

Anthony Guarisco of the US Speaks for Atomic Veterans

Greetings: My name is Anthony Guarisco; I'm the director of the Alliance of Atomic Veterans (AAV). On behalf of our AAV members, we thank you for the opportunity to speak here today, and we extend our gratitude to the many people who have worked to make this conference a reality.

Our Alliance consists mainly of US military veterans who, while serving in the military, were ordered to take part in the US military's experimental nuclear weapons explosions. The US military tells us that from 1945-63 three hundred thousand American troops were directly involved in the US nuclear explosion program. That would include 40,000 troops who were ordered into Hiroshima and Nagasaki to do clean up work in the aftermath of the unnecessary atomic attacks on the innocent men, women and children of those two cities.

It was 1945 when the US military exploded two atomic bombs over Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Our alliance and many other veterans in America believe that the people of those two cities became the first Nuclear Weapons Experimental Animals for the US military. Those of us who were in the Pacific at that time were told and understood that when the Island of Okinawa fell to the Americans (and it did, June 1945) the war would be over. But that is another story for another time.

Although the American atomic veterans did not experience the nuclear weapons holocaust as did our brother and sister Hibakusha of Japan, many of our vets were within very close range of nuclear explosions. The military insisted on moving us closer and closer to the epicenter of the explosions. By August 1946 the decision had been made to use US troops at this first naval nuclear explosions code named "Operation Crossroads." After the second bomb, code name Baker (an underwater explosion), the operation was completely out of control and was quickly and frantically closed down.

Many years later, in 1983, one of our AAV members, a researcher, uncovered the one-time secret and top secret documents, now declassified, that explained why the operation was stopped before the third and last experimental explosion.

In every respect the atomic vets were the sacrificial lambs, laid on the altar of the atomic age for the development of the larger and deadlier nuclear weapons that now hold each of us hostage. We never thought the military would put us in harm's way, but we were wrong about that. We can never forget the clear but unbelievable demonstration of what World War III would look like. Not many people other than the Japanese Hibakusha or other atomic veterans can understand what it would be like to be two miles away from a 24 kiloton explosion.



Anthony Guarisco addresses a rally outside the International Court of Justice in The Hague.

Photo: Joseph Gerson.

We have seen the fire-storm and felt the incredible heat and wind. We remember the continuous and unbelievably high intensity of the loud thundering of 100 thunderstorms at one time. We cringe at the thought of the relentless percussion that engulfed and tightened around our bodies as if it would crush us to death. Indelibly burned in our memory is the sacrilegious devastation that nuclear weapons leave in their wake.

One of the top secret documents dated in the same time frame - August 1946 - revealed a statement made by a high ranking officer in a secret meeting convened on a flag ship in the Bikini lagoon after the second explosion (Baker). The statement: "We must take every precaution to assure that no successful claim can be filed by a Crossroads participant against the Radiological Monitoring Section of Operation Crossroads". Translation: "It's called barring the debt and covering your ass."

The decision to use 42,000 troops for the Crossroads operation was a slow and painful death sentence for tens of thousands of atomic veterans. From the 1960s through the 1980s our veterans were dying all around us. Cancer and conventional illness were in epidemic proportions. We again tried in early 1983 to have the Congress move on the proper epidemiology to ascertain what was happening to our veterans and our offspring. The response was: it was not needed and was financially prohibitive.

When we attempted to obtain help from the Veterans Administration hospitals we were turned away, "locked out" so to speak. At one point, in 1984, the Veterans Administration Hospital (VA) in San Francisco was found guilty in a court of law for shredding and burning official documents from vets.

Our documents were sent to the VA as instructed in an attempt to bolster our claim for health service through the VA system. In 1984, out of desperation and knowledge that the US government would never do the proper epidemiological studies for the atomic veterans, we opted to conduct our own survey from our office in Washington, DC.

From that survey we discovered what the government already knew. Over 53% of the atomic veterans were suffering chromosome aberrations passed on to their children in the form of birth defects. Our vets were dying at the average age of 47. The practice of exposing vets to nuclear explosions continued for 17 more years, and for 17 more years the bombs became more powerful and plentiful, as tens of thousands of the atomic vets became radiation victims and our numbers became smaller.

The military did not want the American public to know about the disaster they created in 1946, and the conspiracy of silence was passed down through the Pentagon until President Kennedy stopped the slaughter in 1963 (with the limited test ban treaty) and the billions of dollars stopped flowing from that great golden cash register in the sky to the corrupt nuclear weapons military industrial complex.

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