The Mystery of the Nagasaki Bomb

On Aug. 9, 1945, three days after obliterating Hiroshima with one nuclear bomb as Japan’s high command met on surrender plans the U.S. government dropped a second bomb on Nagasaki killing 74,000 people instantly, a decision that has never been adequately explained, writes John LaForge.

By John LaForge

“The rights and wrongs of Hiroshima are debatable,” Telford Taylor, the chief prosecutor at Nuremberg, once said, “but I have never heard a plausible justification of Nagasaki” — which he labeled a war crime.

In his 2011 book Atomic Cover-Up, Greg Mitchell says, “If Hiroshima suggests how cheap life had become in the atomic age, Nagasaki shows that it could be judged to have no value whatsoever.” Mitchell notes that the U.S. writer Dwight MacDonald cited in 1945 America’s “decline to barbarism” for dropping “half-understood poisons” on a civilian population.

The New York Herald Tribune editorialized there was “no satisfaction in the thought that an American air crew had produced what must without doubt be the greatest simultaneous slaughter in the whole history of mankind.”

Mitchell reports that the novelist Kurt Vonnegut, Jr. — who experienced the firebombing of Dresden first hand and described it in Slaughterhouse Five — said, “The most racist, nastiest act by this country, after human slavery, was the bombing of Nagasaki.”

On Aug. 17, 1945, David Lawrence, the conservative columnist and editor of US News, put it this way: “Last week we destroyed hundreds of thousands of civilians in Japanese cities with the new atomic bomb. we shall not soon purge ourselves of the feeling of guilt. wedid not hesitate to employ the most destructive weapon of all times indiscriminately against men, women and children. Surely we cannot be proud of what we have done. If we state our inner thoughts honestly, we are ashamed of it.”

If shame is the natural response to Hiroshima, how is one to respond to Nagasaki, especially in view of all the declassified government papers on the subject? According to Dr. Joseph Gerson’s With Hiroshima Eye, some 74,000 were killed instantly at Nagasaki, another 75,000 were injured and 120,000 were poisoned.

If Hiroshima was unnecessary, how to justify Nagasaki?
The saving of thousands of U.S. lives is held up as the official justification for the two atomic bombings. Leaving aside the ethical and legal question of slaughtering civilians to protect soldiers, what can be made of the Nagasaki bomb if Hiroshima’s incineration was not necessary?

The most amazingly under-reported statement in this context is that of Truman’s Secretary of State James Byrnes, quoted on the front page of the Aug. 29, 1945 New York Times with the headline, “Japan Beaten Before Atom Bomb, Byrnes Says, Citing Peace Bids.” Byrnes cited what he called “proof that the Japanese knew that they were beaten before the first atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima.”

On Sept. 20, 1945, Gen. Curtis LeMay, the famous bombing commander, told a press conference, “The war would have been over in two weeks without the Russians entering and without the atomic bomb. The atomic bomb had nothing to do with the end of the war at all.”

According to Robert Lifton’s and Greg Mitchel’s Hiroshima in America: 50 Years of Denial (1995), only weeks after Aug. 6 and 9, President Harry Truman himself publicly declared that the bomb “did not win the war.”

The U.S. Strategic Bombing Survey, conducted by Paul Nitze less than a year after the atom bombings, concluded that “certainly prior to 31 December 1945, and in all probability prior to 1 November 1945, Japan would have surrendered even if the atomic bombs had not been dropped, even if Russia had not entered the war, and ever if no invasion had been planned or contemplated.”

Likewise, the Intelligence Group of the U.S. War Department’s Military Intelligence Division conducted a study from January to April 1946 and declared that the bombs had not been needed to end the war, according to reports Gar Alperovitz in his massive The Decision to Drop the Atomic Bomb. The IG said it is “almost a certainty that the Japanese would have capitulated upon the entry of Russia into the war.”

Russia did so, Aug. 8, 1945, and as Ward Wilson reports in his Five Myths about Nuclear Weapons, six hours after news of Russia’s invasion of Sakhalin Island reached Tokyo – and before Nagasaki was bombed – the Supreme Council met to discuss unconditional surrender.

Experiments with Hell Fire?

Nagasaki was attacked with a bomb made of plutonium, named after Pluto, god of the underworld earlier known as Hades, in what some believe to have been a ghastly trial. The most toxic substance known to science, developed for mass destruction, plutonium is so lethal it contaminates everything nearby forever, every isotope a little bit of hell fire.
According to Atomic Cover-Up, Hitoshi Motoshima, mayor of Nagasaki from 1979 to 1995, said, “The reason for Nagasaki was to experiment with the plutonium bomb.” Mitchell notes that “hard evidence to support this ‘experiment’ as the major reason for the bombing remains sketchy.” But according to a wire service report in Newsweek, Aug. 20, 1945, by a journalist traveling with the president aboard the USS Augusta, Truman reportedly announced to his shipmates, “The experiment has been an overwhelming success.”

U.S. investigators visiting Hiroshima on Sept. 8, 1945 met with Japan’s leading radiation expert, Professor Masao Tsuzuki. One was given a 1926 paper on Tsuzuki’s famous radiation experiments on rabbits. “Ah, but the Americans, they are wonderful,” Tsuzuki told the group. “It has remained for them to conduct the human experiment!”

John LaForge is a Co-director of Nukewatch, a nuclear watchdog and environmental justice group in Wisconsin, edits its quarterly newsletter, and writes for PeaceVoice.

