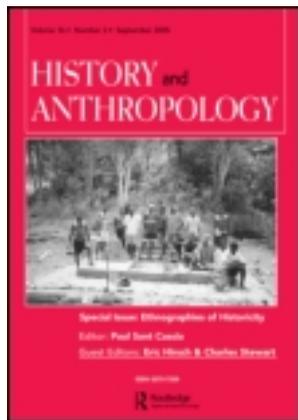


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Searching for Culpability in the Archives: Commonwealth Nuclear Test Veterans' Claims for Compensation

Catherine Trundle

*In the late 1950s, Commonwealth servicemen participated in a series of British nuclear bomb tests in the Pacific. Today these veterans claim to suffer multiple health problems from radiation exposure, and seek compensation from the British and New Zealand governments. In resisting the State's control of evidential archival documents, the veterans devalue State documents and contest the truth of military records, instead elevating personal and collective memories based on notions of witnessing. Yet veterans do accept certain documents as legitimate bearers of historical truth if they emerge from the archives without the influence of powerful State agencies. From these "unfiltered" documents, test veterans create their own private archives which function as sites of memorialization, social legitimation and legal proof. Engaging with the work of Ann Stoler (Stoler, A. L. (2002), "Colonial archives and the arts of governance", *Archival Science*, vol. 2, pp. 87–109; Stoler, A. L. (2009), *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ, and Oxford), I argue that revealing State power requires understanding how groups outside the archives both subvert and mimic its documentary logic.*

Keywords: Archives; Nuclear Tests; Military; Memory; The State

Introduction

In the late 1950s, servicemen from Britain, New Zealand and Fiji participated in "Operation Grapple", a series of British nuclear bomb tests in the Pacific. Decades

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later many of these “test veterans”—now in their seventies—claim to suffer from multiple health problems due to radiation exposure, while some of their descendants claim congenital illnesses and deformities. As a result many test veterans in New Zealand and Britain attempt to gain national military pensions and have launched ongoing legal efforts seeking millions of pounds in compensation from the British Ministry of Defence (MoD). Thus far, both governments have denied that the men ever suffered physical harm, while the MoD is currently contesting compensation claims in the British High Court.

In this article, I engage with anthropologist Ann Stoler’s (2009) call to resist simply reading “against the archival grain” in order to find countervailing narratives of truth and patterns of resistance in the biased and hegemonic discourses of the archives. Rather, Stoler encourages us to read “along the archival grain”, to understand the everyday work of governing regimes and their visions and practices of rule as expressed in their quotidian documentary practices and records (see also Richards 1993). A part of this process, I argue, involves staying attentive to those outside the archives who attempt to work both against and along archival logics. The methods by which archives are simultaneously resisted, critiqued and harnessed allow us to further comprehend the material filaments of State power. In this article, I thus seek to “explore the grey zone of ambiguity that . . . files represent” (Tarlo 2001: 69; see also Tarlo 2003) and to demonstrate that this ambiguity is what gives archival documents their political potency and dynamism.

Test veterans employ this ambiguity when seeking redress for past wrongs. They resist the State’s power to control documentary evidence by employing two seemingly contradictory strategies. First, they devalue State documents and contest the truth of military records, instead elevating personal and collective memories based on the idea of witness. Second, veterans believe that if documents trickle out of State files through limited relational and legal routes, then they may be considered legitimate bearers of historical truth. Thus, State documents may be trusted, and State archival process mimicked, if such documents are extracted from the State against the perceived everyday logic of bureaucratic control and its forms of ordering and censorship. Test veterans thus work both along and against the grain of the archives in order to produce evidence of deservedness and victimhood.

Backgrounding History Contestation

Between 1952 and 1958, the British military conducted 21 atmospheric nuclear bomb tests abroad. For the first five years, these were predominately detonated in the southern deserts of Australia. The British government then moved the testing programme to two coral atolls in the Pacific under their jurisdiction, Christmas Island and Malden Island, now part of the Republic of Kiribati (Arnold & Smith 2006; Pearce *et al.* 1990: 5–6; Roberts 1972: 5). The subsequent nine tests that were carried out were code named “Operation Grapple”, and they involved the first and largest British megaton nuclear bomb detonations. The numbers of servicemen

officially recorded to have been involved are around 22,000 British, 14,000 Australian, 500 New Zealanders and 150 Fijians (Muirhead *et al.* 2003: iii; Pearce *et al.* 1990: 4).

