



**Defense Nuclear Agency**  
Washington, D.C. 20305-1000

*redwing*

NTPR

20 November 1985

MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD

SUBJECT: Phone Conversation with Maj Gen Ernest Pinson,  
USAF (Ret)

1. On 18 November 1985, I called Major General Ernest Pinson about his involvement in Project 2.66 at Operation REDWING. This call was initiated in response to Representative Markey's inquiry on the subject. We talked for about a half an hour.
2. General Pinson said all of the men who flew through the cloud were volunteers. He and the men from the Air Force Special Weapons Center (AFSWC) planned the project and agreed that it could be safely done. The AFSWC men volunteered themselves. They then spoke to the Tactical Air Command (TAC) pilots about the project. General Pinson told them why this was needed, what was going to happen, what were the hazards, what sort of radiation levels could be expected and the biological effect of this exposure. General Pinson told the TAC pilots that he would be the first pilot into each nuclear cloud. He put no pressure on the TAC pilots whatsoever. Pinson wound up with more volunteers than he needed.
3. He advised the TAC pilots and AFSWC men not to wear lead vests or use filters in their aircraft. He said this provided negligible protection and a false sense of security. He did not want the men to become dependent on these devices when they offered no real protection.
4. General Pinson said this project was not in any way a human experiment, nor were the men guinea pigs. The project's goal was to measure radiation levels, not to study the biological effects of low level ionizing radiation. The expected and observed radiation levels were too low to produce a noticeable effect. Manned aircraft were used because previous attempts using drone, missile or cannister collection methods had proved inadequate or inaccurate.

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5. The planes were thoroughly monitored by the AFSWC personnel before the decontamination (decon) crews began their work. Standard decon procedures were used and radiation safety monitors were always present. The decon and ground crews worked under the task force exposure standards of 3.9 rem.

6. He originally asked the Air Force Surgeon General for a maximum permissible exposure (MPE) level of 50 R. Pinson felt he was the leading expert in the Air Force on this subject, and that such exposures would cause no biological harm. The 50 R limit was more than needed, but he proposed this figure to cover any eventuality what-so-ever. The 50 R figure was eventually lowered to 20 R, but even this figure was sufficient for General Pinson.

7. The greatest danger, he said, was the normal operational hazards of flying, not the radiation. In fact, one pilot died when his aircraft exploded while flying in a rain storm. He was airborne in preparation for a detonation when the aircraft exploded. The detonation was later cancelled due to the weather. Radiation was not a factor in the pilot's death.

8. General Pinson is part of the DNA over 25 rem program. He is in good health and has a clear memory. He was involved in many nuclear testing projects. He was a line officer pilot, and earned doctorates in physiology and physics.

9. General Pinson indicated his willingness to come and talk about this subject to DNA officials or Congress, if it was necessary.



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