



NAA&NV NEWS

Members' Publication of the National Association of Atomic & Nuclear Veterans

3rd QUARTER 2016



NAA&NV CONVENTION 2016 • ATOMIC MUSEUM • LAS VEGAS, NV

A NOTE FROM OUR COMMANDER.....

We had a great group of Veterans and spouses, family. This is one of the biggest convention we have had in the last 20 years that I know of. The attendance was so good they caused us some fast running to make it work. We had to change the Banquet place at the last minute because of the 65 that showed for the banquet. The meeting room had to be changed and several changes we made in the last few days for this to happen.

The Tour to the test site was very informative and Ernie showed us a lot of the area. Even the Nevada test site people were impressed with our group. They told me that it had been a lone time since they had a bus of 51 full of one group of Veterans. I believe everyone had a great time.



Operation Tumbler-Snapper

I, PFC John R Fegley, a member of the 82nd Airborne as a paratrooper, participated in that April 22, 1952 nuclear weapons test and can verify exactly everything that was stated in the Baker article submitted in the summer 2015 NAAV news issue.

You will remember in that article by Donald Baker this was about exercise Desert Rock IV of the Charlie Shot designated as Operation Tumbler-Snapper at Yucca Flat, Nevada. The 31 kiloton bomb was dropped from a B-50 over Area 7 and detonated at 3,447 feet above ground at 0930

We as paratroopers were informed that we would be closer to a nuclear detonation than the people who were involved in the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombings in WWII. When the bomb detonated, it was not a boom or a bang but a tremendous crack like a whip. With my eyes closed I saw the white flash, I opened them and when I looked up I saw a gigantic doughnut shaped fireball and felt the heat from it hitting me in the face. We had to remain in the fox hole because of the debris that was being propelled toward us and then again as it was being sucked back over and up into the fireball.



We regrouped and were trucked back to a dry lake airstrip, put on our parachutes and boarded a C-47 airplane and flew towards the designated drop zone. An Air Force cameraman sat on the floor in front of me. A green light came on and the jumpmaster ordered us to stand up and hook up. The cameraman squeezed between myself and the trooper in front of me and stuck his camera out of the emergency exit, I heard his camera make contact with the side of the

plane. I looked at him and all I could see were his shoes holding him from being sucked out of the plane. Myself and the trooper in front of me grabbed him by his feet and managed to get him back safely back into the plane when the jump master gave the order to jump.

When I made contact with the ground, I observed the rest of the of the planes with no chutes in sight. Just then, when they reached the designated drop zone, the other paratroopers began to jump. I looked around to locate a smoking telegraph pole because that is where we were informed that the bomb would explode exactly 3000 ft above it. We were in that area quite a while before they reached us and continued on with the rest of the manuver.

I had to shower three times and leave all the clothes I wore with them because I had been in a hot spot. I was given a packet of iodine pills to take and advised when they were all gone I wouldn't have to worry about the radiation I received because it would be gone .

Because of everything I have been enduring over the years, I now look back and know it is from the massive dose of radiation I received. My only wish now is that I would have backed off when we were advised we didn't have to participate and could observe the nuclear test from the mandatory ten mile observation point set by the atomic energy commission.

It was a drastic inhuman experiment on all of us who were involved by those responsible for conducting these tests, and should never have occurred.

-- Submitted by John R Fegley--

2017 Meeting Place

During the meeting the wives thought it was time they become members and that they would get the next meeting place ready. Please look at these sites that were chosen by the group and make your vote and send it to Fred or E-Mail him.

Branson, MO
Philadelphia, PA
Dayton, OH
Twin Cities, MN
Chicago, IL



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TO ALL STATE COMMANDERS --

If you note any errors in the above listing as to E-Mail address, or phone number, please let Fred, Gillie or Bob know. It has taken us some time to get a correct list due to no response.

