

Statement by Robert Patrick Daigle XXX-XX-0487 Statement Completed in 2022

This statement is written in support of my claim for service-connected compensation and as a descriptive statement of my exposure to toxic chemicals and ionizing radiation emitting material; which includes information about my extensive exposure to chlorinated hydro-carbon solvents. This is also a request for the proper consideration of a group of veterans I believe have been either forgotten or ignored, and this letter is also written as a declaration of frustration with the exclusion of sailors that had been involved in the maintenance of Navy nuclear weapons in the radiation exposure lists maintained by the Veteran's Administration, the Department of Defense (Special Weapons Unit) and the Justice Department.

I attended the below schools after my enlistment in the U.S. Navy on December 10, 1957 and subsequent to completing Navy Boot Camp. I completed Phase I of the Navy Nuclear Weaponsman course, which consisted of courses in electricity & electronics in Great Lakes, Illinois. After my graduation from Phase 1, I was given a Navy rating of Nuclear Weaponsman Seaman (NW-E3). My tour of duty as a Nuclear Weaponsman commenced with the Navy Nuclear Weaponsman Course, Class NW-1, the very first class in the new rating of Nuclear Weaponsman, which commenced on June 9, 1958. The class was convened at Sandia Base, Albuquerque, New Mexico. I graduated on August 15, 1958. I was assigned solely as a Nuclear Weaponsman (nuclear weapons technician) throughout my tour in the Navy from 1957 to 1961.

During my courses of instruction at Sandia Base, we were told that the effects of radiation exposure were highly dramatized in Hollywood movies. We were also told the public's conception of the dangers of radiation were extremely exaggerated. Further, there was no training regarding the hazards of the chemicals, particularly chlorinated hydro-carbon solvents used while performing maintenance operations on the weapons. We constantly used solvents such as trichloroethylene (technical and reagent) and toluene in copious quantities during our instruction and at both assignments where I was assigned as a Nuclear Weaponsman. I used the above listed solvents in very large amounts when cleaning the weapons and we were never provided any respiratory protection against the fumes or reliable skin protection at any time in my tour as a Nuclear Weaponsman.

At the completion of the NW-1 training class instruction, I was promoted to Nuclear Weaponsman 3rd Class Petty Officer (NW-E4) and assigned my first permanent duty station at the US Navy Clarksville Naval Ammunition Depot (nuclear weapons only), which was located within the 106 Airborne Army Base, Ft. Campbell, KY.

When I was only 17 yo, (I was a minor), I received my first duty assignment as a US Navy Nuclear Weaponsman (nuclear weapons technician) in "W" Division (Special Weapons Unit) at the Clarksville Naval Ammunition Depot. This initial assignment included drilling holes and emplacing atmospheric pressure sensors in the nose end of a Mark 15 (MK-15) nuclear weapon, which were required for precise elevation detonation of a MK-15.

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The below photo is of a MK-15 nuclear weapon. Note the atmospheric pressure sensor holes emplaced in the nose of the MK-15 by myself and other nuclear weapons technicians.



The Mark 15 nuclear weapon, or Mk-15, was a 1950s American thermonuclear bomb, the first relatively lightweight (7,600 lb. (3,400 kg)) thermonuclear bomb created by the United States. A total of 1,200 Mark 15 bombs were produced by the United States from 1955 to 1957. There were three production variants: Mod 1, Mod 2, and Mod 3. The design was in service from 1955 to 1965. As detailed in Navy SWOP 20-7, which lists the radiation emissions of weapons, the MK-15 and MK-28 were among the highest ionizing radiation "emitters".

During my assignment in "W" Division at Clarksville, I was included in a three man team to conduct the required processes for each of many nuclear weapons. The nuclear weapons we worked with included the MK-15, the MK-28 and various other nuclear weapons, which I cannot remember all of their designations after so many years This was a very detailed and safety oriented team. While one man was assigned to read the very detailed instructions,

one step at a time, the other two men were to agree on the instructions and proceed as directed. In example, when we were working on the MK-15, we completed the required safety instructions; such as removing the three or four detonation pins. Each pin would be removed to a certain mark on the pin. The man assigned to read the instructions would say, "Remove pin 1 to the 2" mark on the pin". "Now, remove pin 2 to the 1" mark on the pin", etc. This procedure would be continued for each of the 3-4 pins. By removing these pins the nuclear warhead would be disarmed. Once the pins were properly removed the warhead was still capable of detonating as a conventional weapon. To fail to remove the pins in a certain order and to the proper markings on the pins or even to completely remove a pin out of sequence could and probably would have resulted in a conventional weapon detonation. If this weapon had exploded, this team of men would have been vaporized and the entirety of the W Division would have been affected. This was a very stressful procedure.

Once the weapons was safely deactivated, the team would test electrical circuits, all of the detonator caps, and the surface of the warhead. During the cleaning of the warhead, we would also clean the interior core location where the uranium (U235) core had been previously inserted and then removed prior to transport to Clarksville Base. This core space would contain spalling from the uranium (U235). This spalling was very radioactive material (ionizing radiation), which would be cleaned with a cloth soaked in trichloroethylene (technical and reagent) and/or toluene. There was never any protective gear or equipment provided for this core cleaning and no monitoring for radioactivity levels, ever.

This 3-man team also completed other maintenance required such as breaking down the sheathing of the weapon to expose the warhead, cleaning the interior of the sheathing, painting the sheathing, inspecting the weapon chassis carrier, and other duties that were stipulated on the work assignment. This was a "turnkey" operation with dire consequences if the detailed instructions were not followed - to the letter.

