newspaper obtaining reports and plans of some tests, the Pentagon continued until last year to deny they occurred.

After pressure from national media, members of Congress, the VA and sailors, the Pentagon finally said in May 2002 that some initial research showed such tests happened. It pledged to finish an extensive study by the end of June 2003 to identify all trials and the places, substances and people involved.

It had released updates on numerous specific tests every few months as research continued, but completion of the study Monday allowed compilation of some final statistics. The Defense Department also released new specific information on 10 tests, including six in Utah, about which it had not previously commented.

"I am pleased that our investigators were able to bring closure to this in-depth investigation, and by replacing speculation and uncertainty with fact, to offer the veterans of these tests some much deserved peace of mind," Assistant Secretary of Defense William Winkenwerder said.

Rep. Jim Matheson, D-Utah — a co-sponsor of legislation to require the Defense Department to release the names of veterans who were unknowingly involved in the tests — applauded the release of final information.

"Veterans and their families deserve to know what our government did that may have resulted in serious health consequences, even death," Matheson said. "Sadly for Utahns, this track record of government lies and secrecy with respect to weapons testing is no longer surprising."

The Pentagon, after research at Dugway's technical library and in naval archives, said the Deseret Test Center had designed 134 series of chemical and biological warfare tests as part of Project 112 between 1963 and 1974. However, it said only 50 were conducted and 84 were canceled.

Of the 21 series of at-sea tests conducted, only three (with several trials each) used deadly VX or sarin nerve agents — a tiny drop of which may kill. Most used safer substances to simulate

characteristics of more dangerous materials. However, many of the simulants used were also toxic or disease-causing under certain conditions.

Of the 29 test series conducted on land, 13 used VX or sarin.

Nine of the on-land Project 112 tests were conducted at Utah's Dugway Proving Ground. None of them used VX or sarin, and all were said to use safer simulants.

However, the Deseret News previously identified at least 1,174 other tests of chemical agents at Dugway, which documents said spread nearly a half million pounds of nerve agent to the winds. Also, the newspaper has identified 328 open-air germ warfare tests there through the years, plus 74 radiological "dirty bomb" tests and the equivalent of eight intentional meltdowns of small nuclear reactors.

In the at-sea tests, sailors — and now documents — said clouds of chemicals or germs were spread to the winds as ships and tugboats sailed through them to test how clouds would spread, and also to test detectors and protection and decontamination systems. Sailors wore protective suits or were placed inside compartments deemed to be safe.

One of 10 new "fact sheets" about individual tests released Monday described a series, called Project Folded Arrow, where a submarine (the USS Carbonero) spread clouds of germ-weapon simulants against a ship (the USS Granville S. Hall) near Hawaii. Later, it conducted simulant attacks against 15 locations on Oahu. Later, it simulated a germ attack against the Kaneohe Marine Corps Air Station.

Those tests used a germ called *Bacillus globigii*, which is not considered dangerous to healthy people. However, it can cause potentially deadly illness in people who are weak or already ill.

The same simulant was used in three of the Project 112 tests at Dugway.

Six of the 10 new fact sheets released on Monday were about tests at Dugway.

One series, with two trials, in 1974 used a simulant to test the ability of an aircraft-mounted device to potentially spread clouds of VX. Similarly, a different aircraft spreading device was tested in another series in 1972-73, with seven trials, which included spreading toxic cadmium sulfide with other simulants.

Another in 1972 and 1973, with 38 trials, used a controlled environmental mobile facility to study the decay of *Bacillus globigii* and *Serratia marcescens* (another simulant of deadlier germ weapons) on contaminated materials. Another in 1973 used those simulants plus T-3 coliphage (a virus) for similar work on an outdoor grid.

Another series, with nine trials, at Dugway in 1973 used oily simulants (including one that is a suspected carcinogen) to test decontamination techniques on LVTP-7 amphibious vehicles.

One series, with seven trials, at Dugway in 1974 sprayed simulants of nerve agents over an area to test how well a Marine nuclear assembly team could perform duties in a contaminated environment, and how well their protective equipment worked.

A Defense Department Web site with a complete list of tests, findings and other information is: www.deploymentlink.osd.mil/current_issues/shad/shad_intro.shtml

Veterans who believe they were involved in Project 112 tests and desire medical evaluations should call the VA's help line at 1-800-749-8387.