ATOMIC VETS

America's atomic vets: 'We were used as guinea pigs – every one of us'

Article metaTopics By Jennifer LaFleur
May 27, 2016

The USS De Haven sailed from Hawaii's Pearl Harbor on May 5, 1958, carrying 240 men deep into the Pacific on a secret mission. Gunner's mate Wayne Brooks had only a vague idea of their destination. But within a few days, he would experience an explosion so immense and bright that he could see his own bones. He and his crewmates had been assigned to witness Operation Hardtack I, a series of nuclear tests in the Pacific. Over three months, he witnessed 27 of them.



The De Haven, a destroyer, was one of dozens of ships assigned to the operation at Enewetak Atoll, Bikini Atoll and Johnston Island. It would be their crews' initiation into the ranks of hundreds of thousands of service members now known as "atomic veterans." What seems like a story long tucked away in history books remains a very real struggle for those veterans still alive, the radiation cleanup crews who followed and their families – many of them sick and lacking not just the federal compensation, but also the recognition they believe they deserve. There is no commendation or medal for being an atomic vet.

The magnitude of the De Haven's mission became clearer even before the crew reached Enewetak. As they reached an area near where tests already had been underway, they sailed into heavy showers. Radioactive rain poured down and "hot" seawater contaminated the ship's wash-down system.

The sailors were ordered to decontaminate the ship by scrubbing the decks with long-handled brushes. Then, as they closed in on Enewetak on May 12, Brooks spotted a far-off flash in the distance: a nuclear blast. The next morning, a countdown blared from the De Haven's PA system. A nuclear test – code name Koa – was being conducted from a barge in the lagoon of Enewetak Atoll. Its blast would release at least 75 times the power of the bomb that killed more than 130,000 people in Hiroshima, Japan, in 1945.

Brooks, a slender Texan, had enlisted in the Navy a year earlier at 17. That morning, he manned his gun station on deck. He had no special goggles or clothing. He and the other sailors wore long-sleeved shirts and tucked their pant legs into their socks. They did as they had been told, turning away from the blast site and putting their hands over their eyes.

The flash was so bright that even 20 miles from the blast, Brooks, now 75, said, "When you put your hands over your eyes, you saw your bones in your hands and in your fingers."

The U.S. crews who took part in the Operation Hardtack I nuclear tests in 1958 are among the hundreds of thousands of service members now known as "atomic veterans." Credit: Courtesy of the National Nuclear Security Administration's Nevada Field Office

Shockwaves moved across the water. When the ship began to rock, Brooks uncovered his eyes and turned back toward the blast site. He saw a mushroom cloud rising into the sky. "The cloud just got bigger and bigger," he said "It was really colorful – red, orange. It seemed like a fire was burning inside a cloud."

Three days later, Brooks witnessed another blast. The shot, named Wahoo, was detonated 500 feet underwater. It sent a column of water hundreds of feet into the air, a surge taller than the nearby empty target ships. The De Haven, only 3 miles from the explosion, shook "violently with a loud cracking," and Brooks recalled rivets popping from their metal moorings.

His story is not unique. In the aftermath of World War II and during the height of the Cold War – between 1946 and 1962 – the U.S. detonated more than 200 above-ground and undersea nuclear bombs. Over three months, Brooks would witness 27 of them.

The atomic bomb blasts that Brooks witnessed took place almost 13 years after Hiroshima. The visit by President Barack Obama to that city was undertaken, in part, because the president wanted to remind the world that the risk of nuclear destruction and proliferation still are very real, and he called for "a sense of urgency" around reducing "the prospect of nuclear war in the future."

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ATOMIC VETS (CONTINUED)

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In the decades since Brooks witnessed those 27 tests, he has suffered throat and lung problems, rashes and prostate cancer. Like other atomic veterans, he blames his ailments on his radiation exposure. So far, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs seems to disagree.

Wayne Brooks, 75, coordinates quarterly meetings of local atomic veterans at an American Legion hall near Portland, Oregon. Brooks has suffered throat and lung problems, rashes and prostate cancer ever since he participated in Operation Hardtack I in 1958, but his pains and diseases don't qualify for federal compensation. Credit: Zachary Stauffer for Reveal

Brooks has applied multiple times for the special VA compensation reserved for atomic veterans. He was denied each time on the grounds that his pains and diseases are not among those that qualify.

