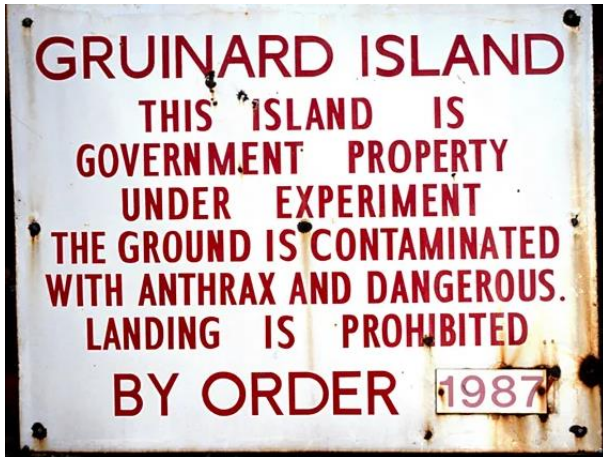


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Britain's mysterious WW2 'island of death'

By Myles Burke



(Credit: Getty Images)

- 1 In the 1960s, the BBC set out to investigate local reports of secret, shocking World War
- 2 Two experiments, dangerous contamination and unexplained animal deaths on a remote
- 3 island off the coast of Scotland.
- 4 "Hereabouts, they call it the island of death, the mystery Island, and for good reason," said
- 5 windswept BBC reporter Fyfe Robertson as he stood across the sea from the remote and
- 6 desolate Scottish island of Gruinard in 1962.
- 7 "Now, this is not a story of old dark deeds or Highland superstition. No, this story started in
- 8 1942. The war had been going on for three years when suddenly a group of scientific boffins
- 9 from the War Office took over the island and started experiments so secret that even today, 20
- 10 years later, very few people know what went on over there. The local people -----."
- 11 Robertson was aiming to investigate the stories of dangerous government experiments that were
- 12 believed to have happened on Gruinard. At the time he was reporting, the UK's Ministry of
- 13 Defence had already declared the island off-limits and Robertson couldn't persuade fearful
- 14 locals to sail him around the island to get a closer look at it.
- 15 It was an environmental catastrophe. Shockingly, the island remained dangerously
- 16 contaminated and a no-go area for nearly half a century, until, on this day in 1990, the UK
- 17 government finally declared Gruinard Island safe.
- 18 The truth was that Gruinard Island had been the site of a clandestine attempt by the UK during
- 19 World War Two to weaponise anthrax, a deadly bacterial infection. The exact details of what
- 20 had happened there would only come to light when in 1997 the government declassified a film
- 21 that the military had shot at the time, which detailed the experiments.
- 22 The project, called Operation Vegetarian, had started under Paul Fildes, then head of the
- 23 biology department at Porton Down, a military facility in Wiltshire, England, that still exists
- 24 today. Porton Down had first been established in 1916 as the War Department

25 Experimental Station to study the effects of chemical weapon agents, which were increasingly
26 being used as World War One progressed. In the 1940s, with Britain at war again, Porton Down
27 was charged with developing biological weapons that could be used against Nazi Germany to
28 catastrophic effect, minimising actual direct combat between troops.

29 The plan was to infect linseed cakes with Anthrax spores and drop them by plane into cattle
30 pastures around Germany. The cows would eat the cakes and contract anthrax, as would those
31 who ate the infected meat. Anthrax is a naturally occurring but deadly organism.

32 Symptoms of infection can take time to fully appear but when they do, they are horrific and can
33 become lethal very quickly. The proposed plan would have decimated Germany's meat supply,
34 and triggered a nationwide anthrax contamination, resulting in an enormous death toll.

35 But to get to grips with how anthrax would work as a weapon in a realistic setting, researchers
36 needed an outdoor site far away from populated areas to test it. In the summer of 1942, the
37 military bought the remote, uninhabited 522-acre island of Gruinard, and banned locals from
38 landing there.

39 A military team, under the supervision of scientists, then began to conduct chilling experiments.
40 Using livestock brought over to the island to serve as test subjects, they started a series of trials
41 releasing anthrax spores across the island's terrain.