The Enduring Myth of Hiroshima

On Aug. 6, 1945, the United States dropped the first atomic bomb on a populated area, the Japanese city of Hiroshima, followed by a second on Nagasaki three days later. There then ensued a U.S. propaganda campaign to claim the slaughter of more than 200,000 people saved lives, writes John LaForge.

By John LaForge

The U.S. atomic destruction of 140,000 people at Hiroshima and 70,000 at Nagasaki was never “necessary” because Japan was already smashed, no land invasion was needed and Japan was suing for peace. The official myth that “the bombs saved lives” by hurrying Japan’s surrender can no longer be believed except by those who love to be fooled.

The long-standing fiction has been destroyed by the historical record kept in U.S., Soviet, Japanese and British archives — now mostly declassified — and detailed by Ward Wilson in his book Five Myths about Nuclear Weapons (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2013).

Greg Mitchell’s Atomic Cover-Up (Sinclair Books, 2011) also helps explain the durability of the “saved lives” ruse. Wartime and occupation censors seized all films and still photos of the two atomic cities, and the U.S. government kept them hidden for decades. Even in 1968, newsreel footage from Hiroshima held in
the National Archives was stamped, “SECRET, Not To Be Released Without the Approval of the DOD.” Photos of the atomized cities that did reach the public merely showed burned buildings or mushroom clouds — rarely human victims.


“We didn’t want MacArthur and others saying the war could have been won without the bomb,” Groves said.

In fact, MacArthur did not believe the bomb was needed to end the war, but he too established a censorship program as commander of the U.S. occupation of Japan. He banned reporters from visiting Hiroshima or Nagasaki, expelled reporters who defied the ban and later said that those who complained that censorship existed in Japan were engaged in “a maliciously false propaganda campaign.”

That most people in the United States still believe the “saved lives” rationale to be true is because of decades of this censorship and myth-making, begun by President Harry Truman, who said Aug. 6, 1945, “Sixteen hours ago an American airplane dropped one bomb on Hiroshima, an important Japanese Army base. That was because we wished this first attack to avoid, insofar as possible, the killing of civilians.”

In fact, the city of 350,000 had practically no military value at all and the target was the city, not the base three kilometers away.

Taking President Truman at his word, the 140,000 civilians killed at Hiroshima are the minimum to be expected when exploding a small nuclear weapon on a “military base.” Today’s “small” Cruise missile warheads ¾ which are 12 times the power of Truman’s A-bomb ¾ could kill 1.68 million each.

Official censorship of what the two bombs did to people and the reasons for it has been so successful, that 25 years of debunking hasn’t managed to generally topple the official narrative.

In 1989, historian Gar Alperovitz reported, “American leaders knew well in advance that the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki was not required to bring about Japan’s surrender;” and later, in his 847-page *The Decision to Use the Atomic Bomb* (Random House, 1995), “I think it can be proven that the bomb was not only unnecessary but known in advance not to be necessary.” The popular myth “didn’t just happen,” Alperovitz says, “it was created.”
Kept hidden for decades was the 1946 U.S. Strategic Bombing Survey’s conclusion that Japan almost certainly would have surrendered in 1945 without the atomic bombs, without a Soviet invasion and without a U.S. invasion. Not long after V-J Day in 1945, Brig. Gen. Bonnie Feller wrote, “Neither the atomic bombing nor the entry of the Soviet Union into the war forced Japan’s unconditional surrender. She was defeated before either of these events took place.”

President Dwight D. Eisenhower, a five-star general and the Supreme Allied Commander in Europe, said in his memoirs he believed “that Japan was already defeated and that dropping the bomb was completely unnecessary.”

Adm. William Leahy, the wartime Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, wrote in 1950, “It is my opinion that the use of this barbarous weapon at Hiroshima and Nagasaki was of no material success in our war against Japan. The Japanese were already defeated and ready to surrender.”

Feller’s, Ike’s and Leahy’s opinions were conspicuously left out of or censored by the Smithsonian Institution’s 1995 display of the atomic B-29 bomber “Enola Gay.”

Admiral Leahy’s 1950 myth-busting and censor-busting about the Bomb could be an epitaph for the nuclear age: “I was not taught to make war in that fashion,” he said of Hiroshima’s incineration, “and wars cannot be won by destroying women and children.”

John LaForge writes for PeaceVoice, is co-director of Nukewatch, a nuclear watchdog and environmental justice group, and lives at the Plowshares Land Trust out of Luck, Wisconsin.

Iraq’s Depleted Uranium Threat

Over the past two dozen years, the massive damage that the U.S. has inflicted on Iraq’s population, infrastructure and environment includes the residue from American “deplete uranium” weapons that can cause cancer and other illnesses, writes John LaForge.

By John LaForge

A new report from the Netherlands based on U.S. Air Force firing coordinates shows that the U.S. military fired its armor-piercing munitions ¾ made of waste uranium-238 which is called “depleted uranium” or DU ¾ into civilian
areas of Iraq and at Iraqi troops during the 2003 invasion and occupation, 
defying the U.S. Air Force’s own legal advice that the toxic and radioactive 
ammunition be used only against hardened targets in compliance with the Laws of 
War.

The study, “Laid to Waste,” by the Dutch organization PAX found that the lack of 
legal obligations on U.S.-led militaries in Iraq to help clean-up after using DU 
weapons has resulted in Iraqi civilians and workers continuing to be exposed to 
the highly toxic heavy metal years after the war. The health risks posed by the 
inadequate management of Iraq’s DU contamination are unclear because neither 
U.S.-led forces nor the Iraqi government have supported health research into 
civilian DU exposures.