This was a common experience among the dozens of atomic vets interviewed by Reveal from The Center for Investigative Reporting. Many feel, as Brooks does, abused, neglected and forgotten by the government and a country that exposed them to unforeseen risks.

"We were used as guinea pigs – every one of us," Brooks said. "They didn't tell us what it was gonna do to us. They didn't tell us that we were gonna have problems later on in life with cancers and multiple cancers."

The estimated number of service members who participated in the tests varies from source to source, but could be as high as 400,000. Brooks is among the fortunate: Even with his health challenges, he still is alive.

One of the few studies of atomic veterans looked at about 3,000 participants in a 1957 Nevada test shot code named Smoky. Released in 1979 by the Center for Disease Control, it found that they had more than twice the rate of leukemia than their peers – eight cases versus 3.5. Other studies have been inconclusive.

The atomic testing program included a wide range of experiments and exposures. Thousands of service members were on ships in the Pacific. Thousands more stood or crouched in trenches carved into the

Nevada desert. Pilots and their crews flew planes into mushroom clouds. Others were underwater in the ocean as blasts were detonated, swimming as frogmen or in submarines. Some parachuted into blast sites soon after the explosions.

Marines prepare to charge an "objective" seconds after Operation Tumbler-Snapper's shot at the Nevada testing site in 1952. Credit: Courtesy of the National Nuclear Security Administration's Nevada Field Office

The military had a long history of using war games to train troops. During the nuclear testing era, troops were exposed to detonations to see how they would react to a nuclear attack and whether equipment still would function.

All of the atomic vets were sworn to secrecy. Until the secrecy was lifted decades later, they could not tell anyone about their experiences. Even if they became ill, they could not tell doctors they might have been exposed to radiation.

Scientists had known from the earliest days of building the atomic bomb that radiation posed risks. Research found increased rates of certain cancers among the survivors of the Japanese bombings. It also showed that the children of survivors were more likely to have smaller heads and physical disabilities. But there never was a coordinated attempt to study or track the health effects of radiation on the atomic vets or their children.

"They never used the knowledge that they could have gotten from us," Brooks said. "They could have watched us all our lives and seen what it did, but they didn't. They dropped us like a hot potato."

Brooks is a gentle man who ties back his long gray hair in a ponytail. He still speaks with a West Texas accent but now lives outside Portland, Oregon. He belongs to the National Association of Atomic Veterans, a group trying to help others get compensation and push for recognition. He also coordinates quarterly meetings of local atomic veterans at an American Legion hall, where they share their experiences and support one another.

The meetings started in the mid-1990s with about 50 members. Eight men attended the January meeting. "I think this is all we have left," Brooks said at the time.

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ATOMIC VETS (CONTINUED)

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Atomic veteran Jim Bunting was a Marine who participated in Shot Hood, a 74-kiloton atomic test in the Nevada desert in 1957. He died in December at age 76 after a series of health problems.



Credit: Zachary Stauffer for Reveal

Jim Bunting was not at that January meeting. He died in December at 76, after a series of health problems. But he attended a barbecue in July, where the men and their wives gathered around picnic benches behind an American Legion hall near Portland.

A thin man with sharp blue eyes and a trim mustache, Bunting got around with the aid of a cane. He wore a blue jacket covered with military patches, including one from the National Association of Atomic Veterans.

Bunting became an atomic veteran when he witnessed the largest above-ground nuclear explosion on U.S. soil: Shot Hood, a 74-kiloton blast in the Nevada desert. More than 3,000 personnel were there, two-thirds of them Marines. Like Bunting, then 18, many were on temporary assignment from Camp Pendleton near San Diego.

Before dawn on July 5, 1957, Bunting and his fellow Marines clambered down into trenches. He remembered that day vividly. Brooks members crouch in trenches in the Nevada desert during Operation Tumbler-Snapper while witnessing nuclear testing in the years after World War II.