Servicemen were stationed on the island or on frigate ships at the times of detonations. The ships were stationed at varying distances from the detonations, ranging from 20 to 150 nautical miles. The MoD and New Zealand Defence Force have always maintained that the men were stationed sufficiently far from the bomb blasts to be unaffected by primary radiation: gamma rays which emanate out of the blast for 20 miles (the “shine”) and would cause direct burns to the skins, and acute symptoms such as vomiting and nausea. They also maintain that the bombs were detonated sufficiently high enough at 2 kilometers above sea level, and on days with clear, windless weather, so that any radiation particles would have shot directly up into the stratosphere to disperse around the earth, and no local fallout would have occurred. The MoD argue that the vast majority of servicemen were exposed to zero radiation, and that their presence at Christmas Island was required to execute the measurements and sampling tests required to gain knowledge of the bombs’ effects (see Moonie 2002). Such a military presence was also required, the governments involved argue, to ensure that a large enough service group was “indoctrinated” in the experience of nuclear war and would thus be able to carry out duties if confronted by nuclear war in the future (see Crawford 1989, 2001). By contrast, many veterans believe they were exposed to radiation at Christmas Island as a covert government experiment to test the weapons’ effects on human health. In the fifty years that have followed, many servicemen have come to attribute the rates of illnesses and early deaths of their cohort to radiation. As a consequence, many servicemen and servicemen’s widows have sought military pensions in both Britain and New Zealand. More recently, a group of about 1000 servicemen and widows from New Zealand, Britain and Fiji are suing the MoD, a case still in the process of appeal before the British High Court.

This paper is based on ongoing ethnographic research examining the claims for compensation made by Operation Grapple test veteran groups in New Zealand and Britain. The data from which it draws has been collected over fifteen months. In this time, I have examined legal case proceedings, media stories and medical reports, and conducted interviews in both Britain and New Zealand with medical experts, nuclear test veterans, Defence Force personal, reporters who cover the legal cases, and veteran advocates. I have also conducted participant observation at test veteran gatherings and meetings. This study traces the circulation of relations, documents and identities across national borders. New Zealand and British veterans are linked by overlapping memories, shared goals, constant communication, a collective lawsuit and a common sense of grievance. This study cannot, therefore, be defined as either multi-sited or spatially bounded, but incorporates an “arbitrary” mixture of local and transnational connections and disjunctions (see Candea 2007). It thus traces nationally bounded legal systems and governmental responses, and a transnational social field of test veteran communities.

Creating Archival Negatives

The sense of grievance that test veterans express in legal courts, in the media and in private narratives foregrounds the use, misuse and validity of archived documents.¹ In the 1980s, when test veterans began to express concerns publically about the health effects of the testing programme, the New Zealand Defence Force conducted a historical study to determine whether its naval men had been placed in risky proximity to the bombs and whether any form of compensation was due. In reconstructing the events, Defence historians used the Naval Frigate ships' "Reports of Proceedings". No test veterans were interviewed or called upon to recount their experiences, as their 30-year-old memories were considered unreliable. These official records provided skeletal accounts of the ships' activities, and the Defence Force regarded them as the most persuasive form of data from which to construct historical knowledge and evidence.²

As Harper argues, for institutions "documents provide resources whereby objectivity can be achieved. This objectivity provides the materials which organizational actors can use to 'see', 'recognise' and 'constitute' the rational basis for choosing one course of action over another" (1998: 33). An awareness of what content such forms allowed and encouraged, and the presence permitted to their authors, governs the ability of bureaucrats to produce their documentary artefacts. As Ilana Feldman illustrates "The regulation of style . . . [is] also a regulation of content" (2008: 39). And for those engaging in the bureaucratic process, the act of documentation can be more important than the documents produced (2008: 60). Correspondingly, in her study of Fijian NGOs, Annelise Riles shows that in compiling official UN documents, "Emphasis lay not on the innovative details, but on the success of the replication of a given pattern from one artefact to the next" (2001: 79). Essential to the bureaucratic production of a successfully executed peacetime deployment were carefully compiled daily records tracking the unfolding coordinates of a naval mission. The form of such records determined how the nuclear tests could be retrospectively understood and imagined. Parts of the New Zealand frigate HMNZS Pukaki's Report of Proceedings from 1957 read:

Friday 22nd August.

