

From; Edward W. Jackson 18 November 2009
116 Grand Meadow Dr.
Fort Worth, TX 76108

Subject; My experience with Agent Orange while deployed to Guam

To; House Committee on Veterans' Affairs
Attn: Congressman Bob Filner
335 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Congresswoman Kay Granger
320 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Senator John Cornyn
517 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Department Of Veterans Affairs
Attn: Sec. Shinseki
810 Vermont Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20420

Governor Rick Perry
Office of the Governor
P.O. Box 12428
Austin, Texas 78711

The Honorable Congresspersons Filner, Granger, Senator Cornyn, Sec. Shinseki, and Gov. Perry

My name is Edward W. Jackson, from Fort Worth, TX. I am a retired United States Air Force (USAF) Master Sergeant with more than 22 years of service to our nation. I served from 9 July 1970 to 31 July 1992, when I retired, making me a Vietnam Era, Cold War Era, and Desert Storm Era veteran. I am extremely proud to have had the opportunity to have been of service to our great nation, a nation I still believe is the finest the world has ever had.

I would like to inform you of my experience with the herbicide known as "Agent Orange" (AO) while I was deployed on temporary duty to Andersen AFB, Guam from approximately Nov. 1972 to May 1973, in direct support of Operations Bullet Shot and Linebacker II. My normal assignment was with the 93rd Transportation Squadron, Castle AFB, CA, While on Guam I was assigned to the 43rd Transportation Squadron as a bus and truck driver. Most of my assignments were to transport the B-52 aircrews, by bus, who were flying combat missions to bomb North Vietnam.

However, occasionally, I was also tasked to drive a truck to transport 55 gallon drums of AO, including helping to load and unload the trucks. We were told these chemical were herbicide and included AO, among some of the other “Agent Rainbow” herbicides (Agents White, Blue, Purple, etc.). These herbicides were stored in the open on ramps on Andersen AFB. These drums of herbicides were used by the Civil Engineering Squadron to spray weeds and brush on the ramps, taxiways, revetments, runways, and other areas of Andersen AFB. I know these herbicides were also sprayed at some of the various US Navy Bases on Guam, including the Naval Magazine, Naval Communications Station, Naval Air Station, and Navy Harbor area. I know they were used in and around my own barracks area at the “Marbo Complex”. I was not directly involved in the spraying operations. AO and its chemicals, like Dixon, and other chemicals have been found by the EPA and GEPA, in the fresh water supply we would drink, cook with, and shower with.

When I was tasked to drive trucks to be loaded with AO, it was often to move the drums to the storages areas, as they were shipped (mostly by US Naval ships) to Guam. I would also drive the truck, load, and unload drums so we could remove rusting and deteriorating drums that were leaking from the storage areas. These drums were usually loaded on my truck by forklift, if one was available. If not, we would load the trucks using a winch, which was very difficult as the drums were heavy.

I do not know who inspected these drums, or how old the drums were. But the climate on Guam was very hot and humid, and you could always smell the Pacific Ocean and its salt in the air. There was also the smell of the herbicide in the air.

Once a drum began to leak, it would be either classified as a minor leak or a major leak. The ramp concrete areas always seem to have wet areas or puddles, as well as stains as I remember. This liquid was the AO that leaked onto the concrete. I cannot say for certain where these AO puddles ended up when it rained, and it seemed to rain everyday. We always seemed to get this leaked fluid onto us and our fatigues. I never thought much about it as, like any 19-21 year old at the time I was “bullet proof”.

Drums that were classified as minor leaks were transported back to the Navy Harbor and loaded back onto US Navy ships for disposal at sea. However, drums that were classified as having major leaks (I don’t know how they determined minor or major leaks as it all looked the same leaking rate to me), were determined to be to dangerous to transport through the civilian areas of Guam between Andersen AFB and the Navy Base. So, we would take these drums to an area called “Northwest Field” on Andersen AFB. Northwest Field always looked like an abandoned air force base, but did have some military activity at the time. Most roads and runways were overgrown, but the roads we traveled were sprayed with AO to kill the vegetation. At a location on Northwest Field I would backed my truck, with a “spotter” up to the edge of a small cliff. I cannot say exactly where this cliff was, but I could see the ocean from it, and the ocean was not very far away, maybe about ¼ mile, or so. This cliff I estimate to be maybe a straight drop of 20’-30’ if I remember it correctly. But, it was not a very big drop. At the bottom of this cliff was a huge pile of all sorts of junk that had been thrown over for many years. Some of this debris was burned, some was severely rusted. But, just about anything you can imagine to be in a dump was in this huge pile, including drums of chemicals and AO that had been thrown over before I had done it.

