

Atomic veterans launch suit

1957 NEVADA TEST

'We were sent there without knowing'

BY JACK AUBRY

OTTAWA • A group of veterans exposed to radiation during atomic weapons tests in Nevada in 1957 will launch a class-action lawsuit against the federal government after receiving word that they will be offered a "pathetic" \$24,000 each in compensation.

Jim Huntley, who is one of the surviving soldiers from the tests, told a news conference on Parliament Hill yesterday that the group is being ignored by Defence Minister Peter MacKay, with their phone calls no longer being returned by officials in his office.

He said the widows of veterans who have died from radiation exposure should be compensated \$150,000 each.

"We were sent there without knowing," Mr. Huntley said.

"We can be training aids or guinea pigs but that's what we were. They were also trying to figure out how the soldier would react when that bomb went off. Whether he'd go forward and fight or quit and go the other way.

"Now, I can't get a call from anybody for two or three weeks. I don't trust them, I don't like them, they've lied to us and it just keeps going and going. And I am tired of it, and frustrated, and I think lawyers will do a better job than I have done."

He said the atomic veterans were told the government would announce the package last month but that promise appears to have been scrapped after Gordon O'Connor was shuffled out of the defence portfolio and replaced by Mr. MacKay.



PHOTO COURTESY OF KEN UMPHERVILLE

A mushroom cloud from an atomic explosion at the U.S. army's Nevada test site on April 15, 1958. Surviving Canadian veterans want Ottawa to compensate them for radiation exposure.

Mr. Huntley said the veterans, many of whom have had to deal with cancer and other ailments since the tests, have been fighting for more than 20 years to get the government to acknowledge that they were exposed to radiation during atomic blasts.

He noted that the U.S. government decided in the 1980s to recognize the plight of its veterans who took part in the tests, granting \$75,000 payments to veterans who have developed any of more than a dozen types of conditions, mainly cancers.

"There are widows who have lost their husbands from these tests and it's not right that they not only have received no compensation, but they haven't even been recog-

nized," said Mr. Huntley, 68, of Balzac, Alta.

A spokesman for the Canadian Atomic Veterans Association, he said he would be contacting the group's lawyers as soon as he returned to Calgary.

A January, 2007, report, produced for Mr. O'Connor, found that the levels of protection the men used were questionable during the tests and some personnel were "exposed to radioactive contamination on the testing grounds where they had to live, sometimes for months at a time."

Mr. Huntley said the government continues to ask the veterans to prove that their illnesses are related to the atomic weapons tests they were exposed to 50 years ago.

CanWest News Service

GLOBAL SPECIAL

Canada's atomic veterans are the subject of a new documentary, *Time Bombs*, which airs on Global Television on Nov. 10 at 10 p.m. local time

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For Global Currents, a Global Television documentary series (www.globaltv.com)