Credit: Internet Archive

He said he crouched in a trench 3,500 yards from the detonation site. He was given dark glasses to wear. As nearly every atomic vet was told to do before a blast, he put his arms over his eyes. When the flash came, he saw the bones in his arms.

The detonation ignited brush fires, and the shock caused some trenches to collapse. It shattered windows and shook buildings in mining communities at least 60 miles north of the test area. People in Los Angeles could feel the ground shake from the blast, according to government documents, and San Franciscans could see the flash.

After the blast, Bunting and other Marines were ordered out of the trenches. They participated in a “coordinated air-ground maneuver against the attack objective,” according to a Defense Nuclear Agency report about Shot Hood.

“We played war games right up to ground zero, where the sand had melted into glass,” Bunting said. “We could feel the crunching beneath our feet. Anyway, that was about the size of it. It was a hell of a firecracker, we thought, hell of a firecracker.” The health problems came later.

“I’ve had a heart attack, three strokes, an aneurysm, abdominal aneurysm operation, which went to my feet later on,” Bunting said at the barbecue. “I couldn’t walk for two years.”

Bunting did not apply for atomic veterans compensation because he knew his conditions were not eligible, even though studies have linked radiation exposure to heart attacks and strokes.

But he wanted atomic veterans to get recognition. He died of congestive heart failure on Dec. 16 without seeing that happen.

Credit: Courtesy of Wayne Brooks

THANK YOU... From your newsletter editor: Sorry I had to leave the meeting early but want to thank you for your prayers and concerns. My wife is now home on 24/7 hospice care and doing as well as can be expected. We don’t have much encouragement from the doctors reports but will take one day at a time. At least she is in no pain. Since the stroke effected the front right lobe this causes problems with MOOD, SLEEPLESSNESS & MEMORY so no day is the same. Not the same gal I married 59 years ago. Newsletter this quarter may be a few days late, but we will try to get back on track by the next quarter.



OPERATION REDWING

GET ME OUT'A HERE

I wasn't really out there on Dog in the middle of nowhere to just monitor a Geiger counter. Our platoon's job was to instrument a building-like structure on a nearby desert coral island, basically a bunch of steel girders with sides made by bolting on sheets of galvanized convoluted steel. The H&N guys had that all done and ready for us when we first arrived there. To get there from Dog, we daily climbed onto a DUKW, basically an amphibious truck that could move around on land and in the water as well. I might point out that after the daily ride became boring, on the way out or back, I would troll a fishing lure as I sat in the stern of the vehicle. I actually caught fish on the way to work some days, much to the amusement of the enlisted guys with me. Not too many Army officers could say that, I mused.

What we were doing to that structure was attaching accelerometers and strain gages to the steel girders. The intent was to see what forces were exerted on the building as it was blown down and destroyed by the scheduled detonation of the hydrogen bomb. I forgot to mention that our building was relatively close to ground zero, but we didn't worry about that, because the test was weeks away.

After the sensors were attached, we ran wires from them to an underground bunker that H&N had also built before we arrived. Down in the bunker, the wires were attached to a variety of recording instrumentation. Power to run the instruments and bunker lighting came from an above-ground generator that would ultimately be destroyed by the blast as well. The plan was that the closed-up bunker would survive, and after the test took place, the civilian BRL team would wait for the radiation levels to drop, open the bunker and get all the data, recorded on removable media, take them back to Aberdeen, and analyze the results. This process was aimed at adding to the knowledge base of what exactly happens to a building when a hydrogen bomb explodes nearby, a known distance away.

I actually pitched in and helped with the instrumentation work. After the strain gages were attached, they would be at the mercy of the weather out there in Bikini. With water all around accompanied by high daytime temperatures, the humidity was quite high. It rained frequently, with a torrential downpour every hour or two that lasted for perhaps 5 or 10 minutes,

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FINAL CALL

James C. Newman-----Bell, FL
Richard R. Stoye -----Braintree, MA
Raymond Baker Jr. -----Urbandale, IA
Larry W. Borman -----Winfield, KS
William R. Kinman -----Lompoc, CA

LOOKING FOR.....