42 "The aim was to test whether the Anthrax would survive an explosion in the field, they didn't
43 know that, and then would it remain virulent thereafter," Edward Spiers, emeritus professor at
44 the University of Leeds told the BBC documentary *The Mystery of Anthrax Island* in 2022.

45 "Eighty-odd sheep were tethered at various stages downwind of the likely explosion. The
46 explosion was done by remote control. It isn't a great bang, a draught of highly potent spores
47 moving down on the wind and causing infection and death wherever it goes."

48 The results were devastating: within days of exposure the sheep started showing symptoms and
49 rapidly began to die. Their infected bodies were autopsied and then incinerated or buried under
50 tonnes of rubble.

51 Some of these experiments were witnessed by local crofters who spotted the drifting clouds of
52 anthrax over the island. One local, who had sold sheep to the scientific team, recalled that he
53 saw what he described as smoke coming down on top of the animals. "I think it was all kinds of
54 poison gas, anthrax," he told Robertson in 1962.

55 The secret trials carried on until 1943, when the military deemed them a success, and scientists
56 packed up and returned to Porton Down. As a result five million linseed cakes laced with
57 Anthrax were produced but the plan was ultimately abandoned as the Allies' Normandy
58 invasion progressed, leading the cakes to be destroyed after the war. By 1952, Britain had
59 developed a different weapon of mass destruction and had succeeded in its ambition to become
60 the third nuclear power in the world. Four years later it ended its offensive chemical
61 and biological weapons programmes, and in 1975 ratified the Biological Weapons Convention,
62 which bans all use, production or stockpiling of them.

63 The aftermath of Operation Vegetarian was catastrophic to the island. Anthrax is a very resistant
64 bacteria and can persist for decades in the soil, causing infection when ingested even years after
65 an outbreak. The military's experiments had left the island too dangerous for people or animals
66 to live on, with even the rainwater washing from the island being potentially lethal.

67 In the months following the tests, animals on the mainland near Gruinard Bay began dying. As
68 Elizabeth Willis cites in her paper, *Contamination and Compensation*, the UK government
69 quietly paid out compensation to those affected but claimed the deaths were the result of a
70 diseased sheep that had fallen off a passing Greek ship.

71 One local told the BBC in 1962: "It was quite obvious to us that they knew something about it
72 or they wouldn't have paid up so quick as they did."

73 The military quarantined the island indefinitely and put up signs warning away visitors.
74 In the decades that followed the end of World War Two, attempts were made to decontaminate
75 the site using chemical treatments and controlled burning, but they proved largely ineffective. A
76 series of tests in 1971 showed that while there were no longer anthrax spores on the surface,
77 they still lingered on in the soil underneath, posing a grave risk to anyone setting foot on the
78 island.
79 In 1981, an environmental group called the Dark Harvest Commandos landed on the island and
80 took samples of anthrax-infected soil. They left a bucket of that soil outside Porton Down to
81 highlight the deadly contamination on the island, aiming to force the government to do
82 something.
83 Five years later, scientists returned to try decontamination efforts again, soaking the island in a
84 mixture of seawater and formaldehyde, as well as removing and incinerating contaminated
85 topsoil. This time they were more successful and finally, on 24 April 1990, after 48 years of
86 quarantine, the UK Government declared Gruinard Island anthrax-free.
87 Gruinard was not the only site where the UK conducted secret biological warfare tests, but it
88 was the first. The consequences of what happened there stand as a grim testament to
89 -----.

<https://www.bbc.com/culture/article/20240419-britains-mysterious-ww2-island-of-death>

QUESTÕES

→ O que completa os espaços pontilhados na linha 10 do artigo?

- a) were told nothing.
- b) always suspected the plan.
- c) were punished at the time.
- d) were very friendly.
- e) died in silence.

→ Segundo as informações lidas, por que o repórter Robertson não pôde se aproximar da ilha?