At 0900 PUKAKI (having been misled by a dubious starsight) was somewhat inside the viewing range, being twenty-eight miles East of the South East point of the radar. Apart from the half-dozen men required in the wheelhouse, engine and boiler-rooms, the ship's company were mustered on the upper deck to view the first nuclear test, but facing away from the burst H-Hour plus fifteen seconds. Although clouds on the horizon masked the fireball, a good view was obtained of the mushroom head forming as it rose.

Tuesday 2nd September.

At 0826 the second weapon was detonated off the S.E. corner of CHRISTMAS ISLAND. PUKAKI was stationed thirty-five miles to the N.E. and had excellent views; and the ship company being dressed in full anti-flash gear as a precautionary measure. This being a larger weapon, the effects were correspondingly more impressive, the flash penetrating closed eyelids and most people feeling at the same time a distinct warmth on their backs.

The conventions of style contained within the Reports of Proceedings produce rational, detached accounts of discrete events, factually anchored by precisely

recorded time. They are delivered by an anonymous third person voice. Such documents hint at affective response and lived experience, but the reader is presented with no subjects through which to understand or ground such externalized “facts”. They contain little spaces to record the unintended, the unexpected and the unofficial.

Many test veterans deeply distrust such documents and the accounts they contain. Their own observations and memories of ship life during the bomb tests were much less orderly than those presented in the Reports of Proceedings. A New Zealand test veteran named Sam recalled in an interview how the officers would frequently “turn a blind eye” to certain behaviour. Men would strip down their protective clothing as they stood on the ship deck under the sweltering heat waiting for the detonations with little reprimand. A British widow, Heidi, told me in an interview that her late husband recalled that while on Christmas Island, he had read an angry telegram sent from British-based scientists of the bomb programme to officers on Christmas Island. It asked why a detonation had occurred when the weather had been insecure, with thunderclouds, rain and wind ensuing directly after a blast. Many test veterans now believe that such weather would have contained radioactive fallout. A New Zealand test veteran, Peter, recalled in an interview how his frigate steamed for a nearby rain-cloud shortly after a blast, so the men could shower on the deck. Short water supplies were a recurring problem on the frigates. Such a cloud, he argued, would likely have contained irradiated particles that the men would have ingested. No records of such events exist in the Reports of Proceedings. These documents illustrate that the production of history involves the “uneven contributions of competing groups and individuals who have unequal access to the means of such production” (Trouillot 1995: xix).

Archived Reports of Proceedings and the reports that are produced from them become “archival negatives” against which subjective memory comes to be valued as a form of historical truth. Ann Stoler (2009: 108) develops the notion of “historical negatives” as a mean by which to explore alternative, shadowy spaces of history and its production. Rather than focus on the events that become exposed in high relief, she seeks to trace “disturbances in the colonial order of things” in order to witness “potential dissent and current distress” as well as the role of imagined lives and imaginative solutions (see also Stoler 2002). Here I take the essence of Stoler’s conceptualization, and apply it to conflicts that occur between those on the inside of the archives and those on the outside. An archival negative is thus the alternative and often contrastive truth that arises out of the absences within the archival form. Official and unofficial versions of the past constitute each other through contrastive practice. For test veterans, embodied memories, which are conspicuously absent from the record, are recounted in veteran groups as a privileged form of collective remembrance. Even when veterans die, their memories continue to bear witness along such relational routes. Heidi, a British widow, recalls the memories of one deceased veteran:

Lord Penny (the scientist who designed the bombs), his personal steward told me that on the day before one bomb he heard Lord Penny talking over dinner. He strolled into the mess and said to another scientist, “I have something to say to you. Tomorrow is going to be a bigger day than expected”. And of course they were putting depleted uranium around

that bomb. [and Penny continued] “I suggest we are not here when it goes off”. They left and flew to Malden [island] that night.