There were no dosimeter film badges worn or personnel radiation exposure monitoring, nor were there any required "stay-times" in the vicinity of the nuclear weapons during both of permanent duty stations. My duty assignment at Clarksville Base lasted for a period of *circa* 18 months. My exposure was significant, but no DD-1141 was completed at this duty station and as a result my radiation exposure was never recorded in my permanent military medical records.

I will note that in 1965 the Naval Command closed Clarksville Base and transferred the real estate and facilities to the US Army, Fort Campbell, KY. The Army later used some of the bunkers previously used for maintenance on nuclear weapons, and in particular the W Division bunker, to store classified documents. Within one year of the Army storing classified documents in W Division bunker, the Army determined that the ionizing radiation level was so high that it was too dangerous for personnel to even enter. At that time the Army removed the classified documents and destroyed the W Division bunker,

This activity has been, and can be, confirmed by the proper authorities at the Ft Campbell Army Base.

I was next transferred to a new duty station at the Waikele Naval Ammunition Depot (only nuclear weapons) at Waikele, Oahu, Hawai'i. I was once again assigned to the W-Division and placed in a 3-man team. We completed the nuclear weapons maintenance, repairs and modification just as we had at Clarksville Base.

Again, there were never any radioactivity monitoring, personal monitoring and no recording of ionizing radiation on a DD-1141.

We also completed "fly-ins" of nuclear weapons from different US aircraft carriers in the Pacific; all in the middle of the night to maintained secrecy. All of the nuclear weapons flown in were always considered as "hot" since the uranium (U235) core had recently been removed aboard ship. No personal safety equipment or radioactivity monitoring was ever provided during these fly-ins. Once the nuclear weapons were received, we would load them on their respective carriers and transport them to Waikele. Upon arrival at Waikele these weapons would be stored in cave bunkers located inside the ravines that surrounded the W-Division structures.

During the time I was stationed at Waikele Base, we were also required to perform atmospheric conditions in all of the cave bunkers containing nuclear weapons. This entailed temperature and humidity readings, and visually inspection the outside of the nuclear weapons sheathing. This duty was completed in the presence of a number of nuclear weapons in each cave bunker and furthering our exposure to ionizing radiation without any type of ionizing radioactivity monitoring.

After *circa* 18 months at Waikele Base, I was transferred to Treasure Island Naval Base near San Francisco, CA for discharge. No medical examination on me was ever completed before discharge.

The vast majority of maintenance, repair and modification of nuclear weapons procedures were conducted by Nuclear Weaponsman at shore locations such as Clarksville Naval Ammunition Depot at Ft, Campbell, KY and Waikele Naval Ammunition Depot in Oahu, Hawai'i. This involved the complete disassembly of nuclear weapons to a point where there was little to no shielding between nuclear warheads and the internal warhead core that contained the active radioactivity material from the uranium (U235) core. My exposure levels from ionizing radiation were never recorded on a DD-1141 as required by Department of Defense regulations (SWU) and therefore were never recorded in my military medical record.

It has since been acknowledged by others, including the Navy, that for many years concerns about a specific type of radiation (gamma) had been misplaced. The concern should have been about neutron radiation. During my Navy tour of duty,

time/distance/shielding restrictions were never applied, and monitoring for airborne beta/gamma emitters was never employed. The Navy finally realized, belatedly circa 1963, that intrinsic neutron radiation was a concern to individual safety, and subsequent to my enlistment, which was completed in September 1961. Thereafter, the Navy began taking steps to mitigate the problem of exposure of the Nuclear Weaponsman to ionizing radiation and safety procedures concerning the chemicals, particularly chlorinated hydrocarbon solvents used while performing maintenance, repair and upgrading operations on the weapons .

My lifetime exposure is unknown due to the lack of personal dosimeter use or personnel radiation exposure monitoring during my Navy tour of duty as a nuclear weapons technician. And, the failure of clear direction from higher authorities concerning radiation monitoring, and the failure to record neutron exposure on my DD-1141 for the totality of my Navy tour of duty as a Nuclear Weaponsman. In addition this failure, the trichloroethylene and toluene I frequently used such as methyl ethyl ketone and freon solvents in my duties, again without any respiratory or reliable skin protection nor warnings about the danger of the chemicals used was never provided.

After recently being alerted, I began to understand that past maintenance procedures on the old weapons systems, all maintenance manuals, since they were classified, had been destroyed. There was no repository of history on the old systems. The only knowledge of past maintenance operations were in the minds of the men and women that had previously worked on nuclear weapons.

I believe that my accumulated exposure to ionizing radiation, especially neutron, which was never recorded during my time of duty, and exposure to known carcinogenic liquids have contributed to my eye problems, such as narrow-angle glaucoma, macular disintegration, cataracts and various physical and physiological disorders, including PTSD, that I have suffered from over the past many years. Hence, I request that this information be considered in determining all of my service-connected compensation.

I am very proud of my Navy tour of duty as a Nuclear Weaponsman. I feel my job contributed to the defense of our nation in a way that will never be fully appreciated by the American public, and as a deterrent saved our nation from annihilation. I believe the least our government should do would be to investigate to determine if those who served as Nuclear Weaponsman (nuclear weapons technicians) should be included on the radiation exposure list along with the "Atomic Veterans" that have a presumption of service connection for numerous physical diseases and physiological disorders. A radiation dose reconstruction program by the Veteran's Administration, the Department of Defense (Special Weapons Unit) and the Justice Department for Navy Nuclear Weaponsman veterans would be an honorable effort on behalf of these sailors.

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I hereby certify that the statements on the previous five (5) pages are true and correct as to the best of my knowledge and belief:



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