

**THE ROYAL VICTORIAN EYE & EAR HOSPITAL**

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MELBOURNE, C.2  
Australia  
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**MEDICAL STATEMENT REGARDING**

**ERNEST COE**

8th December 1972.

**TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN**

Dr. Ernest Coe has recently undergone laryngectomy (31st October 1972) and has recovered satisfactorily postoperatively; and in normal circumstances would be allowed home now. However, he needs help with changing of his tracheostomy tube and still requires tracheal suction, because he has no effective cough.

**Past History:** chronic bronchial asthma, and chronic alcoholism with Korsakoff's psychosis.

At present he is well rehabilitated with regard to his alcoholism. His behaviour is normal, friendly, and he is fully orientated. He is fully ambulant, feeds himself, and has normal bowel and bladder function. This means he would be suited to a convalescent type hospital or nursing home, provided tracheal suction could be arranged.

He is keen to return to Brisbane, where his two daughters live (with their families).

Such a trip should only be by air, and he would require to be escorted by a doctor, in case of respiratory problems.

**DOG USED TO LOCATE MAN**

Police last night used a tracker dog in an attempt to find a man, 60, missing from Greenslopes Repatriation Hospital.

The man, Ernest Robert Coe, disappeared from the hospital at midday on Wednesday. Police said he had loss of memory and, because of an operation, was unable to talk.

Coe is 5ft. 7in. tall, of stocky build, fair complexion with greying hair and blue eyes.

**Body found**

Water police yesterday recovered the body of a man in the Brisbane River opposite Turbot Street, City, about 9 a.m. Police said there were no suspicious circumstances. The man's name has not been released.

COE, Ernest Robert Mitchell, Greenslopes Repatriation Hospital, Brisbane, formerly of Melbourne, passed away, Brisbane, 10.11.72. May, privately cremated, Albany Creek Crematorium, Friday, 18th. Mark, Hammett, A.F.O.A., Ph. B.M. 44 4911.

Department of Otolaryngology

E.N.T. Registrar,

K. A. Zdanus,

*K.A. Zdanus*

# Nuke waste left at sea

BY KIM SWEETMAN

NUCLEAR waste was deliberately dumped in the off the Sunshine Coast and in the Gulf of Carpentaria as part of British tests in the 1950s.

Drums of radioactive material, including liquid which could cause cancer from a single touch, were dropped from RAAF planes and then machine-gunned so they would sink.

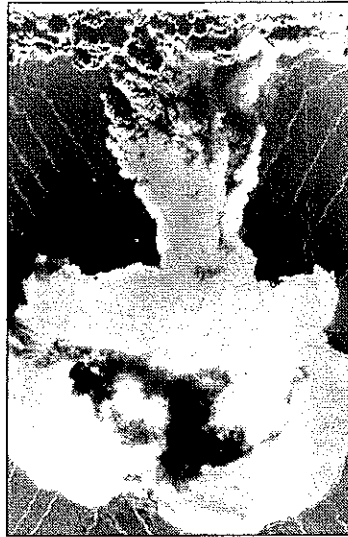
Most of the nuclear waste came from South Australia, where the British were letting off atom bombs north of Woomera.

Queensland waters were used for four years as the rubbish tip for the testers - but no clean-up operation along the coast ever followed.

A 1980 RAAF report, recently released in South Australia, said contaminated engine parts, cleaning equipment and clothing were also dumped at sea.

The dumping ground extended approximately from Brisbane Island to just south of Tin Can Bay, and most areas of the Gulf of Carpentaria were used.

Some of what was released



NUCLEAR CLOUD: A 1957 Maralinga A-bomb blast

into prime fisheries and environmentally pristine sites included the most dangerous nuclear materials ever used, strontium 90 and caesium 137. Materials containing both elements were put in the drums. Both have been linked to bone cancer and birth defects, often after only very limited exposure.

The drums were dropped in deep water at least 370km from land but subsequent tidal flow studies have repeatedly shown water from the dumping sites could have reached the beach within a few days.

The RAAF approved the dumping in 1954 after several involved in the Woomera tests were found to be highly contaminated.

A 1954 report admitted dumping the waste on land "might attract undesirable attention".