This vignette was recounted to me by others who knew Heidi. Such stories serve to create a realm of unofficial veteran knowledge, its authority resting on first-hand experience and spoken testimonials that have been passed down through relations of trust, fraternity and kinship. They act to commemorate the sacrifices of military service and avoid the effacement of suffering (see also Malarney 2002: 172–188). Here individual and collective memory becomes indistinguishably interlinked. Thus, as Peter Gray and Kendrick Oliver demonstrate, “for collective expressions of memory to occur, individuals must participate; the memories of individuals, in turn, are structured and influenced by the memory practices of the community of which they belong and by the exchange of memory content with other members of the community” (2004: 4; see also Booth 2006: 22–23; Lomsky-Feder 2004). While such talk may be constrained by the hierarchies of social relations that give certain stories and people more of a voice and audience, it is unconstrained by the conventions of paper forms. Veterans value it because it is open to pregnant pauses and unspoken looks of bitter betrayal, and gaps can be filled in dialogically by fellow veterans. When their own words and memories fail them, other means of expression can evoke their experience effectively. Such memories are, furthermore, more easily recalled in relation to present needs and realities (Booth 2006: 51). While historians have rightly challenged the analytical separation of “history” from “memory” (see Gray & Oliver 2004: 4), ethnographically, this case study demonstrates that such a distinction can have strategic and political salience.

Such archival negatives thus act as a form of existential affirmation. The Reports of Proceedings rarely record the rank and file servicemen: they do not record their bodies, their actions, or their experiences. Test veterans perceive the archives as Hamilton *et al.* (2002: 9) do, as “monuments to particular configurations of power”. The men’s memories, by contrast, recalled the awe, excitement and fear as the blast of heat hit their faces and as the mushroom cloud grew; the wave of pressure as the shock wave hit, seeing the bones of their hands through their eyelids during the blast. Some recalled their unease as they shovelling away the gulls that had falling from the sky with their eyes burned from their skulls. And they recounted their obedient and youthful ignorance as scientists scuttling to find shelter from rain that fell the day following a test while the servicemen stood about cooling down. Aesthetically and in narrative form their shared memories are opposed to the Reports of Proceedings in their affective content, and their focus on risk and uncertainty. They reveal the messy haphazardness of experimental regimes versus the orderliness of official statements that portray militarism as the execution of a carefully prepared technical plan. They centre the body as the repository of memories and historical truth, as a material thing with borders physically breached by lethal agents and as a psychological and emotional receptor of a dramatic and awe-inspiring event. Feldman argues that “Archives have conventions that allow entry to certain materials only; they deploy technologies that can render lived experiences almost unrecognizable” (2008: 34). As Stoler notes, asides and counter narratives,

such as those that test veterans produced in dialogue with official records, are not “outside the archival field” (2009: 24), but an integral aspect of it. What constitutes the archival field thus needs to be drawn in ways that include all of the versions of history that the archives enable and provoke.

Archival documents were not only mistrusted because of the versions of truth that they effaced or enabled the State to create. The mode by which documents circulated and did not circulate was, for many test veterans, a key factor in determining their truth-bearing potential. For test veterans, the evidential documents upon which cases of blame and culpability could be legally built were largely controlled by the accused. They felt trumped by State institutions that could, often without explanation or threat of appeal, withhold documents deemed a “security risk”. Thus even when archival documents were trusted, needed or desired, test veterans had to develop dogged strategies to access them. In further explaining how test veterans engaged with archival documents, I now turn away from the documents themselves and their content, towards how documents circulated, were discovered or remained out of sight.

Freedom on Information and the Documentary Duties of the State

Andrew was just 20 years old when, as an engineer for the British Army, he was sent to Christmas Island. In 1958, he witnessed five nuclear tests, three in the megaton range. Andrew recalled that four days after the first nuclear test, he suffered from nausea, diarrhoea and itchy blisters. He received a medical examination and was treated with a spray for his blisters. In 1959, he was discharged from the army, deemed unfit for further duty. He has a severe ulcer and received a 20% military pension. From then on his civilian health records show a range of disorders: cysts, sterility, renal colic and arthritis. In the early 1980s, Andrew became aware of radiation-related illnesses and began to attribute his ill health to Christmas Island. Thus marked the beginning of his advocacy for test veterans through the British Nuclear Test Veterans’ Association, and multiple appeals to the Pensions Appeal Tribunal to increase his pension.

Throughout this process, the MoD continued to assert that Andrew’s radiation dose at Christmas Island was zero, and his appeals were unsuccessful. In 1985, he appealed again, arguing that the military medical records that he had managed to obtain had been doctored, and crucial evidence had been removed. They contained no records of the examination or treatment he received directly after the first blast for blisters, vomiting and nausea. They also contained evidence, he argued, that the doctor who the War Pensions Board commissioned to assess him was, biased, unsympathetic and dismissive towards test veterans. Written in a hand drawn box on the side of a War Pensions clinical report, the doctor had written “politically sensitive case” and just below he has labelled Andrew a “paranoid appellant”, noting his influence in the British Nuclear Test Veterans Association. Such asides are, as Rawlings (2011) demonstrates, not extraneous to documents’ form or meaning. Rather, they are vital layers that provide the interpretive frames through which the original text or prescribed content come to be understood, managed and actioned.

