

Prepared Statement
of
The Honorable William Winkenwerder, Jr., M.D., M.B.A.
Assistant Secretary of Defense for Health Affairs
on
Shipboard Hazard and Defense
Before the House Veterans Affairs Committee
Subcommittee on Health
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COMMITTEE ON VETERANS AFFAIRS

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to be here today. Moreover, I want to thank you for your continued support of the men and women who have served in our Armed Forces.

As Assistant Secretary of Defense for Health Affairs, I want to stress that the Department of Defense (DoD) is absolutely committed to an aggressive and thorough investigation of all chemical and biological warfare tests planned and performed by the Deseret Test Center between 1962 and 1973. The purpose of the investigation is to provide relevant medical information to the Department of Veterans' Affairs (VA). The Deseret Test Center was established as a result of Project 112. Project 112 was one of one hundred and fifty management initiatives begun by Defense Secretary McNamara, after his review of the Department of Defense in 1961. Under Project 112, the Deseret Test Center planned and conducted a joint chemical and biological testing program that included shipboard and land-based testing. Project Shipboard and Hazard Defense (SHAD) was the shipboard portion. SHAD was designed to test ships' vulnerability to biological or chemical attack.

When I testified before the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee in July of this year, I expressed that we are dedicated to finding and declassifying all relevant medical information from those tests. Additionally, we are committed to sharing this information with the VA by June 2003. Today, I would like to discuss what we have done, what we have learned and what are currently doing.

Since August 2000, when the Department of Veterans' Affairs requested that the Department of Defense provide information concerning classified Project SHAD tests, we have developed a close working relationship with the VA. From the beginning of this process, VA staff members have met regularly with our investigators to review their activities and to verify that the information being sought was what VA needed to assist them in addressing health care matters and settle benefit questions. A team from our Deployment Health Support Directorate meets regularly with VA personnel, to ensure we provide the VA with the relevant medical information they need to address veterans' concerns.

To date, our investigation has revealed a great deal about tests planned and conducted by the Deseret Test Center. The Center planned 134 tests between 1962 and 1973. So far we have verified that 46 tests were conducted and 62 were cancelled. We are working to determine the status of the remaining 26 tests. The majority (24) were planned for 1970-1974, a period in which plans were being made to close the Deseret Test Center.

We are working closely with the Department of the Army to facilitate declassification of the necessary data, focusing on relevant medical information. Because many of the same agents remain a threat to our Forces today, the records cannot be casually declassified. Our investigators identify the relevant medical information and request declassification of this specific information in a process that has been significantly expedited.

As information becomes available, it is provided to the VA in the form of fact sheets. To date we have published 45 fact sheets on 41 tests which involved more than 5,000 servicemembers. The fact sheets detail which ships and units were involved in tests, when the tests took place and what substances the crew may have been exposed to. In order to expedite

the VA's notification to affected veterans, we now provide names and service numbers of servicemembers involved in each test to the VA as soon as we identify the ship or unit involved; we do not wait for the declassification process to be completed. To date, we have provided the VA with the names of 4,990 veterans from 16 of 18 known shipboard tests and are searching for classified reports which identify the ships used in the remaining two tests.

Our investigation has confirmed that Deseret Test Center tests were primarily conducted using simulants believed to be safe in place of chemical or biological warfare agents. In those instances when potentially harmful substances were used, there is no evidence that any of the service members involved were exposed to them without proper protection. Service members were vaccinated before testing that involved live biological agents. If actual chemical agents were used they were confined to airtight sections of their ship. When appropriate, protective clothing was also worn. While some service members may not have known all the details of these tests, it is likely they knew that they were participating in testing due to use of precautionary measures. We have learned that the scientists involved informed senior leaders about tests using simulants. Like other operational activities, service members were not informed of these tests.

Information is presented to the VA as quickly as possible and is posted on our web site, DeploymentLINK.mil. A chart located on that web site shows the status of our investigation for each of the tests and is updated regularly. In addition to responding to letters, e-mails and telephone calls placed to our toll-free number, we have also attended the reunion of the crew of the USS Power and have asked other crews to allow us to attend their reunions to help us better understand the concerns of these veterans. We have also sought out scientists and senior officials involved with the tests to increase our understanding of what happened during the tests.

With the termination of the U.S. offensive chemical and biological weapons programs and with changes to operations and health research standards, the use of live agents on humans is severely restricted. With modern technology we can determine the effectiveness of defensive measures by using mannequins. The military services do still use simulants during operational testing and training. We are reviewing all policies governing the use of simulants during testing and training. Additionally, small amounts of live agent are used in training at the chemical school. Our objective is to ensure that concerns like those surrounding the Deseret Test Center tests do not arise in the future.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes my statement. I thank you and the Members of this Committee for your outstanding and continuing support for the men and women of the Department of Defense. I look forward to addressing your questions.