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Vet to testify on 'death bed'

Daily Post Staff 7 hrs ago



AGENT ORANGE: A U.S. Army Huey helicopter sprays Agent Orange over Vietnamese agricultural land during the Vietnam War. The Department of Defense has said Agent Orange was never present or transited through Guam, but veterans who were stationed on Guam during the Vietnam War say otherwise. Post file photo

The upcoming start of a U.S. Government Accountability Office investigation into the alleged systemic use of Agent Orange on Guam decades ago has prompted an Air Force veteran, who has provided statements to U.S. lawmakers he sprayed the toxic herbicide on the island, to provide everything he knows.

"I am prepared to give my last sworn testimony on my death bed," retired Master Sgt. Leroy Foster stated in an email to The Guam Daily Post, in response to the military's confirmation a GAO team would be on island this week to seek information into claims of Agent Orange contamination on the island.

Foster has provided accounts to U.S. lawmakers of being a young airman in the 1970s whose duties included spraying herbicide while stationed on Guam's Andersen Air Force Base during the Vietnam War.

He was 19 at the time, and low on the job ladder, he said, when he started getting orders to spray Agent Orange and Silvex, also a toxic chemical later banned from use on Guam decades ago.

Foster stated he "power-sprayed" these chemicals on Guam for years.

Now suffering from cancer and multiple autoimmune disorders, Foster also offered an apology in the email to what he believed was his part in leaving a legacy of diseases for generations of Guam children and within his family.

"I suffer greatly, but deserve it for all the unborn I harmed and the little children and families and our beloved veterans," Foster wrote.

Foster's email to The Guam Daily Post yesterday was copied to Guam officials and certain U.S. lawmakers. The Post asked him for comment on the GAO team's upcoming investigation.

The military confirmed on Guam last week the GAO team would arrive this week.

GAO questions

In scheduled meetings with service members and officers on Guam, the GAO team stated it wants to discuss the following questions:

- What is known about where the federal government stored, transferred, and used Agent Orange or its components at locations in the U.S. and its territories?
- To what extent have DOD and other federal agencies assessed the threats to human health and the environment associated with Agent Orange at known and suspected contaminated sites in the U.S. and its territories?
- To what extent have DOD and other federal agencies planned and implemented cleanup and other related actions at known and suspected contaminated sites in the U.S. and its territories?
- What is known about the extent to which the federal government has tracked costs associated with cleanup efforts associated with Agent Orange?

Legislation named after Foster

In January, recently expanded legislation was proposed to allow eligible veterans who served in Guam, the Northern Marianas and American Samoa during the Vietnam War to receive expedited consideration for Department of Veterans Affairs benefits if they suffer from diseases the U.S. government has linked to the herbicide Agent Orange.

House Senior Deputy Majority Whip Dennis A. Ross, from Florida's 15th District, on Thursday introduced the expanded Agent Orange legislation, called Fighting for Agent Orange-Stricken Territories in Eastern Regions Act, also known as the FOSTER Act, and named after Leroy Foster.

The legislation would:

- Grant presumptive Agent Orange exposure status to U.S. service members who served in Guam, the Northern Mariana Islands or American Samoa during the Vietnam War; and
- Enable eligible veterans to receive expedited consideration for VA benefits if they suffer from any of the diseases the U.S. government has linked to Agent Orange.

Foster has said he's had multiple cancers due to his exposure to Agent Orange in Guam, but does not qualify for VA benefits for his ailments under current law.

Town Hall

Military veterans, their families and those who work with or on behalf of veterans, can raise their questions and concerns at the Town Hall and Resource Fair being held by the Veterans Affairs Pacific Island Health Care System.

The annual U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs event is a chance for the organization and veteran affiliates to present and obtain feedback on important health care matters.

The event will be held from 6 to 7:30 p.m. Dec. 13 at the Guam National Guard Readiness Center in Barrigada. It will offer resources related to the Beneficiary Travel program, the Patient Advocacy program, the TriWest Healthcare Alliance with the Veterans Choice program, health administrative services, flu shots, chaplain services, suicide prevention and programs for the homeless.

Agent Orange Meeting for Service Members

U.S. GAO meetings for military service members will be held at the Guam Vet Center:

Suite 201, Reflection Center, Hagatna

10 a.m. and 2 p.m. Dec. 5, enlisted service members

10 a.m. and 2 p.m. Dec. 6, officers