Andrew lost the War Pensions appeal case. In 1993, he continued his climb through the layers of the legal systems, this time to the European Commission for Human Rights, and in 1997, he and another test veteran brought a case against the British government in the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg. Andrew and his fellow claimant argued that their rights to a fair trial had been denied because documents regarding their health problems and exposure to radiation had been withheld.³ The MoD's argument that they had fulfilled their duty to enable access to information hinged on one rule within the Pensions Appeal Tribunal Act. Under Rule 6, after each of the tribunal's ruling Andrew technically had 6 weeks to request the disclosure of any documents of relevance to his case that he believed a government department possessed. Yet Rule 6 is in practice a fragile avenue for seeking documents, as its power is easily stymied. The president of the tribunal had to deem the request relevant, before he/she passed it on, and then the Secretary of State or relevant departmental Minister could reply that the release of such documents was a security risk, and place an indefinite stay on the documents.⁴ Elderly and frail men with chronic or terminal illnesses viewed such delays as a cruel injustice.

For a law to exist as a social fact, it needs to be obeyed or broken, responded to and recognized as a force in public life (Asad 2006: 23). And laws can only be appealed to if people know of their existence. Andrew explained to me that he never knew about Rule 6 at the time, and the Pension Appeal Tribunal had never informed him of his right to receive information through it. A widow and member of the British Nuclear test Veteran Association in a press release stated that:

We have . . . been informed that we should apply for pensions using Rule 6 of the War Pensions Agency. That would be alright—IF ANYONE KNEW WHAT IT WAS! We have even asked some of our Members of Parliament and they do not know of it. We are also told, should we want to know about it, we should give full details, including in which office [documents are] held! How do we do that when even the officials don't know! (Gray 2002)

This demonstrates how State power can be both bolstered and challenged. In order for those outside the archives to access documents, more than rights are required; degrees of knowledge are essential. These include, most fundamentally, knowledge of such rights. And they include knowledge of how and where such rights can be pragmatically and strategically enacted. By defining its responsibility narrowly through the abstracted formality of legal rights, the State has, in effect, been able to limit access to information and curtail test veterans' archival engagement.

At the conclusion of the hearing, the veterans lost their case narrowly by five votes to four. The European Court of Human Rights ruled that Rule 6 provided sufficient guarantee of a fair trial and access to information. Yet the dissenting judges were vocal in their opposition. In a statement made by three of the dissenting judges, they argued that:

Their medical records, as produced by the government contain hardly any information as to their physical condition before and after the tests, or as to the possible consequences of

their presence near the places where the tests took place. The government implied that that information did not exist. That would mean that the authorities had been grossly negligent in not gathering it. It is also possible that such information exists or did not exist and that it has been deemed necessary to keep it or destroy it. That would be even more serious. Whatever the case, the information should have existed and ought to have been communicated to the men concerned. . .The applicants had the right to be informed of all the consequences that their presence in the test area could have for them, including those it could have on their pensions. They had the right to know what might happen to them, without having to ask.

For these judges, access to information and the collection of health related data is the positive, rather than reactive duty of the State. This illustrates the way in which modern conceptions of the archives, and questions of freedom of information, are intrinsically tied to the logic of modern biopower, the governmentality of life itself. This demands the surveillance of citizen bodies in archived form, through personal records and professional assessments (Foucault 1979). According to the ethical arguments of the dissenting judges, the State's lack of record-keeping and accumulation of documentation on the individual men's health prevented the enactment of a key principle of modern biological citizenship: citizens empowered to monitor and enhance their own bodies and health independently through self-knowledge and internal surveillance (Rose 2007). This point is made by test veterans with regard to the lack of blood sample information that servicemen received before and after the tests, and the lack of individual dosimeter badge readings that would have given individual radiation dose readings. The veterans believe that the State purposefully did not record such data to ensure causal links to cancer could never be traced to Christmas Island in the future. Test veterans deem these imagined documents as ethically essential to the relationship between the State and its soldier-citizens. That these documents were never created, nor safely stored, creates their political and moral presence in spectral form. As Feldman (2008: 58) notes absent files creates traces that continue to have agency and effect. For test veterans it is precisely the void that an imagined document can create that strengthened their moral claims of State neglect. This illustrates that the gap an absent document may create in the archives may have as much power as were the document to exist.

