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Captain Agnes M Bresnahan

I came here today to address the total and intentional failure of the VA in processing and approving service connected entitlements for women and men exposed to weapons of mass destruction in the performance of their military duties both stateside and overseas. Exposed and lied to and denied proper medical attention. Unknowingly we women and men in uniform were used as experiments dating back to the 1950's exposing us to chemical agents which include but are not limited to PCB, mustard gas, nerve gas, sarin gas and many other chemicals containing dioxin/Agent Orange.

I wish to address the VA's hierarchy's constant, immoral and intentional denial of service connected compensation and entitlements to veterans exposed to these chemical agents and total disregard to the regulations pertaining to this exposure. And to their widows/widowers and most of all the innocent, who bear our service, the children and grandchildren who die from Agent Orange or those who lived and bear the scars of their parents or grandparents service. The Agent Orange babies. I am one of those Agent Orange ( Dioxin) victims, service connected, who have been denied entitlements, medical care and compensation. Diagnosed at Walter Reed Medical Hospital, on active duty, source of exposure identified as Fort McClellan, Alabama. Fort Ritchie, Maryland and Fort Drum, NY have also been identified as Agent Orange sites and I have served on these Installations also. I have had this poison of multiple chemical exposure, including Agent Orange, in my body since I was 20 years old and I will be 56 years old next month.

There is no such thing as Agent Orange... a colored stripe on a 55-gallon drum. Yet there were many other colored stripes on hundreds of thousands of 55-gallon drums. All had one thing, Dioxin. This is what is killing those who were exposed. And Dioxin is why the reproductive systems of women and men in uniform pass on to our children and grandchildren. Our DNA is mutated and our immune systems are compromised. Yes both for women and men and in many ways more for women.

The Dioxin, after traveling and destroying each and every organ of our bodies, takes and destroys the reproductive system. And I know the suffering of men who have bore this. But only in the past few months have I come to understand so deeply the pain and sorrow that women in uniform have suffered.

The medical conditions of Agent Orange do not discriminate. AO doesn't care where you were exposed. AO is an equal opportunity poison. I have the same brain damage, nerve damage, bone disease, multiple chemical sensitivity, chronic pain, chronic fatigue and a long list of other AO illnesses as anyone who served in Viet Nam, Korea, Cambodia and Laos.

I have come here at a great financial expense.. Because the VA Commission does not post when it will be convening in advance. Those of us who come to be heard are unable to take advantage of hotel and airline discounted prices. This short notice of the hearings has precluded many from coming here today. These women and men who cannot be here today have asked that I bring their testimonies with me. I am honored to do so and request that these statements be read out loud and entered into the official record of these hearings.

I have been in a Leave Without Pay status since September 21, 2005 from my position as a GS12/9 Computer System Analyst with the Department of the Treasury, Internal Revenue Service, Andover, Massachusetts. I have a pending reconsideration of Disability Retirement with the Office of Personnel Management. As OPM required causation of the Agent Orange diagnosis supported by clinical and scientific evidence which" my doctors" used, The VA Hospital, Office of the Chief of Staff advised me that he was advised by the legal department that he could not do that because it would amount to "expert testimony". Including my active duty and my IRS Federal Service, I have over 30 years of service. My position at the IRS was eliminated due to a reduction in force and was a violation of OPM regulations and laws that protect active duty disabled 30% or more, including the Viet Nam Readjustment Act of 1974.

The Viet Nam Readjustment Act was the law that I was hired under at the IRS in August of 1983. During the reduction in force I was placed in a position and shift that management knew that I could not physically do. The VA Hospital and Parkland Medical Center submitted letters to support my medical condition and my limitations, but they were ignored by all levels of management. My medical conditions worsened after 2 and a half days of working after the RIF stand up date of September 19, 2005. Since that date I have been homebound and require assistance from my friends and family in all aspects of daily routines. The only money I receive is the \$870.00 VA compensation and much of that is used for medical services and medications, which the VA will not provide or cover.

My military career came to an end as the physical pain, chronic fatigue, the multiple chemical sensitivity, brain and nerve damage and other AO illnesses was so great that I could no longer do my job as a Combat Support Signal Officer. If not for the exposure the Army would have been my career, as I loved being a soldier.

A civilian again and walking wounded and dying, My outward appearance remained unchanged until 2001 when I went through "wasting again" and the Dioxin, which is stored in fatty tissue, once again traveled through my body. Since my exposure, internally my body raged with poison Outside it appeared normal.

