

## Vietnam vet getting word out on Agent Orange issues

BY KATHY MILLEN [kmillen@stmedianetwork.com](mailto:kmillen@stmedianetwork.com)

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Army veteran Mike Barbour served in Vietnam and was exposed to Agent Orange. Barbour, who suffered from a bleeding disorder, poses in his yard with the flag placed on his father's casket. | Jonathan Miano~Staff Photographer

NAPERVILLE — Getting the word out to Vietnam veterans and their families about illnesses linked to Agent Orange exposure can be a slow process.

But Mike Barbour of Naperville keeps plugging away.

Three years ago, Barbour, a Vietnam veteran, was diagnosed with immune thrombocytopenia purpura, in which a decreased platelet count causes bleeding and bruising. His doctors believe the cause of his condition dates back 40 years to his exposure to the herbicide used to defoliate the jungles of Vietnam. Agent Orange is now being blamed for a number of illnesses including cancer, diabetes and heart disease. Anyone who served in Vietnam from January 1962 through May 1975 is presumed to have been exposed, according to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs.

Barbour underwent five rounds of chemotherapy and his illness is under control. Now a veterans community relations coordinator with Naperville Township's Veterans and Senior Affairs Team, he is trying to educate other veterans, as well as the medical community, about Agent Orange exposure.

In addition, he is campaigning to get military veterans to register for benefits with the VA.

“It’s not a giveaway program,” he said. “This is a right and a benefit they earned for their service and for putting on the uniform.”

Since his story first ran in The Naperville Sun in September, Barbour has been contacted by many people with concerns about Agent Orange, including an Oklahoma attorney with a client dealing with a similar platelet problem. Several Vietnam veterans sought Barbour’s assistance in signing up for VA benefits and for Agent Orange screenings. Another 60 veterans signed up for VA benefits during a health and wellness fair held by Naperville Township in the fall.

Barbour said health care professionals and veterans are becoming more educated about Agent Orange.

“We are seeing these doctors and specialists and veterans starting to make the connection now with stuff that is wrong with them and with Vietnam and the Agent Orange issues,” he said. “I had 10 or 15 calls, and that doesn’t count the guys (I talk to) at the (Judd Kendall) VFW post. ... I know that we were able to help people, that’s for sure.”