

U.S. Veteran Exposes Pentagon's Denials of Agent Orange Use on Okinawa 元米兵、沖縄での枯れ葉剤オレンジ使用にかんするペンタゴンの否定を明るみに

Jon Mitchell

U.S. Veteran Exposes Pentagon's Denials of Agent Orange Use on Okinawa Japanese translation available

JON MITCHELL

Thousands of barrels of Agent Orange were unloaded on Okinawa Island and stored at the port of Naha, and at the U.S. military's Kadena and Camp Schwab bases between 1965 and 1966, an American veteran who served in Okinawa claims.



Larry Carlson at his home in Florida, April 12, 2012

In a Jacksonville Florida interview in early April with The Japan Times and Ryukyu Asahi Broadcasting Co., a TV network based in Okinawa, former infantryman Larry Carlson, 67, also said that Okinawan stevedores were

exposed to the highly toxic herbicide as they labored in the holds of ships, and that he witnessed it being sprayed at Kadena Air Base.

Carlson is one of only three American servicemen who have won benefits from the U.S. government over exposure to the toxic defoliant on Okinawa — and the first of them to step forward and reveal that massive amounts of it were kept on the island.

His claims, which are corroborated by five fellow soldiers and a 1966 U.S. government document, directly challenge the Pentagon's consistent denials that Agent Orange was ever stored on Okinawa.

"The U.S. Department of Defense has searched and found no record that the aircraft or ships transporting (Agent) Orange to South Vietnam stopped at Okinawa on their way," Maj. Neal Fisher, deputy director of public affairs for U.S. forces in Japan, recently informed the author.

But the VA's decision to grant Carlson benefits over his exposure to the herbicide appears to fly in the face of this - and similar U.S. government denials - while also offering the closest that the authorities have yet come to admitting to the presence of Agent Orange on Okinawa.

"I am the tip of the iceberg. There are many others like me who were poisoned, but the VA (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs) is denying their claims," Carlson said during the interview at his Florida home. "I urge those men to dig in and plant their feet."

During his time in the U.S. Army, Carlson was assigned to the 44th Transportation Company at the U.S. military port in Naha between December 1965 and April 1967, a period of major escalation of U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War and of the spraying of Agent Orange in Vietnam and Laos.

"Transport ships came in (from the United States) and we would move drums of Agent Orange. We worked 12 hours around the clock until we'd unloaded the ship," he said.



USS Comet - one of the ships used to transport Agent Orange to Okinawa

"A lot of the time, when they dropped the barrels in our truck they would leak. I got soaked at least three times and we couldn't do anything because we were driving (the barrels to storage sites) and couldn't shower until we got back to our barracks."

The SS Transglobe (highly decorated during the Vietnam War for having come under enemy fire more than any other civilian ship), the USS Comet and ships from the Sea Lines were most frequently used to transport Agent Orange to Okinawa, according to Carlson.



SS Transglobe - decorated Vietnam War transport vessel

Deliveries arrived every two months on average, and 1966 was the busiest time in terms of shipments, he said.

"It was hot and heavy then. They wanted us everywhere, and we were hauling everything — including Agent Orange," Carlson said.

After the barrels were unloaded, they were temporarily stored on Okinawa and then shipped to South Vietnam, where the U.S. military sprayed huge amounts of Agent Orange over jungles and crops during "Operation Ranch Hand" - an herbicidal warfare campaign against the Viet Cong.

The Vietnam Red Cross estimates that about 3 million Vietnamese are still suffering from their exposure to the dioxins contained in the herbicide, almost 40 years after the war ended. Adults who came into contact with Agent Orange developed a range of sicknesses including cancers, skin diseases and diabetes. Since dioxins are also fetotoxic, the children of those exposed were affected - they died in the womb or were stillborn; many others were born with crippling birth defects - both mental and physical. In Vietnam, an estimated 150,000 children are suffering from the impact of US herbicides.

Carlson's claims will fuel existing concerns in Okinawa that Naha's port, Kadena Air Base and the U.S. Marines' Camp Schwab are still contaminated with Agent Orange dioxins, which have remained in the soil for decades. In a November 2011 press conference, people residing near Camp Schwab in the late 1960s explained that their neighbors had fallen ill after eating shellfish gathered near the installation. Others worried that the early deaths of former base workers may have resulted from their spraying of Agent Orange.

