

Depleted Uranium - An Untold Story

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Roger Helbig, a man with an unhealthy obsession: he believes that depleted uranium (DU) waste from the nuclear fuel cycle, which is used in munitions and bullets - is safe.

I received an unsolicited email from him, entitled 'The Real Doug Rokke' in response to an article I had written for *The Brussels Tribunal*. It read:

'I see that you have been taken in by Doug Rokke, who really does not know much about anything, let alone depleted uranium. It is sad that a Phd has so little real knowledge. I also see you claim to be a journalist. What newspapers, radio stations or TV stations have you actually worked for, or are you like Bob Nichols, a self-described journalist with no actual journalistic experience?'

His tirade continued:

'Rokke's military records and part of his PhD thesis are attached. You will note he has no real expertise in depleted uranium and his claims about the Middle East are pure fantasy, yet you inflame the Arab street with them. You ought to learn more about what is before telling the world all about it.'

I had written in the article:

'Depleted uranium from shells fired by British and American forces during the Balkan wars has found its way into the food chain and has been detected amongst the civilian populations of Kosovo and Bosnia. A study of the local population in three locations in the two Balkan regions has found samples of the highly radioactive particles in the urine of all those tested.'

Helbig had highlighted the excerpt, commenting:

'This is pure bullshit and you know it. Where are the actual test results? I presume you don't choose to read the United Nations Environmental Programme report - it is only about 300 pages, well documented instead of scientific myth!'

Lieutenant Colonel Roger Helbig, USAF, Rtd (it appears) is one of a small Pentagon-inspired group devoted to denigrating and undermining the efforts of those drawing attention to the dangers of DU, which three UN Sub-Committees have designated a weapon of mass destruction. Rokke is just the latest in a long line of Helbig targets. Journalist Bob Nichols, *Project Censored* award winner for his DU coverage, writes, 'Individuals on web sites throughout the United States have complained about the abusive and aggressive actions of an Air Force Lieut. Colonel named Roger Helbig'.

David Lindorff, another award winner and the (UK) Observer's David Rose, have also suffered a barrage of abuse for stories exposing the dangers of DU, which poisons the environment, thus entire food chain regionally where used, for four-and-a-half billion years.

Nichols cites Helbig 'attacking hundreds of sites and harrassing web moderators.' Informative DU sites (such as www.Pandoraproject@yahoogroups.com and www.notinkansas.us - the latter's meticulously researched alerts included the chilling warning of US military in Iraq reagrding bathing in shower water taken from Tigris river: 'GI's Beware Radioactive Showers') are also victims. Researcher, John Ervin, posted on www.apfn.net: 'They've already sent Lt. Colonel Roger Helbig after me.'

Leuren Moret, President of Scientists for Indigenous Peoples and City of Berkeley (Ca) Environmental Commissioner states: 'Helbig has been harassing me nonstop for two to three years.' Moret travels the world warning on the dangers of DU, working with a group of independent scientists (www.radiation.org) and submitted a paper on DU to a UN Sub-Committee, one of the ones which led to DUs designation as a weapon of mass destruction.

The picture Helbig paints of his latest target Rokke is unrecognisable from the truth. Major (Dr) Doug Rokke, Former Director of the US Army Depleted Uranium Project (www.traprockpeace.org), principal author of the Pentagon regulations and procedural guidelines (US Army Regulation 700-48 And US Army PAM 700-48) on the dangers and handling of DU affected areas: tanks, structures, terrain, equipment and personnel, civilian and military.

Rokke, whose team led the (impossible) clean up in Kuwait in 1991 after the first Gulf War, was so horrified by what he found, he finally spoke out - at cost. Sick from DU poisoning himself, he has suffered ongoing 'physical, psychological and economic threats' from Helbig and other US government representatives since.

Rokke has crucial, credible, hands-on knowledge, thus, writes David Lindorff, the effort to discredit him, label him 'a fraud', demote him to 'Lt.' by Helbig, has been vicious and tenacious.

