



ACQUISITION,
TECHNOLOGY
AND LOGISTICS

THE UNDER SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

3010 DEFENSE PENTAGON
WASHINGTON, DC 20301-3010

APR 3 2003

27 MAR 2003

The Honorable Lane Evans
Ranking Member
Committee on Veteran's Affairs
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515 - 6335

Dear Representative Evans:

Thank you for your recent letter to the Secretary of Defense regarding U.S. atmospheric nuclear testing on Johnston Island. I am responding on behalf of Secretary Rumsfeld.

In your letter, you specifically requested information about two events involving the release of radioactive materials from aborted missile launches on Johnston Island. The events you mentioned did not occur during Operations HARDTACK I and II, which successfully completed all test shots in 1958. The aborted missile launches occurred during Operation DOMINIC I in 1962. I have attached several fact sheets regarding these test operations.

Operation DOMINIC I resulted in four aborted launches on Johnston Island from April to November 1962. Three of these caused plutonium contamination. They are summarized below (all times local):

1. Bluegill, June 5, 1962, midnight. The tracking system lost the missile and the missile and warhead were destroyed after 13 minutes of flight. No contamination was recorded on the Island.
2. Starfish, June 19, 1962, just before midnight. The rocket motor stopped functioning approximately one minute after launch. The missile and warhead were destroyed in flight. Large pieces of radioactive debris fell back to the island.
3. Bluegill Prime, July 25, 1962, 11:00 p.m. The rocket burned on the launch pad due to a malfunction of the launch ignition system. The missile was ordered to be destroyed and the resulting explosion scattered debris in all directions, causing the most serious contamination of the four failed launches.

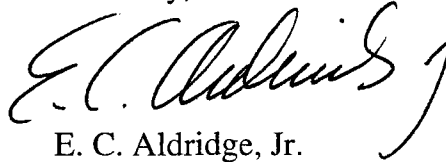


4. Bluegill Double Prime, October 15, 1962, 9:15 p.m. The missile malfunctioned 90 seconds into the flight and was destroyed at a height of 109,000 feet. When the missile was destroyed, some of the debris tumbled back onto the Island.

The Department of Veterans' Affairs (VA) central office in Washington, D.C. and all VA regional offices were sent copies of the Operation DOMINIC I history, which includes a description of the aborted events and the contamination. A copy of the history has been provided for your information.

If you require any further information, please contact me or Ms. Kim Cope of the Defense Threat Reduction Agency's Legislative Affairs staff at (703) 767-4940.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "E. C. Aldridge, Jr.", written in a cursive style.

E. C. Aldridge, Jr.

Enclosures:
As stated