

## AN INTRODUCTION

On May 15, 1946, a U.S. Army B-17 Flying Fortress carrying top secret cargo lumbered down a long runway and took off from Clovis, New Mexico on a flight to Bikini Atoll in the South Pacific. It would land briefly at Tucson and at Los Angeles. The big B-17 then would take off one last time en route to Hamilton Field in Marin County just north of San Francisco but they never made it! The plane crashed in the wooded hills of Marin County.

Shortly before 2 a.m. on May 16, Oakland Naval Station Airport radio operators heard a call from the crew of the B-17. The crew reported that their plane was running low on fuel and lost in the fog. The doomed B-17 was actually flying over Hamilton Field when they were in communication with the Oakland Naval Station Airport radio operators, but because of the dense fog the crew of the B-17 thought they were flying over the Oakland Naval Station Airport and tragically, so did the Oakland radio operators! Oakland instructed the B-17 to descend to 1500 feet and head out over the ocean; this would enable the Oakland operators to pick the plane up on radar. The crew of the B-17 followed instructions and descended to 1500 feet, thinking they were headed southwest out over the ocean, but they were not flying where they thought they were and smashed into the side of White's Hill three miles west of the town of Fairfax, and slid 75 yards down the slope, and came to rest. The right wing was wrenched back against the broken fuselage and the two engines on the left wing were torn off.



(Green) is Hamilton field; (Orange) is White's Hill about 7 miles away from Hamilton field. (Red) arrow shows the direction where the B-17 was heading.



The red dot shows approximately the location of Hamilton Field where the B 17( because of the dense fog) mistook for Oakland Naval Station Airport before it crashed approximately at the location where this photograph was taken.

Nine men were aboard. Seven survived the crash. One was 1<sup>st</sup>. Lieutenant Richard Beach the co-pilot, who with another man managed to crawl out of the planes shattered cockpit and stumble two miles through night and forest to the front porch of a house near Fairfax.

At the house, Edward Seiber was awakened by a rapping on the door. He discovered the two dazed, injured fliers bleeding on his porch; “They were weaving back and forth after speaking a few words, both sagged to the floor,” Seiber said. “One of them told me ‘Our plane crashed.’ The other one muttered ‘one hundred and eight degrees from Hamilton Field radio range. We are five minutes at 140 miles speed from Hamilton Field.’”

Those directions enabled rescuers from area fire departments to locate the wreckage and to begin cutting into the fuselage to extricate the rest of the crew. Headlights of their fire trucks illuminated the scene. But within 20 minutes, military security troops began arriving in large numbers, ordering the civilian rescue crews away from the plane. “What’s on that plane is more important than human life itself,” a fire chief was told.

Guards took up positions at the foot of the ridge to keep public and press from approaching.

Emergency sirens wailed through the night as one man slipped past the security cordon, hiked to the ridge top, and watched soldiers struggling frantically to maneuver two small cranes into position to pull two big crates — as long as automobiles, he recalls — out of the plane. By 5:50 a.m. the crates had been loaded onto trucks, covered with tarps, and driven away.

The crash came just two weeks before the cold war was to take a quantum leap — literally — toward a dangerous future with the U.S. detonation of an atom bomb at the new test range at Bikini. It was the first post-war A-bomb; it would be the fourth ever to explode. The test was code-named “Operation Crossroads”.

The government said the bomb was being tested to see how it would work against enemy naval vessels; a number of derelict hulls were

to be deployed in the test area. But a U.S. admiral who had seen what the bomb had done to Hiroshima scoffed at that motive. "You don't have to set one off to know what it'll do to a ship" he snorted. "I'll tell you what it'll do, it'll sink her."

Operation Crossroads was in fact intended to sink any hopes the U.S.S.R had of competing militarily with the U.S.A. The test was planned as a massive media event. Hundreds of journalists and politicians from around the world had been invited to watch the bomb go off. Now, with the test date approaching rapidly, the flying Fortress took off on its doomed flight to Bikini. What was in those two big cargo crates?

Back in March, 1965, my father Ed Peak, who at that time was a Boy Scout Master at Camp Tamarancho in Fairfax, California, my brother Kevin and I were hiking on White's Hill, overlooking Camp Tamarancho. My father mentioned to us about the airplane crash on White's Hill. My father said, "I don't know much about the crash". Later on that day we came across the commemorative monument called the Memorial Chapel Plaque. Over the years I would think about the mysterious airplane crash, wondering why and how it happened. After all, my father happened to have been a WWII Navy fighter pilot in the Pacific Theater.

By August 1990, I was working for Bel-Aire taxi co. in Mill Valley, California. I met a co-worker named John Romer, who was a free lance writer. John told me that he was always looking for a good story. So I told John about the old airplane crash on White's Hill, which was a local unsolved mystery-- I wanted to see it solved.

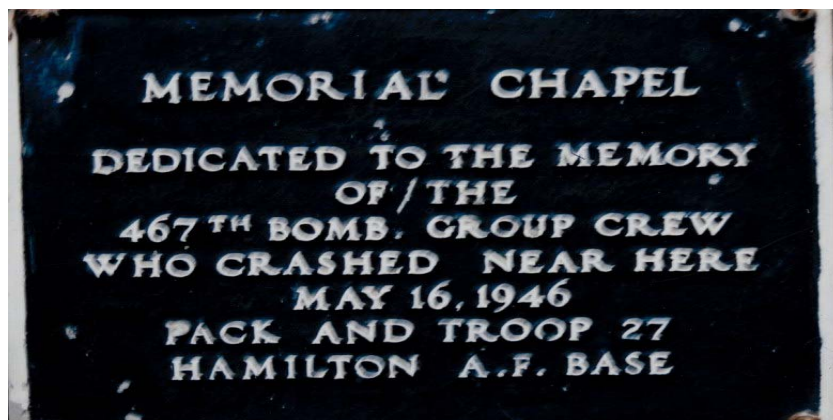
In October of 1990, John and I began working on the story. We did research on it from October 1990 to March 1992. The story shed light on a previously suppressed but important lesson of American History; that a plane crash involving atomic weapons parts, happened near a Boy Scout Camp. Perhaps it could have been in your neighborhood and it was none

of your business to know ... because, “there was something on that plane that was more important than human life itself!” What was it, you might well ask-- at least in 2009 it should be OK for us humans to have an informed peek at this “Thing.” The story you are about to read is true. John Romer and I pursued the story with special attention to uncovering the factual details, by interviewing surviving crew members, reviewing military documents (via the freedom of information act) and studying old news papers. I hope you enjoy the story!

Gary Peak.



Memorial Chapel



Memorial Chapel Plaque

**“WHAT’S ON THAT PLANE IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN HUMAN LIFE ITSELF”**

**THE STORY OF THE MYSTERIOUS**

**B-17 PLANE CRASH IN MARIN COUNTY**

**May 16, 1946**

**By Gary Peak**

Monday October 14, 1990:

Meeting with John Romer:

John and I agreed that we would begin our investigation on the White’s Hill plane crash with the stories that appeared in the *San Francisco Chronicle* right after the plane crashed.

The front page reads:

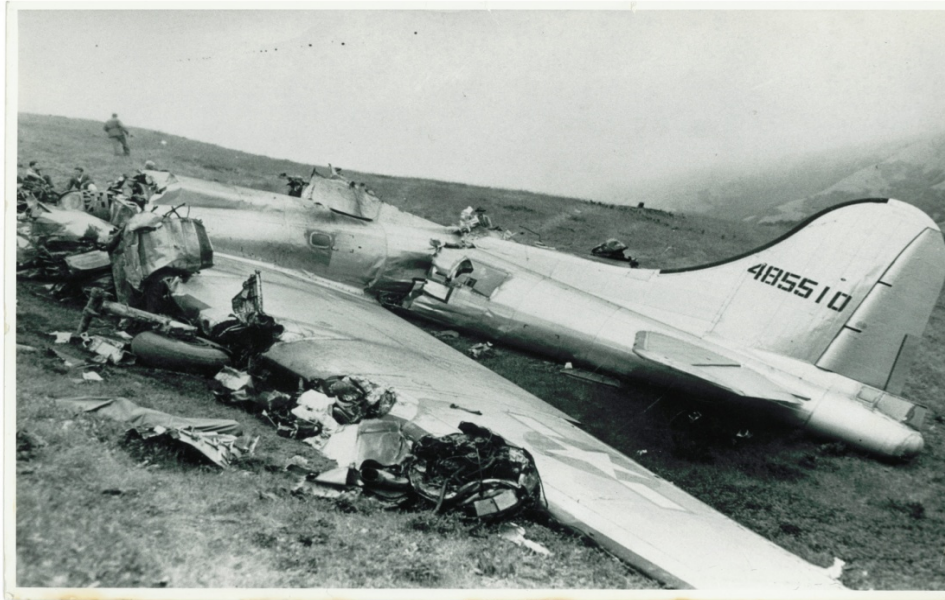
**“B-17 Crash at Fairfax-2 Dead, 6 Hurt.”**

