

**Statement for
the Record**

Reserve Officers Association of the United States

And

Reserve Enlisted Association

for the

House Veterans Affairs Committee

May 5, 2010

Health Effects of the Vietnam War – The Aftermath



“Serving Citizen Warriors through Advocacy and Education since 1922.”™



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The Reserve Officers Association of the United States (ROA) is a professional association of commissioned and warrant officers of our nation's seven uniformed services, and their spouses. ROA was founded in 1922 during the drawdown years following the end of World War I. It was formed as a permanent institution dedicated to National Defense, with a goal to teach America about the dangers of unpreparedness. When chartered by Congress in 1950, the act established the objective of ROA to: "...support and promote the development and execution of a military policy for the United States that will provide adequate National Security." The mission of ROA is to advocate strong Reserve Components and national security, and to support Reserve officers in their military and civilian lives.

The Association's 63,000 members include Reserve and Guard Soldiers, Sailors, Marines, Airmen, and Coast Guardsmen who frequently serve on Active Duty to meet critical needs of the uniformed services and their families. ROA's membership also includes officers from the U.S. Public Health Service and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration who often are first responders during national disasters and help prepare for homeland security. ROA is represented in each state with 55 departments plus departments in Latin America, the District of Columbia, Europe, the Far East, and Puerto Rico. Each department has several chapters throughout the state. ROA has more than 450 chapters worldwide.

ROA is a member of The Military Coalition where it co-chairs the Tax and Social Security Committee. ROA is also a member of the National Military/Veterans Alliance. Overall, ROA works with 75 military, veterans and family support organizations.

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The Reserve Enlisted Association is an advocate for the enlisted men and women of the United States Military Reserve Components in support of National Security and Homeland Defense, with emphasis on the readiness, training, and quality of life issues affecting their welfare and that of their families and survivors. REA is the only Joint Reserve association representing enlisted reservists – all ranks from all five branches of the military.

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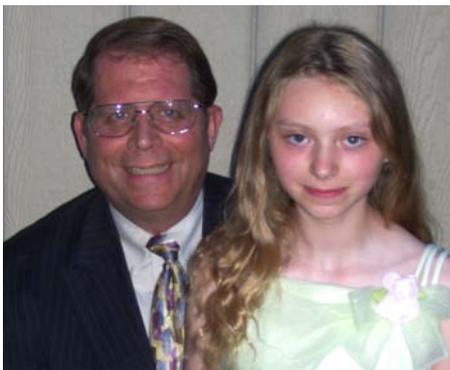
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The Reserve Officers and Reserve Enlisted Associations are member-supported organizations. Neither ROA nor REA have received grants, sub-grants, contracts, or subcontracts from the federal government in the past three years. All other activities and services of the associations are accomplished free of any direct federal funding.

Introduction

Mr Chairman and members of the committee, ROA thanks Chairman Filner for the introduction of H.R.2254, Agent Orange Equity Act of 2009, that includes blue-water sailors, and blue-sky airman for treatment of ailments relating to exposure to toxic herbicides, and the 256 House members who have cosponsored it. H.R. 2254 is intended to clarify the law so that every servicemember awarded the Vietnam Service medal, or who otherwise deployed to land, sea or air, in the Republic of Vietnam is fully covered by the comprehensive Agent Orange laws Congress passed in 1991.

A Personal Testimony



Marshall Hanson and daughter Sydney

I am CAPT Marshall Hanson, US Naval Reserve (retired). I did two tours in the waters off Vietnam as a blue-water sailor. One tour in 1971 was under training orders as a college student, and the next just following my commissioning in 1972.

Normally, I would be submitting written testimony strictly on behalf of the Reserve Officers Association and the Reserve Enlisted Association. ROA does have a resolution #11 that was passed in 2008 which

talks to “Preserving Veteran Status and Benefits for Those Who Have Served in Theaters of Operations” that is based on the lack of available treatment for certain Vietnam Veterans, but for this one time I think I need to reflect on my personal experience.

In 1998, my youngest daughter was born with a cleft soft and hard palate, a condition that surprised my wife and me as we couldn’t identify a reason for it at the time. Cleft palate is a condition in which the two plates of the skull that form the hard palate (roof of the mouth) are not completely joined, leaving a hole in the top of the mouth into the nasal passages. This condition has been found in offspring of veterans exposed to Agent Orange. From the characteristics of the cleft, the doctors assured us it was not genetic in the sense of family history. Luckily the correction to this condition was covered by private health insurance and personal copayments, and access to one of the world’s best craniofacial surgery teams at Seattle Children’s Hospital. Today, she is a healthy smart-mouthed tween, and dentists have to be informed that she ever had surgery.

