

## ELK HUNT II & DEVIL HOLE I

7 days, 168 hours upon returning from Hawaii, completing Deseret Test Center's (DTC) project Magic Sword, involving 2.5 million mosquitoes on good old Baker Island in the Phoenix Island Group. I was off on another adventure with DTC. I often contemplated why DTC hadn't contacted it's Pearl Harbor field office, to short circuit my circuitous route to Alaska. In my career I've witnessed people arriving at Honolulu airport from one flight, only to be met with a new set of travel orders and plane ticket to head directly to another awaiting plane for a new mission.

As things transpired, I went from Honolulu airport to New York. The brief lay over was exactly what I needed. Unbeknownth to me new orders were awaiting my arrival at the Army Pictorial Center (APC). But in the meantime I was able to turn in the Clas A uniform for dry cleaning, wash other unmentionables, go home to Pa. for part of the weekend and see my girlfriend.

The one that got away, man I still think of her 55 years later. I loved her and she would probably have married me, if only I had asked? However we had so many problems, I never even tried to count them. The master of incumbered was the age old adage TWO PEOPLE CAN LIVE AS CHEAP AS ONE. Who ever said that LIES LIKE A RUG. Compatibility wise we were about 95% perfect.

The closest we ever came to an argument took place, after I bought her a round trip ticket to Hawaii. I had spent the night at her place and she knew my destination. After checking in, she solemnly and nearly in tears said " I wish I could go." I looked at her in dismay saying "Go pack a bag you got a ticket.: I'll wait here and we'll catch a later flight. She covered her mouth laughing, knowing perfectly well I spoke the truth. Why she hadn't mentioned a vacation earlier, I don't know. However in the ensuing months that ticket was used and we spent an entire week together.

When I signed back into the orderly room at APC the first sergeant had a gleam in his eyes. He'd been looking forward to putting me on the duty roster, and start pulling my share of the all night being sheriff over night, that I had escaped being away. I think seeing me, he tore up the existing duty roster just to include me. He stuck me on duty about 200 hours away, about 9 days away, but I only stuck around for 168 hours.

I had to use every waking minute of that 168 hours as productivity as possible. Like while a load of clothes were washing, I could go eat a meal. I had to prioritize everything in my agenda to get everything done on time. The system was absolute, need and finally nice to have, Getting to the dry cleaners was absolute, so they would be clean for the flight out. Need was like washing clothes and iron the stuff that needed it. Some things could be accomplished at night, after work hours 8-4:30 time frame. I couldn't wait for the flight to start packing, I had to start upon notification of the new mission.

I was heading back to Alaska for Project Elk Hunt II on the longest daylight time of the year, on the 21st of June, 1965, aboard a Northwest Orient bird to Seattle. Then a Pan Am flight to Fairbanks. Since I was heading up there to replace the crew already on site, the only camera gear needed to take with me were mostly expendables, gum labels, tape, film plus odds and ends.

These projects Elk Hunt II and Devil Hole I would be laced with odd, weird and deranged activities and events that will unfold throughout the story. I believe these oddities will out due Project Magic Swords or rival its tales of a Air Force test director on a Navy ship, loss of a landing craft, camera crew sexing mosquitoes and I being the single entity for reconnaissance and surveillance of the island.

At Ft. Greely a new twist took place. Instead of reporting into the Arctic Test Center barracks, I was ushered into the guest house, up to the third floor. The film crew had gotten a "Statement Of Non-Availability." This allowed at least a partical per diem. The statement proclaimed the installation had no housing nor bedding available for the team or myself. I would be housed with the rest of the Dugway Proving Grounds (DPG) guys, in the guest house, but not on the same floor.

In the story Weapons Of Mass Destruction, I elated to the fact that DTC's mission was testing chemical, biological and nuclear weapons, not only in the U.S. but North America came to the forefront. Half the guest house was filled with a Canadian crew testing their own chemical weapons on U.S. soil.

I haven't the faintest idea how any of the Canadians stayed alive. The room across the hall had 2 northern neighbors. Nightly them and seemingly the entire Canadian team got drunk, the entire guest house reeked of booze. The 2 across the hall from me usually gussled down 3/4 of a gallon of hard booze and frequently I'd seen 3 empty bottles spilled about or a  $\frac{1}{2}$  gallon jug and some quart size empty bottles. Being neighborly, the Canadians often invited me to join them in partying with the group. I declined being a infrequent beer drinker. That is to say after my days in San Diego,

The maids arriving every morning, opened all the doors, along with every window in the joint to air out the stale musty stink of booze, butts and puke. By the time the maids arrived, I already had my windows wide open. Several maids told me that my room was the easiest for them to clean. Basically made the bed, empty the ash tray and trash, change out bath towels. Then from time to time add a roll of toilet paper, dust and mop the floors some days. In the Canadian rooms it was every day, pick up the empty bottles. Empty the over flowing ash trays of butts, cigars or snuff. Dump the trash can and mop up vomit, if not puke off the beds, the sink, shower. Then start to made beds and clean the place.

I never knew how the Canadians could ever sober up enough to go into a HOT TOXIC ZONE, and not get killed? But they did! It was night after night, not just on weekends, they consumed gallons of booze the entire summer they were at Fort Greely.

I remembered the sergeant from last summer that tried to pull a caper and Re-Up in Alaska to get extra money out of the deal. However his conniving failed, yet as I boarded the Northwest flight I had only 16 days left on my term of service.

I had nothing to go home to. The home town had been heavy into textiles, but clothing jobs were going overseas. In the vicinity was a steel mill, however Japan and Europe under the reconstruction of the U.S. Backed Marshall Plan, were shipping steel here cheaper than it could be produced locally. The future was bleak. At the same time in 18 years I'd been to Philadelphia 5 times, Atlantic City a couple of times, Gettysburg and Washington, D.C. Never more than 150 miles from home.

