



FACT SHEET

Office of the
Assistant Secretary of Defense (Health Affairs)
Deployment Health Support Directorate

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Deseret Test Center

Elk Hunt, Phase I

Shortly after President Kennedy's inauguration in 1961, the Secretary of Defense, Robert McNamara, directed that a total review of the U.S. military be undertaken. The study consisted of 150 separate projects. The chemical and biological warfare review was known as Project 112. As part of the Project 112 review, the Joint Chiefs of Staff convened a working committee that recommended a research, testing, and development program for chemical and biological weapons. To oversee this program, the Deseret Test Center was established at Fort Douglas, Utah, in 1962. Both land-based and ship-based tests were conducted during the period 1962 – 1973. The Deseret Test Center closed in 1973.

The Elk Hunt, Phase I tests were designed to determine the amount of either standard or modified VX nerve agent picked up on the clothing of personnel traversing various types of contaminated terrain. The tests examined the length of time a barrier is effective in producing casualties. Elk Hunt, Phase I also compared pickup of agent when M23 mines filled with standard and modified VX nerve agent were detonated under water and under ground.

In Elk Hunt, Phase I, standard or modified VX nerve agent was disseminated from M23 mines detonated under ground in three types of terrain – shrubbery, wooded, and ground covered in rye grass – and under water. Personnel, assuming various tactical positions, traversed the contaminated test grids at specified times and the amount of VX picked up on their clothing was measured. Personnel wore complete, impermeable, butyl-rubber outfits and M9A1 masks.

Twenty trials were conducted in the vicinity of Fort Greely, Alaska from July 3 through August 15, 1964.

The Department of Defense (DoD) is providing this information, at the request of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), to assist the VA in providing healthcare services to qualified veterans and to assist veterans in establishing service connection for disability claims. The Deployment Health Support Directorate (DHSD) collected this information from multiple sources and requested that the military services declassify it to allow its public distribution. The VA accepts this information provided on location, dates, units and/or ships, and substances involved in this exercise, which DHSD extracted from classified DoD records, and will provide it to individual veterans as necessary, but the VA cannot verify its accuracy.

Test Name	Elk Hunt, Phase I (DTC Test 65-14)
Testing Organization	US Army Deseret Test Center
Test Dates	July 3 – August 15, 1964
Test Location	Fort Greely, Alaska
Test Operations	To determine the amount of either standard or modified VX nerve agent picked up on the clothing of personnel traversing various types of contaminated terrain. To determine the length of time a barrier is effective in producing casualties. To compare pickup of agent when M23 mines filled with standard and modified VX are detonated under ground and under water.
Participating Services	US Army, Deseret Test Center personnel
Units and Ships Involved	Selected personnel assigned to HHC, 171st Infantry Brigade, 15th Artillery Battalion, 40th Armor Battalion, 4th Battalion, 9th Infantry, 1st Battalion, 47th Infantry, 538th Ordnance Company (Direct Support)
Dissemination Procedures	Standard or modified VX was disseminated from M23 mines detonated under ground and under water.
Agents, Simulants, Tracers	VX Nerve Agent Modified VX Nerve Agent (one percent polyisobutyl-methacrylate added as thickener)
Ancillary Testing	Not identified
Decontamination	Not identified

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**Potential Health Risks
Associated with Agents,
Simulants, Tracers**

VX Nerve Agent – (Synonyms: Phosphonothioic acid, VX)

VX nerve agent is extremely lethal. It is an oily liquid that is clear, odorless, and tasteless. Death usually occurs within 10-15 minutes after absorption of a fatal dosage. VX nerve agent is one of the most toxic substances ever synthesized. Symptoms of overexposure may occur within minutes or hours, depending upon the dose. They include: constriction of pupils, headaches, runny nose, salivation, tightness in the chest, nausea, vomiting, anxiety, difficulty in thinking, muscle twitches, tremors, and weakness. With severe exposure, symptoms progress to convulsions and respiratory failure. There is little information available regarding the long-term human health effects of exposure to low doses of VX.

(Sources: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention <http://www.bt.cdc.gov/Agent/Nerve/VX/ctc0006.asp> [as of January 25, 2002] Zajtchuk R (ed.), Textbook of Military Medicine (part 1, Medical Aspects of Chemical and Biological Warfare, 1997), Office of the Army Surgeon General, Washington DC, 1997. SBCCOM Online, Edgewood Chemical Biological Center <http://in1.apgea.army.mil:80/RDA/msds/vx.htm> [as of April 2, 2002] World Health Organization, Department of Sustainable Development & Environmental Protection, http://209.61.192.180/phe/factsheet_5.htm [as of April 2, 2002] Department of the Army Pamphlet 40-8: Occupational Health Guidelines for the Evaluation and Control of Occupational Exposure to Nerve Agents GA, GB, GD, and VX http://books.army.mil:80/cgi-bin/bookmgr/BOOKS/P40_8/CCONTENTS [as of February 5, 2002])

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