The second page reads:

**“Mystery in Marin: Army Shrouds B-17 Crash in Secrecy But permits photos.”**

From page one

**“Early yesterday morning a flying fortress destination Bikini; smashed into the side of Bald Hill behind Fairfax in Marin County. The plane hit the top of the ridge. Then swiveled around and slid down the side of the slope. The picture below shows the air plane where it finally came to rest.”**



### Bikini Rumor:

1. The B-17 which took off from Clovis New Mexico was said to be assigned to the Bikini Atom Bomb operation and to have "confidential equipment aboard".
2. The crash was said to have been due to the odd fact that the B-17 with fuel capacity sufficient for a non-stop flight across 400- miles flight from, Mines Fields, Los Angeles to Hamilton.
3. Three Members of the original complement of 17 aboard the craft were assuredly missing. Five had left the plane somewhere along its route- if had stopped at both Tucson and Los Angeles- but no trace of three others could be found according to these reports.

Two details seemed to strengthen the curious possibility that fuel exhaustion had caused the crash.

Hamilton Field officers disclosed that a few minutes before the accident the plane had been in Radio contact with Oakland Airport and had reported its gasoline running low. Officers also pointed out that the plane did not catch on fire after striking.

First word of the accident came from Edward Seiber proprietor of a convalescent home about two miles from the crash scene. He was awakened by a rapping at the door around 3 a.m. and discovered two dazed severely injured men on his front porch.

The two are believed to have been the pilot and co-pilot, one of whom was seemingly repeating, over and over again, the radio message he was transmitting when the crash came. How they extricated themselves from the wreck, or how they managed to stagger some four miles for help before collapsing were unsolved mysteries last night.

#### Two Bodies:

Seiber's telephone call to the Sheriff's Office brought medical aid and rescue crews from Hamilton Field. They found one man, a Lieutenant wearing four battle stars, dead under one crumpled wing. They found another dead man, a Sergeant, sprawled some 40 feet away.

Five men, all alive were removed from the wreckage by crews which smashed their way into the planes cabin with axes.

#### Wreckage Guarded at [Gun Point]

Rumors of the plane crashed said to be assigned to the Bikini: Atomic bomb test. Men from the 401 Recues unit from Hamilton Field took their place

top and bottom of the hill, keeping “public and press from approaching the plane.”

May 17, 1946: *San Francisco Chronicle* Reads:

“Loud Pounding on the Door and There Lay Two Fliers”

By Edward Seiber: Manager of the Bothin Convalescent Home.

“We were suddenly awakened by a loud pounding on the front door about three o’clock this morning.”

“I put on the light’s, opened the door and was shocked to see two men in fliers clothes. They were bleeding badly-their faces were terribly bruised and cut.

“Our plane crashed,” Said the pilot.

“They could hardly stand up. I tried to get them to come into the house but they wanted to stay on the porch. I got blankets and covered them up.”

“Painfully, since his arms and ribs hurt, one of them pointed in the direction of what we call Baldy Peak. It’s about two miles from my house. One of the men gasped out, “we are 180 degrees from Hamilton Field.” I called Hamilton Field for an ambulance.”

“The men must have wandered about four miles around the rugged hillside before they reached our house. There was a light on at the broader house, and they had seen it flicker. They were fortunate to come here for we have the only phone in the neighborhood.”

“It was foggy over Baldy Peak early this morning and I guess that’s what caused them to crash. I told Hamilton Field that they had crashed but the plane did not burn, but that six other men were caught inside and that one might be dead.”

*The Fairfax Gazette* newspaper:

Thursday May 23, 1946.

Had the flying Fortress which crashed above Fairfax last week not been loaded with top secret equipments having to do with the Bikini Atomic Bomb Test, perhaps, there would not have been such a wild rush to heavily guard the wreck. Also there might not have been such a hubbub on the part of the military in tearing back and forth from the scene of the wreck to Hamilton Field; and incidentally, nobody but a top rank scientist could probably have recognized anything out of the ordinary in that twisted pile of junk, even if they had got close enough to take a look.

It was the wild driving of siren screeching jeeps and “recons” through the heart of San Rafael that was particularly dangerous. When the speedsters were out of the congested traffic areas on their way through San Anselmo and Fairfax it wasn’t quite so bad. The San Rafael police had a serious traffic problem on their hands for a time however.

At 70 to 80 miles an hour the military cars raced back and forth until traffic patrolmen were stationed at points to divert them over Fifth Avenue which took them on the street at the back of the court house instead of the more densely traveled one on Fourth St.

The problem came up as to how to steer them off Fourth St. when going through town. While it was quite true their sirens could be heard for miles, policemen could not be spared to do nothing else but divert the Army messengers.

Finally police hit upon a smart idea for intercepting the cars racing back to Hamilton Field from the wreck.

A householder was contacted who lives on Fourth St., almost to the San Anselmo boundary-line. Every time a military car tore past the front door the householder informed the San Rafael Police over the Police radio and in a jiffy a Police officer was on the job to shoo the speeding military personnel over the back street.

Had that B-17 only carried a small amount of the gas that was burned up that Thursday morning dashing back and forth from Hamilton Field it would have reached its destination safely?

Some comments were heard to the effect that when it was taking off at Mines Field in Los Angeles nobody gave the gas supply serious attention. The trouble was that there were so many important officers on the plane that such a commonplace matter as checking the gas tank was evidently overlooked.

Also, it has been asked by civilians who know nothing of the mysterious way the military performs, why did this plane with its precious cargo of scientific gear and top ranking fliers dispatches to travel in the middle of the night instead of waiting

until day light when mountain peaks could be plainly seen?

Saturday October 26, 1990:

Meeting with Dick Hackie:

Saturday morning I drove out to Camp Tamrancho the Boy Scout camp above Fairfax. There I met Dick Hackie; strangely enough Mr. Hackie had been a Boy Scout master in Marin County since 1946! In May of that year the Boy Scouts were having their "Annual Scout Jamboree". Mr. Hackie recalled The Military cordoning off the area and ordering the Scouts to stay off White's Hill. "You could see the plane on the hillside," he said. "The plane was badly damaged." Mr. Hackie gave me a list of people to talk to who were there around the time of the plane crash and could supply me with more information.

Wednesday November 8, 1990:

Exploring White's Hill in search of the B-17 Bomber:

On a foggy and cold Wednesday morning I drove out to Woodacre, I decided to approach the top of White's Hill which stands 1430 feet high, from the North Side. Snooping around on private property, I didn't want to be noticed, so the fog concealed me somewhat. Approximately a half mile down from the top of White's Hill was Camp Tamarancho I spent about three hours on the hillside looking for any clues. Even though White's Hill is steep and is known to be a habitat for rattle snakes, I survived and eventually found a large piece of the B-17's cock pit!



A part of a B-17 cockpit

Monday November 12, 1990:

Meeting with John Romer:

John and I decided we would have to find a copy of a certified crash report on the B-17. After searching for two weeks, John discovered that Norton Air Force Base in Los Angeles had copies of all information about US Military plane crashes, past and present throughout the United States. John and I decided we might need some help getting this information. John approached Congresswomen Barbara Boxer, who has an office in San Rafael California. With the aid of the extensive Boxer's staff we had a copy of the B-17 crash report in a week!