With only six days in Da Nang, Vietnam, while awaiting transit to and from ships, I had always felt that I was lucky, figuring that I had little to no exposure to herbicides. Since moving to Washington, D.C. eleven years ago, I have had the chance to work with other Vietnam veterans who were not so lucky and had suffered from the cancers associated with Agent Orange. One,

John Morrison, prematurely passed away with in the last few years, after decades of suffering from crippling ailments related to his exposure.

Then, I learned at age 57 that I have a heart condition that will require heart surgery in the fall of 2010. Was I exposed, and are herbicides the cause? Does my condition qualify as ischemic heart disease? These are questions yet to be asked and answered by my cardiologist. But this is yet another condition, without a family history correlation. Recent facts that I learned have caused me to wonder about a possible connection.

As the committee is aware, American forces sprayed millions of gallons of Agent Orange and other defoliants over parts of Vietnam from 1961 to 1971. During "Operation Ranch Hand," US forces sprayed about 20 million gallons of Agent Orange and other herbicides on southern and central Vietnam to deprive enemies of jungle cover. The ship that I was assigned to on my second tour was USS Niagara Falls (AFS-3), which was included on a short presumption of Agent Orange exposure list of offshore "blue water" naval vessels conducted operations on the inland "brown water" rivers and delta areas of Vietnam that was issued by the Department of Veteran Affairs.

I reported aboard the Niagara Falls in 1972, but the period of presumptive exposure is 1968. The Niagara Falls did similar types of assignments with cargo pickups anchored in the brown waters of Da Nang Harbor and replenishments off of Cam Ranh Bay and the mouth of the Mekong Delta. The Niagara Falls also steamed along the Vietnam coast resupplying Navy destroyers along the inshore gunline, and the aircraft carriers and support ships on Yankee Station to the North.

In addition to similar littoral water duty, the Niagara Falls like many blue water ships was exposed to herbicide runoff from Vietnam river basins. With 13 large river systems, Vietnam is considered to have a complex and dense river network with most of the large river systems linked. The Mekong River, alone, splits into nine arms, with all flowing down and emptying into the sea. Agent Orange is insoluble. It was carried whole into the swamps, down creeks into the rivers and down the rivers into the South China Sea.

It can also be noted in Figure One (see page 6) that herbicides were heavily sprayed along the coast. The Navy ships stationed of the coast were adrift in an herbicide soup, with runoff continuing to occur even after spraying ended in 1971.

Aboard Navy ships, potable water is produced by evaporative distillation of seawater. In distillation plants on ships seawater was usually fed into an evaporator where the water was boiled by a combination of heating and reduced pressure (vacuum). The vapor was condensed in the condenser from where it was pumped into the feed tanks.

As a result insoluble agents remained in the water. An Australian study focused on the evaporative distillation process that was used to produce potable water by Navy ships from surrounding estuarine waters. It was entitled Co-Distillation of Agent Orange and other

Persistent Organic Pollutants in Evaporative Water Distillation, and found that “the main contaminant in Agent Orange was found at about 85 percent of the quantity observed in the control samples and co-distilled to a greater extent than any other PCDD/F investigated here.” Sailors were being exposed to herbicides through their drinking water. The Australian study also was motivated by an Australian Veterans Administration report noted that veterans of the Royal Australian Navy (RAN) experienced higher mortality than other Australian Vietnam Veterans. Australia’s largest naval commitment to the Vietnam War was the provision of destroyers, on rotation, to serve on the gunline – delivering naval gunfire support for allied ground forces.

Navy destroyers provided mobile battery support for troop actions in Vietnam. Located between one to two miles off the coast, they accurately fire 5 inch shells at a rate of 40 rounds per minute on targets at ranges beyond 14 nautical miles inland. This bombardment would go 24 hours a day, with ships firing thousands of rounds. These ships were close enough ashore that during the war, twenty-nine gunline ships were hit by enemy shore artillery.

A question should be asked as to what happened to the remaining 15 percent? As kitchen chemistry demonstrates to anyone who cooks, an agent in the water when it is boiled migrates to the sides of a container. Boil an insoluble salt in a coffeepot, soon that insoluble salt coats the inside of the coffeepot. Through the distilling process, Agent Orange continued to percolate within the evaporators even after external exposure ceased because it coated the system. Every additional load of seawater taken into a Navy ship and then boiled added to the concentration of Agent Orange on the inside of the evaporators and condensers – continuing to contaminate potable water used on the ship.

