

My name is Michael C. Bernhardt, I was a TSgt and the acting deployed NCOIC of the 711th Special Operations Squadron Aircrew Life Support shop from April 2002 thru July 2002 at Camp Stronghold Freedom, Karshi Khanabad (K2), Uzbekistan, during Operation Enduring Freedom.

During the first week of June 2002, the US Army was conducting their normal routine, monitoring the various buildings and areas of the camp for possible chemicals left over from the Soviet forces formally stationed there. A soldier, wearing a gas mask, walks into our Life Support equipment room and starts taking air samples from various areas, when the CAM (Chemical Agent Monitor) starts sounding an alarm. I reacted with wide eyes and I held my breath, while it might sound comical now, I was unsure of what to do at that moment. While he was in our section the CAM sounded an alarm three different times.

When he was done, he informed me that our section had tested positive for residual Mustard Gas in two locations and a different chemical agent (Blood, Blister or Nerve agent) in a third location. I no longer recall specifically what the second chemical was. The areas that tested positive were under the box style shelves that were made to hold the aircrew's flight and survival equipment. Imagine if you must an open box placed with the opening facing down creating a void, this is how the bottom shelves were. So when the cement/concrete that the HAS (Hardened Aircraft Shelter) was constructed from, heated up in the summer months, spills/leaks that occurred over the years of use would heat up and off-gas. The fumes from this off-gassing was trapped under the bottom shelf in concentrated enough quantities that it allowed an alarm to be sounded.

Days later we were told it was insecticide, and then paint fumes that created these false positives. The problem with that theory/story was there was no painting going on in the HAS at the time, besides how would paint fumes and dust kicked up by the so called recent and on-going painting/construction only be present under the shelves, while the surrounding high traffic areas showed no signs of these issues. Not only that but our office was the only area that tested positive, with the story we were told there should have been more positive hits throughout the HAS.

I was initially told to write the equipment off (I was informed this came from Col Roger US Army, via Lt Col Doug 8th Special Operations Squadron Deployed Commander), when I was told no one would sign a letter attesting to this and absolve me of the loss of approximately \$1,000,000.00 plus in flight equipment, survival equipment and classified survival radios and that they could not ascertain the HAS would be sealed and the equipment not pilfered. I refused adding that without this equipment our unit's mission was done, as we could no longer support the aircrew with the appropriate flight and survival equipment. I informed them that I would retrieve the equipment with or without their approval. Approximately two days later SSgt Brett (Life Support Technician from the 8th Special Operations Squadron) and I were given the go ahead to retrieve the equipment. We were directed to conduct the equipment retrieval operation during the evening as it would be cooler and would garner less attention. I seem to recall we started sometime after midnight with our task.

We discussed with the Army CBRNE soldiers the decontamination process, which we are familiar with since we conduct decontamination procedures of aircrew in our job. We also covered emergency procedures in the event something happened (IE heat exhaustion, injury, etc.). We got suited up and we proceeded with the task of retrieving our equipment and gear, which the Army Chemical Decontamination troops conducted off gas testing on the bagged equipment (Later we were told to allow the equipment to spend a day or so airing out before moving it to our new location). After we were done, the Army conducted a "Down and Dirty" decontamination of SSgt Brett and I. This procedure had us stand in a bag of bleach and have our suits and masks sprayed with bleach, then we stood in a

bag of water to dilute the bleach, and was sprayed with water, after which our suits were cut off, then we proceeded to the second station to have our masks removed and the filters and suits were bagged for disposal. We conducted further cleaning of our masks to insure total decontamination followed by installing new hoods, filter and straps provided to us by the Army.

Once we were given a new place to operate out of (A converted hallway in the JSOC building), we basically proceeded as if nothing had happened. Meaning no decontamination of the flight equipment was conducted, the reason being we were once again told that there were NO chemicals present. We conducted basic serviceability checks of the equipment, conducted a post-flight cleaning of the equipment and pressed on supporting the mission. This equipment was as follows: Survival vests, body armor, flight helmets with oxygen masks, headsets, and night vision goggles. The aircrew also stored their flight pubs, along with their helmet bags and some personal equipment in the Life Support section. This personal equipment included but was not limited to cold weather gear, towels, extra clothes etc.

At no time did we brief the aircrew as to what exactly had transpired, as this was not our place to do so, any briefing should have come from our Command Staff. Sure some heard about it through the rumor mill and approached us, and we passed on what we were told about it being a false alarm. Also one or two aircrew members were present during the time we retrieved all the gear from the HAS.

There are pictures taken of the incident and in them is Lt Col Doug, the deployed commander for this rotation. The pictures were taken by TSgt Linda, 919th Special Operations Wing. I am the taller of the two individuals with him and SSgt Brett the shorter one. The first few pictures are of us being told that we are to get what is important first, and save the least important stuff for last. This way if we became exhausted or overheated we would not be leaving the minimum mission essential equipment behind.

Although the incident was mentioned in my list of "Bullet statements" I provided for my end of tour award, there was no mention of it in my award write-up, nor did it show up in my EPR's (Enlisted Performance Report). Basically it was as if the incident never happened, and it was never mentioned or recorded into any of my official personal records.

No mention of this incident is annotated in my medical records. I brought the incident up with our medical section during my post deployment physical and was informed that since it was a false positive/alarm it COULD NOT be included in my records even for information purposes, and I had to fight just to have the K2 Health Risk document provided to us by the deployed medical personnel included in my records.

The attached pictures show how they treated a so called "False Positive", why go through all these safety precautions if there was no concern and no danger.....? There are just too many contradictions and not enough straight answers; it's time for the excuses to stop and the honesty to begin.

I declare under penalty of perjury that the aforementioned statement and facts are true to the best of my knowledge and recollections.

Michael C. Bernhardt
TSgt, USAF Retired
7531 Shadow Bay Drive
Panama City, FL 32404-2411
(850)252-6266













