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(A Lab News Story)

ENC. 16

A NUCLEAR WEAPON IS MISSING

ROUGH DRAFT

AEC-Sandia-Kirtland Team Assists In Search For Missing Weapon

UNIQUE DOCUMENT, SAC200118800000

As is well known, on Monday, January 17, 1966, at 9:22 am local time, a B-52 collided with a KC-125 tanker aircraft over the village of Palomares, Spain. The B-52 was carrying four nuclear weapons, three of which, along with the wreckage of the aircraft, fell on and around the village of Palomares, fortunately without causing any injuries whatsoever. Impact explosions of the high explosive in two of these weapons caused some local contamination, and some 5,000 drums of contaminated soil have been removed from Spain and are being returned to an AEC disposal site. The missing weapon, which was seen descending on a parachute by a pharmacist, his assistant, and a number of the local fishermen, has been located and is on its way back to the United States.

DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY DECLASSIFICATION REVIEW	
1ST REVIEW DATE: 1/92	DETERMINATION (CIRCLE NUMBER(S))
AUTHORITY: 10C 6300	1. CLASSIFICATION RETAINED
NAME: W. J. HOWARD	2. CLASSIFICATION CHANGED TO:
	3. CONTAINS NO DOE CLASSIFIED INFO
2ND REVIEW DATE: 1/21/99	4. COORDINATE WITH:
AUTHORITY: 10C 6300	(C) CLASSIFICATION CANCELED
NAME: W. J. HOWARD	(B) CLASSIFIED INFO BRACKETED
	(A) OTHER (SPECIFY): 3-PAGES

Up to this time, however, no information has been released concerning the effort that local AEC, Sandia and Kirtland personnel have played in the recovery of the missing weapon. The action started on Saturday afternoon, January 22 (5 days after the accident), when a former Sandia employee, W. J. (Jack) Howard, who is currently Assistant to the Secretary of Defense for Atomic Energy, called Alan Pope (9300), giving him some limited information about the accident and asking the assistance of the Sandia Aerodynamics people. A representative from Department 1540 was already on the scene in Spain, helping with the land search. Mr. Pope was asked to assemble a team and get together with the Kirtland Nuclear Accident Group, headed by Col. William E. Gernert (AFINS), in the hope that calculations could be made which would assist in finding the missing weapon.

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This team consisted of Randy Maydew (9320), Floyd Forsythe (9323), and (9323). A group of messages had been received by the Kirtland Accident Group and these were brought over to Sandia by Mr. Pope for study. It appeared, from the meager knowledge available, that the aircraft had collided at about 30,000 feet, and that after obtaining the local winds, which were as high as 125 miles an hour at 30,000 feet, computations could be made from the impact point back into the sky to locate the collision. This was accomplished during the night of January 17-18, so that preliminary information could be furnished by late the following day. However, continuing information coming in from the Field appeared so conflicting that it was decided to send an aerodynamicist to the location, and Randy Maydew got the job, joining Stu Asselin (1540) and other experts who had been provided by the Air Force. On-the-scene study of the situation proved very valuable and a stream of new data continued back to Sandia Corporation for the following three weeks, enabling a great number of trajectories to be computed depending on different release altitudes of the weapon which had to be based on estimates as to at what altitude the bombs were released from the B-52.

After three weeks, Mr. Maydew was replaced by W. R. Barton, 9324, who aided by participating in the land search, interrogating the witnesses, recomputing trajectories based on new information, and acting as a member of the technical advisory group for General Wilson, who was on site to direct recovery operations. All of this effort was with the continuous

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participation of the local AEC people and the Kirtland Accident Group. It was finally agreed that since it was impossible to determine the exact point at which the missing bomb broke out of the aircraft, the most prudent thing to do would be to rely on the testimony of the witnesses, some of whom were extremely familiar with the sea area from their fishing experience, and it was possible to <sup>construct</sup> ~~center~~ a circle about a mile in diameter, whose center was the water impact point, with the expectancy that the weapon itself would be found somewhat south of that point due to the underwater-current information then available. This primary search area, which was designated Alpha I, was just south of a larger rectangular area which had been computed according to the best wind data then available. After several weeks of search, the weapon was located in the primary area about 3,000 feet from the center of the circle. This recovery had been complicated by the mountainous sea bottom at this point, where steep hills, a thousand feet high, rise from the bottom of the Mediterranean where the maximum depth is about 3,000 feet.

The Albuquerque people were pleased to have a part in helping to bring this unfortunate accident to a satisfactory close.

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Distribution:

M0659A Elva Barfield, FOIA Officer/OPA; DOE/AL

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