Evaporators and condensers are not cleaned, unless the whole system is disassembled and re-installed. When undergoing Regular Overhaul (a three-year cycle on destroyers) new evaporators and condensers are installed.

During the third year I was aboard USS Niagara Falls, the evaporator distillation had to be overhauled during the ship’s cycle overhaul. Contaminant scale had built up requiring the system to be cleaned and parts to be replaced, finally removing any potential Agent Orange contaminate from the ship’s drinking water system. If exposed, I not only was subject to particulates in 1971 and 1972, but may have also been exposed by contaminated ship’s distilling systems until 1975, from sources earlier than 1971.

Unfortunately without the law being changed, the burden of proof is on me to convince the Veterans Administration that through my Vietnam service, I have been adversely affected by herbicides. There is an element of timing, and despite six days “feet on land” in Vietnam, there is no official documentation that I was there, although with luck I might get some confirmation from some classmates that I haven’t seen for thirty-eight years. My case is further complicated because of the nature of the statistical analysis used to determine a basis for presumption. And I am just one of hundreds of Reserve Officers Association and Reserve Enlisted Association members facing these challenges.

Health-wise I am told that I am not in a position to wait for the V.A. to process a delayed claim. With luck prior to required surgery, I will qualify for TRICARE as I am a retired Reservist who

will turn 60 in September. While I have military health care to fall back on, most Vietnam Veterans don't have access to that as an option.

Conclusion

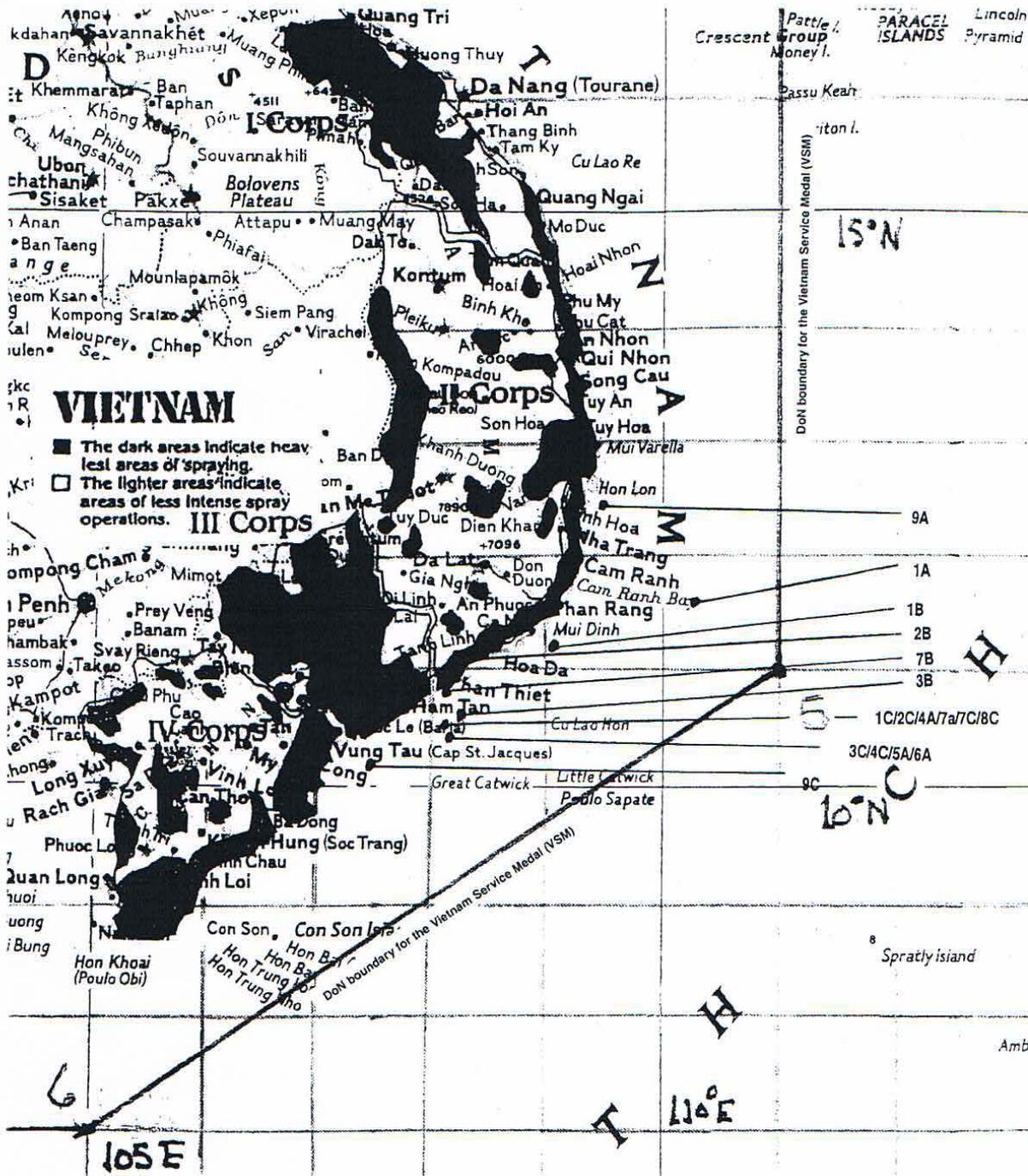
Thousands of Sailors served providing gunfire support aboard destroyers along the coast and on Yankee Station aircraft carriers providing air cover and bomb support over Vietnam. Navy veterans who were awarded the Vietnam Service Medal as a result of service in the waters offshore Vietnam (blue water vets) should be entitled to the same presumption of exposure to Agent Orange as veterans who set "foot on land" in Vietnam or did duty in brown water missions. As a result, many Navy veterans who served offshore and their survivors were granted disability or DIC benefits based on an Agent Orange-related disease.

