

D 9 E 9 K

Conversation between Dean Meyer, Charles Blackwell, Margaret Anne Rogers,
John Warren and John Enders...February 15th, 1974

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Blackwell: There were two chambers here and these were used. Then after that, the next place they dug the pits were over in Area 8 and those weren't used.

Rogers: Now what is Area 8?

Blackwell: That is back up at the gate and goes south.

Rogers: Yeah, that'd be Area E.

Blackwell: Right and go all the way out to Area 8.

Meyer: We'll take her out there.

Blackwell: We'll go out there because there is a burial pit there also, just south of the pits in that area.

Meyer: I stand corrected then...

Rogers: This one and the other one were fired.

Blackwell: The other one were fired and then they moved over into the other area.

Meyer: And one of the two up here that was fired was excavated...

Blackwell: Right!

Meyer: We refired it with trace

Blackwell: We excavated that one and ^{went down and} jacked the door of the chamber open, went in and took a look to see if there were any explosives left or anything of this sort and we could find no evidence of any explosives in there at all. At that particular time, which was a long time ago, we did find some radioactive material, but ...

Meyer: What?

Blackwell: pallonium

Meyer: Pallonium, alphie meter (?)



Blackwell: And, so the underground chamber was still very much in tact at that time...

Rogers: And it's the one that's buried under this mound of earth right here.

Blackwell: Under the mound of earth here and...

Meyer: That would be what on this map?

Blackwell: That one would this one here HP-4.

Meyer: HP-4 was fired, re-excavated, and re-fired with trace

Rogers: I'll check with you to see if that's your 1953 mineral.

Blackwell: Then they put in some barrels of scrap HE and we jacked the door of the chamber closed and then cables were run from this, the shaft was back-filled, we even put pieces of 12 x 12, 15-20 feet long down into this and when it was fired there was so much more explosives in it that time than there were the first time that it even shot some of the timbers back up out of the shaft, they cleared the ground! I mean that one breeched, no radioactive material breeched, but the force from this lifted the dirt enough to force some timbers out and some dirt out, but it did not force any of the radioactive material out that had been contained in the chamber. I'm sure that at the present time the chambers ruptured, especially after looking at the condition of the chamber at Trinity and what that would look like after we fired the HE on it, of course, that one was not back-filled. And, I'm sure it did breach the chamber.

Meyer: Of course, that was the purpose of the second firing was to test the theory of design against HE.

Blackwell: Right. Well, we know it was breeched...

Meyer: They couldn't get the door shut though, the door did not shut as well the second time.

Blackwell: Well, the way the door was designed, though, Dean, that the force of the explosive, unless you completely ruptured the chamber, the greater the force in there the tighter the door would close unless you completely destroyed the chamber because of the door design, the door facing design.

Meyer: Alright, HP-4 had pallonium fired in it. What did the other one have?

Blackwell: Same thing.

Meyer: Same thing. Was there any uranium associated with this experiment?

Blackwell: No, appreciable amount, there may have been a trace amount. But it would have been very small, because all that they were doing was just the gadget with the pallonium, but no other part of the weapon.

Meyer: That's my understanding also.

Blackwell: Right.

Rogers: This is chamber HP-6

Blackwell: You see HP-4 is off at that angle, so it has to be under this mound of dirt about where the sand bags are located. I would say a bit farther down than this barricade here, John. It would have to be about where the sand bags are piled on top of the burn and, because after the explosion of the shot, after the excavation, it was back-filled again then they did the leveling off of the area and built the bur . . . But...

Enders: According to my rough engineering calculation that's roughly 200 ft. east by south from this point.

Blackwell: That about right, to about where the sand bags are at or maybe slightly further than that, but that is going to run you about 200 ft.

Rogers: Well, now, was HP-6 constructed the same way you did HP-4?

Blackwell: No, it was not excavated like 4 was.

Rogers: So it was fired and then filled, back-filled?

Blackwell: It was back-filled. On 6 it was left the way it had originally been and they excavated that particular one because it was going to involve a construction area.