Conversely 3 years in the Army I took basic training in South Carolina, MOPIC school 40 miles from New York to see the city, took a train ride completely across the country to Oakland. Had a sea voyage to Hawaii, Japan and Korea, besides more trips to Hawaii, American Samoa, again California and of course Alaska. The entire year of 1965, I would travel the world shooting movies 272 days, with only 93 days in New York. Plus I travelled 65,000 miles in planes that year.

Besides that I was at the pinnacle of R & D, the vanguard of knowledge, I was involved with cutting edge technology, why would I want to get out? DTC was my home away from home. Working with professionals of DTC projects and DPG work crews that knew what to expect and know how to deal with the unforeseen situations. In short I had the world by the ass; so why discard it??? When in civilian life in my region I had no marketable skill. Motion Picture would be a laughing job, even TV was not an option.

At the command post (CP) at the Gerstle River Test Site, it was like old home coming. Of course there was Bruce Black, the civilian test supervisor and SL7 pay grade Ken Sly, the Dog Patch crew chief. The crack-pot Billy Green, Johnson from the laundry unit and of course the test Director Major Harry H. Ledbetter, along with all of old gang from the summer of 64. Yes this felt like home welcoming. Of the almost 40 test crew only 3 or 4 new faces appeared. With everyone jumping off the top bunks to shake hands or pats on the back and shoulders, it really felt good.

The rest of the film team were gasping and gawking as to why I was a celebrity among the DPG gang. What was unbeknownst to them and ignorant to the fact that I was accepted as one of them with reservations. I was from East of The Hudson River and they were West of the Continental Divide, sort of as blue and white collar system. I had lived, worked and ate with them in the past. I was accepted as one of them, a member of the family, not some outsider, an interloper, an acquaintance. That's why I was whole heartly greeted, welcomed and given salutations.

The chemical munition men had added a new man, an Army captain, I couldn't think of how to converse with the man. I was frankly told he had credentials to arm atomic bombs. That was a top secret job, but christ why? The Army doesn't possess nuclear bombs, so why have someone trained for a non-existence job. It sure didn't make any sense, unless he had transferred from the Air Force or Navy to the Army. Its rare but a few times it does happen. Martin and Ross were back, I would plan on being their shadow this year again. That is because nothing happens until the nerve agent land mines are armed and placed on the grid. I never spent much time with the medics nor meteorological teams, for they were Fort Greely personnel, and I'd probably never see them again.

The photo team with an officer had a vehicle from the Ft. Greely motor pool. Once I arrived, in reflection I can now ascertain DTC rolled the dice, and told APC to get rid of the photo team and leave me to do my work, since I was the only cameraman ready, willing and able to stay alive in the HOT GRID. Before leaving we decided that the entire photo team should use the camera lights to film the lab work and then the lights could go back to New York, along with other unnecessary equipment.

Upon setting up the lights in the warehouse lab, and filming the events the lab people conducted of the samples that came from the toxic grid, the lights were packed ready to be shipped, along with other useless equipment. I had to sign for the equipment that would remain in my use. Along with expendables, such as film and other sundries.

Over the decades and as I'm writing these stories, I can visualize the impact I had. Of the nearly 40 motion picture cameraman in Field Photo, I was the sole only willing volunteer to suit up with the Dog Patch crew and enter the HOT GRID. If it hadn't been for last summer, when I was left up here all alone to film the action and was off course. With Ken Sly's help I rose to the mission. I realize the virtues of last years experiences. I was in a morassic situation, until Sly's unabashed straight forward gut wrenching disseration tossed me a life preserver in a sink or swim situation.

Every other film crew had their own van to come and go as they pleased. I had to prevail with the transportation available. That was the Dugway crew work bus, to get to work and do what ever the crew did. Not just what seemed nice. Thus being me, myself and I, I did things no other film crew felt important or frivolous or other wise useless. That was the essence of the project. I on the other hand whole heartily endorsed the superfluous realm of the mission to acclaim, praise of future projects endorsements, no other cameraman obtained.

With the departure of the photo team and of course the van, I decided to get a military drivers license, that was mostly unneeded in most instances, but nice to have. The small driver testing office inside the motor pool maintenance shop building, was a 1 man testing room. When I failed the written test, the sergeant conducting the episode sort of rubbed his chin and implied he liked the green and yellow knee boots I was wearing. I being there likewise imolied I'd like a drivers license. A comprise was consummated.

Even though I now had a military drivers license, the motor pool itself refused to issue me a vehicle on my own. A driving test was unwarrented since I would only pass 4 to 6 vehicles in 40 miles. The accident rate was low. I'd just use the Dugway work bus as last year.

In New York City the drivers license was about as useful as a fart in a wind storm. One 15¢ mass transit token could let me travel to 4 of the 5 counties that comprise the Big Apple. I once rode the subway for 23 straight hours and hadn't covered all the subway miles of the system. The same token with transfer would allow me to switch from bus to subway or reverse. Why get a car when insurance rates were about \$100.00 a month in the mid 60's. Especially when I was seldom there.

Other developments with the chemical munitions boys, besides the atomic weapons qualified captain, there was a (WAC) womens Army Corp she was way out of her league. While wearing chemical corp insignia that related to non toxic substances, such as water purification solutions and non poisons. Among the Deseret Test and Dugway Men, this girl was like a kindergarden kid amongst university PhDs. No way could she comprehend or grasp the severity of the events unfolding. In no way I wanted to be near her or the captain if they headed toward the HOT GRID.

On the celestial scene, I was to get a real education or possible broadening of past years rude awaking. By the map, Ft. Greely is only 175 miles from the Arctic Circle where the sun shines 24 hours a day in the summer. But 175 miles South the sky is twilight sufficiently not to need lights to drive at night. At the CP when trials were delayed, out in the open space without obstacles, I saw the sun rise shortly after midnight in the extreme Northeast, maybe 20 degrees off due North. Then rise through out the morning to its zenith in the Southern quadrant by noon. Then a slow descend into the West and finally extreme Northwest at sunset at about 330 degrees from due North. The sun dipped only a few degrees below the horizon.

Conversely at the equator there was very little dawn and twilight. The sun rose and travelled from the Eastern horizon 180 degrees to set in the West without much fanfare of twilight. It was light or dark within 15 minutes, with 12 hours of daylight and 12 hours of darkness.