- Atomic Veterans who served with the Marine Helicopter Squadron HMR-361 on Bikini Atoll in 1958. Wanting to compare Health Issues (several) and Benefits (none) from the VA. Contact Kenneth Oeschger at 847-991-1637 or e-mail me at scotchgrove1937@gmail.com!
- Looking for someone to step up and take the Secretary Job for NAA&NV. If interested contact Fred Schafer the National Commander at 541-258-7453 or E-Mail: derf@trcschafer.com!



Be sure and pick the location you would like for the next convention and send your choice vote to Fred Schafer as seen on Page 2. We need your input to get things set up for 2017.

Operation Redwing (Cherokee) Thermonuclear Explosion

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followed by oppressive sun and heat. So the job I took was to protect the sensitive gages and attached wire joints with a coat of hot melted wax.

Since testing of the gages by guys in the bunker was always under way, electric power was potentially flowing in the connections at any given moment. One day, as I stood with a can of hot molten wax in one hand and an artist's paint brush in the other, painting away, the hand holding the can of wax must have touched a "hot" connection, and the electric shock caused an involuntary instantaneous high-speed withdrawal of that hand from the connection, in the process throwing all the molten hot wax on my naked chest. "Yow!" I hollered, as I tried to wipe the burning sensation off. Well, the wax solidified instantly, so it did come off, but it took a layer of my skin with it. I had a patch of missing skin about a square foot in size right in the middle of my chest.

A quick ride to see the medics got me coated with salve and a huge bandage. The pain lasted for only a day or two, but complete healing took a couple weeks. Nevertheless, I was back on the DUKW the next day, ready to continue my part of the work. After all, I wasn't disabled, but just feeling like a big jerk. Actually, that accident was fortuitous, because in a few days I had to do the wax job all over the structure while standing on a ladder, about 10 feet up. Thankfully, I exhibited much greater caution. I remember thanking God that the accident didn't happen while I was on the ladder, because I surely would have fallen.

Eventually, our work instrumenting the structure was done, and it was ready to be blasted down by the H-bomb. We had a few minor tasks to complete, so most of the team left for Dog by DUKW, and only two enlisted men and I were left to complete some minor last-minute stuff down in the bunker as we awaited departure. However, the minutes ticked by, and no one came to extract us. Eventually, as the responsible officer, I started getting edgy, wondering whether somehow the brass had forgotten that we were there, and that we would be left there until the bomb dropped nearby, wiping us out by radiation if not by fireball or blast. As our concern heightened, I finally reached the point when I grabbed the microphone to the radio, our only means of communication with the outside world, pressed the talk button and calmly said: "This is Lt. Van Soye calling for anyone hearing

this message, please respond. Over." Wait, wait, and more wait. No response. Again I spoke, a little less calm, "Hey is anybody out there listening?" Nothing in response. Finally, with a loud, strained voice, I shouted, "Hey we're stuck here waiting for evacuation, come and get us now!" A faint voice responded, "OK, we'll get a helicopter there shortly. Relax." "Relax," I thought, "How can we relax when we're right next to ground zero, and in a few hours they're going to drop an H-bomb on us!"

About 20 minutes later, we heard the familiar and now welcome "thwack, thwack, thwack" sound of an approaching helicopter, so we climbed out of the bunker, sealed it up and awaited the chopper to land. We jumped on, with a deep sigh of relief, and away we went. A few hours later, we were aboard the USS Ainsworth, a World War II troop carrier, sailing to our assigned anchoring location about 30 miles from ground zero, where in a few hours we would watch what happened when, for the first time in history, a multi-megaton hydrogen bomb would be dropped onto a target from an airplane. I knew that what I would see would be vastly different from the several atomic bombs I witnessed going off a distant hundred miles or more away during my stay on Dog. But what I was to see the next day was beyond my wildest imagination.

