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(A Lab News Story)

ENC. 16

ROUGH DRAFT

A NUCLEAR WEAPON IS MISSING

AEC-Sandia-Kirtland Team Assists In Search For Missing Weapon

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As is well known, on Monday, January 17, 1966, at 9:22 am local time, a B-52 collided with a KC-125 tanker aircraft over the village of Palomares, Spain. The B-52 was carrying four nuclear weapons, three of which, along with the wreckage of the aircraft, fell on and around the village of Palomares, fortunately without causing any injuries whatsoever. Impact explosions of the high explosive in two of these weapons caused some local contamination, and some 5,000 drums of contaminated soil have been removed from Spain and are being returned to an AEC disposal site. The missing weapon, which was seen descending on a parachute by a pharmacist, his assistant, and a number of the local fishermen, has been located and is on its way back to the United States.

DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY DECLASSIFICATION REVIEW
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Up to this time, however, no information has been released concerning the effort that local AEC, Sandia and Kirtland personnel have played in the recovery of the missing weapon. The action started on Saturday afternoon, January 22 (5 days after the accident), when a former Sandia employee, W. J. (Jack) Howard, who is currently Assistant to the Secretary of Defense for Atomic Energy, called Alan Pope (9300), giving him some limited information about the accident and asking the assistance of the Sandia Aerodynamics people. A representative from Department 1540 was already on the scene in Spain, helping with the land search. Mr. Pope was asked to assemble a team and get together with the Kirtland Nuclear Accident Group, headed by Col. William E. Gernert (AFINS), in the hope that calculations could be made which would assist in finding the missing weapon.

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participation of the local AEC people and the Kirtland Accident Group. It was finally agreed that since it was impossible to determine the exact point at which the missing bomb broke out of the aircraft, the most prudent thing to do would be to rely on the testimony of the witnesses, some of whom were extremely familiar with the sea area from their fishing experience, and it was possible to ~~contrive~~ construct a circle about a mile in diameter, whose center was the water impact point, with the expectancy that the weapon itself would be found somewhat south of that point due to the underwater-current information then available. This primary search area, which was designated Alpha I, was just south of a larger rectangular area which had been computed according to the best wind data then available. After several weeks of search, the weapon was located in the primary area about 3,000 feet from the center of the circle. This recovery had been complicated by the mountainous sea bottom at this point, where steep hills, a thousand feet high, rise from the bottom of the Mediterranean where the maximum depth is about 3,000 feet.

The Albuquerque people were pleased to have a part in helping to bring this unfortunate accident to a satisfactory close.

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