Suiting up in full rubber protective clothing with camera in hand, I followed Ross and Martin while arming the VX nerve agent land mines, as the 3 of us had done the year prior. Since VX last 7 years as a lethal weapon, the full rubber suit was required. They unscrewed the cap on the side of the mine and inserted the long burster and covered the explosive. The smaller short burster slid into the top center cavity of the mine. A blasting cap was placed atop of the busters. Remember in real life a pressure release system would detonate the munition. For test an electronic blasting cap was needed. The entire grid was armed the same way after electric continuity was verified at every mine. Then back to the Decon point to unsuit and shower before the blast.

After Major Ledbetter or Bruce Black detonated the mines, the entire crew and I suited up to go out into the HOT GRID and get VX samples. As they had in the summer of 1964 the Dugway crew wore white booties over the yellow and green boots, plus there were lawn rollers. As a kid, in the spring before mowing began and the lawn was wet I had to roll the yard. This was the day of push rotary mowers. To get a smooth lawn, we flatten the night crawlers earth worms, moles, gof hers or other burrowing small animals that tore up the yards. The rollers usually had a plug for water, allowing as much or as little as one could move. Today golf course greens are probably the only place lawn rollers are still used. For Elk Hunt II white cloth was attached to the rollers to collect samples. On page 18 of the story WEAPONS OF MASS DESTRUCTION I describe VX as a ro'se hue clear muc's or aloe vera and even snot. It also looks like clear cooking Karo syrup, that is more familiar then some other descriptions.

This year I was also on non-crew member flight status. Since my 1st full work day was the 22nd, I only had 8 days to get the required 4 hours. At the Ft. Greely air field the (LTC) lieutenant colonel in charge was still there and remembered me. He wanted to hanger fly (gossip) and called me into his office. I knew Delta Junction/Big Delta had the largest herd of American Bison (Buffalo) in the United States. What I didn't consider was the game warden held a raffle to hunt a bison. It was sort of odd, but if your name was drawn from the lottery, you had 1 day to hunt. The LTC's 12 year old son won the lottery, and the game warden pointed out which buffalo the boy could shoot. In total jubilation the boy killed the bison and pappy was so happy to exult the enthusiasm to me.

By hook or crook, I got my 4 hours. At this late date, in reverie I almost bet the LTC took a past flight record and recorded the data on a clean form, adding my name and data. Maybe I flew from Ft. Greely airport before ever arriving in the state, but I got paid.

The time line to quit the Army or stay in was fastly approaching. With the 4th of July holiday and on the 6th I'd be a civilian, while people at the work site knew me, my security clearance wouldn't be valid. In fact I'd be a civilian without a pay check. I finally went to the Ft. Greely career counsellor in a nail biting time frame to contact the Pic Center in New York and varify data. Then the only officer I knew to administer the oath was Major Ledbetter. I would have to ask him, or have some strange officer I never seen before from Ft. Greely administer the oath of induction.

This all smacked of a year earlier when a sergeant deliberately wanted to re-enlist in Alaska for extra cash, but was called back to N.Y. at the last minute. Now 365 days later I was in the same boat, but I had an oar.

As I pen this story, I can only bet DTC claimed that I was mission essential and that flying me round trip to New York, would adversely affect the performance of the project, and not be cost effective. A photo of Major Ledbetter giving me the oath is available at this website. As a result of 3 more Army years I received 3 times base pay of \$150.00 a month or \$450.00. Plus about \$330.00 at  $7\frac{1}{2}$ ¢ a miles from Ft Greely to Philadelphia. All toll nearly \$800.00 in cash. I opened a saving account at the post bank. It was First National Bank of Fairbanks.

I have no idea why, but in tandem several Dog Patch crew, if not more approached me, while outside having a smoke break, providing me with a tidbit of ancient news from last year. The motif of the announcement was nearly verbatimly matched in each version. They related that last year when Billy Green landed at the Salt Lake City Airport, the family stopped at the airport concessionaire distributing periodicals, such as newspapers, magazines, paper back books, souvenirs and snack foods as well. Billy Green so the version went proceeded to acquire every bag of jelly beans the proprietor had, and probably other bagged candies as well.

If you recall last year his wife mailed him a black kotex, signifying she was in mourning. The related story goes, when the family reached home Billy tossed the jelly beans all over the lawn, telling the children to have fun getting the sweets. Meanwhile mom and pop headed to the bedroom for a quickie. Once reunited with the children, one child looked up quizzing pop "Dad is jelly beans all you can think of!" Why this tale was told to me I have no concept, but it lasted in my memory.

One trial we had a profound problem soon after the mines were detonated the winds or more apply described a zephyr had changed directions, with everyone around the CP having to mask for 2 hours. When your a 3 pack a day smoker as I was; a nicotine fit was inevitable. But the old adage prevailed, WHERE THERE IS A WILL, THERE IS A WAY! To smoke a cigarette while wearing a gas mask I might can do it. It mattered not that instead of exhaling 4000 or so known carcinogens, I was inducing them further into my lungs and associated blood stream. I was chocking myself to death, depriving myself of oxygen with a conglomeration of smoke poison, plus deadly nerve agent. It certainly helped working with professionals and knowing tricks, secrets and short cuts to defy death. In other words if you can smoke a cigarette while wearing a gas mask; you can enter my league!!! For I was in a league of 1--myself!!!

Throughout the week trials occurred at intervals as the laundry was able to sanitize the contaminated protective rubber suits using the 10,000 gallons of 190 proof straight grain alchol. Other factors included the climatic conditions and weather along with the work load of the lab being able to process the incoming sample load, without having a huge back log. Normally about 3 to 4 trials a week could be scheduled with some regularity.