High-risk groups include people living near or working on dozens of Iraqi scrap 
metal sites where thousands of military vehicles ¾ destroyed in the 1991 and 
2003 bombardments ¾ are stored or processed. Waste sites often lack official 
oversight and in places it has taken more than 10 years to decontaminate 
military wreckage from residential neighborhoods.

Hundreds of locations that were hit by the weapons, many of which are in 
populated areas, remain undocumented, and concern among Iraqi civilians over 
potential health effects from exposure, ingestion and inhalation is widespread.

“To help clean-up we urgently need to know the location and quantities of DU 
fired,” said the report’s author Wim Zwijnenburg. “The Iraqi government is also 
in dire need of technical support to help manage the many scrap metal sites 
where contaminated vehicles are stored.”

The ongoing refusal by the United States to release targeting information 
continues to hinder the assessment and management of DU in Iraq. The Dutch 
military contributed a few thousand troops to the Coalition Forces in Iraq, and 
peacekeepers in Kosovo, and raised alarms over contamination in 2001 and 2006.

A handful of U.S. targeting coordinates held by the Dutch Ministry of Defense, 
and released after a Freedom of Information Act request, show that U.S. war 
planes used DU weapons against a far wider range of targets and sites than 
previously suspected, including Iraqi troops. The U.S. and British governments 
have long asserted that DU is only for use against armored vehicles. They have 
often been called “tank busters.”

Depleted Uranium, a by-product of uranium enrichment for reactor fuel and H-
bombs, is categorized as an intermediate-level radioactive waste; contaminated 
rubble and scrap metal are considered low-level radioactive waste. The Dutch 
study finds that international guidelines for dealing with both kinds of waste
from the International Commission on Radiological Protection were ignored and that the Iraqi government did not have the technical capacity to safely manage such contamination.

Unlike anti-personnel landmines and other explosive remnants of war, no treaty currently obliges DU users to help clean-up after the war. However, civil radiation protection standards place the responsibility firmly at the foot of the polluters.

Low estimates suggest that at least 440,000 kilograms (488 tons) of DU was fired by the United States in both Gulf Wars in 1991 and 2003. Civilians living near contaminated sites, scrap-yard workers, Iraqi doctors and researchers have repeatedly voiced concerns over the effects of DU on health and the environment.

Hans von Sponeck, a former UN Assistant Secretary General and UN humanitarian coordinator for Iraq, told the Guardian last October, “There is definitive evidence of an alarming rise in birth defects, leukemia, cancer and other carcinogenic diseases in Iraq after the war.”

“In 2001, I saw in Geneva how a World Health Organization mission to conduct on-spot assessments in Basra and southern Iraq, where DU had led to devastating environmental health problems, was aborted under U.S. political pressure,” Sponeck said.

John LaForge is a Co-director of Nukewatch, a nuclear watchdog and environmental justice group in Wisconsin, edits its quarterly newsletter, and writes for PeaceVoice.

In Case You Missed…

Some of our special stories in December 2013 focused on the Saudi role in terrorism, the importance of national security “leakers,” the collapsing case pinning an infamous Sarin attack on Syria, and the renewed war over “the war on Christmas.”


“Deceiving the US Public on Syria” by Robert Parry, Dec. 9, 2013.


“Embracing Israel’s Atrocities” by Lawrence Davidson, Dec. 10, 2013.

“Obama Urged to Fire DNI Clapper” by Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity, Dec. 11, 2013.


“Judge Leon’s Dirty Climb to the Bench” by Robert Parry, Dec. 17, 2013.


“WPost Slips Behind Amazon’s Cloud” by Norman Solomon, Dec. 18, 2013.


“UN Investigator Undercuts NYT on Syria” by Robert Parry, Dec. 23, 2013.


Double Standards for US War Crimes

U.S. pundits cheer when some African warlord or East European brute is dragged before an international tribunal, but not at the thought of justice being meted out to George W. Bush or other architects of post-9/11 torture and aggressive war on Iraq, as John LaForge notes.

By John LaForge

In response to regular reports of atrocities by U.S. soldiers, drone controllers, pilots and interrogators, the White House routinely tries to help. Every president promises to honor U.S. armed forces and says they are the finest military of all, etc.

At Veterans’ Day ceremonies, president fill-in-the-blank boast, “America is and always will be the greatest nation on Earth.” This past Nov. 11, President Barack Obama said that since 9/11 the U.S. is “defining one of the greatest generations of military service this country has ever produced,” and, of course, “[W]e have the best-led, best-trained, best-equipped military in the world.”

In a bold invitation, Human Rights Watch has called on 154 parties to the UN Convention on Torture to bring charges against U.S. officials under explicit language in the treaty, ratified by the US in 1994.

The treaty requires such action when reputable allegations are not prosecuted by the accused governments, and ours doesn’t need any more evidence, just some of which may be found in these mainstream U.S. media stories:

â€¢ “US Practiced Torture after 9/11, Nonpartisan Review Concludes” (Apr. 16, 2013)

â€¢ “Afghans Say an American Tortured Civilians” (May 13, 2013)

â€¢ “CIA Drones Kill Civilians in Pakistan” (Mar. 18, 2011)

â€¢ “GI Kills 16 Afghans, Including 9 Children, in Attacks on Homes” (Mar. 12, 2012)

â€¢ “Libya Effort is Called Violation of War Act” (May 26, 2011)

â€¢ “NATO and Afghan forces killed 310 civilians over the same period, mostly from airstrikes, the UN reports” (Aug. 3, 2009)

â€¢ “100,000 Iraqis killed since U.S. invasion analysis says” (Oct. 29, 2004)

