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Documenting US Involvement in Chemical Warfare



Ed Mattson, Military Affairs Examiner - October 14, 2011

How complicit was the US government in the cover-up attempt with Agent Orange or is “all this” a figment of the imagination of a bunch of disgruntled veterans? It is hard for the public to wrap their arms around the Agent Orange issue. 88% of the total population are 64 years old or younger, and 26% are under the age of 18, meaning the vast majority of people were either not born or too young to know much about the issue.

In passing conversations with those who have never been affiliated with military service, there is little interest in even learning more about Agent Orange. After a few minutes into a conversation it is easy to tell that people tune-out rather quickly. When we talk about the “government cover-up”; the “government being in collaboration with the big chemical companies to hide from any wrong doing” regarding Agent Orange; and how our elected officials apparently sided with “Big Chemical” because of the large campaign contributions made to “make the issue go away”, you can almost read the mind of the listener that they think you have a loose screw or that you are a couple of French fries short of a Happy Meal.

Our nation has grown complacent at simply “accepting things the way they are”. One-half the country doesn’t even vote, and it hasn’t been, except for the last couple of years, that anyone is paying attention to what the hell is going on. Losing your job, paying \$5 for 10 lbs of potatoes, handing over \$4/gallon for gasoline; having the government tell you can’t build something on your own land for whatever purpose you want because you might disturb some “three-legged brain-damaged rat” that has become an endangered species; or that you find your home on the auction block because inflation just doesn’t leave enough money left at the end of the month to meet the mortgage...then and only then do you take a look around at what’s happening all around you.

Those in Congress depend upon the dumbing-down of the public so they can continue enriching themselves at the public trough. We have made it too easy for elected official to worm their way into office and stay there, with all their power and benefits, until they decide to retire.

Every veteran and active-duty service member, all 25 million of us, have a stake in the game. Not only have we become prime targets in “balancing the budget” by the same government that has sent many off to wars, we allow them to treat us like cattle to be lead around by a rope attached to a big ring in our noses. We took an oath to defend our country from all foes, both foreign and domestic, and right now it looks as “the inside the Beltway Crowd” has managed to work its way into the “Enemy Column” for many veterans. These are harsh words, but the way they government has handled the Agent Orange issue is downright criminal, and the way they have run from their obligation to correct the injustice that has been fostered on not only the veteran but also millions of innocent men, women, and children, is shameful.

Some interesting facts to remember:

1. The government said they were unaware of all the hazards that defoliants can cause.
2. That the chemical companies assured them chemicals like Agent Orange were safe to use.
3. That products like DIOXIN would quickly dissipate into the environment with no lasting effect.
4. That the benefit of depriving the enemy of jungle coverage and food supplies from using defoliants would shorten the war in Vietnam and make a big difference.
5. That the “U.S. Government tried to claim, for many years, the use of Agent Orange in Vietnam was not responsible for the wide variety of health issues suffered by veterans who served there”.
6. All along they knew the real truth as to the toxicity of the Dioxin component and played CYA (maybe that should read “grab-ass” with the Chemical Companies)

The Congressional Record which I eluded to in Wednesday’s article shows that Congress and therefore the Department of Defense, was well aware that our troops and civilian populations were in grave danger by our country’s use of the Rainbow of Herbicides. Below are some notable quotes:

A. In a Senate discussion regarding Chemical and Biological Weapons (CBW), Senator McIntire refers to words of a bill by Senator Stennis that “eliminate back door financing of programs relating to CBW programs”. Now remember, this is in 1969, 9 years after the use of Agent Orange and other herbicides started being used. The wording was “Except as provided in subsection (g) (2) of this section, no funds authorized to be appropriated by this, or any other later enacted Act may be expended for research, development, test, evaluation, or procurement of any chemical weapon, including any such weapon used for incapacitation, defoliation, or other military operations.” (Page S-9520, dated August 11, 1969-Congressional Record)

B. The Record goes on to say, “makes it clear our opposition to the use of lethal CBW agent as offensive weapons and prohibits expenditure of funds for any device to deliver these agents...and we express concern of many about the deployment or storage of lethal agents and microorganisms outside the United States...about recent accounts of unfortunate incidents involving such deployment or storage have prompted new congressional interest in what we may be doing in this area of CBW activity”.

C. Regarding shipments by rail of lethal agents, many had fear of inherent dangers and that, notice must be given Congress and local civilian agencies of any such shipments”, The section goes on to say, “detoxification of lethal agents before they are shipped off for disposal”, which was never followed and therefore a clear violation of the Act.

D. Senator Pell made an interesting statement, “I am sure we have all been concerned about incidents of the past several years where outdoor testing of lethal agents and micro-organisms have jeopardize both animal and human life” (referring to the accidental death of a herd of 6000 sheep in Dugway, Utah and the severe illness of two dozen CBW workers in Okinawa)

E. Senator Goodell admitted, “I want to clarify the point and that it is a crucial point that we are requiring this procedure of lethal chemical agents that are tested and all disease-producing

biological microorganisms, or biological toxins". He went on to conclude, "the anti-CBW amendment we are presenting here today represents an important break with secrecy over chemical and biological weapons. It is a modest measure to check the vast destruction potential of our CBW arsenal".

F. The Congressional Record is very detailed on the subject of CBW's, "We must be guided by the principle that the security of this nation begins with the health and safety of our own people"

G. The Congressional Record also entered a table of Chemical and Biological Weapons but can be summarized as follows:

a. Nerve gases

b. Incapacitating agents

c. Riot control gases

d. Harassing agents

e. Biological agents

f. Defoliants and herbicides: "2,4-D: A weed-killing compound known as dichlorophen-oxyacetic acid that has relatively low level of toxicity to man, IF PROPERLY DISPERSED. Heavier concentrations can cause eye irritation and stomach upsets, however. Dangerous to inhale. Usually used in Vietnam along with 2,4,5-T (trichlorophenoxyametic acid), which has similar-although somewhat more toxic-properties. Effective against heavy jungle. Cacodylic Acid is an arsenic-based compound used against rice plants and tall grass. Strong plant killer that gives quick results. One serious restriction on its use is the possibility that heavy concentrations will cause arsenical poisoning in humans. Widely used in Vietnam. It is composed of 54.29 percent arsenic.

Supporters of the US's Agent Orange Campaign prefer to call it an "herbicide program" rather than chemical warfare. But these official documents reveal that the US Senate knew its real name...Chemical and Biological Warfare Agents.

With this much information available to a bunch of Senators in August of 1969, can there be any validity in any government agency, particularly the defense department, in claiming not to know the dangers of Agent Orange? Or that it was classified as a Chemical and Biological Warfare Agent?

That facts are clear, but even the real toxicity dangers of DIOXIN (the key ingredient in Agent Orange) were not totally revealed to Congress, nor was the haphazard training employed for precise dilution ratios, handling, transportation, storage, and disposal, made known. So in essence, the cover-up started long before the fallout began.

In closing it is apparent we must get Congress to open a complete investigation into the Agent Orange debacle and the affect it has had on our veterans, our civilian populations, and the citizens of some many other countries around the globe REGARDLESS of the cost. Monday I'll clue you in:

The world hasn't learned a thing from Agent Orange...it is still being used in to control foliage in the Brazilian Rain Forests and we hear they are looking using it in an application in New Jersey. It's all part of Dow and Monsanto's bottomline profits. We must act now!

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