Not very long after the 4th of July, Major Ledbetter declared a training vacation. The Dugway crew probably arrived in early May to set up tents, electric for the CP and get the GRIDS ready for this season's trials. The crew had undoubtedly been working non-stop for nearly 2 months without a break. Plus being away from wife and family for that length of time wore on a persons ego real quick. If that wasn't enough just the concept of being in Alaska for months at a time and only seeing the same 40 mile journey from base camp to the Gerstle River Test Site. 10,000 miles in 3 months, but never seeing anything new. We'd see the same microwave tower, the same forest ranger fire tower, the same remain of a forest fire, the same Gerstle River Bridge that I have never crossed, just get to the approach and then veer off to the right down a 4 plus mile dirt road. The repetitiveness was boring, if not monotonous.

Some dreamed of Mount McKinley National Park. See the tallest mountain in the U.S. if not North America. The place was a location everyone has heard of, so since we're in Alaska for my 2nd trip at least visit the tourist attraction. Word was put out days in advance of the trip. This allowed everyone ample time to get money and pack over night clothes, besides the white coverall and green and yellow boots. Western wear was the attire the Dugway crew preferred, while I sported a suit and tie. Again showing the diversity between the East of the Hudson River and West of the Continental Divide syndrome

The work bus had a good going over. It was filled with diesel fuel to the brim. Fluids levels were checked pertaining to breaks, power steering, anti freeze and other operating bus functions. The bus was even swept out, and seats dusted and the windows were given the once over, because the view would be different. Dusted for the benefit of the up-town garments that will adorn the seats for the weekend. The Dugway person possessing a CDL certificate was at the usual helm.

One relatively early Saturday morning the loaded bus headed out the Ft. Greely main gate. There the dilemma was either turn left toward Paxson or right to Fairbank. I have no idea which way was taken, except to say the shortest distance.

Arriving it was a dreary foggy day somewhere around noon as the bus entered the park and the park headquarters to check into the hotel. The 20,320 foot peak of Mt. Mc Kinley was hidden in a curtain of obscurity. Even the glaciers descending from the zenith were covered.

With the bus load requiring almost 20 double occupant rooms. A few guys desired private lodging. Getting everyone registered was a laborious unrelenting task for the under-staffed attendants, and for us standing in line awaiting our turn at the counter. In all almost an hour had passed. Once room assignments were distributed and the guys hauled their luggage to their specified rooms, most of the boys meandered, crawled or in some fashion located the dining room for a late lunch. A few having beer on the bus dismissed food for a liquid lunch.

A few men decided to forgo a tour of the park or more aptly would could be seen. A few just wanted rest and sleep. I imagine a couple called home after being away for months. Talking to mama and the kids would be so much better than a letter. The vast majority subscribed to the tour. I remember seeing anglers on banks and bridge fishing in what appeared only inches of water. Yet salmon with red heads and grotesque deformed heads were fighting an uphill battle attempting to get back to the eddy, pool or stream of their hatching years ago.

After dinner several guys were talking silly. They wanted to hear a country and western band play. A few even entertained the concept of dancing. May be they could find a Squaw Along The Yukon (actual song title). The people up here wanted solitude, they were mostly hermits. They were trying to scratch out living away from civilization, law and order. Nice pristine life style and vanity were foreign terms to these Hatfield and Mc Coy wanna bees.

For some numschull asinine reason I guess I took a dummy pill to stay stupid, but I went along on this ludicrous idea. Since the bus driver had the bus keys, we just hijacked the bus for a joy ride to a Cantwell bar. Entering the saloon, I knew it was a disaster. Paired off were husband and wife duets at tables. Any wife that conceived of coming over to a table of half a dozen guys would come home to find herself homeless. It was that simple, dancing was out of the question.

While our Canadian counter-parts were boozing away their paychecks, I was planning, concocting and finagling ways to make one buck become two. During induction, I signed up for saving bonds, in addition to income tax and social security deducted from a \$78.00 monthly pay check. At motion picture school I bought into a mutual fund. Later I obtained a 2nd fund. Veterans and others verified in service, you can either save or spend all your money. This philosophy was ingrained in my head, so that having a investment strategy was a self help ideology.

With the re-enlistment bonus, flight pay and other gratuities from the project my coffer was flush. Remember the remoteness and communication delays, the New York Times paper was touted as "ALL THE NEWS FIT TO PRINT." Its sports section was larger than the entire Fairbanks paper. The times financial section listed a pamphlet on airline stock ready for big moves. I examined, studied and deciphered the brochure over and over figuring how to make the biggest bang for my buck!

Somewhere around the end of July project Elk Hunt II was winding down. The chemical munitions guys were tarnishing my brain. The next job was Devil Hole I, not using VX, but a different nerve agent GB. Ross and Martin told me GB was both a liquid and a gas. My high school chemistry studies reminded me both forms of the substance was considered a fluid. I wondered if both forms were lethal or if only one form was deadly?

Major Ledbetter personally told me he had graduated from college with a degree in chemical engineering. That was a subject seldom heard of in every day life, but it seemed a natural progression from the class room to practical experience with Deseret Test Center and the Army.

Major Ledbetter extolled the following account. He said the British had invented GB nerve agent as a pesticide. The British scientist using a hole from a mothballed ship as a laboratory, dumped a load of bugs and insects into the hole. Then GB was pumped into the hole and the hole was sealed for several hours. Then a few scientists ventured into the hole to see what effects the pesticide had on the critters in the hole. When the scientist failed to return, the British knew they had something more potent than a pesticide.

About this time a movie projector was set up in the Gerstle River dining hall. After lunch when the Canadians had departed for their C.P. and the cooks were escorted out. The blinds were drawn and a 10 minute film was threaded and the movie came to life.

It was a Russian secret test of nerve agent filmed in the lab. The movie was in 3 parts. The first had a caged rabbit. The rabbit was given a snoot full of Russian nerve agent. The rabbits nerves went ballistic for a few second and died.

A 2nd rabbit in a pen was given a snoot full of Russian nerve agent, and when the twitching began the rabbit was injected with American antidote atropine. A short time later this rabbit also died.

