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WHAT IT TAKES IS A LITTLE COURAGE (Agent Orange!)

I was asked a question by a USAF veteran who served in Thailand in the late 1960's early 70' period, should there be a concern of cancer? Recently he learned of cancers being reported in USAF veterans, who were stationed in Thailand, during the Vietnam war. His question "could these veterans have been exposed to certain herbicides we generally refer to as Agent Orange?" My answer "there is certainly concern."

The "powers that be" since my earliest days of being involved with Agent Orange issues have attempted to deny or limit the dangers of Agent Orange. It seems as if every person who tried to bring the dangers of dioxin poisoning of American troops in Southeast Asia, to the forefront was discredited by the VA, some veterans groups and the various political administrations. This was both Democrats and Republicans as well.

In 1977 at the Whitehall VFW Post 8794 (Columbus Ohio) we organized a group to assist Vietnam veterans who were having problems with unusual conditions in very young adults. We met with strong opposition from some veterans and equal strong support from others.

Involved with that group were several veterans who did not go "in-country" but were in Thailand. Of those who were in Thailand several had similar problems as those who were "in-country" Vietnam. A common thread was they claimed to have been working on C-130's. These C-130's may have or may not have had Agent Orange aboard. I attempted to obtain direct answers but could never link an individual veteran with a specific aircraft. Records of maintenance were not available.

The Agent Orange issue nearly got me fired in 1984. After I had published my first article regarding Agent Orange in 1983. The essay is chapter 2 of my book IN SEARCH OF THE TRUTH FOR THE VIETNAM COMBAT VETERAN. "Poison: Agent Orange" was the article involved.

After the article was published in the OHIO AMVET News, the Veterans Service Office director asked me if I was the author of the article. He was holding the paper and pointing to my name. The director then read the title of the article, my name and stated it included Franklin County VSO. He said it was wrong for me to link the office with false information and accused me of "printing lies" he then told me if he saw my name linked with the "trash" again he would fire me. The veterans commission supported his position. The next several articles appeared in the Ohio VFW, Ohio AMVETS and VVA paper were without my by-line. It was only after he retired did my by-lines appear again.

During the 1980's many of my fellow VSO's avoided being seen with me at meetings. Although many would catch me when others were not around to ask questions regarding Agent Orange. Over the next decade, as the issues I pushed in the late 1970's and early 80's, began to be recognized as residuals of Agent Orange, things changed quite a bit. A few of the employees in the VA Regional Office even began sending their contacts to me for representation.

In my opinion, as a result of early desire to "nip it in the bud" as Barney Fife used to say, any USAF comparison was destroyed. Operation Ranch Hand was flawed when I read it in the 1980's. I said so in print, in 1983. In the year 2000, the USAF admitted 17 years after my article; the Operation Ranch Hand was indeed flawed.

I honestly believe people were at least exposed to Agent Orange in Thailand by direct contact with equipment used in spraying missions. I do not have any evidence there was any Agent Orange sprayed in the area; but, I am not so sure, there was no Agent Orange sprayed in or around Thailand either. It is an unanswered issue.

Source: http://davebarker.portalone.us/html/a_little_courage.html

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