Wednesday November 30, 1990:

Meeting with John Romer:

John and I went over the B-17 crash report, the report reads:  
*Army Air Forces Report of Major Accident.*

1. Place of accident: CA. Marin Fairfax 3 Miles West of Hamilton Field CA.
2. Aircraft No. 44-85510 B-17G Aircraft Home station- Clovis Army Air Field Clovis, New Mexico. 234, AAF Base Unit
3. Date of Manufacture March 7, 1945 Boring

#### 4. List of men aboard:

Skaggs, Warder H. 1<sup>st</sup> Lt. 0-740964 790th.  
Beach, Richard C. 1<sup>st</sup> Lt. 0-2067089 234th.  
Peters, Russell M. Lt. Col. 0-147878 395th.  
Rincon, Hugh J. 1<sup>st</sup>. Lt. 0-1318330 234th.  
Hardisky, Martin J. 2 Lt. 0-927559 234th.  
Hutton James O. Sgt. 37010436 238th.  
Miller, Carl H. pfc. 18227085 788th.  
Nichols B. M/sgt. 19039119 375th.  
Sougsa, Milton M. 1<sup>st</sup>. Lt. 0-806742 790th.

B-17G pilot 1<sup>st</sup> Lt. W. Skaggs, with a crew of four and twelve passengers, departed Clovis AAF at 1600 mst. 15 May 1946 for Tucson Arizona and arrived at Davis-Monahan AAF at 1855 mst. 15 May. The aircraft departed Clovis AAF with 1790 gallons of fuel at Davis-Monahan AAF for Mines Field at 2025 mst. 15 May with the same crew and ten passengers. The pilot Lt. Skaggs failed to check NOTAMS and Mines Field even though it is listed as being closed effective in May 46 except between 0700 and 1900 on NOTAM 14 May. Upon the arrival at Mines Field. Los Angeles, the pilot was informed by the tower that Mines Field was closed and had no servicing facilities available at that time. Aircraft landed at 2215 PST May 16, 1946.

Upon landing at Mines Field, Passengers debarked, the number of which is not definitely known but believed to be five. The pilot Lt. Skaggs, preceded to the weather office was briefed on the weather, and filed clearance by telephone though the Mines tower with the Los Angeles traffic control center. The flight plan was approved by air traffic control to fly to Hamilton Field at 11,000 feet away; Flight service due to its physical location near the airway

traffic control found out about the flight plan and approved it, although this approval was not forwarded back to Lt. Skaggs.

Lt. Skaggs with a crew of four and five passenger (nine people were recovered from the crash 5510 and Vicinity. This is believed to be the total number of person on board) took off from Mines Field at Mines and estimated arrival at Hamilton Field in two hours. Lt. Skaggs reported having 820 gallons fuel prior to departing Mines Field.

The Flight plan given to Airway Traffic Control was 5510.... B-17....Skaggs....L.A. ....11, 000 ft ....A-1....DHF.... 4495, 126. 18....2310P....2hrs....9:30...3-2...DSF....2317. Approved flight plan returned to 5510 by Airway Traffic Control was: Army 5510 cleared to DHF. Tower via A-1 cruise 11,000 Climb CFR. The first contact with 5510 in the San Francisco Radio reported him at 11,000 ft. Requesting a CFR let-down. 5510 was sighted by San Francisco tower at approximately 0124 P. Lt. Skaggs reporting sighted on unknown airfield circling it and calling Hamilton Tower to ask if they had an aircraft circling overhead, from the transcription of radio conversation attach, it is believed that he contacted Oakland Tower instead of Hamilton and that the field he was circling was San Francisco Airport.

At approximately 0129 P. Oakland Tower finally spotted 5510 Southwest of the field and upon request gave 5510 a bearing to Hamilton Field of 310 degrees. From then on his exact location is undetermined 5510 reported over the Bay Bridge at 2,000ft at 01327. Following this radio transmission was established between Hamilton tower and 5510.

Action taken report blacked out.

5510 requested let down instructions.

Oakland Airway Traffic Control through the Hamilton Tower advise that he could let down on the Oakland Radio Range, Hamilton Beacon, or by radar. (GCA). Lt. Skaggs chose the let down by radar. He reported he was on top and that his fuel supply was low. The GCA unit (canary) at Oakland was immediately alerted and frequency assigned to 5510. After and interval radio contact was established between 5510 and Canary. 5510 was told by Canary to report over the Oakland Radio range station at 4,000 ft. This was by 5510. Lt. Skaggs and his statement does not definitely state whether he was told to report over the cone of the Hamilton Beacon or the some of the Oakland radio range.

This section is blacked out.

5510 reported as being over the station (not starting which station) out approximately 0150P. An aircraft was heard to flyover Hamilton Tower.

This section is blacked out.

The Oakland GCA. Canary, believing 5510 has reported over the Oakland Radio Range Station then proceeded with normal let down instruction. As told to the accident board, by Lt. Commander D.E. Pointer, Officer in charge of the GCA Unit at Oakland, 5510 was not picked up in the scope of the radar unit. However, the GCA until allows three minutes after an aircraft reports over Oakland Radio Range to pick him up in the scope.

During this time, as the aircraft is turned out over the bay, they instruct him to let down and graced on in the established procedure, it being possible to pick an aircraft up on the scope better when it is clear of the blind spot over the station. If after three minutes it is still not possible to pick up the aircraft in question on the scope, he is told to discontinue let down and climb on an established heading, the terrain allowing plenty of clearance to do this. As 5510 reported over the Oakland Radio Range when in reality over the Hamilton Beacon, the normal procedure in that three minute interval let him down in such a manner that he struck Baldy Mountain shortly after 0152P. {GCA} could not contact 5510 after that time.

The procedure given 5510 to follow after reporting over the Oakland Radio Range was: 1. Steer 180 degrees and descend to 1500ft. 2. Then make a standard safe turn to the right. 5510 reported over the "station" at approximately over the "station" at approximately 0150 P on a heading of 320Degrees. An Airplane was heard to pass over, Hamilton Field out approximately this time flying northwest and to turn as to perhaps come back over Hamilton. He was then heard to pass Hamilton. He was then heard to pass Hamilton again flying southwest.

This section is blacked out.

5510, hit the ground at the completion of the right turn following let down to 1500ft. The remote compass in the crashed 5510 showed a reading of 345 degrees. The course taken by aircraft as it hit and slid substantiated this heading. The manner that the aircraft hit and slid for some 100 yards.

Wednesday December 9, 1990:

Discovering one of the B-17's engines on White's Hill:

Another cold and foggy morning seemed opportune for another search on the steep heavily wooded eastern slope of White's Hill. There amidst the trees, slightly more than half way down the hillside, I came across one of the B-17 Pratt-Whitney engines. The engine must have rolled down the hillside the night of the crash and was wedged between two large trees.

I tried moving the engine to get a better look at the backside, when suddenly; the engine got away from me and began rolling. Running after the engine, I was sliding almost head first down the very steep hill. I was lucky not to be injured at this unexpected event, for when it finally stopped rolling at the bottom of the hill I was dazed and somewhat exhausted, lying in a creek bed, next to the engine. I soon realized that I was very close to the Boy Scout camp site (Lion Den) and I knew that the Scouts would come across the B-17 engine, I made a mistake! (I didn't want the story to leak out.)



Picture-B-17 engine

Wednesday December 16, 1990:

Meeting with John Romer:

John and I discuss the possibility of the B-17 being connected to Operation Crossroads. John found out that there was a book written about Operation Crossroads. John obtained a copy of that book.

Wednesday December 23, 1990:

Meeting with John Romer:

John had a copy of *Operation Crossroads*. In the book gave a list of airplanes involved with *Operation Crossroads*. B-17G- 485510 was on that list of aircraft used for *Operation Crossroads*.

Here is the portion of *Operation Crossroads*:

*Operation Crossroads* was an atmospheric nuclear weapon test series conducted in the summer of 1946 at Bikini Atoll in the Marshall Islands. The series consisted of two detonations, a low altitude test and a shallow water test. The devices, each with a yield of 21 Kiloton's were named SHOTS, ABLE, and BAKER, a planned third test, a deep under water detonation was canceled after the second test.

The series was intended to study the effects of nuclear weapons on warships, equipment, and material. These tests would provide important information on the survivability of warships in the event of nuclear war. Both the Navy and the Army Air Force were interested in the outcome of these experiments for reasons of future budget estimates. From a scientific point of view, technical experiments were also planned on nuclear weapons explosion phenomena and radiation contamination.

