

# Nation & World

NEWS BRIEFS FROM WIRE DISPATCHES

## Veterans advised of potential risk of radium treatment

### Use of radiation for some ailments was once common

By ROBERT BURNS  
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Thousands of American servicemen who were given radiation treatment decades ago by military doctors may be at risk for further health problems, the Defense Department said yesterday.

The Pentagon said it is working with the Department of Veterans Affairs to notify servicemen who participated in nasal radiation treatments. It made no mention of the children of military personnel who were treated with radiation for innerear problems in the 1940s and '50s.

In a report on a wide range of military radiation research involving humans during the Cold War, the Pentagon said only the nasal radiation treatments posed health questions that required followup.

The Pentagon is not admitting that the radiation caused any problems and it continues to cite studies that say evidence of long-term health problems associated with this treatment are inconclusive. However, it now acknowledges a "significant risk" of such linkages.

Other projects among more than 2,300 documented radiation experiments include the use of Mennonite conscientious objectors in experimental taste tests of irradiated foods in 1956. Also, Alaskan Eskimos were given radioactive iodine-131 in an Air Force study of thyroid activity in men exposed to cold in the 1950s. The government is now negotiating compensation for some of them.

Stewart Farber, a public health scientist who has pressed the government for years on the nasal radiation

treatments, said the Pentagon report, by dealing only with servicemen, ignores a bigger population of civilians who got the treatment.

"They want to make it look like they're doing something when in reality they're not helping people," said Farber, who is associated with the advocacy group Center for Atomic Radiation Studies, Inc., of Brookline, Mass.

The report said the number of servicemen involved is in the thousands.

Apparently most were Navy submariners and Army pilots. They were particularly vulnerable to inner-ear problems from exposure to rapid pressure changes.

Marvin Baumstein was 27 and an Army Air Force gunner when he was given radium treatments through his nostrils in 1945 to shrink his adenoids and cure a temporary hearing loss from a B-24 bomber training flight. It worked, he said yesterday, but he later developed cancer of the larynx. He smoked cigarettes but blames the radium treatment for his cancer.

"I would like my kids to know the Army was responsible," he said in the barely audible voice of a man who had half of his larynx removed.

In the 1940s and '50s it was common practice to use radium to treat sinus inflammations and to shrink swollen adenoids.

Typically, a rod containing 50 milligrams of radium was pushed through each nostril and placed against the opening of the eustachian tubes for six to 12 minutes. Repeated over a period of months, this would shrink the adenoids. The eustachian tubes help the ear to drain and balance pressure on the inner and outer ear.

The military stopped using the treatment when pressurized aircraft cabins came into use and new medical treatments, such as antibiotics and tympanic tubes, were developed.

**"I would like my kids to know the Army was responsible."**

Marvin Baumstein, who once underwent radium treatments and later developed cancer