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If Veterans don't help Veterans, who will?

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Feb. 24, 2012

Sen. Carl Levin
269 Russell Office Building
U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510-2202

By Fax: 1-202-224-6221

Re: Request for Help and Hearing on Agent Orange Issue

Dear Senator:

I am writing to seek your help in regard to my disability claim related to my exposure to leaking Agent Orange drums buried by me and other soldiers at Camp Carroll (Waegwan), South Korea. In this connection, I am also requesting a Congressional hearing on this issue since I have lost confidence in the ability of the US Forces Korea to investigate my claim truthfully.

I am not sure whether you are familiar with my story, which has been reported publicly in 2011. It was first reported by KPHO CBS 5 News (Phoenix, AZ TV) on May 13, 2011, and subsequently by Stars & Stripes too.

As for a brief background of myself, I would like to provide the following info:

1) I served thirteen (13) months at Camp Carroll, South Korea, as a member of D Company 802 Engineer Battalion, 2nd Engineer Group, 8th Army, USFK from February 1978 to February 1979. I received an honorable discharge from the Army in December 1979.

2) During the summer and fall of 1978, I and other members of the “earth mover” platoon of D Company were ordered to dig a big trench (approximately 30 feet deep, a city block long, and 20-25 feet wide) at a place called “Area D,” inside Camp Carroll, and then bury hundreds of chemical drums, including Agent Orange, and very possibly nerve agents which were stored in a warehouse on Camp Carroll and brought in from other U.S. military bases in South Korea. During this time, I worked as a bulldozer operator and was involved in both the digging of the trench and the burial of the drums until the trench was finally sealed by me at the direction of my commanding officer just prior to my leaving Korea.

3) I am currently sick with various health problems such as diabetes, glaucoma, diabetic peripheral neuropathy, liver disease, skin rashes, which, I believe, are associated with my exposure to the dangerous, leaking chemical drums at Camp Carroll. We handled these drums with no protective gear either. I am now on the insulin pump, which delivers insulin to my body 24 hours a day because of this exposure.

4) I first applied for disability benefit with the Department of Veterans Affairs in 2006. It was initially denied, but on appeal I received a partial benefit on the basis of PTSD—not Agent Orange exposure and it's related health conditions—in 2011. They have totally ignored my Agent Orange related conditions, so I appealed to the Board of Veterans' Appeals to have this recognized. . At present, my case is back at the Detroit Regional VA office because the Board remanded my case back from Washington D.C. to the regional office for re-adjudication.

5) When I and two other fellow veterans came out publicly with our story in May 2011, the 8th Army and ROK government formed a joint investigation group to investigate my claim. I gave all the information I had to the investigative officers who visited me. I even went to South Korea in July 2011 at the invitation of a South Korean civilian group to locate the area where the drums were buried. When taken to the site of the burial of the drums I asked to be familiarized with the landmarks that were still present from when I served here, including going to my old motor pool. I was rushed through the entire process, refused access to my old motor pool, and put back into a limousine with the Colonel who was my guide in a matter of 15 minutes and taken out of the area, leaving the press corp and others who accompanied me behind, wondering what just happened?

6) In any case, after much delay, the Joint Investigation Group announced its findings on December 12, 2011. Their conclusion was very evasive, stating that “we have found **no definitive** evidence that Agent Orange was buried or stored at Camp Carroll.”(Underline and bold added for emphasis) In addition, they alleged that the drums were excavated from the site and removed to the U.S. in 1979 and 1980, without any documentary proof.

I am very disappointed with this apparent cover-up of the truth by the investigative group, which neither interviewed my company commander, retired Colonel Stephen Massey, nor released any relevant Army documents on the case. I do not believe they conducted an honest, thorough investigation into my claim. Therefore, I would like ask you to hold an independent Congressional hearing on the truth of this issue under your leadership—subpoenaing all the pertinent military documents on the case.

What is at stake is not only my disability claim but also the health and well-being of many U.S. veterans who served at Camp Carroll and the U.S. soldiers who are currently serving at the base, along with hundreds of Korean workers who worked there as well as Koreans living near the base. I believe you also want an honest government as I do.

I am willing to testify before the Armed Services Committee if called upon. As additional evidence, I am enclosing a copy of my buddy letters (4 in total, including one from Colonel Massey), as well as my own personal statement.

If you need further information, please do not hesitate to contact me. I look forward to hearing from you in the near future.

Respectfully yours,

Stephen F. House
Clay, MI 48001-3329

Enclosures