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Agent Orange on Guam:
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AGENT ORANGE



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Retracing Agent Orange

After serving the nation, Guam veterans have found themselves in another battlefield where the truth is at stake, and the burden of proof imposed on them

By Mar-Vic Cagurangan

"Guam is America's Chernobyl. At least Russia is taking care of their people who exposed themselves to radiation in Chernobyl. Japan is doing the same thing." — Brian Moyer, Agent Orange survivor

Guam veteran Brian Moyer, right, assists Superfund team from US EPA and Guam EPA in identifying Agent Orange-sprayed sites. Photo courtesy of Sen. Therese Terlaje's Office.

More than four decades since his deployment to Guam, Brian Moyer returned to the island and took a walk down memory lane. "Things have changed dramatically at Polaris Point," Moyer said, baring his sorrow and frustration. But he was dead set on finding residual of the past.

It was more than a sentimental journey. Moyer's visit to the island during the first week of October was part of a mission to seek justice for Guam veterans, including himself, who are fighting a seemingly endless battle to prove that Agent Orange was sprayed on Guam, a claim that the Department of Defense continues to dismiss as a myth.

Very few Guam veterans were successful with their medical benefit claims as the Department of Veterans Affairs has pretty much taken its cue from DOD. Most have

been denied claims of medical treatments of diseases presumed caused by their exposure to Agent Orange.

"We, Guam veterans, are tired of being treated as second class veterans and the people of Guam are tired of being treated as second class citizens," Moyer said in an interview with the *Pacific Island Times* after the completion of fact-finding trips to areas where the toxic herbicide was believed to have been sprayed between 1960s and 1970s.

Moyer, who co-founded the Agent Orange

Survivors of Guam with the late Msgr. Leroy Foster, assisted the Guam Environmental Protection Agency and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Superfund Technical Assessment and Response Team that performed soil sampling at several locations off-base. His travel expenses were covered by private funds raised by the Military Veterans Advocacy, Agent Orange Survivors of Guam and the Blue Water Navy Association.

"We have a responsibility to right a

wrong," said the 64-year-old Moyer, a resident of Mt. Dora in Florida. He is taking the lead in advocating for Guam veterans following Foster's death last year. "We go around the world telling other countries what they should do and how they should conduct themselves but at the same time you're leaving American citizens in the dark."

The soil-sampling in October was a follow-up to the initial tests conducted by the Superfund team in November 2018 at the NCS areas along Route 3, Potts Junction, Nimitz Hill and a pipe line tie-in located in Tiyan. Preliminary results from the 2018 soil sampling indicated the presence of 2,4-D and 2,4,5-T, the primary constituents of Agent Orange, at non-toxic levels in one sample location.

The follow-up sampling took place at Polaris Point off Route 1, Nimitz Hill, Yigo and Tiyan. Equipped with old maps, Moyer assisted the team in identifying sites that the researchers may have skipped during the initial soil sampling.

"We went out to various locations around the island including the Navy Base. We went to Camp Covington and Ship Repair Facility," Moyer said. "We went around Polaris Point. It has completely changed but there are areas that I could identify where herbicide spraying took place."

On Cross Island Road in Santa Rita, the team stumbled upon remnants of an old fuel pipeline. "They were still there. I do not think Guam EPA knew about it. We went back to the old maps of 1975 and this is where we were at, up on the hills," Moyer said. "We broke through the jungles. I can actually pinpoint the exact spot on the map where we came through."

At Sasa Valley fuel farm, the fact-finding team found portions of two old pipelines. "We didn't go into the Navy property. We didn't want to get arrested and get ourselves in bad light. Last thing we wanted to do was come all this way and be discredited in the eyes of the world."

The next stop was Yigo. Samples were taken at Upi Elementary School, which is located next to Andersen Air Force Base housing area. Upi Elementary School was first built in 1958 as Andersen Elementary. The name was changed to Upi in 1990, and the school was rebuilt in 1998.



Brian Moyer

"This is the only school on the fence line. I was looking at the map and this was the school where Leroy said they sprayed herbicide," Moyer said. "He said there were little school children in the playground. He said to me: 'I don't know how many children I may have harmed or killed as a result of over-spraying.' He was very emotional about it."

