

Agent Orange The Second Battle



To: Rep. Bob Bezotte

Subject: Testimonial that will support the amendment of 1967 Pa,150 “Michigan Military Act,” by amending section 182 (MCL 32. 582) which will include “Michigan Vietnam Veteran Recognition Certificate”.

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Contacts: Bob Bezotte,47th District, HB4065 Veterans Committee

Conclusion:

HB 4065 (Former 5601) would recognize Michigan Vietnam Veterans who struggled with the long-term effects known as Agent Orange. This certificate may or may not provide complete closure to those who lost loved ones from this military action. It provides an option from The State of Michigan that Vietnam Veterans are recognized for their bravery with their second battle dealing with the effects of this defoliant long after the war has ended.

Background:

President John F. Kennedy gave final approval to “Operation Ranch Hand” — a massive effort to defoliate the forests of Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos with an herbicide known as Agent Orange. It involved the spraying of an estimated 20 million gallons of powerful herbicides over rural South Vietnam to deprive Viet Cong insurgents aligned with the communist government in Hanoi of food and vegetation trail cover. To a lesser extent, areas of Cambodia and Laos were also sprayed. The U.S. Air Force flew nearly 20,000 spraying sorties from 1961 to 1971.

During the decade of spraying, more than 5 million acres of forest and 500,000 acres of crops were heavily damaged or destroyed. Some one-fifth of South Vietnam’s forests were sprayed at least once — at up to 50 times the concentration that would be deployed for normal agricultural use. Approximately 20 million gallons were sprayed on the Vietnam countryside for the purpose of helping U.S. forces by defoliating forest areas that concealed the enemy and destroying the crops that provided their food. It has been estimated that as many as 2.6 million U.S. service members were exposed to the chemical, (Ref. Photo Taken By the writer 1970).



The U.S. Dept. of Defense initially denied that exposure to these herbicides was responsible for the health problems veterans began suffering during the ensuing years, but in 1991 the Agent Orange Act was approved by Congress that sought to “analyze and summarize the scientific evidence regarding presumptive military service exposure to the defoliants, dioxins, and herbicides, better known as Agent Orange, during the Vietnam War era.” This recognition that there was a connection has resulted in the Dept. of Veterans Affairs (VA) recognizing certain cancers and illnesses as being related to Agent Orange. While this acknowledgement was a major step forward in fair treatment for the veterans regarding their health problems, it did nothing to honor this different kind of sacrifice.

As of April 1, to qualify for Agent Orange -related benefits, a veteran must have one or more of the 14 conditions:

- Chronic B-Cell Leukemia
- Hodgkin’s Disease
- Multiple Myeloma
- Non-Hodgkin’s Lymphoma
- Prostate Cancer
- Respiratory Cancer
- Soft Tissue Sarcomas
- AL Amyloidosis
- Chloracne
- Diabetes Mellitus Type 2
- Ischemic Heart Disease
- Parkinson’s Disease
- Early onset Peripheral Neuropathy
- Porphyria Cutanea Tarda

In addition, 35 senators introduced a bill that would add new conditions to the Agent Orange to the list:

Bladder Cancer
Hypothyroidism
Parkinson-like Symptoms Parkinsonism
Hypertension

Testimonials:

Interview: Martha Williams- Widow
Husband: Brent Williams (Duffy)
United States Army – 1967 -1970
Served in Vietnam – 1969-1970

Duffy had a wonderful marriage with Martha for 47 years. Fifteen years after he came home from Vietnam unwanted medical issues crept into the family as he was diagnosed with Type 2 Diabetes. Duffy underwent 12 yrs. of shots. The shots had to be discontinued because his immune system started to fail. Martha further explained that in 1983 Duffy had to have surgery for a pacemaker.

Duffy was forced to retire from his East Lansing job at the age of 50. He was denied Social Security three times and finally received VA Benefits after four years with the help of Bill Taylor from Detroit. At this time Duffy's medical conditions included B-Cell Leukemia and Arthritis. He past away at the age of 71.

Interview: Susan Frazier – Widow
Husband: John Frazier
United States Marine Corp – 1966 -1971
Served in Vietnam During the Vietnamese Tet Offensive 1968

John served in what was known as ICORP located in northern Vietnam and south of the DMZ, (Demilitarized Zone). John served as a supply Sargent and he would tell his wife Sue how they would spray the defoliant in his area with low flying planes. It was commonplace to spray the area when they were eating chow. This provided double exposure with both outside skin absorption and ingestion through the food.

Susan had told the writer they had to use their own insurance for more than 1.5 years until disability was approved by Social Security. However, Susan further commented that Sen. Debbie Stabenow was contacted to help with the VA Claim for approval. John passed away at the age of 55 in 2002

Interview: David J. Mester
United States Marine Corp 1969-1970
Served in Vietnam – 1970-1971

I served north of Da Nang in the ICORP area south of the DMZ, (Demilitarized Zone). This writer was assigned to the engineering company which allowed us to move into the jungles and build stations for the Marines. As a result of these military actions, I was exposed to Agent Orange and have been diagnosed with Leiomyosarcoma of the left shoulder with multiple surgeries in 2007. Subsequently, I was diagnosed with Prostate Cancer that resulted in a Robotic Assisted Lap Radical Prostatectomy in 2018. My treatment continues to be ongoing at the Ann Arbor, Michigan VAMC. Please Reference Attachment

Interview: David Roddy

RE: Robert Vandenberg – Brother-In-Law
United States Air Force

Robert Vandenberg was a Master sergeant who served 23 ½ years in the United States Air Force. For approximately 5 years (1965-1971) he was he was stationed in Bangkok, Thailand as a C130 aircraft, crew chief. The crew would off load 55-gallon drums of Agent orange for transport in and around Vietnam during that time period. Robert told David that they did not wear any protective gear and that the defoliant would often spill onto their clothes and hands and they would simply rinse off with water, which was not always readily available. The C-130 would fly to Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos to drop their defoliant payload. At the end of the day, they would have to wash down the interior of the craft because of leakage.

Robert Vandenberg had a combined VA disability rating of 200% twice the maximum compensable. He was diagnosed with at least 9 Agent orange related, presumptive diseases and secondary conditions: non-Hodgkin's lymphoma, Diabetes, Neuropathy, Prostate Cancer Ischemic Heart Disease, Peripheral Vascular Diseases and ED.

Sergeant Vandenberg spent the last several years in a Veterans rehabilitation home. He passed away on Aug 6, 2020 at the age of 76 from a heart attack.

Interview: David Roddy

U.S. Army Infantry Sgt. 1969-1971

Served in Vietnam 1969-1970

David Roddy served in the Vietnam War in and around Pleiku, Vietnam from June 1969-1971 His unit, the 4th Infantry 2/8th Mechanized Infantry's area of operation took them into many areas that were sprayed with the chemical Agent Orange. On a least one occasion Sgt. Roddy recalls entering an area of the jungle that had, shortly before, been sprayed and was still damp with the agent. He and many others were in direct contact with the agent and had no idea of what it was at the time or of its potential danger.

Dave has been diagnosed with a number of presumptive diseases and secondary related conditions, with others still pending Diabetes, Neuropathy, Degenerative Disc with pending claims for Hypertension, GERDS, Sleep Apnea, Pre-Cancerous Prostate condition. He also suffers from a level of PTSD, and a service-connected Back Injury unrelated to Agent Orange.