The 3rd penned rabbit was given a snoot full of the Russian nerve agent. When the twitching began this rabbit was injected with the Russian anti-dote. After a few seconds the twitching stopped. Within a minute the rabbit was hopping around the pen without any ill effects. The Russian anti-dote cured both the voluntary and involuntary muscles, whereas atropine only handles the involuntary muscles. To control the voluntary muscles in the U.S. the patient has to be hospitalized. This takes time and costs weeks of downtime on the battlefield. At the same time a Russian soldier would self administer the cure and be an able body within minutes of the attack.

This 10 minute film was a real eye opener. Over the decades Russian spies stole our secrets of the atomic and hydrogen bomb development. Our nuclear sub details and untold scores more classified data. Why can't our spies and CIA steal some of the Russian nerve agent antidote and save us millions of dollars and time in developing our own version of the stuff?

As aforementioned elsewhere in these lines nothing happens until the munition were armed, and being the shadow of Ross and Martin, the guys that armed the weapons kept me honed and attuned to up coming events that was the key to Devil Hole I project. As Elk Hunt II finished the full rubber protective suits were packed away. In its place were lighter cloth coverall/jumpsuit garment. Gone was the gas mask hood that covered the entire head. I'm sure the gloves remained for a few key personnel. The chemical munition guys that handled the weapons, myself as cameraman following Ross and Martin and now the sample collectors.

Finally Ross and Martin informed me that GB was a liquid agent while in storage. However it becomes a poisonous deadly gas when released. As the first trial was started, an entirely new sequence took place. Our ride to the grid was not a truck, but an infantry armored personnel carrier (APC). I got in the rear loading ramp and took a seat along the side. The ramp was raised up and on the floor lay a 155mm or 6 inch in diameter artillery shell, that was probably 20 inches long.

The APC headed down some different dirt path nearly a mile from the CP and the VX grid. I had no idea what was happening, but I would observe and become educated as the project progressed.

Out in the boondocks of Alaska we stopped at something I'm going to have to describe later. It was supposed to be bunker, We stopped to drop off a blasting machine. The kind anyone sees from a 1940's cowboy movie involving mines. It was just a square box containing a magneto for electric and a handle plunger to generate the electric power. Then we continued up to a stand of aspen trees or woods maybe an acre in size, a 1/4 mile from the so called bunker.

The APC stopped at the woods. I with camera in hand got out the now open ramp, while Ross and Martin came to the back. One entered and handed a small ammo box to his partner, as the one inside the APC picked up the artillery shell and we all headed into the grove of trees. When they located a tree with a rope hanging down the munition men halted and set the round on the ground. Now I began to film as the sync pair did their thing, One unscrewed the plug where the fuse would normally go, while the other opened the ammo box to take out 2 bursters. Both bursters were dropped into the hole, and I think a blasting cap put in. The continuity was check and the plug screwed back in

CONFUSION: If we used the plug ring and replaced it properly in the top of the round, the plug's threads certainly had the propensity to cut the electric wire, short circuiting the electric current to explode the armament. Conversely, if a actual fuse was inserted, electric wires for detonation would be external and visiable from the fuse. I have no reconciliation of such a device. Also the chemical munition team would have to fashion a harness or cradle of rope to hoist the shell up the tree. Retrospect of the time and events tells me the plug was used.

I deem sometime in the past I heard the term safety officer tossed around the CP. Yet if he ever viewed the so called bunker, he'd say put a match to that death trap, and let it burn! It was nothing more than a few loosely fitting logs for walls and a couple of tree branches with leaves for a roof. That was to protect us from flying 11bs size shrapnel and falling tree limbs. That armored personnel carrier was 1000 times safer than that so called bunker. Inside the bunker was set up a military field phone to call the CP. Once the artillery shell was all set to be exploded, a call was put into the CP.

Before the electric wires were connected the blasting machine was primed. The plunger was lifted and pushed down once or twice to get the magneto working good. Then and only then were the wire from the woods attached. Normally it took about 10 minutes after the initial call to the CP declaring ready, that the weather team and other declared it was GO. A count down from 9 to 0 began and the blasting machine plungers was lifted to maximum height and at ZERO the plunger was rammed downward. A second or two later we heard the explosion. We could see leaves and puffs of smoke rise from the top of a tree. Seconds later we heard the wizz of shrapnel coming our way. Some landed behind us, others landed on both sides of the bunker. I don't think we wore gas masks the entire time.

The 93 pound artillery shell containing about 3 quarts of liquid GB nerve agent, when the explosive bursters detonated releasing pure energy, cracked, ripped open, tore apart the containment barrier into bits and pieces that became shrapnel. The hot expanding explosive gases instantly vaporized, the liquid into a mist and acting as an atomizer also sublimed the liquid into a nerve racking deadly poison. The deadly projectile of shrapnel could with jagged edges rip, tear or kill human flesh.

WEAPONS OF MASS DESTRUCTION: including chemical arms are highly scrutinized and tightly examined during deployment and uses are severely controlled. On the ELK HUNT SERIES Ross and Martin only set out and armed the weapons, but the test bosses, when all the project's factors were favorable, actually throw the switch detonating the weapons. No one person had total control of the WMD, that could reek havoc if not properly supervised.

Yet on Devil Hole absolutely minimum supervision was used. On sight personnel evaluation of performance involving trustworthiness, loyalty, honesty, was a judgementally factor in who worked on this project. Because Devil Hole would extend outside the parameters of prudent precautions. Extraordinary circumstances prevailed allowing individual self control over the hideous weapons.

Once the debris and shrapnel stopped landing around our flimsy bunker, the blasting machine was detached from the wires and the 3 of us headed back to the C.P. for decontamination and shower. I'm certain parts of the C.P. were dismantled. Things in excess and not needed were packed and stored away. Some if not most of the Dugway crew could head home once the C.P. was scaled down. The DPG team had no active part in this project.

After the initial trial of GB nerve agent, gas masks were required when around the area of the tree grid. Even though the noxious toxic agent had hours ago disseminated even by a gentle breeze, some isolated pockets definitely found seclusion under brush, leaves or even hidden in tundra and muskeg along with hiding mosquitoes. The poison would persist until disturbed by stepping on it, or wind that would disperse out the killing agent without warning.

