

THE PRICE OF PEACE PANORAMA BBC 1 26/1/98

David Hobbs

In the Royal Navy from 1969 to 1982 leaving with the rank of Petty Officer. He has returned long service medal and submarine badge to Ministry of Defence in protest. He was an MEA (reactor operator) on HMS Resolution before its first refit:

"Although a couple of hundred million pounds had been spent building this huge Polaris submarine there had been no facility for making tea or coffee in the propulsion department. So we used to use water from what is called the heated day tank, which is a tank of water kept constantly boiling used to supply the primary loop for the reactor - this was supplying it with constantly boiling hot water - we would draw that water off to make tea. We were never informed that it was in any way dangerous. It was mechanically in connection with the primary loop but we were told the valves in between were so good that nothing could leak backwards. Obviously as we found out to our cost later radiation had been leaking backwards prior to the first refit.

.. I had personally been drinking radioactive tea for about 2 years.

.. There was no health check on any of the personnel that had been involved in drinking tea from that tank."

on first refit of Resolution:

"We were told to clean out the active drain tank, the active water tank in the reactor compartment. This tank is supposed to be pumped out by an electric pump. The electric pump wouldn't work. We were then told to try the semi-rotary hand pump - that pump wouldn't work either. We were then given polystyrene cups and plastic lemonade bottles and told to drain the water from the tank into the lemonade bottles, put those in polythene bags and give them to the Health Physics rep. The only protective clothing we had were the cotton gloves, the little chef's hat and the white cotton overalls."

".. I was taking apart the high level discharge valve when the sub was in dry dock. During the time that I was away from the job the sub must have done a primary coolant discharge. When I returned to the job and took out the rest of the valve the whole lot just gushed down on top of me. As I was working in an upright position it all fell on top of me and I actually swallowed it. It was in the primary line discharge ... this water that drenched me was under pressure .. the decontamination facility is the officers' shower .. I was taken to the officers' shower and scrubbed down by the stewards.

I was loyal to the Royal Navy and I believe the Royal Navy and the Ministry of Defence should be loyal to me".

Ron Pinnick (also on Resolutions reactor when cups and bottles were used to drain the active tank):

"The amount of times we have been in the reactor compartment and we have been sat in water in the bilge trying to pump out tanks - we have come out soaking wet. These plastic bottles all wrapped up in polythene with radioactive stickers all over them - you come out, take your overalls off and are told to get yourself home."

Peter Smith (Chatham):

"I got burned out in 5 weeks on Dreadnought, but that's still not on my record. .. Once I went to red, I was told youve 250 to come and you're out of it tomorrow .. then I was close to what I supposed to have and hadn't finished the job - the inspector said it's all right you can have another 250, so down you go again.

Terry Deadman (Chatham)

- the clothes were to protect the system, not you.

Keith Mitten (Chatham)

"I went onto Valiant and we were garbed up in vent hoods and everything and I was sent down 4 times and the monitor said - OK you can go back down - and we were scrubbed down and we were down there 1/2 hour and we filled our dose up - we couldn't go back down again for months"

- now has a cancer near the knee which he says is due to radiation

Tim Robson (Chatham)

died aged 39 from cancer,

his radiation records show "limits exceeded" during two quarters.

Rudi Molinari (Chatham)

Leukemia, records showed dose of 307 mSv

Won £163,000 in High Court

David Spriggs (Chatham):

died from inoperable cancer which he believed was from his nuclear work
widow Melanie Nicholson:

"He was working in the nuclear dockyard above his head on some pipes which were carrying radioactive waste. While he was tightening up a nut the pipe broke and he was covered in water. At the end of the shift he was showered but the lights went off and the alarms went off and he had to shower again several times. He was not allowed back into the nuclear dockyard for at least 6 months."

MoD said that he was not classified as a radioactive worker and therefore he couldn't have worked in the reactor compartment of a nuclear submarine. But witnesses have confirmed the account of his accident. Chatham and Rosyth Dockyards did not have enough classified labour to do the job required without exceeding dose limits, so they brought in people from other parts of the yards who were offered more money than they had been getting. They were used as "human sponges" building up dose levels. Dose record keeping became increasingly poor as the closure of Chatham grew nearer.

The Government had been aware of the risks involved from the earliest days. When told about the risks from radiation by the Medical Research Council, Prime Minister Harold McMillan said "It is a pity but we cannot help it"

Bill Nealson

Industrial Radiographer

The most irradiated man in British history
Dose records say whole body dose of 108 mSv but postmortem found 15,000 mSv. The fatal accident inquiry said his cause of death was radiation. He died a horrible death. His widow said: "no one has ever said that he will make sure that this will never happen again."

Kevin Sanson (Chatham)

"When we are doing our job - what we thought was for our armed services - at the end of the day we get kicked in the teeth."

John Large on dockyards and first refits:

"They simply didn't have the kit, the management and the competence quite frankly to operate the maintenance, refitting and refuelling facilities that these submarines needed".

It was known in 1958 that radiation via inhalation was the main hazard followed by ingestion. Yet the monitoring has only been for external radiation.
John Large "It is a Nelson approach".

John Spellar MP (Minister)

"We do accept that some individuals who worked in nuclear dockyards had levels of radiation that were high and have acquired cancers which were possibly due to radiation".