Also overlooked are Air Force Airmen who were exposed to herbicides stored at staging airbases, and storage sites outside of Vietnam and in the airspace above. Many are suffering the same diseases as a result of exposure to the herbicide Agent Orange, and deserve Veteran health care, and disability benefits for their ailments, or care for survivors.

The Reserve Officer Association (ROA) and the Reserve Enlisted Association representing over 65 thousand members support expanding the presumptive coverage by the Department of Veterans Affairs.

But in addition ROA recognizes with Resolution 08-11 (see page sevenpa) that exposures to chemicals, toxins and heavy metals can occur in any war and that these can be spread more widely by airborne drift or water-borne runoff than calculated computer models. It remains vitally important in any theater of contingency operations that individuals are recognized for their service and remain eligible for health benefits regardless of manner of exposure whether on land, sea, or in the air. Medical treatment of serving members as well as veterans needs to take precedence over determining statistical correlations.

Figure One follows: Spray Patterns of Herbicides in Vietnam.



Indochina - Politically to Viet Nam, Laos, and Cambodia. Physical geographers extend the term to include Thailand, Burma, and the Malay Peninsula.

National Geographic Atlas of the World, Fourth Ed, ©1975
National Geographic Society, Washington

FIGURE ONE

**Preserving Veteran Status and Benefits for
Those Who Have Served in Theaters of Operations.
Resolution 08-11**

WHEREAS, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has proposed to amend its adjudication regulations regarding the definition of service in the Republic of Vietnam in regard to exposure to Agent Orange;

WHEREAS, the current definition of service in Vietnam includes service in the waters offshore and service in other locations if "conditions of service involved duty or visitation in the Republic of Vietnam"; and

WHEREAS, the VA wishes the definition "to include only service on land and on inland waterways" of the Republic of Vietnam; and

WHEREAS, thousands of Sailors served providing gunfire support aboard destroyers along the coast and on Yankee Station aircraft carriers providing air cover and bomb support over Vietnam; and

WHEREAS, thousands of Airmen stationed in Thailand, prepared aircraft and flew missions over Vietnam; and

WHEREAS, Marines and Soldiers fought in Laos and crossed into Cambodia; and

WHEREAS, distinguishing types of service in an theater of operations is a bad precedent, when "boots-on-the-ground" veterans are differentiated from all other Armed Forces participants, especially when this Nation is currently at war; and

WHEREAS, exposures to chemicals, toxins and heavy metals can be spread more widely by airborne drift or water-borne runoff than calculated patterns;

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, that the Reserve Officers Association of the United States, chartered by the Congress, urge the Congress, the Department of Defense and the Department of Veterans Affairs, to retain current definitions of service in any theater of operations ensuring that individuals are recognized for their service and remain eligible for health benefits regardless of manner of exposure whether on land, sea, or in the air.

Time Sensitive - submitted by ROA Headquarters Staff
Adopted by the ROA National Convention, June 28, 2008