		<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No (If "Yes," answer items 18a and 18c also)	
18a. Did you have a separation or retirement physical examination?		18b. When was the exam?	18c. Where did the exam occur?
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CTION Tell us how your disability is listed on Page 1 are related to your military service		11. Explanation CONSTANT PAIN IN KIDNEYS, PROSTATE AND BOWEL. HEART PROBLEMS - HAVE IN MY HEART SEVERE HYPERTENSION ALL OF THESE PROBLEMS I FEEL IS A DIRECT RESULT OF EXPOSURE TO AGENT ORANGE. I WAS WITH THE 44TH TRANSPORTATION COMP. ON OKINAWA, JAPAN, WHERE WE TRANSPORTED 55 GALLON DRUMS OF THE AGENT TO STORAGE FACILITIES. SEE ATTACHED MILITARY PAPERS	
Your Name <i>Larry A. Carlson</i>		Your Social Security Number <i>000-58-1000</i>	

21-526, Feb 88 page 2

Barrels of pain: A form that Larry Carlson sent to the Department of Veterans Affairs lists the health problems attributed to his exposure to Agent Orange in the 1960s. COURTESY OF LARRY CARLSON



Naha Port was the main entry point for Agent Orange on Okinawa

In southern Vietnam, the ground where former U.S. military installations once stored the herbicide remains highly toxic to this day. Scientists have identified almost 30 potential dioxin hotspots - including Da Nang Air base where dioxin levels up to 30,000 times normal levels have been found. To date, the Japanese government has blocked requests for dioxin tests on Okinawa's bases, claiming that it found the testimonies of US veterans' implausible.

Given Carlson's allegation that local stevedores helped unload leaking barrels of the toxic defoliant, Okinawan residents are likely to be alarmed about their own risk of exposure. In the mid-1960s, roughly 50,000 Okinawa residents were employed at U.S. military bases.

Carlson also recalls witnessing the chemical being sprayed as a weed-killer at Kadena air base.

"Sometimes, the supply chain would request 10 drums (of Agent Orange), so the trucks would go up there (to the base) and unload whatever they had asked for. There were workers

spraying the chain link fence so that it looked neat," he said. The usage of Agent Orange in this manner was widespread in South Vietnam, Guam and Thailand due to these locations' quick-growing vegetation.

Carlson first suspected that he had been sickened by his exposure to the dioxin-laden defoliant in 2005.

"I hit the brick wall. My kidneys weren't functioning. They diagnosed me with Parkinson's Disease. Then lung cancer. . . . They removed half of my left lung and parts of my right," he said.

Carlson also worries that his own exposure may have affected the health of his children, who could have inherited genetic defects. His daughters suffer from thalassemia — a rare, inherited blood disorder — and two of them gave birth to stillborn babies.

Carlson first applied for redress in 2006. In his claim he wrote, "Constant pain in kidneys, prostate and bowel. Heart problems - hole in my heart. Severe hypertension. All of these problems I feel is a direct result of exposure to Agent Orange. I was with the 44th Transportation Comp. on Okinawa, Japan, where we transported 55 gallon drums of the agent to storage facilities."



Carlson displays the scars from his lung

cancer surgery.

The VA dismissed his claims. While Vietnam War veterans are automatically eligible to receive benefits for 14 dioxin-related illnesses, the Pentagon's denials over Agent Orange's presence on Okinawa scuppered Carlson's initial application.

But he persisted in his battle over compensation and collected five statements from fellow service members who had worked alongside him at Naha's port. All of their accounts corroborated Carlson's claim that large quantities of the herbicide were transported through the docks. One of these men has since died from ischemic heart disease while another is suffering from prostate cancer - both diseases are listed by the U.S. government as related to dioxin-exposure.

Carlson also tracked down a 1966 U.S. Air Force document that described an 18-day trip by civil engineering representatives to the Philippines, Taiwan and Okinawa to teach naval and air force service members how to safely handle herbicides. According to the report, one of the purposes of the trip was to "review base programs and assist individual bases with establishment of safer and more effective programs" related to the usage of these chemicals. The report also stated that "Literature on various products was distributed at the conference and all bases visited. This action is designed to keep sections informed on some of the newer chemicals now available for pest and weed control." Given that Agent Orange was first formulated on a large scale in 1966, many veterans suspect that it is among the "newer chemicals" mentioned.

Infantrymen like Carlson, however, received no such training and handled Agent Orange without any protective equipment.