â€¢ “U.N. Chief Ignites Firestorm by Calling Iraq War ‘Illegal’” (Sep. 17, 2004);


â€¢ “U.S. Presses for Total Exemption from War Crimes Court” (Oct. 9, 2002)


â€¢ “Bombing Necessary Despite Toll on Civilians, U.S. Envoy Says” (Jan. 9, 2002);

â€¢ “U.S. helicopters fire on women, children in Somalia” (Sep. 10, 1993)

â€¢ “US forces buried enemy forces alive” (Sep. 13, 1991)

â€¢ “200,000 died in Gulf War, and counting” (May 30, 1991)

**The Military’s Dirty War on Women**

Atrocities against people of occupied or targeted countries aren’t the only ones accumulating. According to a July 2012 report by the Pentagon, over
25,000 sexual assaults occurred in fiscal year 2012, a 37 percent increase from FY 2011. About “500 men and women were assaulted each week last year,” USA Today reported July 25. See: “Reports of Military Sexual Assault Rise Sharply,” NY Times, Nov. 7; & “Sexual Assaults in Military Raise Alarm: 26,000 Cases Last Year,” May 7, 2013.

Throughout the Army, Navy, Air Force and Marines, according to the Pentagon, 74 percent of females report one or more barriers to reporting sexual assault. In addition, 62 percent of victims who reported sexual assault indicated they experienced some form of retaliation.

This is why, according to Sen. Tammy Baldwin, D-Wisconsin., more than 85 percent of all military sexual assaults go unreported. In fact, Sen. Baldwin says, “overall rates of reporting dropped from 13.5 percent in 2011 to 9.8 percent in 2012.”

In view of the staggering numbers, and to help end the cover-up and suppression of sexual assault reporting, Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand, D-New York, has proposed removing investigation and disposal of such allegations from the military chain of command and place these cases with military prosecutors.

Currently, commanders, superior to victims and perpetrators, decide whether or not to prosecute an accused G.I. Commanders even have the power to reduce or overturn a judge or jury’s conviction.

Gillibrand’s Military Justice Improvement Act of 2013, S. 967, would give military prosecutors, instead of commanders, the independent authority to decide whether or not felony cases go to trial. The proposal has earned broad bipartisan support. It would reform the Code of Military Justice to make the system independent at the felony level.

A related bill, the Military Sexual Assault Prevention Act, S. 548, sponsored by Sens. Amy Klobuchar, D-Minnesota, and Lisa Murkowski, R-Alaska, would prevent those convicted of sexual crimes from serving in the military, improve tracking and review of sexual assault claims in the military, and help ensure victims have access to criminal justice.

Presidential speeches can’t permanently obscure our record of military outrages. Some congressional reform could at least confront the ones committed against women in uniform.

John LaForge is a Co-director of Nukewatch, a nuclear watchdog and environmental justice group in Wisconsin, edits its quarterly newsletter, and writes for PeaceVoice.
The Right’s war on the poor rages on, driven in part by the belief that racial and ethnic minorities are getting much of the help. Yet, as food stamps are slashed, Congress lavishes money on military projects that are judged wasteful or useless, John LaForge writes.

By John LaForge

Beginning Nov. 1, food stamp cutbacks mean $36 per month less for a family of four.

Public “servants” like Wisconsin Republican Paul Ryan and Democratic former President Bill Clinton point to the failure of poverty programs to end poverty, and then slash those program budgets or abolish them altogether. Clinton’s actions did away with Aid to Families with Dependent Children in a fell swoop he dubbed “welfare reform.”

Meanwhile, the chronic test failure of anti-missile rockets never results in budget cuts, but is called reason enough for more funding. The latest miss by the “missile defense” project occurred July 5 over the Pacific, adding to a near perfect record of total flops or faked hits. The rocket business is one welfare program that is never declared fraudulent or wasteful except by scientists, honest think tanks and military watchdog groups.

Today a lot of Republicans claim the food stamp program, officially the
Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program or SNAP, is rife with fraud. They say “Ineligible people get food stamps!” So Congress dogs the poor who may not vote and don’t donate to campaigns, while doling out billions of dollars to missile contractors Lockheed, Martin, Boeing, TRW and Raytheon, etc. in exchange for millions of dollars in re-election cash.

So the House adopted a farm bill in July that for the first time since 1973 eliminates food stamps A Senate bill approved in May cut about $4.5 billion from the program, mainly by altering eligibility rules.

The percentage of our population that uses food stamps went up from 8.7 in 2007 to 15.2 in 2012. This near doubling is partly the result of the Great Recession, high unemployment, and the fact that Republicans have made deep cuts in unemployment benefits.

The House action will eliminate about 5.1 million people from SNAP, according to a report by the Health Impact Project. Almost half a million people who get food stamps but still do not get enough to eat (the average SNAP amount is $134 a month) would lose their eligibility for the stamps. The HIP study found that food stamps cuts will not just affect the ability of low-income people to feed themselves, but would also increase poverty.

Failed and Redundant Weapons

Independent analysts like MIT Professor of Science, Technology and International Security Theodore Postol argue that “ballistic missile defense” (BMD) can’t work, interceptor missiles can never distinguish real incoming weapons from swarms of decoys, and should be cancelled.

Postol charged in a March 2000 letter to President Clinton that the program’s officers were “most likely attempting to illegally use the security and classification system to hide waste, fraud and abuse,” that included faked test results. British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher told Ronald Reagan 30 years ago, “I am a chemist. I know it won’t work.”

Still, spending for BMD over three decades totals about $200 billion, $130 billion by 2000, according to the Center for Strategic and Budget Assessments, and about $10 billion every year since then. Last March, President Barack Obama announced another $1 billion in funding to add 14 new “interceptor” missile pads to the 26 already deployed in Fort Greely, Alaska.