Meyer: Well, isn't it true that HP-6 was untouched after its use.

Blackwell: Right.

Meyer: The entrance shaft was back-filled before it was used.

Blackwell: Oh, yes, very definitely.

Meyer: This has not been disturbed on the surface or down underneath since it was fired.

Blackwell: No, no way. Same as it always had been since the initial firing.

Meyer: I believe that that group of trees is the back-fill for the entrance.

Rogers: O.K.

Rogers: We have been discussing Area D, the voices on the tape are Charles Blackwell, H-1, Dean Meyer, retired, Margaret Anne Rogers, H-8.

This is Area E...

Blackwell: Now here is the pit we're talking about. This one contained pallonium and there was a certain amount of uranium that went into this one, too. In pit 5.

Rogers: 71, 70 and 29 were never fired?

Blackwell: Not to my knowledge, they were never fired.

Rogers: Do any of these notations over here ^{on the map} mean anything to you, like butto and miscellaneous? This is E, this is a blow-up of this area right here.

Blackwell: Oh, yes. All of the things here are still classified, I guess.

I know the materials that went into this one.

Rogers: Pit 4.

Blackwell: Because they were dumping the stuff down here, here we have Pit 4.

This is the one that contained the bulk of the material, you can see it won't go down there, because that is still open, it is not filled up.

Then...

Rogers: Is the type of material classified? or the form that it's in?

Blackwell: The form that it's in would be classified. The type of material is not classified.

Rogers: Do you know anything about it? Can you comment on what type of material it would have been.?

Blackwell: It was normal uranium, and polonium 210 that went into this - Pit 4.

Rogers: Let's walk over there.

Meyer: Now what's in here, Blackie? Waste wise.

Blackwell: In this fenced area? This fence was put up because of the pits down here, Dean. Because at one time they had the cut off saw and this sort of stuff out here and they were sectioning and then they would recover as much of this as they could. The parts that would get leaks, they didn't think they would gain that much information from doing sectioning on this. A lot of this if they were blown up they would, well, some of this they would section as far as they could saw and then they would blow this open with HE, with blocks of Comp B and then the parts would then go down here and into the dump.

Meyer: Nothing buried in this area?

Blackwell: Yes, there's a pit down.

Rogers: But, HP 29 here, the underground chamber here, it's just that it's minus a lid and it's been filled in rather than, it wasn't fired, and material wasn't put into it to your knowledge.

Blackwell: Not to my knowledge

Meyer: I'm not sure its filled, I'm not too sure it just wasn't structural failure.

Blackwell: Structural failure, I imagine.

Rogers: This is Pit No. 2 that the bulk of the material went into.

Blackwell: Is it? Is that 2 or is that 4?

Rogers: This is Pit 2 right here. All along the south fence.

Blackwell: And that's been back-filled even since I was inside this area last.

Meyer: I think they cleaned this up when they cleaned up the area here.

Blackwell: That's probably what they did because there was a long pit that was all the way across here. The wall of the pit ran from about here over to about where those rocks are at.

Rogers: About 10 feet? or 12 feet?

Blackwell: It would go closer to 15-20 feet. It was a long pit.

Enders: It's probably the width of a D8 dirt pan, the dirt pan they use which is about 13 feet.

Blackwell: This is the one with the bulk of the material in, it's no. 4.

Rogers: Well, this is pit 2. Now Pit 4 is over there along the east fence, right over there and it was a very long pit.

Enders: O. K. That's over there. She's even got a compasss to help you.

Blackwell: Oh, now I can see.

Rogers: So, are you still saying...

Blackwell: No, no, this is the pit that contains the bulk of the material right there.

Enders: In other words we're standing on it.

Blackwell: Right, this is the one. See hear, most of the material is in this pit
2 .

Enders: No. 2 has Wally. Have you ever heard of that?

Meyer: No.

Enders: 60 curies , what was this a gadget?

Blackwell: These were the section gadgets, yes.