- a) Os moradores da região ainda tinham medo de navegar nas proximidades.
- b) Ninguém conhecia com exatidão onde se localizava Gruinard.
- c) Ainda eram feitos experimentos muito perigosos por lá.
- d) A população local tinha finalmente assumido o controle da região.
- e) Vinte anos depois, os militares continuavam instalados na ilha.

→ O que NÃO é afirmado no texto?

- a) Apenas em 1997 a ilha de Gruinard foi declarada segura.
- b) O Reino Unido testou armas biológicas clandestinamente na ilha.
- c) Nos anos 1990 a verdade completa sobre as atividades secretas foi descoberta.
- d) Nos anos 1940 tentou-se usar armas biológicas contra a Alemanha nazista.
- e) O objetivo buscado era o de diminuir combates diretos entre os exércitos.

→ Observe as afirmações abaixo. Quais delas condizem com o que é dito no texto?

- I- O uso dos esporos de antraz como arma precisava ser testado longe de áreas povoadas.
- II- A ideia era que o gado comeria os bolos de linhaça e ficaria contaminado com o antraz.
- III- Os sintomas da infecção apareceriam imediatamente após o contato.
- IV- O gado que foi usado no experimento vivia na ilha há décadas.

- a) I e II.
- b) III e IV.
- c) II e IV.
- d) I e III.
- e) I e IV.

→ Abaixo há afirmações verdadeiras (V) e falsas (F) sobre o tema. Segundo o artigo, qual alternativa apresenta a ordem correta?

- I- A ilha de Gruinard era habitada por pescadores na Segunda Guerra.
- II- Os cientistas precisavam saber se o antraz permaneceria virulento após os ataques.
- III- A primeira explosão ocorreu por controle remoto e produziu um enorme estrondo.
- IV- Os esporos se disseminaram com o vento e infectaram o gado.

- a) F- V- F- V
- b) V- F- F- F
- c) V- V- F- V
- d) F- F- V- F
- e) V- V- F -F

→ Conforme as informações lidas, dias após o experimento

- a) o gado apresentou sintomas e começou a morrer.
- b) os escombros cortaram a ação do antraz no solo.
- c) os habitantes da ilha denunciaram os militares.
- d) os gases venenosos se dissolveram no mar.
- e) a fumaça seguia flutuando sobre o continente.

→ **A partir da leitura, o que ocorreu após o fim da Segunda Guerra Mundial?**

- a) Os bolos de linhaça com antraz foram destruídos.**
- b) Os testes continuaram sendo feitos durante décadas.
- c) Até os cientistas abandonarem a ilha, houve programas ofensivos.
- d) A Grã-Bretanha impediu a entrada na ilha até 1975.
- e) A Grã-Bretanha tornou-se a principal potência nuclear do Ocidente.

→ **De acordo com o que foi lido, o experimento com o antraz**

- a) exterminou animais no continente perto da ilha.**
- b) provocou o crescimento de vegetação no solo da ilha.
- c) causou o pagamento de indenização aos militares.
- d) destruiu toda a vegetação nativa da ilha.
- e) não contaminou a água para os animais.

→ **Conforme o autor, como foi solucionada a situação em Gruinard?**

- a) A ilha foi encharcada com uma mistura de água de mar e formaldeído, e a camada superficial do solo contaminado foi removida e incinerada.**
- b) Os ambientalistas conseguiram reverter a contaminação no corpo dos animais e no ar através de tratamentos químicos.
- c) A ilha ficou sem habitantes e em quarentena por cerca de trinta anos.
- d) Os resquícios do antraz foram finalmente enterrados após anos de queimadas controladas.
- e) O governo britânico pediu perdão à população da ilha e à do continente pela tragédia climática.

→ **Segundo o que foi lido, o que completa a linha pontilhada na frase final do texto?**

- a) both the dangers of biological warfare and humanity's capacity for destruction.**
- b) the possibilities of distinct lives on earth.
- c) both the end of an era of peace and new hopes of friendship.
- d) scientists' inability to solve important issues to humanity.
- e) the impossibility of the human species to destroy itself.