The research team, however, had no success in its attempt to collect samples from AAFB. "The commanding general of Andersen Air Force Base refused us access on base. I trained at the firefighting school up there. According to the ATSDR report, they are showing a dioxin level of up to 19,000 ppm there."

Unlike the November 2018 tests, the follow up samples will be tested for dioxins. Preliminary analysis is expected to be completed by the end of the year.

"Guam is America's Chernobyl. At least Russia is taking care of their people who are exposed themselves to radiation in Chernobyl. Japan is doing the same thing," Moyer said.

Agent Orange was one of the defoliants – known as "rainbow herbicides" – used by the U.S. military as part of its herbicidal warfare program during the Vietnam War from 1961 to 1971. They were used to destroy bushes, trees and vegetation to deprive insurgents of cover and food crops as part of a starvation campaign.

Veterans who were on Guam during the Vietnam War era reported being afflicted with diseases that are now on the VA's Agent Orange list including ischemic heart disease, lung and trachea cancers,

prostate cancer, multiple myeloma, Hodgkin's disease, non-Hodgkin's lymphoma, Parkinson's Disease, type 2 diabetes, peripheral neuropathy, AL amyloidosis, chronic B-cell leukemia, chloracne, early-onset peripheral neuropathy, porphyria cutanea tarda and soft tissue sarcomas.

Moyer has been diagnosed with peripheral neuropathy, a condition that occurs when nerves that carry messages to and from the brain and spinal cord from and to the rest of the body are damaged or diseased. "A VA neurologist who ran the tests on me told me my condition was caused by exposure to toxic chemicals," Moyer said.

A native of Detroit, Moyer was on Guam from Feb. 15, 1974 to Feb. 13, 1976 as a member of USMC's Marine Detachment USS Proteus AS19. "I was here also for Operation New Life when Vietnamese refugees came in," he said.

Moyer's late father, Charles Moyer, was on Guam with the USN Gunners Mate on a Destroyer during WWII. His uncle Bob Henkel was also machine gunner, who fought on Saipan. "I didn't even know my father was here," Moyer said. "He had no problem talking about Atlantic but he never spoke about the Pacific Theater and when he did, it was very quick."

Moyer was on Guam during the same time Foster and Lonnie Kilpatrick—a Navy veteran who died of AO-related disease last year—were deployed on island. "I witnessed herbicide spraying take place. I did not know what it was but I witnessed it take place in many occasions at Polaris Point," Moyer recalled.

In December 2015, a study published in the *Hawaii Journal of Medicine and Public Health* found that infants born to mothers who lived in Agent Orange-sprayed areas were at an increased risk of infant mortality due to congenital anomalies.

It was the first study that examined the link between herbicides and infant mortality on Guam. It covered medical data between 1970 and 1989, which indicated large inter-village disparities in infant mortality. "Because of AO's potentially long

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half-life, environmental studies are also required to determine if AO has persisted in the Guamanian soil, and if present, studies of the current population on Guam area needed to determine if AO continues to be a public health threat,” states the study authored by Jonathan K. Noel, Sara Namazi and Robert Haddock.

While defense officials have consistently denied that the U.S. military used Agent Orange outside of Vietnam, veterans who were stationed on Guam have testified at several forums that they sprayed the herbicide in military facilities and defense properties on Guam including tank farms, a cross-island pipe line, pump houses, hydrant pits and filtering systems at AAFB. Their claims, however, have repeatedly been quashed by the government’s counterclaims. In a report released in November 2018, the Guam

Accountability Office said at least one ship carrying Agent Orange stopped at Apra Harbor on its way to Vietnam but no record exists showing that any cargo actually landed.

“Available shipment documentation indicates that nearly all of the Agent Orange procured was either used in U.S. military operations in Southeast Asia, used for testing, damaged, or destroyed,” GAO said.

GAO has analyzed available logbooks for 152 of the 158 shipments of Agent Orange to Southeast Asia but it was unable to establish a clear picture because shipment records were either missing or incomplete as “they were likely not maintained during and after the Vietnam era.”