Rogers: Wally was a section gadget. Button would be a section gadget.

Blackwell: I never heard of Wally. And all the time that they were using
it out here, they never referred to it as Wally, I'll clue you.
Someone dreamed that name up later.

Meyer: When was Wally fired?

Enders: July '50 was when it was...

Rogers: Pit 1 that we just walked past, it says that it's ^{got} dillonium, beryllium
fired targets, what Lc and Le? and miscellaneous?

Blackwell: Oh, I know what that is.

Meyer: Dillionium is pallonium.

Rogers: O. K. slight error there.

Meyer: That's an error, I believe, on the map.

Blackwell: You know what this is.

Meyer: Oh, yes. (lots of laughing)

Rogers: What's...

Meyer: It doesn't change what I said this morning.

Blackwell: No, there was none, because they weren't working with plutonium
in the gadget at that time.

Meyer: Fission products?

Blackwell: No. It was, no, the only thing that was in them was beryllium

pallonium, and uranium. But no plutonium.

Rogers: But they did use every pit that's on that map.

Blackwell: Yeah, the chance that some of the material went into each one of them, but I know that they went into this one here by the fence.

Rogers: You know, they don't say anything about Pit 5 and Pit 6 on the map which we're kind of walking on right now.

Meyer: You know there is one thing that we have to bear in mind that these pits were used also for non-radioactive waste. This site being so far from any disposable area, they not only put their radioactive waste in here, but I understand they would place any essentially non-radioactive material that they wanted to dispose of in here.

Blackwell: Yes, and the same way over in Area 6, that was more convenient over there so the bulk of the material in that pit is non-radioactive waste.

Rogers: Where is Area 6?

Blackwell: That's up by the gate.

Rogers: Area K!

Meyer: That's Area K on the map that he had this morning. Right.

Blackwell: The material that went over the side on that one, I'm sure is decayed and gone by now, but appreciable activity ^{at} that particular time and considering the high fly, I don't think you'd ever find any of the material there now.

Meyer: I might add that for a number of years the pits out here were not under the jurisdiction of the Health Division.

Enders: Amen.

Blackwell: This was a convenient place to bury the material and there weren't the restrictions, on the placement of pits at that particular time

and this seemed to be the logical place to dispose of the material,
because of lack of restrictions at that time.

Enders: Furthermore, it's a remote site and you'd of had to haul it.

Rogers: Alright this is Abrams map from a 1963 report he did on disposal areas. And he shows Area E as 4-1-S and he shows Area D as 4-3-S. But now he also shows a 4-2-S that I believe he called an underground chamber that had been fired. Does it mean anything to either one of you in that location?

Meyer: That's where we were earlier.

Rogers: And this is where we are now.

Blackwell: To my knowledge there never was a chamber there. As you come up here, it's the right location for the bone yard, Dean. They had some experiments going out there, but these were above ground. Just like, ... like in this excavated area here, that was an experimental area, too, but this was all above ground. And then right on top of the hill, right over here between here and the bunker over here that was one also and there's one over there by the bone yard, but that was here again, above ground.

Rogers: Has there been any surface contamination?

Blackwell: No.

Meyer: I agree. I can't, I have always heard about the three empty chambers down here in Area E.

Rogers: O. K.

Blackwell: But there were quite a few experiments going out here, but we were above ground.

Meyer: May I suggest you check that out with Don Millen, WX-3.

~~Blackwell:~~ He has one shaft was constructed at 4-1-S and one at site 4-2-S and two at site 4-3-S. Explosives containing uranium 238 were fired at site 4-2-S and 4-3-S. These shafts were last used about 1949.

Portymun or
~~Meyer:~~

Blackwell: 2-S, I don't remember one there.

Meyer: I don't either, not an underground.

Blackwell: Not an underground. I do down at the other area, there were 2 two fired in this area. They put 3 at 4-1-S, but I don't remember an underground at 4-2-S.

Party man Meyer: He got this from Russ in 1961, Harlow Russ.