Even more insulting are the weapons programs unwanted by the Pentagon that get funded again and again. Military brass have said that the new Joint-Strike fighter jet bomber (or F-35) and additional upgrades to the M1 Abrams tank are unnecessary. The 6,000 completed M1 upgrades are enough, says DoD. Baltimore Sun
blogger Terry Munson reported Aug. 17 that zeroing the Abrams rehab program would save $3.5 billion.

Pentagon chiefs have called a lot of costly systems unneeded and unaffordable. Josh Sweigart in the Dayton Daily News reported last year that the military had proposed cost cutting that would save at least $487 billion over 10 years.

The Pentagon suggested canceling: 1) the Global Hawk drone, whose purpose is served by the U2, saving $2.5 billion by 2017; 2) the C-27J Spartan transport aircraft, saving $400 million by 2017; 3) 5,000 jobs from the Air National Guard, and slashing $300 million from its budget; and 4) plans for an East Coast missile defense battery that Gen. Martin Dempsey, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, had called unnecessary, saving $3.6 billion by 2017.

The same congressional budget cutters who call for “small” government have insured that useless military boondoggles in their districts stay big, even while providing fewer jobs per billions of dollars spent than any other sector of expenditure.

As Munson said, “If we used some of that money to feed hungry children and educate those who need it most Congressional reps might be compelled to find support among real voters and not just corporations seeking government handouts.”

John LaForge writes for PeaceVoice, is co-director of Nukewatch, a nuclear watchdog and environmental justice group in Wisconsin, and edits their quarterly newsletter: www.nukewatchinfo.org

Stuck in a Job at the End of the World

Very little sympathy is felt for Air Force personnel assigned to fire nuclear missiles that could end all life on the planet. But their grim, boring and existentially absurd job has eroded staff morale so much that their collapsing competence has added to the world’s risk, explains John LaForge.

By John LaForge

Some of the Air Force’s self-styled nuclear “missileers”, sitting at launch controls in Minot, North Dakota, recently earned a “D” on their intercontinental ballistic missile firing (ICBM) skills. More than 10 percent of the Minot Air Force Base’s 91st “Missile Wing” was declared incompetent and was stripped of
launch-duty clearances.

The Air Force removed 17 of Minot’s 150 missile launch officers in April, over what commander Lt. Col. Jay Folds called “such rot” that, according to The AP on May 8, “even the willful violation of safety rules, including a possible compromise of launch codes, was tolerated.”

Air Force commanders told The AP they were concerned about an “attitude problem” among the ultimate bomb scare command. The Air Forces’ two-person crews work three-day shifts in underground Launch Control Centers and are supposed to be constantly at-the-ready to fire the 10 Minuteman IIIIs under their control. Minot AFB is in charge of 150 ICBMs, 15 “flights” of 10 missiles each, with one launch control center for each flight.

Another 150 are on alert in Wyoming and 150 more out in Montana. All 450 of the relics are armed with a 300-kiloton “W-87” warhead. Three-hundred kilotons is a magnitude equal to 18 times the destruction that incinerated Hiroshima in 1945 killing 140,000 people.

The Air Force put on its dress uniform in the face of the scandal. In May it announced it would retrain the incompetent nuclear triggermen and the commanders asserted to Congress that its H-bombs were secure.

Gen. Mark Welsh, the service’s top general, told the Washington Post, with deliberate irony one hopes, that Air Force officers sense that the land-based missile system “is a dying field.” And it’s a fact that everyone from President Barack Obama to the War Resisters League has called for the Bomb’s abolition.

Gen. Welsh admitted to the press that there are “a limited command positions to which missile launch officers can aspire.”

Being stuck in dead-ended Air Force careers and posted in the wilderness of central North Dakota, Minot’s Cold War throw-backs, who call themselves “Roughriders” and “Vulgar Vultures” on their website, are trained to fire Minuteman III ballistic missiles at the sea (they can be re-programmed but are targeted on the oceans for “safety”) and, day after wind-swept prairie day, have absolutely no military function or purpose whatsoever.

It’s hardly surprising that their minds drift. Since they’re prepared to commit the bloodiest, most nightmarish crime in human history or imagination, the missileer’s principal pre-occupation must be to think about something else, anything else. Many work on graduate degrees. One launch control center I visited in December 1987 was decorated with Christmas lights.

The inevitable if not impending elimination of their useless rockets has to depress what’s left of the launch teams’ esprit de corps. Even their civilian
commander, Pentagon chief Chuck Hagel, has signed onto a call by the group Global Zero to eliminate all the ICBMs and to eventually discard all nuclear weapons.

Of course Minot AFB has been demoralized by more than the nuclear war flunky scandal. In August 2007, three of its Colonels, a Lt. Colonel and dozens of low-level personnel were demoted or sacked after they allowed the fantastically dangerous loading and cross-country air transport of six nuclear-armed Cruise missiles from Minot to Barksdale AFB in Louisiana. Even if that astonishing action was covertly orchestrated by Vice President Dick Cheney for an attack on Iran that never materialized, the highly implausible but official cover story of mismanagement, rule-breaking and recklessness was an international humiliation for Minot.

That same year, Cold War super-hawks Sam Nunn, George Shultz, William Perry and Henry Kissinger publicly declared their support of a “world free of nuclear weapons.” These life-long nuclear arsenal defenders had finally joined Reagan Administration adviser Paul Nitze and Strategic Air Command leader Gen. George Lee Butler in calling the arsenal worse than useless.