In contrast to all later atmospheric nuclear tests, a large media contingent was present for the two Crossroads detonations. They were allowed to cover the test atomic bomb explosion with sufficient thoroughness to satisfy the public as to the fairness and general results of the experiment."Quartered aboard USS Appalachian (AGC-1), 131 newspaper, Magazine, and Radio correspondents from the U.S., Australia, Canada, France, The Republic of China, the Soviet Union and Britain, covered the detonations, turning these experiments into major media events. In addition, the artists presented here also recovered the project: Gunnery Sergeant Grant Powers, USMC, were the official artist for the operation while lieutenant commander Arthur Beaumont, USNR, and Captain Charles Bittinger, USNR, were observes.

Selected as ground zero for test ABLE, USS NEVADA (BB-36) was painted bright orange to assist the B-29 Bomber crew to find their aim point. Although the old battleship survived both bombs, extensive contamination from test BAKER led to her destruction by gunfire and aerial torpedoes in an exercise off Hawaii on 31 July 1948. The view is from the bridge of USS Arkansas (BB-33) during final test preparations and the evacuation of people and the support fleet from Bikini lagoon.

The Test's

Code Name: ABLE

Time and Date: 09:00 34 July 1, 1946

Location: Bikini Atoll

Height: 520 Feet

Type: Air Burst

Actual yield: 21 Kilotons.

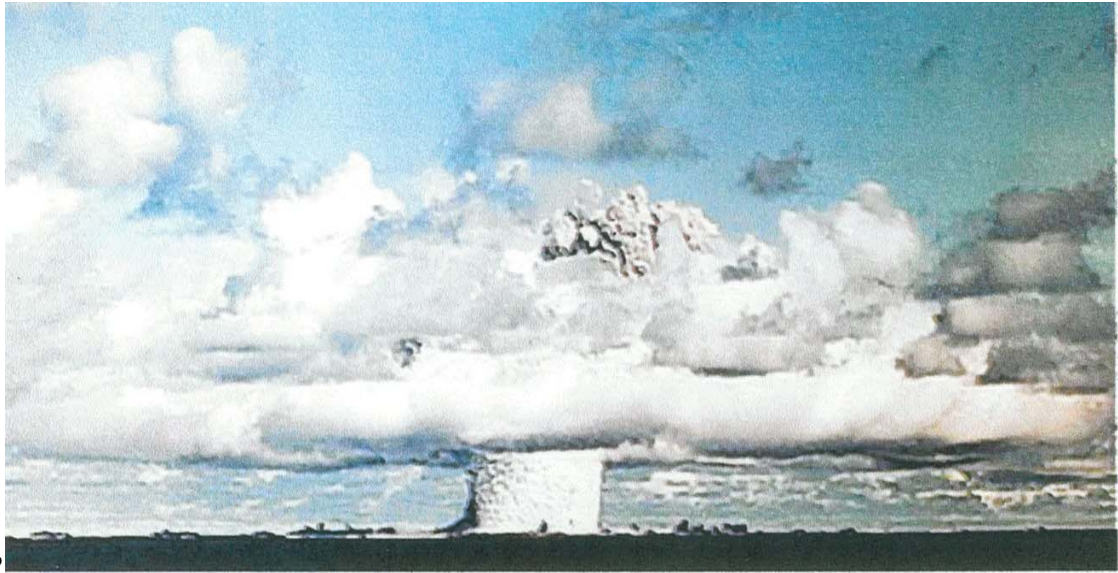
The first shot of Operation Crossroads, ABLE, was an airdrop of MK-3 Plutonium implosion bomb over the target airway of ghost ships. This was the world's fourth nuclear explosion, second nuclear test, and first weapons effect test.

By mid-June the Task Force was in place. The Derision with its cargo of experimental animals was one of the last arrivals (14 June) several small scale-rehearsals were done in preparation from ABLE Day



Code Name: Able

Code Name:



BAKER

Test 2.

Time and Date: 08:3500 July 23, 1946

Locations: Bikini Atoll

Height: 90 Feet

Type: Underwater Burst

Actual yield: 21 Kilotons

Baker, the second shot of Operation Crossroads, was the world's fifth nuclear explosion, third nuclear test, and nuclear explosion. As soon as the extent of damage from ABLE had been determined. CJTF1 tentatively set 25 July for Baker. The news media ship USS Appalachian returned to Pearl Harbor to allow some media people to depart and others to join the group. Some observers were taken a cruise to Ponapean Turk, Majuro, and Guam islands while the Task Force prepared for BAKER.

Several target ships had sustained boiler and/or stack damage. Wreckage was cleared and repose made so that every target ship was able to steam under its own power on at least one boiler. USS Independence needed considerable work to ensure watertight integrity. The submarine skate needed superstructure repairs including a temporary bridge. One by one the ship targets' ship was moved to their positions in the new target away for Baker. ABLE blast damage inspections were completed and new instrumentation and new experiments were set up on these target ship in preparation for Baker.

The atom bomb is here it exists. We must look to the future. Up until now only three have been exploded and none over the water. It is the duty of the military service to explore the military might of this new weapon. We want to be prepared for any use of atomic energy that may become necessary whether offensive or defensive.

Saturday March 13, 1991:

Meeting with Lloyd Patterson:

I decided to take a good look at Mr. Hackie's list of people who were around at the time of the B-17 crash. On that day, I met with 67 year old Lloyd Patterson at noon. He grew up on Castle Rock st. in Woodacer California.

In May of 1946, Lloyd was an assistant Boy Scout Master at Camp Tamarancho in Fairfax. Lloyd knows the area well and remembers the night of the B-17 crash on White's Hill. "Suddenly, he was awakened from the emergency sirens wailing throughout the night." He said. He came outside from his house and was surprised to see the Woodacer fire engines racing down on Castle Rock.

The fire engines made their way through the old White's Hill train tunnel. The tunnel, which was built in 1904, went all the way through White's Hill to the Westside of Fairfax."

Lloyd recalled:

From my house, I could see the top of White's Hill. At the top of the hill I could see the fire engines. But there was no fire. I decided to make the trip up the hill. The top of the hill is about 2 miles away from my house. When I was close to the top, I watched from a short-distant, hiding behind some large trees. When I saw the wrecked B-17 the time was 4:10 a.m. But within 20 minutes, Military security troops began arriving in large numbers, and ordering the civilian rescue crews away from the plane. I heard a military guard tell a Fairfax fire chief, "What's on that plane is more important than human life itself"!!! Armed guards took up position at the foot of the ridge to keep the public and press from approaching, I watched soldiers struggling frantically to maneuver two small cranes into position to pull two big crates as long as automobiles." Lloyd remembers, the two crates were out of the B-17 by 5:50 a.m. the two crates had been loaded onto the two trucks, covered with tarps, and driven away.

I stayed on the hill until about 10:00 a.m. --All I could see was armed guards around the plane. Then I made my way down from the hill, and back to my house. I never did find out what was in the two crates.



Picture-B-17; the big opening on the plane where the Military removed the top secrete cargo.

Wednesday March 16, 1991:

Meeting with John Romer:

I mentioned to John, the T.V. Show *Unsolved Mysteries*. I said they might be interested in this story. So John put a letter together to send to *Unsolved Mysteries*.

Wednesday May 12, 1991:

Meeting with John Romer:

John informed me that the T.V Show *Unsolved Mysteries* called and was very interested in doing the story. John told them we were still working on the story and that we would get back to them soon.

Wednesday May 19, 1991:

Meeting with John Romer:

John asked me if I knew any good cops. I said yes, I know a 25 year veteran on the San Francisco P.D. his name is Steve Gough-- John said we need

Steve to find crew members of the B-17. I told John, I'll talk to Steve next week.

Wednesday May 26, 1991:

Meeting with Steve Gough:

I met Steve at Drake High School, in San Anselmo. Steve ran an Olympic Weight Lifting Club there. I informed Steve about the B-17 story, and showed him a copy of the letter to *Unsolved Mysteries*. Steve who lived in Fairfax was very interested in the story and was willing to help us in finding crew members of the B-17. I gave Steve a copy of the list of crew members. Steve said, "I will let you know."

Wednesday June 3, 1991:

Meeting with Steve Gough:

Steve had good news for me. Steve said, "Before I give you the information on the B-17 crew members, I must meet with your friend John Romer."

Wednesday June 10, 1991:

Meeting with Steve Gough and John Romer:

Steve informed us that he found three of the B-17 crew members

1. Hugh J Rincon
2. Warder Skaggs
3. Richard Beach

Saturday June 13, 1991:

John Romer makes a phone call to Hugh Rincon.