Proud to serve - Carlson in uniform from his time in service. COURTESY OF LARRY CARLSON

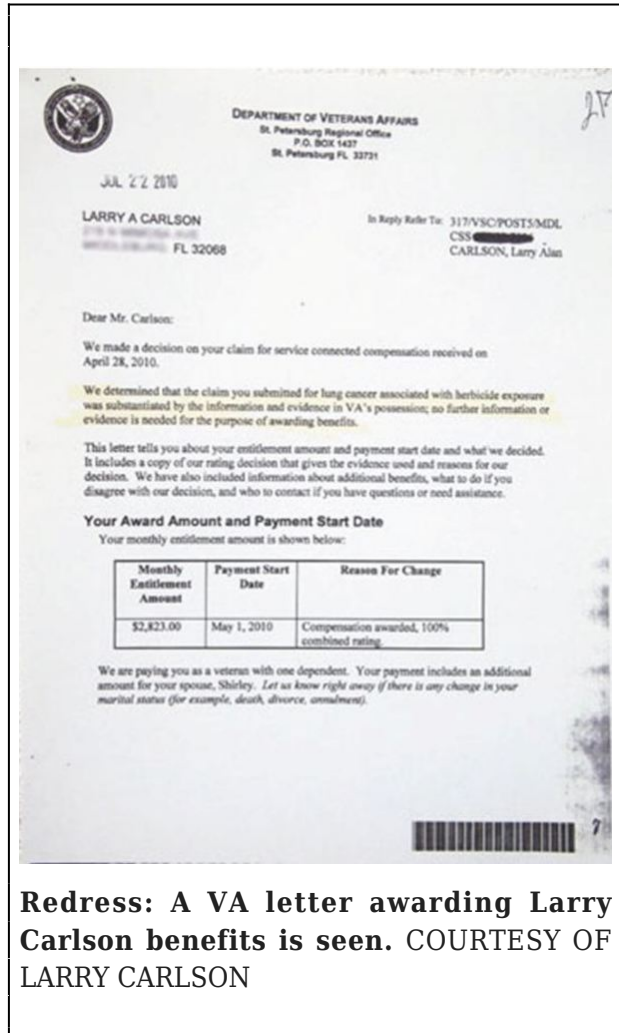
"A simple training session would have saved some of the guys from being contaminated," Carlson said.

The documentation tipped the scales in Carlson's favor. In July 2010, the VA's regional office in St. Petersburg, Florida, awarded him its maximum disability compensation due to his exposure to Agent Orange on Okinawa.

"We determined that the claim you submitted for lung cancer . . . was substantiated by the information and evidence in VA's possession," a letter he received from the office says.

Carlson currently receives \$2,800 a month to cover his medical expenses, which include a daily dose of more than 20 pills to keep the effects of dioxin-poisoning under control.

"When I received the letter, I felt blessed. I felt that an unseen hand had touched the heart of the person who awarded that claim. I am really thankful for the VA," he said.



Redress: A VA letter awarding Larry Carlson benefits is seen. COURTESY OF LARRY CARLSON

During the past year, more than 30 U.S. veterans have talked with me about sicknesses they attribute to exposure to Agent Orange during deployments covering 15 military installations on Okinawa between 1961 and 1975.

U.S. government records show a further 130 veterans have lodged compensation claims similar to Carlson's, and experts say the number of those exposed could be in the thousands.

The VA has only approved redress in two other

cases.

One involved a former marine who developed prostate cancer from his exposure to herbicides on Okinawa from 1961 to 1962, and who was awarded benefits in 1998.

The other concerned a claim from another marine, who also served on Okinawa, for Hodgkin's lymphoma and diabetes mellitus type 2 attributed to handling contaminated equipment shipped from the Vietnam War to Okinawa in the early 1970s.

Taken together, these three successful claims paint a worrying picture of not only the long term presence of these poisons on Okinawa - but also the vast geographic extent of their usage from the Yanbaru jungles (where the 1998 veteran was exposed) through Camp Schwab to Naha Port in the south of the island.

Paul Sutton, a former chairman of the Agent Orange/Dioxin Committee run by the Vietnam Veterans of America, a nonprofit organization, expressed doubt that the Pentagon will relent and fully compensate all the other veterans exposed to the herbicide on Okinawa.

"The U.S. government will fight tooth and nail against granting compensation to veterans who served on Okinawa," said Sutton.