Nearly daily trials of Devil Hole I project continued with a redundancy, if not for the fact we were not only working with explosives, but deadly nerve agent the project might be monotonously boring. I felt even on Elk HUNT II that I could preform the task of Ross or Martin should one be unable to work. However I held off asking that question awhile longer.

Knowing fully there were many other fellows of the Dugway crew that could be more qualified and possess more maturity than myself. Yet these 2 that I've shadowed these two summers witnessed my behavior and seeing I wasn't a brash, irrational, impetuous not displaying the immaturity of a wild kid barely able to vote.

With ESP intution or some knowing sense, I asked the team if I could arm and detonate one of these artillery rounds? The very next trial I got out of the APC as usual with camera in hand, while one of the partners reached in getting the ammo box and heading into the woods, leaning over his shoulder saying "THAT YOURS". Almost half laughing it took me a lot to lift up and carry that 93 pound dead weight killing monster.

How well I recall wondering around the woods, half tripping over fallen limbs and mangled branches looking for a tree that still held a rope and pulley. I think I was surprised that most of the stand of trees still stood after half a dozen explosions among the tree tops. Locating a virgin tree target took a while, and the weight I was carring was getting heavier by the minute,

I set down the shell to unscrew the plug ring. Then tipping the round on a tilt, I slid not dropped the 2 explosive bursters into the center cavity. then completing the sequence, whether by blasting cap or fuse, I finished the task. One of the two munition men checked line continuity and all the wires were connected. The two helped me hoist the round up the tree truck and tie it off. Then back to our unsecure bunker to call the bosses.

I remember stepping on the electrical wire leading to the grid, so that in no way could the wires be attached to the blasting machine prematurely. I primed the blasting machine testing the resistance the magneto had. The C.P. was contacted that all was ready on the grid. Then I connected the wires to the blasting machine, and waited for the count-down to begin.

It seemed that someone at the C.P. knew I was inpatient, if not as nervous as an expectant father, wanting a perfect blast on his first attempt. In fact the phone rang in an inordinately short time to hear the count-down of 10-9-8- lift the plunger handle up 7-6-5-4-3-2-1- ZERO. I rammed the plunger home hoping to achieve 1,000 volts to get a mighty blast from my first attempt. I remember from the blast that our bunker area received about 5 zings and wizzes from incoming schrapnel around the bunker. But none ever hit the bunker in all the trials.

The time for me to arm and detonate a chemical weapon on U.S. soil could not have been more perfectly timed. By this trial I knew the routine involved with arming the weapon, yet not knowing in this stage of the project that there were only limited static detonations, and I got nearly the last one.

During the latter part of August 1965, Major Ledbetter in the dining hall during lunch that his next mission was going to be in the spring of 1966, in Hawaii. He wanted each and every person in the room to be on his team in Hawaii. Aside from the meterologocal and medic teams that were part of Ft. Greely, I was the only military person the announcement affected. Even though Devil Hole I wasn't finished, the Dugway crew had virtually no part in the next phase of the project. The C.P. could be mostly dismantled and the crew sent home.

This statement was unheard of, totally unprecedeted and have diastrophism reverberations. Nobody, but nobody in the military could predict where they might be 6 month henceforth, especially in light that Vietnam was expanding exponentially. Another major factor in this negativity of this happening was that I had just signed up for 3 more years. The Army's arm of the Pentagon could permanently transfer me elsewhere, Europe, here in Alaska, Korea, Canal Zone Vietnam, Hawaii, or another stateside location. For me to brag I would spend next spring in Hawaii was all but an ungodly proclamation on my part. Yet spring in Hawaii for me came to furition as expected.

About the same time Major Ledbetter came to me informing me that he had a flight scheduled and wanted me along. I was early on the day of the flight and did some serious hanger flying with the aviators. I already had all the flight time needed for July and August, but this was official.

At the airfield Major Ledbetter had a strange officer with a radio. We all met and were escorted to a (B) model Huey helicopter that was reserved for VIP status. All I knew was we were flying out to the Gerstle River site to get an aerial view of the aspen grove grid.

Pictorially for me everything was wrong. When I do aerials I like to fly at 200 to 400 feet high at 60 knots speed over the area. We were flying about 2 miles behind the grid at 1,500 feet altitude. I was basically along for the ride. Major Ledbeter had helo supplied headset to converse with the pilots and yelled instruction to the other officer. Finally after circling for some time we spotted a puff of smoke near the aspen woods. The officer with the radio called new coordinates and a few moments later another puff of smoke rose from the vicinity of the aspens. More radio talk and one more puff of smoke rose from within the woods. The show was over and back to the airfield. It behooved the helo to stay well clear of those incoming target practice shells. That was just caution to give a wide berth of the aspen woods.

Almost in unison with the helicopter flight, a photo team reappeared. It may have been the same team that I replaced or some new crew. There was an officer along, thus the team along with me were afforded a vehicle at our disposal. Instead of going to the Gerstle River bridge turnoff, the crew cut off the road about a mile prematurely. I hadn't seen a new dirt road being built. However I hadn't seen the D-8 Caterpillar bulldozer around the C.P. area lately either. It was undoubtedly used to clear the new road for this part of the project.

A short distance down this bulldozed road spread out to see a battery of 6 155mm self propelled howitzers facing a seemingly Southwest direction. This was why we had the helo ride and be fire direction for the arty battery. Here was an entirely new education on artillery fire better known as indirect fire. Rather than aim the gun directly at the target and fire, with artillery the barrels are raised and the shell is fired up toward the sky with intent to hit the target. I don't know if they used an abacus, algebra, calculus, a sliderule or trigonometry for their multi confab fig-uration. The team computed distance, powder needed, winds dewpoint and tem-perature to determine humidity etc. The artillery using their method can with 6 inch guns shoot at targets over mountain ridges 15 miles away, that only a plane of helo could other wise hit.