That next morning, May 21st, 1956, I and dozens of other participants were roused from our sleep at 4:00 am, and ordered to the top deck. It was very dark in the cool morning with only a mild breeze blowing, and the coolness of that morning seemed to be a great relief compared to the oppressive heat we lived in just a few hours earlier on Dog.

We were soon told by loudspeaker that the B-47 carrying the H-bomb had taken off from Kwajalein, and was en route to the drop point. We were then given instructions concerning the dark glasses that had been issued to us when we boarded. We were told that they were much darker than ordinary sun glasses, and would have enabled us to look right at the sun and barely be able to see it. About this time, we heard and then saw the B-47 pass right overhead, and I secretly prayed that they wouldn't accidentally drop the bomb just then. Since it was only 30 miles to ground zero, we were ordered to put on the dark glasses, turn our backs to where ground zero would

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Operation Redwing (Cherokee) Thermonuclear Explosion

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be, right off our starboard side, shut our eyes tight, and then used both hands to cover the glasses on our face. "This is a ridiculous overkill," I thought. But not for long, as suddenly there was a flash of lasting bright light so powerful that even with our hands over our dark glasses, our eyes shut and our backs to ground zero, it was just as though a flash photographer had taken our picture from three feet away, but the brilliant flash persisted. I thought I could almost see the bones of my fingers right through the flesh and my dark glasses. In about 10-15 seconds, the loudspeakers blared that we could slowly turn around and carefully peer between our fingers at the H-bomb blast, some 30 miles away.

I did, and was overwhelmed to behold what appeared to be the entire horizon in front of me on fire. It quickly became clear that it was really a humungous column of boiling red and purple fire slowly rising up thousands of feet into the air. Vertical contrails of rockets streaking up on both sides of the column of fire indicated rocket-borne instruments were taking scientific measurements of some kind, I presumed. I was truly awestruck by that vision, and will never forget it as long as I live.



After several minutes, a huge white cloud seemed to form on top of the column of fire, giving it the familiar mushroom shape prominently imbedded in everyone's mind, implying a nuclear explosion had taken place. By now it was light enough to "see" the shock wave from the explosion racing towards our ship. I couldn't actually see the pressure wave, only the rippling effect it caused to the water's surface. It arrived in less than a minute, creating sudden discomfort in my ears, just as though I had instantaneously rode an elevator from the bottom

to the top of the Empire State Building. Some hard swallowing dissipated the near-painful ear discomfort.

We all stared intently at the astonishing sight on the horizon in front of us. But we were soon interrupted by a loudspeaker announcement telling us to get below deck soon, as the Ainsworth's ship-wide sprinkler system would soon be turned on to wash away any fallout from the blast that was soon likely to start coming down on us. They didn't have to tell me twice. I was gone.

The next day, two of the civilians wanted to go from the ship to the bunker to extract the recorded data from the structure we had instrumented. They asked me to go with them, but I refused, and cautioned them not to go as the radiation levels would be perilously high. As the CBR-trained officer, I had the responsibility to urge them not to go, but since they were civilian, no authority. So they went anyway, without me. "Stupid," I thought; "Brilliant scientists, but too dumb to wait a day or two for safety's sake." I never did learn if they were adversely affected later in life.

A couple of days later, I did make a journey by small boat to ground zero. There was nothing visible above the water to indicate a 3.8-megaton explosion, but beneath the water's surface was a deep, black hole in the surface of the earth. I couldn't wait to get away from there and back to the ship. It wasn't many days later that Operation Redwing was for all intent over for me, and I returned to the states.

A month or two later, the Army announced it was under budgetary restraint, and that those officers responsible to serve 24 months active duty would be released after 18 months, and do their remaining time in the Reserves. I'd already done 21 months, so I was on my way out by order of the Secretary of the Army. BRL offered me a cushy civilian job with high pay, but I wanted none of the bureaucracy, none of the military, none of any of it. Hurray, I was free again!

Submitted by Chuck Van Soye

When you see something that is technically sweet, you go ahead and do it and you argue about what to do about it only after you have had your technical success. That is the way it was with the atomic bomb.
J. Robert Oppenheimer



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