

(8) Depleted Uranium: *The A-10 Warthog's "Dirty" Bomb*

Because depleted uranium (DU) is almost twice as dense as lead, it is used in armour-piercing projectiles. DU is a toxic and radioactive byproduct of the enrichment process used to produce fuel rods for nuclear power plants. Not surprisingly, the nuclear industry provides DU to weapons manufacturers free of charge. This saves them the cost of disposing of this radioactive waste material.

On impact, DU munitions ignite and aerosolize, spreading fine dust particles that can travel as far as 26 miles. DU dust particles are extremely dangerous when inhaled. Health effects include increases in infectious diseases caused by severe immunodeficiencies, renal and hepatic dysfunctions, leukemia, elaptic anemia, malignant neoplasms and congenital deformities. DU has a half life of 4.5 billion years.

Nazi research on DU munitions was passed to the American military in 1945. The US Air Force first used DU munitions in 1966, during the Vietnam war. DU was, however, used most extensively during the destruction of Iraq in 1991 when 148 A-10s flying over 8,000 combat sorties, firing almost a million DU shells. US and British forces fired more than 300 tons of DU munitions during that air war.

DU has since been used in Somalia (1993), Bosnia (1994-1995), Sudan (1998) and Yugoslavia (1999).

Although DU munitions can be fired from tanks and artillery, variants of the A-10 Thunderbolt are the only warplanes that fire these munitions. A-10s use the GAU-8 Avenger, a seven-barrel gatling gun that fires 3,900 DU rounds per minute.

The following A-10 variants have performed at air shows in at least 15 Canadian towns and cities:

A-10A Thunderbolt II (US)

O/A-10A Thunderbolt II (US)

Photographs:

Bottom: The Canadian Air Force caption for this photo (taken at the Abbotsford show) is: "An American A-10 Warthog demonstrates its lethal firepower."

Top left: The A-10, like other warplanes, is often painted to terrify the enemy and entertain the crew.

Top right: Following its demonstration of "lethal firepower," a boy at the Abbotsford military air show touches the A-10's DU-firing Avenger gatling gun.



Photo: Cpl. Martin L'Ecuyer, 19 Wing Imaging

<www.airforce.dnd.ca>

Hundreds of tons of exploded DU ammunition were left in Iraq and Kuwait, turning the area into a huge toxic waste dump. A 1995 study submitted by Iraq to the UN reported sharp increases in cancers and various diseases in Iraq's southern region. Iraqi health officials say radioactivity levels in southern Iraq are "150 to 200 times the background level," and that "our cancer incidence has increased 10 times during the past few years."

The Nation reported, "A secret British Atomic Energy Authority report leaked to the *London Independent* in Nov. 1991 warned that enough DU was left behind in the Persian Gulf to account for '500,000 potential deaths' through increased cancer rates." Another study, by the Operation Desert Shield/Desert Storm Association, found that out of 10,051 Gulf war veterans who have reported mysterious illnesses, 82% had entered captured enemy vehicles and had probably been exposed to DU munitions.

U.S. jets also fired 31,000 depleted uranium shells during the Balkans War.

Source: <rwor.org/a/v23/1120-29/1126/biowar.htm>