John called Mr. Rincon around 7:30p.m. The 74 year old Mr. Rincon was willing to talk to John about the B-17 crash. John was interested in meeting with him. Mr. Rincon was willing to make an appointment to meet on Saturday June 20, at his home in Sacramento.

Saturday June 20, 1991:

Meeting with Hugh Rincon in Sacramento California:

John picked me up at my house in San Rafael around 8:15 a.m. We had an appointment with Mr. Rincon at his house at 11:30 a.m. The drive took about 2 hours from San Rafael.

We arrived in West Sacramento early around 10:20 a.m., we stopped at a Safeway store to relax and get our thoughts together. A block away was Mr. Rincon's house. The time was 11:15 a.m. We drove over to Mr. Rincon's house and noticed a big American flag in his front widow. I said to John, "Mr. Rincon must be a very patriotic American!" John rang the door bell, Mr. Rincon answered. Mr. Rincon was wearing summer clothing, Sacramento was hot that day. Mr. Rincon invited us to the living room; and consequently introduced us to his wife Dorothy Lee, who has been married to him for 45 years. John and I had a list of questions to ask him about the B-17 Crash.

John: "How many years were you in the Military?"

Mr. Rincon: "37 years, I am a retired Lt. Col."

John: "What Military unit were you in May of 1946?"

Mr. Rincon: "I was stationed at Clovis AFB, New Mexico. I was in the 234th. AAF base unit."

John: "Did the B-17 have anything to do with the Bikini Atom Bomb Project, or related to Operation Crossroads?"

Mr. Rincon: "Yes all the crew members were part of Operation Crossroads. At the time it was top secret. All of us were classified" Top Secret Clearance".

John: "I understand that you were served in World War II, where were you stationed at that time?"

Mr. Rincon: "During the war, I served in Europe with the 8<sup>th</sup> Air Force in England and in the Pacific Theater with the 7<sup>th</sup> Air Force. I had been awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross and the Air Medal with three Oak Leaf Clusters."

John: "Tell us what was happened when the B-17 Crashed on White's Hill?"

Mr. Rincon: "The landing instructions sent the B-17 Southwest from Hamilton Field, and when told to make a slow turn to the right and descend to 1400 feet in the thick fog, the B-17 then slammed into the hill. I was sitting in the nose where the bombardier would normally sit."

John: "Was Hamilton Field in anyway part of Operation Crossroads?"

Mr. Rincon: "Yes -personnel and equipment were flown in from Clovis - New Mexico to Hamilton Field. Hamilton Field was the embarkation point for ocean shipment at Fort Mason in San Francisco; personnel were flown from Hamilton Field, then out to the Bikini Islands."

John: "Was the B-17 at the time of the crash carrying any "Top Secret" equipment aboard? "

Mr. Rincon:"Yes we were carrying two crates aboard. Lt. Russell Peters was in charge of this project."

John: "How did the news papers find out that the B-17 might be a Bikini plane?"

Mr. Rincon: "The rescue crew's personnel from Hamilton Field told the press that the B-17 is a Top Secret plane."

John:" Were you going to fly out to Bikini?"

Mr. Rincon:" No, I was going home to San Francisco, to be with my wife Dorothy Lee, who was expecting the birth of our twin daughters."

John: "Did you know Lt. Col. Russell Peters?"

Mr. Rincon: "Yes, Russell Peters was in charge of equipment aboard the plane. Peters was carrying a brief case hand cuffed to his wrist. When he was in the hospital, the doctors had to fight with him to let go of the brief case."

John: "Do you have any photographs of the B-17 crash?"

Mr. Rincon: "Yes, they were given to me by a friend in the rescue crew at Hamilton Field."

John: "How many days were you in the Hospital?"

Mr. Rincon: "71 days. When I got out of the Hospital I was ordered not to talk about the B-17 crash."

John: "Was there any important personnel aboard the plane working with the bombs for the Bikini Test?"

Mr. Rincon: "Yes, Carl Miller-- who died in the crash. Carl Miller was working with Dr. Frank Ramey on the development of the bombs."

John: "The last question; How did the military remove the B-17 from White's Hill?"

Mr. Rincon: "The military buried the B-17 on White's Hill a week later."



Mr &amp; Mrs Rincon in newspaper article



Mr &amp; Mrs Rincon in their back Yard Sacramento CA



Mr. Rincon with War Medals

John and I said our goodbyes to the Rincon's and started to make our way back to San Rafael. Before we entered the freeway John pulled the car over to the side. John just sat there, trying to get his thoughts together; when suddenly John said: "did you hear what Mr. Rincon mentioned about those two big crates?" "And what about what Lloyd Patterson saw on the night of the B-17 crash? What about the B-17 being buried on White's Hill?" "Why did they have to bury it anyway-- was there something TO HIDE?"

Saturday July 5, 1991:

Meeting with Rich Nerviani:

Rich and I were class mates at Drake High School in San Aneslmo California in the mid 1970s. I asked Rich if he knew anything about the B-17 crash. Rich told me you need to talk to my 'uncle Carlos, he stills lives in Fairfax. Carlos was there when the B-17 crashed.

Saturday July 12, 1991:

Meeting with Carlos Nerviani:

I had an appointment with Carlos at 1:00 p.m., for an Interview on the B-17 crash.

Gary: "Where were you when the B-17 crashed?"

Carlos:" I was home asleep. My house is about 3 miles away from the B-17 crash site."

Gary: "When did you first find out about the B-17 crash?"

Carlos: "I was on my way to Tocaloma to pick up some top soil. I was going up Sir Francis Drake Blvd, on White's Hill road. I could see the B-17 on the hill; I then turned around and came back down the hill. There I met Cliff Cords and some military people near Cap Capelins vegetable garden. Cliff said he was stuck. I didn't know where to send the military trucks. I led the 3 ambulances, Dodge panel trucks, up Iron Springs road. The road came close to the B-17 crash site."

Gary: "Did you see any armed guards on White's Hill?"

Carlos: "Yes, there were about 40 or more military guards from Hamilton Field."

Gary: "How did they remove the B-17 from White's Hill?"

Carlos: "The B-17 was dragged down the hillside and buried. My brother and I watched from the other hillside."

Gary: "Why do you think they buried the B-17?"

Carlos: "I asked one of the military personal about them burying the B-17. The military said we want your name, and they told me to stay away from the crash site."

Wednesday July 16, 1991:

Meeting with John Romer:

John and I went over the interview with Carlos Nerviani. It's seemed to us the story of the B-17 being buried was true. We decided to make the trip up to White's Hill. We hiked up the hill around 9 p.m., and see if we could dig down where the B-17 was buried. John thought that we might need a Geiger counter.

Saturday July 26, 1991:

The trip up White's Hill:

The evening was warm; and there was a full moon that night. John arrived at my house in San Rafael around 8:30 p.m. We brought along picks, shovels, and a Geiger counter provided unofficially by officer Gough. My older brother Kevin, John and I made our way out to Woodacer. Kevin carried the water and flashlights while John and I carried the picks and shovels to the top of White's Hill.

We scanned the hillside with the Geiger counter systematically; we found no signs of radiation there. At the top of the hill you could see the indentation in the ground, were the crashed plane or parts of it might be buried. We started to dig in the hard ground--we dug for about 3 hours. Down below the hill, you could hear the Boy Scouts singing campfire pow-wow songs. My brother Kevin stood watch at the top of the hill. By midnight, we had dug down about 7 feet and found nothing. After we left the pick axes and shovels hidden in some nearby trees, we decided to continue to search

another time-- I remember that we were tired and ran out of drinking water.

Saturday August 3, 1991:

More digging on White's Hill:

I went back to White's Hill later again by myself. The time was 10:00 p.m., the night was warm, the moon was out and the skies were clear, it's a good night for digging! I brought Steve's Geiger counter with me, and no one discovered and liberated the hidden shovels and pick axes.

I decided to dig another hole down the hillside. On the hillside there was a big sink hole there. The ground was hard; it felt like cement, the digging went slow throughout the night. From the hill I could see the moon shining off San Pablo Bay which is about 7 miles away. I kept digging on for about 4 hours, when "suddenly" I hit something hard; I had my flash light shining on the object. The object was a block of cement. The military must have buried the B-17 with blocks of cement! Why would the military go to all that trouble? I took a reading on the block of cement with the Geiger counter; I came up no radiation reading on it. It was a long night and I could now see the early morning sunrise coming up. I took a sample of the cement block to show John-- I then made my way back to the car.