GAO found available records indicating that DOD procured approximately 13.9 million gallons of Agent Orange between 1963 and 1968, of which it used an estimated 12.1 million gallons in Southeast

Asia from 1965 to 1970, used a small amount for testing; and incinerated another 2.3 million gallons in 1977.

“However, some records are incomplete, such as shipment documentation and logbooks that identify ports where vessels stopped on the way to Southeast Asia.”

During a 2003 inquiry conducted by former Congressman Lane Evans, then a member of the House Committee on Veterans Affairs, the Department of Defense confirmed about 5,000 drums of herbicide Agent Purple were transported to Guam and stored in an undisclosed area in 1952 in anticipation of use on the Korean peninsula but claimed they were never used and were returned to the United States. “The department has no record of the use, storage or testing of herbicides Orange, Blue or White on Guam,” Phillips W. Grone, then-deputy undersecretary of the Department of Defense, said in a Sept.

23, 2003 letter to Evans.

The Agent Orange Survivors of Guam’s Facebook account, which documents the veterans’ struggles — and little triumphs, if any— also serves as an obituary page. On Sept. 24, Doyle Wayne Free passed away. “My dad welded pipeline for the Air Force in the jungles of Guam and had just lost his three-year battle against non-hodgkins lymphoma (with central nervous system involvement),” his daughter April Steelman wrote on Facebook. “He was determined to beat it for his family and fought until the last breath. He said he remembered laying in the wet just-sprayed foliage so he could get his job done.”

After serving the nation, Guam veterans have found themselves in another battlefield where the truth is at stake, and the burden of proof imposed on them.

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“For us veterans, a class action is not good because all you’re doing is pouring money. Even attorneys will tell you class action is a money loser for everybody other than the attorneys who will be making the money. Once you start class action you got to put money into this thing, to keep funding it,” Moyer said.

He noted that the last dioxin-related class action against Dow Chemical took 26 to finally get through the courts. “I’m 64 now. Let’s say 64 plus 26 years, that makes me 90 years old. I’m not going to live that long. If you are exposed to herbicides, that takes 13 years off your life.”

Rather than taking the class action route, Guam veterans prefer to hold the government accountable. Besides, Moyer said, “Dow Chemical has very limited money coming in; the U.S. government has more money.”



Currently pending in the U.S. Congress is HR1713. Filed in March this year, the bill would grant “presumptive herbicide exposure status” to U.S. service members who served on Guam and American Samoa between 1962 and 1980.

Authored by Guam Delegate Michael San Nicolas and Florida Rep. Gus Bilirakis, HR 1713 is called “The Lonnie Kilpatrick Central Pacific Relief Act,” in honor of a Navy veteran stationed on Guam who died of cancer.

Kilpatrick died in May last year, barely weeks after winning his long

battle against the Department of Veterans Affairs’ denial of his Agent Orange claims. In April 2018, the department eventually reversed its previous order and awarded his benefits, retroactive to 2010. In his death bed, “Make it count” were his last words that have become the slogan for the Agent Orange justice movement.

HR 1713 has been referred to the House Committee on Veterans’ Affairs, has 68 cosponsors. At the Guam Legislature, Sen. Therese M. Terlaje and introduced a resolution in support of The Lonnie Kilpatrick Central Pacific Herbicide Relief Act, which she said would “correct injustice, clarify the eligibility of affected veterans, and expedite the processing of veteran claims of health conditions caused by Agent Orange exposure.”

In February 2017, Rep. Dennis A. Ross, (R-Florida.) filed H.R. 809 -- The FOSTER (Fighting

for Orange-Stricken Territories in Eastern Regions) Act— which would allow eligible veterans who served in Guam, the Northern Marianas and American Samoa during the Vietnam War to receive expedited consideration for Department of Veterans Affairs benefits if they suffer from diseases the U.S. government has linked to the herbicide Agent Orange.

The bill was named after Msgt. Leroy Foster, who served at Andersen Air Force Base, where he said he sprayed tens of thousands of gallons of Agent Orange in and around the base and along the fuel lines that run through the island. He suffered five different cancers and 28 autoimmune diseases.

The FOSTER bill did not move in the U.S. Congress. “How come we, American citizens, are being left behind?” Moyer asked. “Is America really not great anymore? That is the question.”

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