"Dumping at sea is considered to be the most suitable and cleanest method of handling the wastes but for liquids it would involve the use of containers which must burst on impact with the water," it said.

Nuclear waste was also dumped off the coast of Tasmania, north of major blue fin tuna fishing grounds which are used by commercial fishing operators.

The Australian Radiation Protection and Nuclear Safety Agency said the dumping took place before its time. It did not monitor the dump sites.

"How can you monitor on the ocean bed?" a spokesman said.

• Editorial, Page 73

IC Johnstone was not surprised when top-secret documents surfaced this week detailing how the British and Australian governments planned to send 385 soldiers and airmen into trenches at Maralinga to monitor the effects of two atomic explosions on humans.

The only Australian nuclear test veteran to successfully sue the Commonwealth Government for compensation for radiation poisoning, the 68-year-old former mechanic has spent most of his life trying to prove hundreds of servicemen were used as guinea pigs in the South Australian desert almost 50 years ago.

The quest has pitched the national president of the Australian Nuclear Veterans Association against successive federal governments, all of which have refused compensation to more than 8000 Australian servicemen assigned to the nuclear test program at the Monte Bello Islands, Emu and Maralinga between 1952 and 1957.

An estimated 6000 have died, their widows unable to access classified documents. Proving multiple cancers, heart failures and birth defects in their children were caused by radiation poisoning from 12 bombs the men were ordered to watch explode.

Johnstone was a 21-year-old RAAF mechanic when he lined up with other servicemen on September 27, 1956, to witness his first explosion at One Tree, Maralinga. It was one of four explosions under the codename: Operation Buffalo which Johnstone and colleagues from the RAAF, Australian Army and Royal Australian Navy would observe as they stood in their khaki shirts, trousers and caps.

Johnstone and 283 Australian, British and New Zealand servicemen based at what was known as Camp 43 at Maralinga were ordered to assemble 7.2km from the detonation site, called Ground Zero. They would listen, with their hands over their tightly clenched eyes, for five minutes while a countdown played through a loudspeaker. Officers would order them to wait for two seconds after the countdown before turning around and looking at the explosion.

"They would count down to zero and then there would be this almighty big white flash inside your head, as though your skull was lighting up from the inside and this heat would hit the back of your neck," the 68-year-old vividly recalls from his home in Gosford, NSW.

"Then this hot wind would sweep across and make your clothes flap. The next thing you would hear was what sounded like 500 trains coming straight at you from across the desert. You'd turn around and see this huge fireball going up into the sky, looking as big as Earth. It would just keep getting bigger and bigger and it would seem to last for hours."

Within 24 hours of each test, Johnstone was ordered to drive a towing vehicle into the radioactive site, dubbed the hot-zone, where he

## New documents purportedly reveal the Australian government's use of human guinea pigs in nuclear bomb tests. Colin James and Bronwyn Hurrell report

of the explosions. Sometimes he would wear a white radiation protection suit, with breathing apparatus. On other occasions he would be ordered just to wear his khakis. He and other mechanics would then wash the vehicles with high-pressure hoses, removing large quantities of contaminated soil.

Johnstone would give blood samples each time he entered and left the hot zone, or finished washing and dismantling the vehicles. His body and clothing would also be swept with Geiger counters to measure his radiation count. Officers would record these measurements in pencil on personalised sheets before Johnstone would be ordered to shower. He had been at Maralinga for almost 12 months when he developed serious diarrhoea and vomiting. It got to the point, he says, where "I couldn't suit up any more because I didn't know when I would have to be sick or go to the toilet".

In late 1957 he was transferred to the 3rd RAAF Hospital at Richmond, in NSW, with radiation poisoning. Three months later, he was discharged from the RAAF on the grounds he was medically unfit for further duty.

In 1987, he won a landmark case in the NSW Supreme Court against the Commonwealth Government, receiving \$867,100 in compensation, after his lawyers obtained medical records confirming he had been treated for radiation poisoning.

But when his records from Maralinga were handed over, all traces of the details of his radiation readings had been erased.

"It was only then I realised why they were written down in pencil. When we got them, all that remained were ticks showing each time I had been checked. There was nothing to show I had been exposed to radiation," he says.