Documents That Leak “the Truth”

Thus far I have shown how test veterans attempt to call the documentary process of the State into disrepute. Yet the archives are still a place from which the veterans believe the truth of history leaks out. They believe that undeniable culpability has been and will be found there. Planning and coordinating atomic tests in the 1950s in distant colonial spaces was a complex undertaking that required the cooperation and involvement of many actors and groups. The multiple number of departments and persons who created documentary records of all aspects of the nuclear testing programmes were wide-reaching in Britain, and included parliamentarians, the Atomic Energy Authority, the Atomic Weapons Research Establishment, the MoD,

the Health Department, and the Medical Research Council. It also required the transnational cooperation and oversight of numerous offices and departments in Australia, New Zealand, Fiji and the Gilbert Islands. Archival records show that some of those involved, mainly medical civil servants in Britain, questioned the risks of radiations in telegrams and letters. The merits of, for example, taking individual blood samples were debated, specifically with regard to its potential future political and legal consequences.⁵

Despite the bureaucratic disagreements, multinational relations and multiplicities of opinions in the nuclear testing process, many of the test veterans describe the MoD as the most powerful, unaccountable department in the country with unlimited powers of surveillance and control of information. The MoD, however, was only one organizational structure of many involved, and could not know in the past, nor cannot now know, the entire paper trails that mapped the planning and execution of the tests. With the multiplicity of documents and copies of documents created and stored across organizational and national borders, their power to find, read, assess and censor each and every relevant document has been limited, and their desire to do also remains unknown. This illustrates a contradiction in the archives: the State's power, whether it is a real or a perceived power, is undermined by the system designed to give it strength: the accumulation and iteration of bureaucratic files. In a Derridian frame, the archive works against itself (Derrida 2002). State military files are designed to enable authority through controlling the flow of knowledge so that its agentive potential rests with only a selection of insiders. Yet the very process of fetishizing information, of recording and controlling knowledge, creates material traces that spill beyond the bounds of organizations, as the proliferating piles of documents become discarded, disconnected, and unsupervised. The archival documents pertaining to Britain's atomic testing programme never were, and would struggle to become, a cohesive whole. Bureaucratic State organizations and their acts are often viewed from the outside as a set of calculated and cohesive forms, their telos retrospectively ordered by observers to reveal a singular vision and purpose. Organizations are rarely so ideologically and practically singular (Wright 1994: 4–7). Because of this, State documents over time prove unruly. They come to have "itineraries of their own" (Stoler 2009: 1). As a consequence of such a process, test veterans report that they have managed to happen upon a selection of "undiscovered" or "misplaced" files in various offices and archives. These documents, they believe, act as compelling proof that the MoD wilfully exposed them to radiation and experimented on their health. These documents are among many now used in court.

The veterans thus tread between discounting archived documents and process, and promoting the "truth" that resides in the archives. What determines a document's moral worth and what renders it legitimate or not is thus the process by which it comes to light, the genealogy of its movement into the public and legal sphere. It is first the documentary process, and only secondarily the document's content, that determines evidential truth. In the veterans' eyes, the MoD's power to censor in the name of national security renders all of the documents that they produced tainted. They are certain that all such documents have been "cleaned". This creates an irony.

The MoD's wide-ranging powers of censorship, whether they are used or not, and whether they are used legitimately or not (which cannot ever fully be known) is also the source of their curtailed public credibility and social power. In media coverage of the veterans' cause, as well as in public and private discussion with test veterans, the documentary evidence produced by the MoD counts only as partial, tainted truth. By contrast, it is only documents extracted from the State in ways the veterans discuss as surreptitious or coercive, as against the governmental logic of denial, that veterans view as truth-bearing. This documentary process illustrates again that what constitutes the archival field needs to be flexible across time and space. The new uses to which archived documents are put, and the new meanings that they come to contain, are not contradictory to the domain or archival power (Burton 2005). As Heimer points out, for an archival document alternative relational and interpretive routes "may not be an anomaly" (2006: 97) but rather an extension of the document's form.