Blackwell: Harlow Russ is down at TA-41.

Rogers: He's still with the Lab?

Blackwell: Yes, Harlow at TA-41.

Blackwell: No first hand knowledge on it, Don McMillan would, Bob Landter would,

Enders: Where's Bob?

Blackwell: Bob's at WX-3 now, Harlow Russ is down at TA-41.

Meyer: He would have first hand knowledge of this.

Blackwell: There are still a few people around that were within the group and I know that Bob was working in all the counting trailers at that time and he's still here.

Rogers: This is Area K.

Meyer: Somebody had some non-radioactive materials to dispose of and decided to use this area and so all of this surface material you see is not radioactive.

Blackwell: The only radioactive material to my knowledge that went in here, was material that was cleared out of the area over here where it says TA-32-62 and this area just southwest of it, here as they would get some contamination there, it was in the dirt, it was short half life material. It was pallonium and they would take that and doze in over into the canyon. Then later, they started using it as a dumping area, which should never have happened.

Meyer: Let me back up a minute, do you suppose there are any uranium chips in that pile of turnings?

Blackwell: I would not guarantee it, Dean, there's not supposed to be but so much of this stuff they dumped, they had two machine shops, the uranium machine shop what little they did this was supposed to go to the other dump, and they put the clean turnings from the ^{cold} coal machine shop in here. But I would not guarantee that material from building 113 didn't go in here. But the clean machine shop they dumped all their turnings in here.

Rogers: Which is what we're seeing on the surface.

Blackwell: This is what you're seeing on the surface. This is from the clean machine shop.

Rogers: And it was located out here.

Blackwell: And the material, they had a very limited amount of material from Building 113 that went to the other dump, but who is to say whether material, a small amount of material, from 113 didn't get in here. That's a thing you could never guarantee.

Meyer: Couldn't you take a survey over it, Blackie.

Blackwell: We were going to do that one time, we started to step down and the stuff started to sinking so that is very hazardous to do that.

Meyer: I think if you got a pole...

Blackwell: You might could do that, but it's very hazardous to get down there ... too soft... you can see this came from the clean machine shop.

Rogers: The debris here, part of the firing, you really wonder..

Blackwell: It makes you wonder. I would expect this part to be clean, but the part connected with this could have had some uranium on it. If there is any material that is still radioactive it would certainly be normal or depleted uranium, certainly nothing else because the pallonium that went in here would have long since been dead, because of the half life and all the number of years, because of seven half lives you're down to 7/10 of 1 percent of material left and the life of the material is 138 days and this has been many, many years ago. So you just would not find...

Rogers: You mean this was used up until the early 50's or...

Blackwell: Early 50's it was discontinued, so this was 20 years ago, so after 7 half lives you're going to have 7/10 of 1 percent left and the amount of material that went in here to begin with was not bulk amounts of pallonium to begin with, it was soil and things of this sort that had a very, very small amount of pallonium contamination on it, so that is long since dead. Because we had much higher levels of contamination up here on the concrete that was left up here and I was here 10 years ago that we were checking out and we could find no detectable count on the concrete and that was a much higher level.

Rogers: What was TA-33-62?

Blackwell: It was a firing site, really, in the weapons program, it was all above ground, no underground at all.

Rogers: After they fired into it, then the pallonium contaminated soil you're talking about was when pushed in the canyon...

Blackwell: From leak, the original operation started in this metal building over here and flying from the building into a burm just to the south of that. And as the program grew they moved into this area first and

started working in here and then while they were cleaning up this area they started working in this area here, so it just grew in this direction, really.

? In back of building 21?

Meyer: Right, Building 21.

Rogers: That's where a septic tank is.

Meyer: Right, there is a septic tank there.

Blackwell: There is also a another septic tank that is just outside the fence to the east between 86 and the old clean machine shop, there is a pit out there. We pumped that one out at one time and we didn't find anything in it. We did sample the material but I don't think there was anything found in that particular ? .