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# Probe sought on Guam Agent Orange claims

11 Jan 2017 By Mar-Vic Cagurangan - For Variety



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**HAGÁTÑA** — Shunned for decades, Blue Water veterans who are suffering from diseases they believe were caused by exposure to toxic herbicides while stationed on Guam during the Vietnam War are finally getting attention from national and local leaders.

Some of these veterans have passed away without receiving any benefits from the Veterans Affairs Office. Despite testimony from dozens of veterans who claimed to have sprayed the chemical on various military-owned properties between the 1960s and 1970s, the U.S. military repeatedly denied it used Agent Orange on Guam.

The Blue Water Navy bill, which seeks compensation for those exposed to Agent Orange in Vietnam, does not include Guam, Thailand or Okinawa.

Senior Deputy Majority Whip Dennis A. Ross, a Florida representative, on Monday wrote to House Veteran Affairs Committee chairman Phil Roe, and U.S. Air Force and House Armed Services Committee chairman Mac Thornberry, seeking an inquiry into the Veterans Affairs Office's rampant denials of benefits for veterans afflicted with Agent Orange-associated diseases.

"I have spoken personally to countless Blue Water veterans, including many in my own district, suffering from devastating cancers and diseases attributed to Agent Orange who bravely served in the territorial seas of Vietnam," said Ross, an original cosponsor of the Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act.

Ross is requesting a briefing on Agent Orange exposure in Guam be held by Jan. 17.

"These veterans, and their families, deserve the care and benefits they earned. Unfortunately, today, they have been forgotten by their government. This legislation garnered vast support in the last Congress, but was never considered," Ross added.

On Guam, newly elected Sen. Fernando Esteves announced plans to form an investigative task force that will look into the military's use of Agent Orange and other chemicals such as polychlorinated biphenyl and dichlorodiphenyltrichloroethane on Guam.

Estevez said the task force will provide the reports and data collected from the local community to the Office of Guam Delegate Madeleine Z. Bordallo "in hopes of bringing clarity and action regarding use of hazardous chemicals on Guam."

The task force's main goal, he added, is to ensure that the federal government acknowledges its use of the toxic chemicals, provides treatment to rightful benefits, and cleans up contaminated sites.

Estevez, vice chairman of the Guam Legislature's health committee, worked in the U.S. Army and is currently a member of the Guam Army National Guard.

"Guam has been the 'floating fortress' of the Pacific for decades. Generations of our people living, working, and raising their families here have always had large military bases in their backyards," Estevez said. "We're not talking about a foreign people in some foreign land. We are U.S. citizens on U.S. soil potentially having been poisoned by our own government. This is very concerning to me."

Last week, he wrote to the U.S. Air Force requesting information on claims that Agent Orange was actively used to clear vegetation at Andersen Air Force Base.

"I am deeply disturbed about the recent claims that Agent Orange was actively used at Andersen Air Force Base during the 1960s and 1970s," Bordallo said. "While the DoD has acknowledged that Agent Orange did transit through Andersen Air Force Base, it has consistently denied that the chemical was used for any purpose on island. However, I have heard these claims from constituents and from other service members that have served on island."

For many years, veterans stationed on Guam during the Vietnam War, have been making pleas to national leaders, seeking the federal government's acknowledgment of the use of Agent Orange on Guam. They finally caught the attention of the public

following a former Air Force veteran's interview with Florida's NBC News Channel 8 on Jan. 4. Leroy Foster, a resident of Lakeland, Florida, said he "bears enormous guilt for exposing other veterans and their families."

"Why so long with so much suffering for all of those who are connected to Guam?" asked Brian Moyer, a former U.S. Marine stationed on Guam.

He was diagnosed with severe peripheral arterial disease which is not recognized by the Veterans Affairs office as related to Agent Orange.

"I had a chemical stress test on my heart approximately three years ago and the results say I had a heart attack which I wasn't aware of. Lupus in the skin which I found out I had when I was 28 and six years after I got out of the Marine Corps," he said.

Agent Orange was used from 1961 to 1971, and was by far the most used of the so-called "rainbow herbicides" utilized by the U.S. military for its herbicidal warfare program during the Vietnam War.

According to chemical experts, degradation of Agent Orange, as well as Agents Purple, Pink and Green released dioxins, which have caused harm to the health of those exposed during the Vietnam War. Agents Blue and White were part of the same program but did not contain dioxins.

Studies of populations exposed to dioxin, though not necessarily Agent Orange, indicate increased risk of various types of cancer and genetic defects.

Since the 1980s, several lawsuits have been filed against the companies that produced Agent Orange, such as Dow Chemical and Diamond Shamrock.