This is the same Doug Rokke whose Army evaluation report, dated July 30th 1994, cites the then Captain Rokke as being Project Director and primary technical expert and specialist adviser to US Army major commands, the US Army Chemical School and contractors during training, development and test implementation. In 1995 he was cited for a 'meritorious service' medal, for work on DU. He left the army when none of his health warning reached the troops.

Rokke and another former Pentagon advisor, Dr Asav Durakovic, whose CV and list of peer reviewed papers runs to 52 pages, Canadian expert Professor Hari Sharma (who wrote to NATO and world leaders of the dangers of DU), Dr Garth Nicholson and others have demanded appropriate testing and treatment of all affected – soldiers and civilians – and rigorous DU clean up, where used or tested ‘as already required by the US Department of Defence regulations...’, states Rokke. The polluter pays. But the cost would be stratospheric; so Helbig’s group stalk the internet to insult and intimidate.

‘The use of uranium munitions is an act of terror,’ Rokke says. In context, the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority ‘selfinitiated’ a report for the British government on DU shortly after the 1991 war. If 50 tonnes of the residual DU dust remained, they estimated that there would be in excess of half a million cancer deaths in the region by the year 2000. The Pentagon admits to 325 tonnes remaining and other estimates are as high as 900 tonnes. In 2003 a further two thousand tonne DU burden has been admitted to.

Iraq and the region’s cancers have become a tragedy equalling Chernobyl. Oddly, when the US/UK military allowed the looting of every Iraqi State building, all medical records of this unique war crime was destroyed.

Helbig is exercised by a memo from Los Alamos National Laboratories, New Mexico, from a Lt. Colonel Larson to a Major Ziehman. It is dated the day after the 1991 onslaught on Iraq ended (1st March 1991.) Headed ‘The Effectiveness of Depleted Uranium Penetrators’, it reads: ‘There is a relatively small amount of lethality data for uranium penetrators... The recent war has likely multiplied the DU rounds fired at targets by orders of magnitude...

‘There has been and continues to be a concern regarding the impact of DU on the environment. Therefore, if no one makes a case for the effectiveness of DU on the battlefield, DU rounds may become politically unacceptable and thus, be deleted from the arsenal.’ Thus, ‘we should assure their future existence’ otherwise may stand to lose them. He continues, ‘I believe we should keep this sensitive issue in mind, when, after action, reports are written.’

US tanks damaged by DU rounds in 1991 were taken to a nuclear decontamination plant at Barnwell, North Carolina, reportedly constructed the previous year solely for this purpose. Those beyond decontamination were buried in specially licensed landfill sites.

In June 1995 the US Army Environmental Policy Institute wrote of DU: ‘DU is a radioactive waste and therefore should be deposited in a licensed repository’. The poisoned chalice of breaking the news that Kuwait had been turned in to an unlicensed one, fell to the luckless British Ambassador.

Helbig’s email cites the United Nations Environment Agency Report. There were two UNEP Reports on Balkans contamination. The first was cut – under alleged US/UK pressure – from 72 pages, to two. An impeccable source on the second, to which Helbig refers, stated that in spite of considerable obstacles placed in their way, a list of the most contaminated sites to sample was compiled. On arrival, the multinational forces excluded visits to those sites. As Professor Malcolm Hooper, Emeritus Professor of Medicinal Chemistry at Sunderland University (UK) writes in his article ‘Most Toxic War in Western Military History’, regarding Iraq in 1991: ‘at every level, investigation into illness, birth defects, contamination has been blocked and bedevilled by ... a pervasive myopia which sees lack of evidence as proof.’

Last September, Lieutenant Colonel Helbig, of Richardson, California, was in Court. Complex, inter-connected cases, heard also in June and July, due to resume in December, involve Helbig's neighbour, Jamahl Feres, of Syrian origin and his Swiss wife Katherine. They allege suffering three years of harrasment including the last year, in which Helbig covered all windows in his house which faced theirs, with Israeli flags. Leuren Moret and Bob Nichol will be witnesses for the Feres's.

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