White's Hill from other hill



Arial View shot of White's Hill. The indentation on the hill shows where the plane slid down the hill

Wednesday August 7, 1991:

Meeting with John Romer:

I showed John the block of cement. John said, "The military sure makes it hard to find the B-17." I wondered; was there a military "cover up" about spilled radiation materials here in Marin, to avoid possible law suits and property devaluation scandals?

Back in the mid- 1980s the town of Fairfax had the Marin County Health Department investigate two possibly related illness in west Fairfax and Oak Manor. Fairfax at the time had a town newspaper called "THE FAX," Lew Tremaine, was a writer for that newspaper, and had been known to write many stories concerning local health and environmental issues. Although I personally found much of his writing to be disagreeable, I was curious to find out if he had any additional information of where the abnormal rates of cancer in the local area, called "cancer clusters" were. I certainly knew next to nothing about radioactive exposure and how it can cause cancer and could see how ignorance and hysteria could easily evolve here, besides after all, there was probably no danger whatever although I didn't know for sure. Could the so called "clusters" have been the result of radiation leakage from the plane crash if indeed there were "hot" materials of any kind on that plane?

Saturday August 10, 1991:

I made a trip to the Marin County Library:

I called the Library that morning. They said they would have "THE FAX" newspaper waiting for me when I arrived. I made copies of all the stories about the Fairfax Illnesses. I came across a story about the Illnesses in west Fairfax, August 6, 1987.

Health Officials Investigating Illnesses in west Fairfax.

By Lew Tremaine

The Marin County Health Department is investigating two apparently unrelated bouts of illness in West Fairfax and Oak Manor. THE FAX has learned. Marin County's chief health officer, Dr. Theodore Hiatt confirmed this past Friday that his department is checking into a rash of stomach and intestinal disorders on Laura and Piper lanes in Oak Manor. The sickness which occurred at various times throughout the month of July, and has caused one family to voluntarily evacuate their Laura Lane home. Dr. Hiatt also confirmed that he is investigating reports of an unusually high incidence of cancer in Oak Manor and the neighborhood directly across Sir Francis Drake Boulevard. He stresses that no conclusions have been drawn by his office to date and that he sees no cause for alarm at the present time. A statistical fluke or a cancer problem?

Since 1975, at least 47 cases of varying types of cancer have been contracted in a one-half square mile area of west Fairfax, including portions of Oak Manor Drive, Gregory Drive, Manor Road, Bancharo way, and Bothin Road. A survey containing this information has been compiled by a resi-

dent of the area and passed on to Dr. Hiatt's office via county supervisor Hal Brown.

According to Dr. Hiatt this information is being prepared for a statistical analysis by the Bay Area Cancer Control Agency in Alameda. He said that the entire census tract of the area will be compared with the states tumor registry to determine the number of cases in the area and the types of cancer present.

The survey itself, while not at all scientific according to its author {who also asked not to be identified} has raised concern at the Civic Center. Dr. Hiatt said.

Dr. Hiatt told THE -FAX that it is not uncommon for viral diarrhea to spread through a neighborhood. He noted a case at Marin Catholic High School in which a group of students who met to plan a graduation event all came down with diarrhea after two infected students came to the meeting. "If doesn't fit any Patten, and there has to be a pattern", he said of the situation in Oak Manor. "There are too many variables. Ten people on a block could have diarrhea and they could all have something different. Environmental Health has been dealing with this as best they can. Usually we respond to an emergency department or a number of doctors.

A full-scale investigation requires a great deal of staff time and money, so there has to be some sort of judgment made there.

Wednesday August 14, 1991:

## Meeting with John Romer:

John and I looked over the newspaper articles and found out there is a Cancer Report written by Dr. Hiatt. We agreed that congress-women Barbara Boxer's staff might help us to get that report.

Wednesday August 21, 1991:

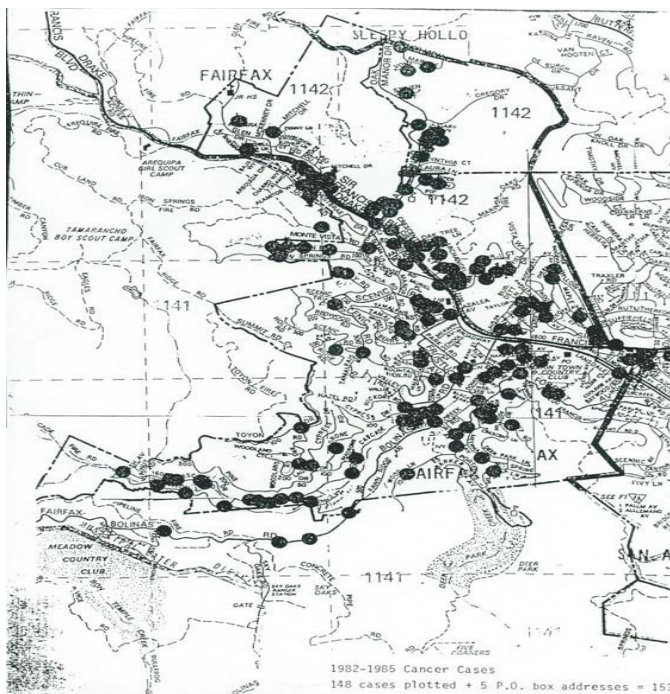
John Romer has a meeting with Barbara Boxer's staff:

Barbara Boxer's staff sent John's letter to Dr. Hiatt re: the cancer report.

Monday September 4, 1991:

## John Romer received the Fairfax Cancer Report:

The report is 58 pages. At the end of the report there are two maps of the area with cancer cases, this got our interest. There is a creek that runs next to Sir Francis Drake Blvd. and there were as many as 72 cases along the creek side. The creek leads up to White's Hill, where the B-17 is buried.



Black dots indicate people affected with cancer.

Saturday September 9, 1991:

Meeting with John Romer:

John and I talked about exploring the Fairfax creek that runs up White's Hill; to see if we could find any signs of radiation.

Saturday September 16, 1991:

Exploring Fairfax creek:

I started exploring the creek in downtown Fairfax; I made my way through town. I then checked the creek with my Geiger counter; for signs of radiation. Judging from the amount of terrain around the crash site, the possibility of contamination could be almost anywhere. However, the crash site was right at the top of the hill. The creek flowed down White's Hill to Bothin Camp, then around and through White's Hill School, through downtown Fairfax, San Anselmo, Ross, Kentfield, and into Corte Madera Creek (this creek does not flow into any of the lakes that supply Marin drinking water, but it is inside the boundaries of the Marin County watershed). If there really was any contamination on White's Hill--All I had to do is check the creek for contamination.

I checked the creek near down town, but found nothing. Later that day, I searched for radiation near White's Hill School and also found nothing on the Geiger counter. I then began to hike up White's Hill creek that led me to the B-17 crash site; I found no readings on the Geiger counter there either.

Wednesday September 20, 1991:

Meeting with John Romer:

John and I had been working on this story for a year. We still didn't know what equipment they had aboard. We decided to keep moving forward with our investigation. John said, "It's time to find the Pilot-Warder Skaggs."

Wednesday September 27, 1991:

Meeting with Steve Gough:

I met with Steve and asked him to locate the Pilot- Warder Skaggs.

Wednesday October 3, 1991:

Meeting with Steve Gough:

Steve found Warder Skaggs, 73 years old and living in Ocean Shore Washington. Steve has his address; but no home phone number. Steve suggested we write a letter to Mr. Skaggs.

Wednesday October 10, 1991:

Meeting with John Romer:

We discussed what to say in the letter to Mr. Warder Skaggs. John said, "I'll have the letter finished by next week."

Monday October 15, 1991:

John Romer sends a letter to Mr. Warder Skaggs.

Sunday October 28, 1991:

Mr. Warder Skaggs telephones John Romer:

At 7:30 p.m. the telephone rang at John Romer house. John answers; on the other end is a man named Warder Skaggs. Mr. Skaggs is calling from Ocean Shores Washington. For the next 30 minutes Mr. Skaggs, tells a story of how the B-17 crashed on White's Hill.

