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2013 VVA Convention Resolution
Proposed by the AGENT ORANGE COMMITTEE
ADOPTED by Vietnam Veterans of America
US AIR FORCE RESERVE C123K AIRCREWS EXPOSURE:
POST-VIETNAM
AO-17

Issue:

The United States Air Force (USAF) used its fleets of C-123K transport aircraft in more than 9,100 missions, for aerial application of more than twenty million gallons of toxic herbicides between 1961 and 1971 in Vietnam. The aircraft were returned to the United States for continued use in airlift missions by USAF squadrons at Westover Air Force Base, Massachusetts; Pittsburgh Air Reserve Station, Pennsylvania; and, Rickenbacker Air Reserve Base, Ohio between 1972-1982 and were then retired from service and placed in storage. Veterans whose duties brought them into intense contact with these aircraft were exposed to military herbicides.

Background:

The United States Air Force (USAF) in 1979, in response to the presence of noxious fumes, conducted scientific tests on unit aircraft and identified and determined that significant levels of military herbicides and insecticides used in Vietnam still contaminated the aircraft; and, additional tests carried out in 1994 by USAF Armstrong Laboratories still showed the presence of herbicides, and in particular, the presence of highly toxic Agent Orange contaminant dioxin. Finding that the contamination was considered sufficient by the USAF, it then required the use of HAZMAT protective equipment when carrying out tests or otherwise entering the aircraft. As late as 2009, further USAF tests conducted at Davis-Monthan AFB, Arizona demonstrated continued contamination of these aircraft. USAF toxicology staff has testified in federal proceedings that toxic levels of contamination due to the herbicides were a danger to public health; and that the levels observed in the aircraft greatly exceed the Department of Defense's (DoD) own standards for maximum permissible exposure to any dioxin contaminating interior surfaces. Other federal agencies have reviewed the data and concurred that exposures to personnel at levels exceeding DoD recommendations are likely to have occurred. In response to the State of Arizona and US Environmental Protection Agency environmental concerns, the USAF withdrew the aircraft from commercial resale, quarantined them and, in April 2010, ultimately took extraordinary disposal measures and smelted the remaining fleet. It is estimated that approximately 1,500 service members, including aircrews and maintenance personnel were exposed to military herbicide-contaminated conditions on the C-123 aircraft; with many of these personnel, who now having health problems commonly associated with herbicide exposure and have endured lengthy legal struggles to prove these problems are service-related. The Secretary of the Department of Veterans Affairs, under Public Law 102-4, has statutory responsibility to accurately designate situations and locations that caused veterans to have been exposed to military herbicides used in Vietnam, as well as their contaminants.

Resolved, That:

Vietnam Veterans of America, in light of the review of the data and scientific information available currently, has confirmed that post-Vietnam service aboard the C-123 led to dioxin exposure at about the same intensity as with ground troops from the Vietnam War. And, having secured expert scientific opinions as to the length and breadth of that exposure; urges the Department of Veterans Affairs to promptly designate the C-123K aircraft, used after the Vietnam War in the United States during 1972 to 1982, as having been Agent Orange exposure sites to permit the approximately 1,500 veterans who were aircrew or maintenance personnel to be eligible for Agent Orange-related benefits.

Further, in light of the inaction by both the United States Air Force and the Department of Veterans Affairs in ameliorating the present situation encountered by these approximately 1,500 veterans; VVA will also advocate with the United States Congress for the introduction of enabling legislation that would grant presumptive herbicide exposure status to US servicemembers who served in the units cited above.

Adopted by a majority voice vote by Vietnam Veterans of America at its 16th national convention in Jacksonville, Florida on 16 August 2013