The whole artillery syndrome had its own jargon of words and phrases. The photo team only sent 1 entire day out of maybe 10 days of this part of Devil Hole I on the artillery site to try and learn what took these military personnel several months of schooling to learn, but we weren't they to be schooled. Instead of a barrel on the gun, they called them tubes, as I would learn in Vietnam. The explosive mix or propellant was abbreviated to prop-charge. The hardware shell was called a projectile. Inside a can-nister were bags of explosive. The bags resembled a small woven fish net with ample opening for combustion to instantally burn. The actual ammo to me looked like black charcoal for a cookout. If I remember the prop charges were stored and shipped in a cyclinder about a yard long and 6in. in diameter to fit the breach of the howitzer. The container had 4 bags of powder. For our estimated 5 mile down slope over trees they would use a single bag of prop charge. If they chose and tilted the tubes much higher they could use the other 3 bags of explosive mix. Instead of the proj-ectile sailing upward to a mile, the round fighting gravity could travel 50,000 feet high to hit the aspen woods.

The weight of the round had to be exacting among the various possible shells. Within normal inventory each howitzer would have smoke or marking rounds. They had to be perfectly balanced with a high explosive shell or (HE) round. For night operation they would have illumination shell for troops to spot infiltrators or night assault. Any inconsistanty among the shells and the various rounds won't land on target. If using illumination rounds to spot enemy and switch to (HE) high explosive shells the weight was different the HE round won't hit the target. I've heard the term (willy-Peter) I guess it refers to white phosphorus. I'm sure each type of round has its own marking to identify each kind of weapon. The GB nerve agent rounds had 3 yellow band around the nose of the shell. I can unequivocally state that none of the artillery people had any idea as to the exact nature of what they were shooting. They may have been told chemical as blue dye on the tree leaves.

Once it was established that the next phase of Project Devil Hole I only involved the howitzer unit from neighboring Ft. Wainwright, outside Fairbanks. That being the situation all photo activity at the Gerstle River Test Site ceased. The Dugway crew would only have a negligible but vital duty, that of collecting the vial samples from the grid after 2 hours of operation. With live people in a HOT GRID the medics were essential, should any mishap occur. The meteorologist mission was needed to know when weather conditions were favorable for each trial. A few DPG men would be needed to decontaminate the vial sample collectors and laundry to wash a couple of jumpsuit/coveralls uniforms.

The entire C.P. area **could** be just a token of its glory days. All that was really needed would be the metal travel trailer that was the command site.

The decon area with showers, one GP tent could condense everything. The squad tents of the medic and meteorologist teams could be struck. The bunk, supply tents folded up and stored. Generators would still have to be required for supplying electric and communication needs. The entire Dugway crew could be reduced to 5 or 6 men.

I mentioned samples the lab processed. I also used the term often. With Elk Hunt II the samples were the white booties on the boots and cloth covers on the lawn rollers. For Devil Hole I the samplers used were most certainly the same as used on Project High-Low aboard the Navy ships. The VX nerve agent is a persistent chemical mix. GB nerve agent is a gaseous killer and would disipate with the breeze, zephyr or gale force wind. Even though the impact of the GB was several hours prior, the grid was considered HOT and anyone entering without a gas mask did so at his own risk.

In the guest house the Canadians were still there. With so few people at the Gerstle River Site, without the Canadians in the dining hall might only feed one dozen meals. That wouldn't be worth travelling over 80 miles round trip.

Its inevitable that some of the samplers were damaged from the explosions in the woods. Either by blast debris or falling tree limbs. This would cause bending, breaking or cause the sampler to become inoperative. However it's far more cost effective to replace inert samplers than a human life. All that is needed is a metal stand, a suction pump off a vacuum cleaner, rubber hoses and glass vials. Plus a battery or 110 volt electric connection. I never filmed the collection of these samples or getting them back to the lab.

Since the 6 howitzers were barely 2 blocks off the main road, hidden by trees, someone had to stand watching for traffic. With 6 howitzers firing at once, to any motorist it would sound like 20 sticks of dynamite going off, scaring any driver into panic and probable accident. Therefore a guard had to insure no traffic was in sound of the blast.

Over the next week to 10 days the arty battery sent volleys of shells into the aspen grid. I believe there were 6 firings of the entire battery at once over that duration. That meant 36 chemical shells exploded on impact. From behind the howitzers at a certain angle we could view the projectile flying for a second or more on its trajectory and course toward the grid.

On the flight back to New York I had ample time to reminisce about the events of this summers 80 days in Alaska. With about 9 hours of air travel, plus a Seattle lay over, I could look behind or arears, immediate offing and forward months ahead also. I had a myraid of topics to make an examination of my mental diary. My mind pondered the robbery involved. That of Deseret Test Center paying for photographic teams to fly around the country IN SUPPORT OF THEIR PROJECTS as the terminology on the orders read, only to be robbed of productivity by near insubordination or court marshal for refusing to suit up filming the toxic testing on the HOT GRID. They would rather die in Vietnam of metal bullets, than with a sheild of protective clothing and a slim chance of death with non-matallic nerve agent.

If the old adage "HONOR AMONG THIEVES" had bearing, I had scruples. The banditry of swapping boots for a drivers license, claiming missed meals that were comsumed, fictitious plane rides for flight pay; then being an accomplice to stealing an Army bus for a joy ride bar hopping. Man my canniving was amateurish in comparison to near court marshal offenses of near deleiction of duty by other photographers and film crew, by not providing film of the HOT GRID ACTIVITIES.

While the rest of the photo team including the lieutentant were undecided as to what activity that might endure their presents when we got back to the Big Apple; I knew I'd open a brokerage account and utilizing the data from scrutinizing the airline brouchure, I'd invest in America, with the re-enlistment bonus, and make one buck become two! I bought Pan American World Airways while priced in the lower \$30 a share. While on my next assignment in Vietnam reading the Stars & Stripes military newspaper I saw Pan Am scramper to touch \$90 a share in less than 4 months. Another old adage came into play INVESTIGATE BEFORE YOU INVEST was true.