Once my truck was stopped and tires blocked, several of us would “manhandle” the drums off the back end of my truck and over the cliff. I did this maybe 4 or 5 times while I was on Guam. I estimate I was

involved in dumping approximately 20-25 of these drums of AO. Sometimes when the drums would hit the bottom of the cliff, the AO would splash back up at us. But most times the fluids would splash outwards from the cliff, and spill into the debris pile.

For years and years, I never thought about the dumping I was involved in during my tour of duty on Andersen AFB. In 1974, I cross trained to become a Boom Operator on the KC-135 jet tanker and did that for the remaining 18 years of my USAF career.

Upon my retirement I was granted a 10% VA service connected disability for numbness in my arms caused by nerve damage. I went on to have a career at the Dallas/Fort Worth International Airport (DFW) after my USAF retirement.

In May 2007, I was diagnosed with Hodgkin's Disease. I survived that because of the excellent medical care I received here in Fort Worth. But, it was a hard and difficult time of 4 types of chemo treatments every two weeks for 8 long months. My hospitalizations and treatments were mostly paid for by the health insurance I had through DFW, except for my co-payments and deductibles. In November 2007, I filed a VA claim for my Hodgkin's Disease as being caused by my handling of AO while I was on Guam. Cancers do not "run" in my family, and there is no other reason for me to come down with Hodgkin's Disease. My claim was filed with the VA regional Office in Waco, TX. I have been granted a "non-service connected" disability, but I still feel my Hodgkin's was caused by my military service and AO exposure. I have appealed that decision and my VA claim # is CSS 027 40 6281, reference # 349/215C. I have submitted evidence to support my claim. I am continuing to collect additional evidence, should I need it in the future. My appeal is with a DRO in Waco, TX.

I have found out that if a veteran actually had stepped foot on the soil of the South Vietnam, their AO exposure is automatically presumed, by law, no matter how much time they actually spent "in country". However, those of us who directly supported the Vietnam War from locations outside of Vietnam, or in the waters off of Vietnam, are not automatically presumed to have been exposed, and must submit evidence of their claim. This seems to apply to all veterans who may have an AO claim, but did not serve, or step foot in the South Vietnam. These locations include, but are not limited to Guam, Philippines, Okinawa, Japan, Thailand, Laos, South Korea, Johnston Island, Wake Island, Midway Island, Hawaii, as well as several CONUS bases of the USAF, USN, USCG, USMC, and US Army. It seems the VA solely has the decision to accept or reject this evidence for a service connected disability caused by AO exposure submitted by veterans, like myself.

I do not see this as fair treatment of our veterans. Apparently there are some 188 veterans from all of the military services, who served in Guam, in a situation like I have. I have no idea how many veterans from other locations other than Guam may also be suffering various diseases caused by exposure to AO, or the other Rainbow Agents. For my own claim, I have a 4" tall stack of new evidence and copies of the evidence I have already submitted to the VA to support my claim for an additional service connected disability due to AO exposure.

My Hodgkin's Disease and subsequent chemo treatments forced me to retire early from my second career at DFW Airport. I am only 58 years old, and now live on a fixed income.

Please, sirs and madam, I urge you to expand the presumption of AO exposure to areas outside of the republic of Vietnam, and help all veterans who served, backdating to the time of their filed claims. I also urge that this include concurrent military retirement with VA pension payments. Only veterans must give up an equal amount of retirement pay to receive a VA pension. Federal civilian retirees do not have to give up a portion of their earned retirement pays to collect another government pension.

Thank you for taking time to read my letter and consider my recommendations.

Sincerely,

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