Other veterans who have attempted to access their documents have been told they do not exist or they are not entitled to see them. Some believe they have been shredded, along with any other evidence which could prove long-standing allegations that the Australian and British Governments deliberately exposed servicemen to radiation to test the effects on their bodies

The search for the missing documents has been spearheaded by Johnstone's organisation, formed at Camp 43 in 1956 as a social group which planned to later meet for reunions "so we could have a few beers and catch up". Instead, it became one of a number of veteran groups in Australia, Britain, NZ and Canada which have spent almost half a century trying to prove what happened at Maralinga and elsewhere.

Johnstone, who has endured severe anxiety disorders, hypertension, skin lesions, melanoma and the removal of his gall bladder and part of his liver, says of the seven original members of his association, he is the only survivor of Maralinga. Five of his colleagues died of multiple cancers, one died from a heart failure and another was killed in a trucking accident. At the last meeting of the association, late last year, the only people who attended were widows of veterans and lawyers.

Johnstone has been intensively lobbying the Howard Government for compensation for these widows and surviving veterans of the nuclear tests, to no avail. One of the biggest obstacles for the Maralinga survivors is proving their medical conditions were linked to their duties at the nuclear test sites. While the Commonwealth has settled claims against some diseases, such as rare types of bone cancer, it will not acknowledge other general problems such as cancer, tumours or birth defects.

Many survivors lack the money or energy to keep up the fight. Johnstone hopes the new evidence which has emerged this month may give the campaign a fresh impetus.

The first breakthrough came when an Australian researcher based at Scotland's Dundee University, Susan Rabbit-Roff, produced documents detailing how 24 British servicemen were used in clothing trials to test different materials against radiation. Rabbit-Roff, who has been campaigning over Maralinga for several years, says the document further challenges British and Australian claims there was no harmful testing of servicemen.

Her argument was reinforced earlier this week when secret documents located by the researcher revealed that the Australian and British Governments had planned to put 350 servicemen into trenches at Maralinga during an explosion to test the effects of radiation. The plan, codenamed Operation Lighthouse, was aborted only when the British, US and Soviet government agreed to a temporary moratorium on atomic nuclear testing in October, 1958.

The documents, dated between July, 1958, and September 1958, were found in dusty folders in a Perth backyard shed five years ago by a 38-year-old registered nurse, Ann Munslow-Davies. She was 16 when she promised her father when he died, at the age of 48, that she would uncover the secrets behind Maralinga and help other men gain compensation for their medical bills.

MUNSLOW-Davies of Maitland, NSW, chose to back up Rabbit-Roff's latest claims by publicly revealing the documents which, she says, show the Australian government was a "full and active participant" in planned nuclear tests on humans - disproving the theory that the government of former Liberal prime minister Robert Menzies did not know what was happening.

Johnstone says there is no question the Menzies government was aware. He says the documents not only show Operation Lighthouse was discussed at secret meetings of the inter-departmental Board of Management for Atomic Tests in Melbourne but also that when he was at Maralinga, he personally saw soldiers walking around radioactive sites without protective clothing.

"The Government might dismiss this latest stuff and say there wasn't an issue because it never happened but of course they used us as human guinea pigs, they just did it in smaller groups," he says.

Johnstone is supported by Brisbane nuclear veteran Terry Toon, who was in Maralinga for 11 months in 1956 with the army engineer corps. He says he saw up to 250 servicemen, known as "indocitrines", forced to roll around in radioactive dust.

Toon, 62, who is secretary of the Australian Atomic Ex-Servicemen's Association, says servicemen were dumped 5km from Ground Zero after the blast at Marooch on October 4, 1956. "I didn't know what was going on. They were all rolling around in (contaminated) red bull-dust. It was ridiculous," he recalls.

Toon, who was 19 when he witnessed four nuclear blasts in one of 30 survivors now seeking compensation from the Commonwealth.

Johnstone says the main priority now for the nuclear veterans is convincing Veteran Affairs Minister Bruce Scott to waive legislation prohibiting the men and their widows from receiving compensation because they did not see active service. He says the minimum they should receive are Veteran Affairs Department

**'Then there would be this almighty big white flash inside your head, as though your skull was lighting up from the inside'**