"To do so would be an admission that it violated treaties not to store herbicides within other countries' political boundaries. Washington is also betting that not enough veterans will come forward to fight over their (Agent Orange) exposure on Okinawa."

This is a revised and expanded version of an article that appeared in *The Japan Times* on April 15, 2012. A Japanese translation is available [here](#).

Jon Mitchell is currently coordinating two Japanese TV documentaries about Agent Orange on Okinawa - including "The Scoop

Special", a 90-minute program for TV-Asahi which is set to air on May 20th 2012. *The Welsh-born writer is based in Yokohama and represented by Curtis Brown Ltd., New York. He has written widely on Okinawan social issues for the Japanese and American press - a selection of which can be found [here](#) . He teaches at Tokyo Institute of Technology and is an Asia-Pacific Journal associate.*

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Reprinted in Agent of Change on May 12, 2012, this article prompted the following reader comments on day one:

BOZOADULT

May 11, 2012 3:00am

Several years ago my Vietnam War veteran friend died from agent orange exposure. He was in his early 50s.

100% of the male smallmouth bass sampled from the Potomac River in the nation's capital had ovaries!

This is a very alarming canary in the coal mine finding. This should give the ultra-tough man fascists pause because such pollution levels might compromise their he-manliness. They'll just have to increase their dose of steroids to compensate. Bwahahahaha

What? You don't like pink slime? Man up! You must be toughened up for the coming soylent green.

PHIL BALLA

My own experience in the U.S. army over 40 years ago showed me the systematic lies built into chains of command then. I'm not surprised they continue now that the U.S. subsidizes:

-- the nuke industry's guaranteed forever poisons and toxins;

-- genetic-modifying, mass feedlot, & processed food Industrial Ag;

-- freeway, highway, & parking-lagoon-based sprawl culture;

-- for-profit standardized testing;

-- for-profit prisons;

-- for-profit health care;

-- "higher" ed based on corporate-style departmentalizations;

-- drug syndicates, both those of Big Pharma and all the street gangs.

It's a sick, sick culture now, the American -- so of course it relies on a gulag of over 700 military bases in over 130 countries -- and, too, on the same sickening ingredients there as at home. And even more on the lies I saw firsthand long ago.

JEFFREY HILL

The Department of Defense can afford to play the waiting game hoping that Vietnam War-era veterans will die off before they have a chance to have their Agent Orange disability claims heard by the Veterans' Administration.

The US military violated international treaties AGAIN and stored Agent Orange on Okinawa (There's a surprise -- NOT!) and must maintain

the lie to save face.

And US soldiers thought that the Viet Cong and ARNV was the enemy in the Vietnam conflict.

TRUSTNO1BUTJESUS

May 10, 2012 1:38pm

May God's wrath and justice come down on those who put their love of money above their love of man.

CHRISTOPHER MARLOWE

May 10, 2012 11:59am

Scientific evidence is mounting that Monsanto's best-selling herbicide RoundUp also causes birth defects. A new generation of babies born near fields of "RoundUp Ready" (genetically modified) soy in Argentina are suffering birth defects as terrible as those found in the Agent Orange contaminated areas of Vietnam. Scientific research published in 2010 showed that Monsanto's Roundup and the chemical on which it is based, glyphosate, cause birth defects in frog and chicken embryos at dilutions much lower than those used in agricultural and garden spraying. <http://www.scribd.com/doc/57277946/RoundupandBirthDefectsv5>

Industry and regulators knew as long ago as the 1980s and 1990s that glyphosate causes malformations -- but that this information was not made public.

Monsanto's "exciting" new GMO seeds are resistant to more than one kind of pesticide. Rather than resisting Monsanto's glyphosate-based Roundup alone, they will now also be resistant to Dow AgroScience's pesticide 2,4-D. Agent Orange is a mixture of 2,4,5-T and 2,4-D. <http://www.gogreenation.org/2012/01/monsanto-takes-gmos-further-to-24d/>

So the next generation of GMOs is made to resist one of the major chemicals used in Agent Orange! Monsanto and Big Agra are planning to dump this crap on all of our food. Big corporations and our own government are poisoning us and our unborn babies.

SKITSTOVEL

There were soldiers exposed to defoliants even in WWII.

My father was an MD stationed in the S Pacific (Truk Isl.). The island, and it's inhabitants were regularly exposed to defoliants. He developed a rare leukemia and died @ 55.

As an MD and medical researcher, he, and at least two colleagues, were convinced that it was his exposure to those chemicals that caused his cancer.