

B Airman Exposed To Radiation

by Mark Gutkiewicz

GEORGE AFB—A gamma radiation analysis performed by a radiological assay company last week established that an airman stationed at George Air Force Base in the 1970s was exposed to enriched uranium and at least one other weapons grade or weapons grade by-product nuclear substance.

Frank Vera, 41, has suffered a variety of physical ailments including hematological

damage, neurological damage, skeletal damage, pulmonary emphysema and chronic lym-

phatic complications since he

opened a partially buried barrel he discovered while motor-cycling in an authorized recreational area at the southeast end

A number of former airmen have indicated that nuclear weapons were present on the base in the 1960s and 1970s.

of the base in August 1973. While a host of medical doctors have for years diagnosed

Previously, when his physicians had attempted to verify by means of a body radioactivity content analysis whether Vera had absorbed nuclear materials, the Department of Defense refused authorization for the tests on the grounds of national security.

On June 22 — after the intervention of Clinton administration officials, Con-

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gressman George Brown and members of Congressman Jerry Lewis' staff — a gamma radiation count for plutonium, uranium and americium was performed on Vera in Chino Hills by a mobile testing unit run by Pleasanton-based Helgeson Scientific Services.

That analysis showed Vera's body harbors 63 micrograms of enriched uranium-255, 3.8 milligrams of depleted uranium and 2.7 nanocuries of natural uranium. Additionally, gamma readings indicated the presence of another as yet unidentified radionuclide in a quantity roughly twice that of the natural uranium in Vera's system.

Helgeson Scientific's mobile unit was in Chino Hills last week to carry out routine testing on the employees of GenCorp's AeroJet facility when the Veterans Administration gave go-ahead for Vera to undergo testing there. At the Chino Hills facility, AeroJet manufactures depleted uranium armor-piercing projectiles, commonly referred to as tank killers.

According to Vera, Helgeson technicians remarked that his depleted uranium count was in line with those experienced by AeroJet employees who work with the material on a daily basis. They further remarked, Vera said, that his exposure to and ingestion of enriched uranium was significant.

The analysis results cast further doubt on representations

made by the Air Force pertaining to not only Vera's contention that he was exposed to nuclear material when he was stationed at George, but the nature of soil and ground water contamination at the base. George was closed in December 1992.

Denise Caron, a civilian Air Force employee overseeing the clean-up of George, contended in 1993 that "there is nothing wrong with Frank Vera, except maybe mentally," in response to Vera's assertion that the Air Force was covering up the extent and nature of contamination at the base.

Caron also asserted as recently as Dec. 10 of last year, "We didn't have a nuclear mission at George. We didn't use nukes. We didn't use tactical nukes."

Six days later, *Valley Wide Newspapers* published a photograph reportedly taken on Apr. 11, 1961 of four members of an ordnance leading crew with the 329th Fighter Interceptor Squadron then stationed at George as they affixed a Douglas MB-1 Genie nuclear air-to-air missile to the undercarriage of an F-105 interceptor.

Caron also insisted last December that an Office of Special Investigations (O.S.I.) investigation carried out in 1989 and 1990 ascertained that no weapons grade nuclear materials had ever been disposed of at the base.

Shortly thereafter, Chris Filipiak, the now retired O.S.I. investigator who headed up that investigation, came forward to state that his investigation had not concerned itself

with the presence of weapons grade materials at the base.

Instead, he said it had merely been undertaken to establish that some low level nuclear materials, such as medical wastes, components of x-ray units and cathode ray tubes, had been buried in the base's southwest disposal area.

Over the last two years, a number of former airmen stationed at the base, including a master sergeant and staff sergeant, have provided *Valley Wide Newspapers* with statements indicating that nuclear weapons were present on the base in the 1960s and 1970s, and that some radioactive materials had been buried in the southeast disposal area as well as on the base grounds behind the alert hangar.

The southeast disposal area is less than three-quarters of a mile upstream from residential, agricultural and commercial supply wells for Adelanto, Oro Grande and George Air Force Base.

On the basis of the analysis done last week, Vera has filed paperwork with the V.A. to get medical treatment for the conditions that have arisen from the radiation exposure, including further tests to ascertain all isotopes present in his body. Ultimately, Vera hopes to undergo chelation therapy, a process by which isotopes are broken down and leached out of the body.

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