Mr. Skaggs recalled:

The B-17 had encountered fog near Gilroy as it approached the Bay Area from Los Angeles. We made contact with San Francisco Airport, with Oakland Naval Station Airport and with

Hamilton Field. We found a break in the fog over the Golden Gate Bridge, turned, circled back out over the ocean. By then Oakland Naval Station Airport had taken over the instruction, but I was talking to Hamilton Field as well. As the B-17 circled around, I was asked whether I wanted to land on the Hamilton Beacon, the Oakland Range, or if I wished to come in [C F R] contact flying regulations. i.e. (the pilots own visual judgment.) I told San Francisco, who in turn informed Oakland, that I wanted to come in [C F R]. Then they lost me. Next the Oakland Tower heard the 5510 overhead. The Hamilton Tower then received a call from me that I was at 2,000 feet and wondered if they could see my lights blinking. Then I lost their contact again. One more time again, Hamilton Field flight control heard from me requesting 'let down' by radar as I was low on gas. This went on for several more minutes. There was a problem regarding what radio channel the 5510 was using. Radar did pick up the plane. I then called Hamilton to say I was going to land at Oakland. I was given instructions to steer 180 degrees and descend to 1500 feet, then make a standard turn to the right, I reported that I was over the Oakland Beacon. An airplane was heard to pass over Hamilton Field at approximately this time flying south west. I was now in radio contact with the Oakland Naval Station Airport. Five miles short of Hamilton Field, I decided to make my turn to come down at the Oakland Naval Station. I then smashed into White's Hill.

The 'Flying Fortress' broke in two on contact, scattering the front of the fuselage. Both I and my co-pilot, Lt. Beach, were thrown free, still strapped in our seats. My eyes were so full of dirt, I couldn't see. I knew I'd been unconscious, but I didn't know for how long. I had a broken jaw and my scalp was peeled back. Lt. Beach had a broken leg. When we recovered enough to try to go for help, I saw a light somewhere below the hill; we started down the steep hillside, sliding much of the way. 'We were addled, we were numb,' Skaggs said. 'We kept falling down in the dark'. Finally, we stumbled onto a fire road

and followed it down the hill, often falling off the road in the darkness.

Almost an hour after the crash, we finally came to a cottage above the Bothin Hill Farm. We banged on the door. "We knew someone was inside, but I think he or she was scared to death". We walked along the porch looking in the windows trying to spot a telephone. We would have broken a widow if he'd seen a phone.

We continued on the road down the hill. Once again following the dim light below; it turned out to be the light in the Borderer house at the farm. Then we saw the Siebers cottage and went to pound on the door. I remembered the shock on Siebers face at seeing us. His wife came to the door, and he [Siebers] said to her "Oh no, you don't want to see this", and pushed her back inside." We sat on the porch, leaning against the wall while Siebers phone Hamilton.



Edward Siebers cottage

John asked: "These questions to Mr. Skaggs."

John: "Was the B-17 connected to Operation Crossroads."

Mr. Skaggs: "Yes."



Cockpit of the B-17

John: " Was the B-17 carrying any cargo?"

Mr. Skaggs: "Yes, I do not know what the cargo was."

John: "Who do you blame the crash of the B-17 on?"

Mr. Skaggs: "Oakland Naval Station Airport did not have us on radar."

John: "Is the B-17 buried on White's Hill?"

Mr. Skaggs: "Yes, I don't know why."

Wednesday November 4, 1991:

Meeting with John Romer:

John mentioned to me we need some information on Hamilton Field, Base Operations. The following week I made the trip out to Hamilton Field.

Wednesday November 11, 1991:

The trip to Hamilton Field, Novato, California:

In response to the growing need for military air defense in the 1920s a parcel of Novato Farmland on the San Pablo Bay was chosen as the future site for Hamilton Field. Constructed in the early 1930s and dedicated in 1935, Hamilton was originally established as a bombardment base of the 1<sup>st</sup> wing of the air force. The base played a pivotal role during World War II as a flight-training facility and was an official point of departure for bombardment groups heading to the Pacific Theater. Hamilton Army Base was Renamed "Hamilton Field" in 1947, also known for its well planned community layout and landscaping, as well as it's architecturally "cone sire design in the Spanish eclectic style. Decommissioned and vacated by 1975.



Hamilton Field (c.1947)

Wednesday November 18, 1991:

Meeting with John Romer:

Finding 69 years old, Co-Pilot Richard Beach:

Wednesday November 25, 1991:

Meeting with Steve Gough:

I informed Steve, about Richard Beach. I told Steve this is our last hope of finding any information on what was aboard the B-17 the night of the crash. Steve said, " I'll see what I can do."

Wednesday December 2, 1991:

Meeting with Steve Gough:

Steve had good news for me. He found Richard Beach. Mr. Beach is living in Santa Cruz, California. Steve also has Mr. Beach's home phone number.

Wednesday December 9, 1991:

Meeting with John Romer:

I told John the good news. John made plans to give Mr. Beach a phone call soon.

Saturday December 12, 1991:

John Romer called Mr. Richard Beach.

Around 7:30 p.m. that night, John gave Mr. Beach a call. Mr. Beach answered, and was willing to talk to John about the B-17 crash. John said he is investigating the B-17 crash on White's Hill, and would like to write a story about the B-17 crash. John talked over the event for about 15 minutes with Mr. Beach. John asked Mr. Beach if he could meet with him to discuss more about the event that took place that night. Mr. Beach said yes--John made an appointment for the following week at his home in Santa Cruz.

Saturday December 19, 1991:

Meeting with Richard Beach:

John and I left San Rafael that morning around 8:30 a.m. We had a two hour drive ahead of us to Santa Cruz. We had an appointment with Mr. Beach at 11:30 a.m. John and I arrived in down town Santa Cruz early around 11:00 a.m. We located Jackson Street where Mr. Beach has been living since 1960. John rang the door bell, Mr. Beach answered and. invited us in. We sat down in the living room; there we met Jennie, Mr. Beach's wife. Jennie and Richard met back in May 1946, she was a military nurse at Hamilton Field, and was assigned to care for Richard in the Hospital.

The interview with Mr. Richard Beach:

John: "Did the B-17 have anything to do with Operation Crossroads?"

Mr. Beach: "Yes, Operation Crossroads was Top Secret at that time."

John: "Was the B-17 carrying any Top Secret cargo?"

Mr. Beach: Yes, the B-17 was carrying Detonators for the 3 bombs to go off on Bikini Island in July 1946."

John: "Was any of the Detonators damaged in the plane crash?"

Mr. Beach: "I don't know."

John:" Whom aboard the B-17 was in charge of the cargo?"

Mr. Beach: "Lt. Col-Russell Peters; What I understand Peters was in charge of the Detonators on the plane."

John:" Has anyone contacted you in the many years since the B-17 crash on White's Hill?"

Mr. Beach: "No, you are the first."

John: "Did you stay in contact with any of the crew members of the B-17?"

Mr. Beach: "Yes, one man Hugh Rincon, we were together in the 234 Bomber group divisions. I haven't seen Mr. Rincon in many years; I think he is living in Sacramento. California."

John: "Where do you think; we might find information on what was aboard the B-17?"

Mr. Beach: "Cannon AFB New Mexico. You will need a member of congress to receive that information."

John: "We have congresswomen Barbara Boxer to help us."

John: "Was the B-17 carrying any radioactive cargo aboard?"

Mr. Beach: "No."

John: "After your stay in the Army, what did you do?"

Mr. Beach: "I married my wife Jennie in October 1949, and moved to Santa Cruz California. I attended UC Santa Cruz, to become a High School teacher. By 1954 I was teaching at Santa Cruz High School. I retired in 1987."

John and I said our goodbyes and made the drive back to San Rafael. The interview was a success; we now know what the top secret cargo was on the crashed B-17!

Wednesday January 7, 1992:

Meeting with John Romer:

John and I discussed the meeting with Mr. Beach. We now know what was aboard the B-17. Now we needed to get corroborating information from Cannon Air Force Base in New Mexico. John said I'll put together a letter for Barbara Boxer's staff.

Wednesday January 14, 1992:

Meeting with John Romer:

John finishes the letter to Cannon AFB.

Monday January 19, 1992:

Boxer's staff sent a letter to Cannon AFB:

Commanding Officer  
Cannon Air Force Base  
New Mexico 88103

Re: Request Under the Freedom of Information Act 5 U.S.C. section 552

1. This is a Freedom of information Act (FOIA) request under 5 U.S.C., section 552, for any and all information regardless of the method of storage, including files, records, photographs memoranda, notes and documents including "soft" and "do-not-file, files" on the following, from the date of first activity to the date such information is released pursuant to this request.