After spotting those ivory handled steak knifes last year at North Pole, Alaska pit stop I now had funds to buy 2 sets of knifes and the cuterly set, that I held for decades and recently donated to my friend and executor of my will.

Then too, I had the audacious pretext upon sighting a pair of 25 pound practice bombs in a Ft. Greely dumpster. Right that moment the 2 bombs were in the luggage compartment on their way to New York. What a novelty idea to weld the 2 bombs end on end making a mailbox stand. However that rouge idea met with opposition considering the mail carrier might believe if he opened the mail box the bombs might blow up. On that premise refuse to deliever our mail. Pranksters too could have a field day to steal our mail box out of sheer madness or curiosity.

Among the adverse things that happened; leading the pact of eye openers was the Russian rabbit toxic agent test film showing the inadequacy of our nerve agent antidote. It scared the hell out of me to think if we gased them, they could be up shooting at us within 5 minutes. While if they gased our toops, they would be hospitalized for days completely off the battlefield. What a disparagingly predicament for us.

Then there was the audacity, I was wearing signal corp insignia to indicate communications VIA of motion pictures, not ordnance or bomb squad nor engineer brass, whose job uses explosives. Not even chemical corp where toxic agents are off limits to the group. But I over time proved to the 2 chemical munitions men that I wasn't a cocky, derelict peach fuzz kid, but a mature man able to assume responsibility.

Far afield of reality, here I was among the elite, I was not only in this weird experiment expected to film the unheard of procedure of people arming the chemical weapons, but also blowing the thing up. But way out of context was the anomaly that I became probably ONLY THE 3 AMERICAN TO ARM AND BLOW UP A CHEMICAL WEAPON ON U.S. SOIL.

This all happened 51 years ago, as I pen this story. At that time I hadn't voted yet. Ross and Martin were both in the age of mid 40's. If they are still alive today, they would be pushing 100 years old. Thus I may be the LAST AMERICAN ALIVE TO ARM AND EXPLODE A CHEMICAL WARHEAD ON U.S. SOIL.

If the creek didn't rise as the chiche goes; I'd be in Hawaii next spring. That enigma alone elongated my esteem and ego above my peers. By going the extra distance, extra effort; privileges and benefits were accorded without much if any hoopla, but instinctively deducing special treatment not afforded my peers that became my hallmark; as in the story, "G.I. GET TWO FOLD EDUCATION FROM A PAIR OF NAVAL RESEARCH VOYAGES." and the 23 page summary of that job that I wrote to become the sole source of reconnaissance for another DTC project.

Several things took place or started to take form while back in New York. When I spotted the arm room door open I figured us troops were headed to the rifle range again. It was located in Brooklyn at a Nike missile site. Our gas masks were also stored in the arms room. I grabbed my and sized it to my head, using expedient, short cuts and quick methods that saved me my life out on the HOT GRID.

That Friday morning word was put out to draw our gas masks. It was a riot watching these city boys trying to mask up. Hell you would think they never been to basic training and the gas chamber before. I laughed my ass off seeing most of my peers and fellow soldiers spend 30 seconds attempting to but not achieving getting the mask on their head. The manual states 9 seconds. Virtually all had the mask on so tight it would cut off circulation to the brain and they would pass out in 30 minutes. One troop took over a minute to mask up. Man working with VX and GB as I had, they would have been dead before every getting their mask applied properly.

When they got to me of course, I was the only professional there. No one ever seen a professional putting on a gas mask! Thus I was in a league all to myself. I just put the mask to my hair line and shook my head like chasing away a fly and quick nods up and down and sideways movement of my head a second and the mask automatically fell perfectly into place in less than 2 seconds. The inspectors never seen that before and it's not in the manual. I got chewed out for my knowledge, but I'd be alive if this was real. While all the others would be dead.

With Vietnam build-up in full swing, the Army Pictorial Center was tasked to provide 2 camera crew for Vietnam. This was to augment the 39th Signal Battalion stationed there and help with photo missions until the 69th Signal Battalion with its photo unit arrived in country from Germany. A crew of 14 officers and enlisted, still, sound men and motion picture men were selected.

Also at APC it was a tulmulcha time. The Army needed a fast response team to provide visual documentation of brush fire wars occurring around the world. The Army photo chiefton in the Pentagon, selected quite a few top cameramen sound and still photographers to form a new photo organization called DASPO (Department Of The Army Special Photo Office).

The main different would be at APC the cameramen and equipment were just a pool. Every panic every crisis took days or weeks to select a team and figure out what camera gear to take for the job. With DASPO the group would be divided into teams and each team would be issued enough camera, and sound gear for that team. Also each member of a team would have a suitcase packed and ready to travel. Another item of issue was a passport in hand.

Between the 14 men headed for a short stay in Vietnam and DASPO being developed that took about 30 of the 40 or so Field Photo guys. If you weren't on either team you were a dud not worth having along.

At the same time all this was going on and within a month of my arming and blowing up a toxic warhead, network news reports hinted that sheep in Utah were mysteriously dying. Within weeks Utah ranchers were reporting 100's of dead sheep for no apparent reason. Finally some dead sheep were sent off for an autopsy. The result were every nerve in the animals body had been fried. Killed by nerve poison!

Finally the Army had to acknowledge that a toxic agent test at Dugway Proving Grounds had gone awry killing 6,000 sheep. These sheep were grazing not in pens not coralled just grazing over thousands of acres. It reminded me of asking the lab people "HOW NASTY IS THIS STUFF." I saw one sequence from Dugway. The reports stated the mountains in the background were the base boundry. It looked like the mountains were 20 to 25 miles away. Thus the agent killed a swath of death of birds, jack rabbits, coyotes, turtles, bobcats, lizards and any other air breathing thing in its path for miles. This saga continued on the news until November. I heard the story over AFN (Armed Forces Network) radio in Saigon. We heard the Army's response. Yet I alone knew every Dog-Patch person involved, the agent that was used and about how much agent was released! But my lips were sealed.

P.S. On October 10th with 7,000 pounds of air cargo the 14 flew to Saigon.

Written Spring 2016  
*William Foulke*  
William Foulke