Even Sen. Carl Levin, D-Michigan, who last week defended the Pentagon’s usurpation of authority to attack anywhere on Earth for the next 20 years, said about the nuclear arsenal last June, “The more weapons that exist out there, the less secure we are rather than the more secure we are.” [“Senator Urges Bigger Cuts to Nuclear Arsenal,” New York Times, June 15, 2012]

No wonder the Air Force missileers are lackadaisical about the apocalypse. There’s just no future in it.

John LaForge, syndicated by PeaceVoice, edits the Nukewatch quarterly newsletter.

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Reaping the Seeds of Nuke Tests

The warnings about fallout from nuclear tests six decades ago often noted that cancers from the radiation would probably not begin appearing in large numbers for many years. But that time is now and medical experts are wondering whether the surge in some cancers is a result, writes John LaForge.

By John LaForge
Back in the 1950s and 1960s, the Atomic Energy Commission doused the entire United States with thyroid cancer-causing iodine-131, and 300 other radioisotopes, by exploding atomic and hydrogen bombs above ground. To protect the dirty, secretive, militarized bomb-building industry, the government chose to warn the photographic film industry about the radioactive fallout patterns, but not the general public.

In 1951, the Eastman Kodak Company had threatened a federal lawsuit over the nuclear fallout that was fogging its bulk film shipments. Film was not packed in bubble wrap then, but in corn stalks that were sometimes being fallout-contaminated.

By agreeing to warn Kodak, etc., the AEC and the bomb program avoided the public uproar, and the bomb testing program’s possible cancellation, that a lawsuit would have precipitated. The settlement kept the deadliness of the fallout hidden from farmers and the public, even though the government well knew that fallout endangered all the people it was supposed to be defending.

This staggering revelation was heralded on Sept. 30, 1997, in the New York Times headline, “U.S. Warned Film Plants, Not Public, About Nuclear Fallout.” The article began, “[W]hile the Government reassured the public that there was no health threat from atmospheric nuclear tests” The fallout’s radioactive iodine-131 delivered thyroid doses to virtually all 160 million people in the U.S. at the time.

According to the Institute for Energy and Environmental Research (IEER) in Takoma Park, Maryland, which discovered the cover-up, children were especially affected and received higher doses because they generally consumed more milk than adults and since their thyroids are smaller and growing more rapidly. The “milk pathway” moves radioiodine from grass, to cows, to milk with extreme efficiency, a fact known to the government as early as 1951.

Ingested iodine-131 concentrates in the thyroid gland where it can cause cancer. Average doses to children averaged between 6 and 14 rad, with some as high as 112 rad. Prior to 1997, the government claimed that thyroid doses to children were 15 to 70 times less.

**Every Corner of the U.S.**

My friend Steve O’Neil of Duluth, Minnesota, who was born in 1951, has been a public spirited political activist all of his adult life, an advocate for the homeless and a campaigner against the causes of homelessness.

As a St. Louis County Commissioner in his third term, Steve made headlines this month by announcing that he has been attacked by an aggressive form of thyroid
cancer. Steve is not alone in his affliction, more than 60,000 thyroid cancers will be spotted this year in the U.S. Tens of thousands of them have been caused by our government’s nuclear weapons establishment.

The National Cancer Institute disclosed in 1997 that some 75,000 thyroid cancer cases can be expected in the U.S. from just 90, out of a total of 235, above-ground bomb tests and that 10 percent of them will be fatal. That year, the NCI said, about 70 percent of the thyroid cancers caused by iodine-131 fallout from those 90 tests had not yet been diagnosed but would appear years or decades later.

The 14-year NCI study also said the 90 bomb blasts produced more than 100 times the radioactive iodine-131 than the government had earlier claimed. The NCI estimated that they dispersed “about 150 million curies of iodine-131, mainly in the years 1952, 1953, 1955, and 1957.”

The study reported that all 160 million people in the country at the time were exposed to the iodine-131 (the only isotope out of more than 300 that were dispersed by the bomb blasts that it studied). Children under 15, like Steve O’Neil and all the Baby Boomers, were particularly at risk. High doses of fallout were spread nation-wide. Wind patterns and local rainfall caused “hot spots” from Montana and Idaho to South Dakota, Minnesota, Missouri and beyond.

In 1962, according to IEER, officials in Utah and Minnesota diverted possibly contaminated milk from the market when iodine-131 levels exceeded radiation guidelines set by the Federal Radiation Council (FRC). The FRC reacted harshly and declared that it did “not recommend such actions.” The FRC also announced that its radiation guidelines should not be applied to bomb test fallout because “any possible health risk which may be associated with exposures even many times above the guide levels would not result in a detectable increase in the incidence of disease.”

IEER’s scientists condemned this fabulously implausible assurance, writing: “Since thyroid cancers can develop many years after radiation exposure and are therefore not immediately detectable, this reassurance was highly misleading.”

Tip of Cancer Iceberg

The National Cancer Institute’s 1997 study said about 16,000 cases of thyroid cancer were diagnosed in the U.S. annually, and that 1,230 would die from the disease. This estimate turned out to be a gross under-statement.

Today the NCI reports that 60,220 new cases of thyroid cancer will be diagnosed in the U.S. this year, and that 1,850 of them will be fatal. The thyroid cancer “balloon” is with us because the nuclear weapons complex under Presidents Dwight
Eisenhower and John F. Kennedy attacked the very people it was said to be defending. Yet, it gets worse.

The UN Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation says that iodine-131 doses comprise only two percent of the overall radiation dose from weapons testing. Ninety-eight percent of our fallout dose is from 300 other isotopes produced by the Bomb.