The challenge to find a good paying job that I could perform with the chronic pain and fatigue and other AO illnesses, took years. And I went from a GS 4 in 1983 and I crawled my way in pain to a ladder position 7/9/11/12 Computer System Analyst. This was a job that I could do and excel in and I did and I received the maximum performance ratings for years. Overcoming the physical obstacles of my AO illnesses with the pain. Never pain free but manageable pain. Pain and fatigue was my motivation to work each day. Every day that I went to work was another day that I lived and the Agent lost. I was productive and had the dignity of a pay check and I was not a burden. On the days and sometimes for a week, that I could not work, due to the pain, the Agent did not win, I would tell myself that my body needed to rest and this is how it must be.

All those who are chemically exposed must reach far into themselves to pull all that is there and push away smells, visual memories of service and sounds that send fear and hate to our minds and heart; To search our minds for words, to search for the name of a common object or the name of a loved one or how to spell a simple word. We must work around the brain damage. How well it is done depends on where the brain damage is. We must do this in order to survive and to function. And many do so and for those that don't there is comfort for them in other veterans who understand. Been there, done that. Then comes the VA, established by Abraham Lincoln, that the real battle begins. And in many ways it is more painful than any battle ever fought. To have to beg and plead for their compensation and entitlements only to be told to prove it and the proof is ignored and rejected and slapped down. And when the entitlement is for a spouse or a child that the pain is so intense that it eats away the soul.

Those of us who have PTSD and the brain and nerve damage, which Admiral E.R. Zumwalt Jr. stated in his classified report to the Secretary of the Department of Veterans Affairs dated May 5, 1990 and other writings of Admiral Elmo Zumwalt Jr... the label of PTSD does not address the brain and nerve damage, which is a significant attribution to PTSD, but rather the label of PTSD is a stigma of mental frailty and/or a personality defect and not a valid condition. PTSD carries a stigma, which the VA and other government agencies have used to negate valid and life-threatening conditions to prevent the filing of service-connected illnesses. Dealing with the VA will cause PTSD and I am serious about that because you go back to every day that you served. For me it was back 36 years.

The VA assignment of 30% disability for central nervous system disorder, effective June 11, 1977, is not adequate nor was I given proper medical care for the other illnesses which triggered other medical conditions, such as immune diseases and disorders.

In 1994 I received the Agent Orange form letter from the VA which states that you were exposed to herbicides and pesticides used in Viet Nam (Agent Orange).

When I reopened my claim and filed for Degenerating Bone Disease and Disc Disease, it was denied. "Your 214 does not show service in Viet Nam". I reopened my claim for the brain and spinal, central nervous system...DENIED "it is as likely as not" that your neurological condition is caused by anxiety and depression and your military medical records are silent for anxiety and depression. This was refuted by a complete neurological exam done by Derry Neurological Associates and the damage I have is not a result of anxiety and depression. My MRI and neurological exams by both the VA and civilian doctors confirm and validate the diagnosis made by Walter Reed Hospital.

And my fight with the VA goes on. I went before the Decision Review Officer, Appeals on May 10, 2005. As my medical exposure was diagnosed on active duty and the denials of the VA were so blatant, I still brought medical documentation to support my claim. But I ask this commission why that was necessary and still I have been denied over and over again by the VA. The decision of the DRO increased my service connection compensation from thirty to sixty percent. But it was not retroactive to June 1977. I filed papers for entitlement to 100% un-employability. The VA rating guide states that the employment will not be held against the veteran. It also states to err on behalf of the veteran

I also submitted for entitlement for my mother, who will be 81 in January, for loss of my financial aid. I have always been able to assist my family with financial, emotional and physical support until my second wasting. Also, my entitlement for my primary care taker. Entitlement for assisted living and adapted housing, which was all denied by the VA. Why, because the veteran is gainfully employed even though I have not been able to work since September 2005. This veteran has not been able to do many things and I have to hire people to maintain my home and yard. The many things I used to love to do myself, like cook and garden, are long gone. I am confined to the first floor of my home and among the things that I cannot do, unless someone is with me, is to walk up the stairs and take a bath.

Where is the dignity, the honor, the self-esteem and the self worth of the officer and the soldier I was and still am -- denied by the VA. DELAY, DENY UNTIL WE ALL DIE. This replaces the words of Abraham Lincoln----TO BIND THE NATION'S WOUNDS, TO CARE FOR HIM WHO SHALL HAVE BORNE THE BATTLE, AND FOR HIS WIDOWS AND ORPHANS.