A. The B-17G aircraft number 44-85510, stationed at Clovis Army Airfield in the 1940s.

B. The specific and exact nature of the cargo the above plane was carrying when it crashed in Marin County California, on May 16, 1946, the origin of the cargo; the intended final destination of the cargo, and the cargos disposal after the crash.

C. The mission the plane was on at the time of the crash; its route and itinerary and transit point between Clovis and Marin County.

D. Specific details of all previous mission flown by 44-85510.

E. The specific place and method of disposal of the plane after the crash. Results of testing the site disposal for radioactive contamination; Photographs of the site and wreckage.

F. Names, ranks, and service numbers of the passengers and crew on board the plane when it left Clovis on its final mission; names, ranks and service numbers of those who enplaned and deplaned, reroute, and where they did so, and why.

G. Names, ranks, and service numbers of the investigators who surveyed the crash and cargo.

H. All documents pertaining to the investigation of the crash, of the mission, and of the cargo, including the final reports on the crash and on damage to the cargo.

I. All reports of follow-up monitoring of the crash site for possible radioactive contamination.

2. This request includes all contextual information, in any form, which appears on pages or in files with information, in any form, which appears on pages or in files with information pertaining to the subjects of this request.

3. The FOIA requires a response be made request within 10 working days. Should you require an extension of the Acts statutory time limits, please advise us in writing, within 10 days of your receipt of this letter, of: 1) the reason for such extension and the date on which a determination is expected to be dispatched; 2.) an estimate of the quantity of the material responsive to this request; and 3) an estimate of duplication fees, if any.

4. The information in this request, if released, will contribute significantly to public understanding of the operation of government.

5. This request is being made by a representative of the news media who is employed by a periodical of general circulation and whose stories are distributed nationally. Thus, this request may be processed under sec. 552 (a) (4) (A) (ii) (2). This request meets the statutory and administrative requirements for the limitation of fees to representatives of the news media under the Freedom of Information Reform Act of 1986. We reserve the right to request a partial or a total fee waiver at a later date, after your agency has provided an estimate of fees to this requester.

6. I understand that according to regulations governing your actions in this regard, a fee waiver decision may be based on evidence that we forward to you. When and if we request a fee waiver, you will be presented with such evidence.

7. We ask that you search all field offices responsible for the territory in which the subjects of this request have been located at any time.

If you do not intend to search those offices for the documents requested, please notify us immediately.

8. Additionally, please advise us if any of the records responsive to this request have already been released under the FOIA.

9. In the event that access is denied to any part of the requested records, please release all segregated portions of data. Please describe the delicate material in detail, specify the statutory basis claimed for such withholding, and inform us of the appeal procedures available under the law. Please separately state your reason for not invoking your discretionary powers to release the requested documents in the public interest.

10. Thank you for your prompt attention to this request. We look forward to a response within the statutory 10- day period.

11. Please call if we may be of assistance.

Yours Truly

CC: Terry, Frankie, Esquire, First Amendment Coalition

Thursday February 13, 1992:

Meeting with John Romer:

I was driving for Bel-Aire taxi that day. John Romer called the taxi office around 4:00 p.m. I arranged to meet John at the Manzanita Cab stand in Mill Valley, at 5:00 p.m.

I arrived at the Manzanita cab stand; John was waiting there in his car. John had with him the "*B-17 Salvage Report from Cannon AFB*". The front page of the report reads: "*Top secret: Major General Willis Hale*". We sat in John's car and read through the report together. The report was 160 pages long; there were also 14 photographs of the B-17. Some of the photographs showed the two damaged crates. The photographs showed two ten-foot long steel crates; inside are three detonators to be used for the bombs to be set off on Bikini Island in July 1946. The report stated the B-17 was not carrying any radioactive cargo aboard.

On May 17, 1946, B-17 44-85510 was declared an emergency, because of the damage to one of the detonators. Dr. J. Robert Oppenheimer and other scientists are immediately flown out to Hamilton Field from Clovis New Mexico. The entire Operation Crossroads had been seriously compromised by this plane crash. Originally Operation Crossroads planned for three atomic bomb explosions. Because one of the detonators was heavily damaged. It was ultimately decided to continue, but with only two atomic bombs code named "ABLE" and "BAKER".

Major General Willis Hale ordered Col. Ronald F. Fallow to secure the crash site on White's Hill. Col. Fallow commanded the 401 Search and Rescue, from Hamilton Field, he then ordered his 401 unit to bury the B-17 at the crash site.

Saturday February 28, 1992:

Meeting with John Romer:

John informed me that Barbara Boxer's office staff called; and said that they received a letter from Cannon AFB. The military is looking into who was involved in the B-17 crash on White's Hill, and they may not want us to know about this information on the B-17 cargo. John said, "I will be talking to Boxer's staff later today."

Wednesday March 4, 1992:

Meeting with John Romer:

John had a meeting with Boxer's staff; he said "There will be an investigation on us personally to determine our story's credibility. Major Martin from Cannon AFB will be flying out to San Rafael next Saturday to talk to me and to Boxer's staff about the B-17 crash."

Saturday March 7, 1992:

John Meeting with Major Martin:

John reported to me that, Major Martin asked John to show him all the specific detail information of the B-17 crash. John showed all the documents we had on the B-17; Major Martin seemed to make it clear to John," not to go ahead with the story at this time." The information from Cannon AFB is still a top secret and will not be released at any time.

Wednesday March 11, 1992:

Meeting with John Romer for the last time:

John informed me that he was moving to San Francisco and he would get back to me on the B-17 story. I never did hear from John Romer. The San Francisco Police Officer, Steve Gough retired and moved away five years later.

Over those five years and even today I wondered about what the "Top Secret" was, and did John know something that I didn't get to know? Did they intimidate him, appeal to his patriotism, or pay him off, "not to go ahead with this investigation at this time", or was this all just a bureaucratic formality on Major Martins' part and a "secret" about nothing really "important" or "sinister" anyway, (much ado about nothing). In other words, perhaps the Military did not want to stir up hysteria and waste time and money, reassuring the overly sensitive, to anything nuclear in the neighborhood? I wish to this day I would have been with John when he met Major Martin so that I'd have known for sure!

I learned to be less a believer and to ask more questions, after all such is the way of an Eagle Scout as well as a rational and objective man.

Bill Allen was the Director of the Fairfax Historical Society in 1993. On Sunday February 21, 1993- The Fairfax Historical Society came out with a newspaper article in the *San Francisco Examiner*.

A portion of the article reads:

Allen, eager to set the record straight, discounts the wilder rumors that surround the B-17 crash, (tales of a missing 5 pounds of Uranium lost at the site and a mysterious dump carved out of the hillside and capped with concrete.)

Again, if there was Uranium on that hillside in concrete I would have detected it. I had thoroughly searched the crash site and the White Hill drainage area with two Geiger counter, just to make sure there was no radioactive indication. The plane is buried on the hill. I dug part of it up myself. The salvage report and three members of the crew support this as well.

Wednesday April 22, 2009:

I attended a San Anselmo Town Hall meeting:

The Fairfax Historical Society was here to show a film produced by Ben and Emma Burtt, a father-daughter team of San Anselmo. In the film "The Mystery on White's Hill," Emma, a fourth-grader at St. Anselms School was the film narrator. The Film offered a brief history of the B-17 and featured a re-enactment of the early morning crash on that day, May 16 1946. After the film showing, Mr. Burtt had some questions from the audience. I raised my hand, and asked if I could approach the front of the room. He invited me to come forward in front of the audience. I introduce myself; I told them that I have information on the B-17 crash; I then gave a detailed 15 minutes speech on this incident crash and its operation. At the end of the speech, I asked the audience if anyone had any questions. One person shouted out, "You are trespassing on Boy Scout land". I said to the man: "thank you for letting me know that. "After the speech, I quickly left the Town Hall.



My father Ed Peak, and Brother Kevin with the B-17 engine. April 1997

In closing: I want to thank the following people who have been giving me the encouragement and great support to complete this story.

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Richard Beach and Jennie Beach  
Kevin Peak  
Ed Peak  
Victor Wells  
Anh Kellogg

**END**

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