It is not idle speculation to suggest that the cancer pandemic afflict ing the people of the U.S. has been caused by our own government’s deliberately secret and viciously reckless weapons program.

John LaForge works for Nukewatch, a nuclear watchdog group in Wisconsin, edits its Quarterly newsletter, and is syndicated through PeaceVoice.

Nuke Sludge Leaking at Hanford

The U.S. rush to build a giant arsenal of nuclear weapons during the Cold War created an environmental disaster at Hanford in Washington State along the Columbia River. Clean-up costs are staggering and radioactive sludge threatens to contaminate the region’s water supply, writes nuclear watchdog John LaForge.

By John LaForge

Federal and state officials said in February six giant underground tanks holding an explosive and toxic brew of highly radioactive liquid wastes are leaking at the 570-square-mile Hanford Reservation, on the Columbia River in South Central Washington State.

Hanford is perhaps the dirtiest reactor site in the world with 1,000 inactive dumps, 100 to 200 square miles of contaminated ground water, and 50,000 drums of plutonium wastes in temporary storage.

For 40 years, Hanford’s eight production reactors made plutonium for H-bombs, and in the process its contractors dumped plutonium, cesium, technetium, tritium, strontium and other isotopes into the air, soil, ground water and, astonishingly, even directly into the Columbia River, the drinking water source for downstream cities.

Hanford has 54 million gallons of the high-level liquids and sludge in 177 aged and decrepit tanks. In the 1980s, the Department of Energy (DOE) disclosed that up to 69 of the million-gallon tanks were leaking. February’s disclosure makes
In 1998, the DOE said it expected all the tanks to leak eventually. Twenty years ago *Newsweek* declared that all “177 unlabeled tanks leak radioactive glop.” Several million gallons have since been removed for processing.

DOE spokeswoman Lindsey Geisler said late last month there was no immediate health risk from the newly discovered leaks. This reassurance is suspect since the DOE said for decades that tank wastes would take 10,000 years to reach the ground water. It got there in less than 40.

A similar but contemporary PR twist came Feb. 22, when Washington Gov. Jay Inslee said that the state would impose a “zero-tolerance” policy on radioactive waste leaking into the soil. Looking back at Hanford’s record, a “zero-containment” policy is more likely.

**Radioactive Iceberg**

This season’s leaks, which reportedly amount to 300 gallons per year, seem barely newsworthy in view of the colossal dumping that’s been done at Hanford. In the heyday of plutonium production, the Seattle Times has reported, “The DOE estimates that as many as 750,000 curies of radioactive iodine, xenon, cesium, strontium, plutonium and uranium may have been put into the Columbia River each year in the 1950s.”

A week earlier the paper reported said, “Many of the releases involved dumping of cooling water into the Columbia River.” Tim Connor of Hanford Watch in Spokane told the paper that daily releases of 430 curies noted in one 1946 report were, “the equivalent of a Three Mile Island accident every hour.”

DOE officials admitted in 1991 that managers dumped 440 billion gallons of radioactive liquids *directly into the soil*, using ditches, cribs, trenches and injection wells, and that hazardous waste had “fouled the Columbia River.” A 1965 report from Hanford among 19,000 pages of documents declassified in 1986 says “a total of 6 million curies” of radioactive material were dumped directly into the Columbia. In 2000, the DOE estimated that the tanks held 190 million curies of radioactivity.

Leaving aside the billions of gallons of nuclear poisons poured directly into it, the *New York Times* reported in Oct. 1997 that, “If leaks from the tanks reach the Columbia River through ground water, radioactive material would eventually be incorporated into the food chain and could expose people to radiation *for centuries*.”

And even with all these millions of curies thrown into the soil, a ground water
manager at Hanford said in 2000 that the “worst” tank wastes, including technetium-99 and cobalt-60, are “probably still 20 years away” from the Columbia.

Twenty-five years since its reactors were shut down (they stopped making plutonium in 1987) leaking plutonium tank wastes are not the only way that Cold War cancers are still being dispensed from Hanford.

Wildfires burned 300 acres of the reservation in summer 2000, when Energy Secretary Bill Richardson rushed to say July 1, “There does not appear to be any contamination whatsoever.” Wrong again. By Aug. 3, plutonium was found to have been lofted to 10 far-flung areas, including five Eastern Washington city neighborhoods.

Even then, Jerry Leitch, an EPA official at the time, told the Seattle Post that the amount of plutonium was below what’s considered a threat to health. Really? A single atomic particle of plutonium if inhaled can cause lung cancer.

The estimated cost of cleanup, the most expensive anti-pollution effort in history, has steadily increased. In 1989, DOE guessed it would take $57 billion and 50 years. By 1997 its estimate was over $200 billion.

Explosive Risks

The DOE has long worried that its waste tanks, at Hanford and at Savannah River, South Carolina, could explode due to the buildup of hydrogen gas or organic vapors. Indeed, a 1965 explosion at Hanford ruptured one tank that subsequently leaked 800,000 gallons of cooling water into the soil. Again on May 14, 1997, a tank holding plutonium processing chemicals blew up, sending its heavy steel lid and a plume of toxic gas through the roof.

Arjun Makhijani has said that an analysis by the DOE in 1978 put that chance of hydrogen explosions Savannah River’s tanks at 1-in-10,000. Chances of an explosion of organic vapors were ten times higher, or 1-in-1,000. Considering the number of tanks, the chance of one of them having an explosion was one-in-50 each year.