The veterans' approach to documentary evidence is thus one of extraction. Unsure that a document will always be subject to public access, they take copies of State documents and store them in their own personal archives. They become archival sources for journalists, veteran family members, researchers and lawyers. Those who act as leaders and advocates within the test veteran community each have home offices and garages crammed full with filing cabinets and piles of box files. Each has a small photocopier for copying and circulating documents to other veterans. When I visited test veterans in their homes they would often preface my entrance with apologies for the towering stakes of paper and box files that threatened to overtake the spaces of domestic life. Once a veteran discovered an important document it quickly made its way into each of the other veterans' archives. Once the test veteran community knew of my research, it took only a few months for my own filing cabinet to brim with photocopied documents of "evidence" sent to me by veterans, as I too began to think and rethink my own archival system of order and interpretation.

Such a process of archival work appropriates and mimics the State's documentary processes as a source of power (see also Chari 2008: S66). Yet these documents are rarely left unaltered, and in passing between hands the veterans provide interpretive frames, through ordering and markings on the documents themselves. This process acts to draw information out from such documents in ways that make particular historical narratives legible and persuasive, to chart paths of interpretation through them that explain and highlight culpability and blame. Figure 1 illustrates one potent example, sent to me by several test veterans. It contains a copied version of a telegram sent between scientists of the Atomic Weapons Research Establishment in 1956. A part of the telegram reads:

We do not want you to release any statement on the genetic effects or on radio-activity or strontium pending the arrival of Penney. If you have to a safer interpretation of the MRC [Medical Research Council] report would be "has not shown an increase" rather than "shows an increase".

The above passage is highlighted with marks in the margins, its relevance further accentuated by the obstruction of the rest of the telegram by a newspaper article,

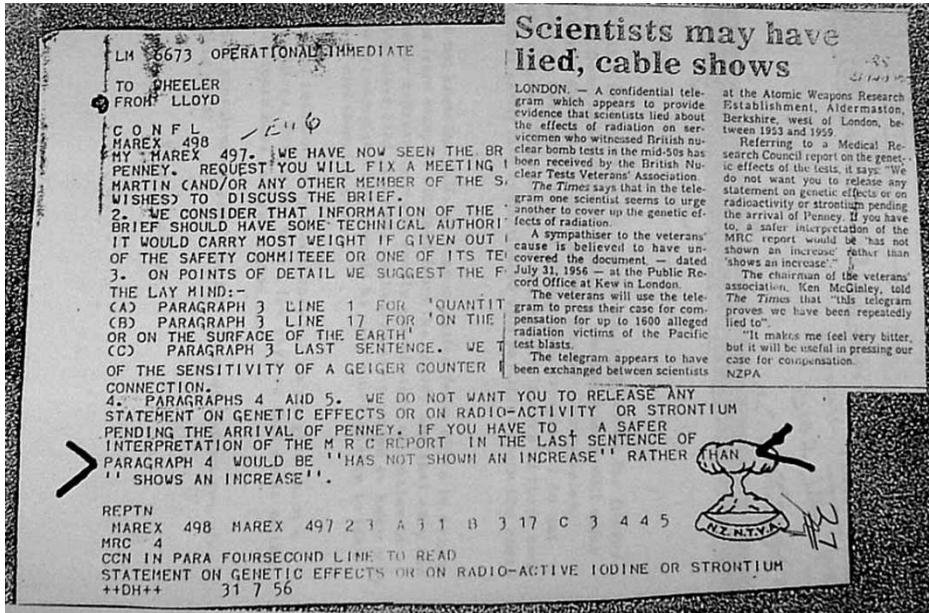


Figure 1. A composite document from test veterans' archives.

rendering it unreadable and irrelevant. This article from the *Standard* newspaper of London provides the means by which the reader is encouraged to interpret the intent of the telegram—as an incitement to lies and cover-ups—and provides insights into the document's effects on veterans, both emotionally and legally. On the bottom left corner the New Zealand Nuclear Test Veteran Association logo has been stamped, with a number indicating this group's own filing logic and archival location. Such a composite document has been copied many times; its faded and grainy print an indication of its high circulation within and beyond veteran groups.

