

# The Telegram

THE PEOPLE'S PAPER

May 23, 2015  
St. John's

This month — between Sunday, Jan. 24 and Thursday, Feb. 25 — marks the 50th anniversary of a U.S. military chemical, biological and radiological experiment that ended up having devastating effects that still exist.

The planning document — DTC Test Plan 65-1 Copper Head (U) — was dated Tuesday, Dec. 29, 1964, but the actual trial was not started until almost a month later.

Project Copper Head was one of 134 experiments listed under the code name “Project SHAD,” which was also referred to as “Project 112.” More specifically, Project Copper Head was a chemical, biological and radioactive aerosol spray experiment. The spray zone covered a 2,688-square-mile area (96 miles long by 28 miles wide) — from coordinates 46° to 46°40' N by 54° to 56° W. The live biological tracing agent *Bacillus globigii* and fluorescent particles of zinc cadmium sulfide were sprayed over 60- by three-mile paths and allowed to drift northward toward the target destroyer manoeuvring down through Placentia Bay.

While three Skyhawks were used to spray the *Bacillus globigii*, a Douglas C-47 was used to disburse the fluorescent particles of zinc cadmium sulfide. The meteorological and radiological teams aboard that same aircraft studied the speed, direction, dispersal time and dispersal location of the aerosol clouds.

U.S. Navy officials chose the USS Power (DD-839), under the command of Commander Arthur M. Hayes, USN, to be the target vessel for Project Copper Head because of its rapid manoeuvring capability, which was necessary to remain in the path of the aerosol cloud if there were drastic changes in wind direction.

Within a few days, some of the crewmembers of the USS Power started feeling the ill effects of the aerosol spray in the form of colds, sore throats and pneumonia. As time passed, various kinds of cancer, especially some rare types, developed and crewmembers began dying, a process that has extended up until the present day.

On one particular spray day, Commander Hayes could not maintain the Power's position under the aerosol cloud. A rapid change in wind direction carried the aerosol cloud inland along the western section of the Avalon Peninsula — over the Placentia region and north-northeastward toward Trinity Bay.

Within three years, the effects were quite obvious. In January 1968, Dr. John Munro Ross, the chief medical officer at Placentia Cottage Hospital, became acutely aware of the abnormally high number of his patients whose laboratory and biopsy tests were returning with diagnoses of cancers that were not symptomatic until in the advanced stages. The types of cancer he was seeing were highly unusual for the region and some were extremely rare.

The Placentia area now has the highest rate for 13 types of cancer and other disorders, especially thyroid disorders. The only group with a higher rate consists of former crewmembers of the USS Power who are still living and who had the experimental chemical, biological and radiological aerosol deliberately sprayed on them.

I have a large amount of information about this topic in my research files, but it would be too lengthy to include in this letter to the editor.

Oh, one more thing ...

This year also marks the 50th anniversary of Canada's flag, “The Maple Leaf,” which has a connection to Project Copper Head and two U.S. military projects. I wonder if anyone know what that connection is.

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