In 1986, researcher Michael Blain at Boise State University showed that women in Eastern Washington and Northern Idaho had elevated rates of thyroid and breast cancer and said there was a high probability that “the excess cancers are attributable to the release of radioactive iodine.”

Cancers, miscarriages and other health problems suffered by people in the area have been blamed on the deliberate spewing of 5,500 curies of iodine-131 to the atmosphere in a Dec. 3, 1949, experiment called “green run,” and on the offhand
dispersal of 340,000 curies in 1945 alone.

In 1974, Dr. Samuel Milham in Washington’s state health department published his finding that men who had worked at Hanford had a 25 percent higher proportion of cancer deaths than for similarly aged men in other work.

And in 1977, the journal Health Physics published Alice Stewart, Thomas Mancuso and George Kneal’s finding of a 6 or 7 percent increased cancer effect in Hanford workers. About this increase Dr. Stewart said, “It wasn’t much of an effect but the shock was that there was any effect at all since the cancers were occurring at radiation exposure levels well below the official limit of five rads per year. It meant that the current standards for nuclear safety might be as much as 20 times too high.”

In 1990, a DOE analysis of radiation exposures downwind from Hanford found that infants and children were heavily contaminated because of drinking contaminated milk. The Hanford Environmental Dose Reconstruction Project found that 13,500 people may have received doses over 33 rads of iodine-131 and that infants and children closest to Hanford could have consumed between 650 and 3,000 rads. Even a single rad can cause thyroid cancer and other illnesses.

Not to put too fine a point on it: Hanford’s latest six leaks are the tip of its iceberg of radiation which is spreading to the Columbia River and beyond a plague of cancer and disease that will never come to an end.

John LaForge works for Nukewatch, a nuclear watchdog and environmental justice group in Wisconsin, and edits its quarterly newsletter. (nukewatchinfo.org)

Punishing Anti-Nuke Protesters

A twisted part of modern America is that harsh punishments are given to people who stand for truth and justice, while torturers and war criminals go free. That’s the case for Bradley Manning who released secrets and anti-nuclear protesters who tied “crime scene” tape to a nuke site, as John LaForge says.

By John La Forge

Risking your personal freedom for a worthy cause is as American as apple pie. But nonviolently putting your life at risk in defense of others is so rare that the actor is sometimes dismissed as crazy.

Some people think the Transform Now Plowshares activists were crazy for sneaking
into a nuclear weapons factory, the Y-12 National Security Complex in Oak Ridge, Tennessee, in order to make a direct, unequivocal and crystal clear demand for an end to the expensive, poisonous, criminal and delusional self-destructiveness of building nuclear bombs.

Of course Sr. Megan Rice, 82; Michael Walli, 63; and Greg Boertji-Obed, 57, are anything but crazy, even if they and could have been shot and killed for daring to snip through the flimsy chain-link fences that surround Y-12, and then walk up to its new storage fortress for bomb-grade uranium. That’s what they did in the wee hours of July 28, after decades of conscientious peace and anti-poverty work prepared them for what would likely be the most dangerous protest of their lives.

At the wall they strung “crime scene” tape because dirty bomb conspiracies are criminal enterprises. They spray-painted disarmament messages, poured blood and hoisted banners. Not a single guard responded. Wackenhut, the contracted security company, was so discredited, and later humiliated by disclosures of its own internal corruption, that its contract was cancelled, heads rolled, a new agency was hired, and over $15 million was spent trying to reestablish some semblance of a defended nuclear weapons complex.

In January, President and CEO of Wackenhut (also called G4S Gov’t Solutions) Paul Donahue told the Knoxville News Sentinel, “The enemy of today is not just organized Nation States, but vandals, activists and protesters looking not necessarily to harm material, or people, but clearly seeking to embarrass.”

All three are out of jail on conditional release preparing for trial, set for May 7, on three felony charges that together carry a maximum of 35 years on prison. Yes, 35 years for trespassing, spray painting and embarrassing.

But as the News Sentinel reported on Feb. 3, the bold intervenors know “that great change never comes easy.” Boertji-Obed told the paper, “People in other countries are frequently killed because of their struggle for justice.”

The three were back in federal court on Feb. 7 for a motion hearing before U.S. Magistrate Richard Shirley. They argued against the prosecuting U.S. Attorney’s attempt to exclude any testimony about, get this, “nuclear weapons,” or “international law,” or the defendants’ intention to practice crime prevention at Y-12.

The prosecutor’s motion “in limine,” or gag order, would, if granted, keep the jury from hearing a word about the outlaw status of the nuclear warheads. As with previous anti-nuclear cases, the defendants contend that binding U.S.
treaties and military service manuals make nuclear weapons illegal because H-bombs can only produce uncontrollable, indiscriminate, toxic mass destruction using radioactive firestorms.

Considering the sociopathic turpitude of preparing the use of such devices, all Sr. Rice, Boertji-Obed and Walli are guilty of, they contend, is an attempt at citizen’s arrest. Of course, the government doesn’t want the jury to hear what the law says about planning and preparing massacres.

For his part, Magistrate Shirley said he wouldn’t exactly limit the discussions of the defendants’ intentions. But Shirley only presides over pretrial hearings. The trial itself will be run by a federal judge who will rule on the motion “in limine,” choose the jury instructions, and decide on questions of “contempt” in the event that forbidden words are uttered by lawyers, defendants or observers.

It’s a testament to the dominance of the H-bomb culture, that one of its judges can forbid defendants in a criminal case from explaining the basis for their actions, while wielding the power to impose 35 years in prison for nothing more than embarrassing that culture. The nuclear war system isn’t called “overkill” for nothing.

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