Latour (1990) argues that documents are devices that allow groups to “draw together”, cohere and integrate information. This enables data and “facts” to persuade and create social and organizational truths (see also Derrida 1995: 3). Composite documents synthesize faded records of private institutional conversations with recent interpretations of that broader past, as well as its ongoing social and political effects. With such created documents, test veterans aim to turn dusty State documents into readily digestible history for journalists, the interested public and test veteran families.

Building their own archives, they feel, allows them to have some control of a resource they view as dangerously limited: time. With their own sources of archival evidence, they can respond to legal and public scepticism of their version of history with their own store of state-based paper truths. While State archives are viewed and experienced as notoriously slow and coldly unresponsive, their own archives ensure speedy extraction and circulation. Their impatience with State archives is, they claim, based on a pressing and stark fact. In 2009, the test veterans reported to me, of

roughly 1000 claimants before the high court, eighty died, creating a sense of urgency among veterans to force a legal, emotional and historical endpoint to their claims.

Conclusion

Documents live double lives. They are integral to attempts that enact utopian ideals such as transparency, traceability and accountability. At the same time, they are critiqued for being modernist tools of coldly rational, reductive and inefficient bureaucratic mechanisms (Riles 2006: 6). For test veterans, State documents are discounted because they represent the ability of the State to control the production of a biased history. Yet test veterans also know that such documents are the most potent means by which they must make their legal claims. These documents are reviled for their careful and calculated absences, yet they are still sought as evidence of the irrefutable truth of past governments' intentions and culpability. I have explained the logic of such contradictory attitudes towards the archives by exploring the nature of the documentary process. Test veterans consider the validity of the content and meaning of archival documents largely by the relational genealogies through which documents trickle out of State files. They also assess them by the methods of documentary form that constrained whose and what version of history was recorded. Moreover, the documentary work of retrieving, circulating and reading archives collectively, while resisting contrary readings, enables test veterans to build a community that affirms a common identity based on a sense of grievance and a shared goal. Documentary work is the means by which a collective public voice can be negotiated and expressed, and is the means through which the men's memories and selves be made socially visible. As historians of themselves, they seek to give meaning to their experiences and existence. These varied uses demonstrate that documents can be appreciated not just for their semiotic capacity, but for their role as actors in local life (Feldman 2008: 45; Reed 2006).

Archival documents can function to instigate, focus and mobilize public inquiry and interest, just as they can also act to delay, distract or foreclose (Stoler 2009: 30). In this case study, archival documents produced both effects. I have argued that if we desire to reveal the grain of State power, we need to attune ourselves to those seeking to manipulate the archives through multiple means. How archives are resisted provides potent clues as to how the State attempts to make the archive speak and how, along the grain, its documents enable it to speak with fractured and sometimes fragile authority. The logic that archives provide and provoke for others' strategic use, whether as a site of contrast or as a mimetic force, is a crucial piece of the archival field and of modern power relations. Explicating how people answer the call of the archives is thus central to understanding the political potential of contemporary documentary work.

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Notes

- [1] In Britain, the most commonly used and discussed archives are the Public Records Office. In New Zealand, the National Archives are most frequently consulted.
- [2] Personal correspondence with a New Zealand Defence Force historian.
- [3] The men's case was based on the perceived violation of several articles of the convention. Article 6 states that "everyone is entitled to a fair and public hearing within a reasonable time by an independent and impartial tribunal established by law." Article 8 states that "everyone has the right to respect for his private and family life, his home and his correspondence." According to the court at the time, this article was interpreted to apply to the men because: "Where states engage in hazardous activities which might have hidden adverse consequences on the health of those involved. Article 8 requires that an effective and accessible procedure be established enabling such person to see relevant and appropriate information" (European Court of Human Rights 1998).
- [4] More specifically the rule states: (a) that it would be contrary to the public interest for the whole or part of the document to . . . be disclosed publicly or (b) that the whole or part of the document ought not, for reasons of security, to be disclosed in any manner whatsoever (Rule 6, as quoted in European Court of Human Rights [1998]).
- [5] In one faded photocopied archival document provided to me by test veterans, the minutes of a meeting held by the Atomic Energy Research Establishment on the 15th of July, 1958 are recorded. The meeting was held "to discuss radiological safety precautions at Christmas Island". Here an Air Commander objected to blood sampling being carried out on individual servicemen, arguing that "if the person was examined and found to be normal before posting to Christmas Island and who later developed leukaemia, it might be difficult to refute the allegations that this is due to rations received at Christmas Island."

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