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VETERANS ADMINISTRATION

INFORMATION SERVICE (202) 389-2741
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20420

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Max Cleland, Administrator of Veterans Affairs, today lauded a Department of Defense decision to do an in-depth follow up on 1200 Vietnam veterans who were heavily exposed to Agent Orange while involved in spraying operations in Vietnam. "This is the most significant single step of a year-long study to determine what causal relationship exists, if any, between exposure and long range health effects," Cleland said.

The 1200 people to be studied were involved in handling and spraying Agent Orange during air missions known as "Operation Ranchhand." Data on their health will be matched to a larger group not exposed. The study will take six years.

VA has been involved in its own study of the problem for more than a year.

Cleland listed these steps:

- * coordinated study of each veteran who reports his concern about Agent Orange to any of VA's 172 hospitals to determine if a pattern of health problems will emerge.

- more -

* a pilot study to determine what body mechanism, if any, exists to make it possible for the chemicals to have a long range effect. Results of this study will be available this summer.

* an advisory group of experts from throughout government, industry and academia will meet formally in June. Most members of this multi-discipline group have advised VA throughout its year-long study.

* computer analysis of medical data generated by VA's annual treatment of 1.5 million veterans in its hospitals are being studied for any existing pattern of health problems that might be related to herbicides.

* consultation with every known source of information on the subject including conversations last month between VA scientists and the Vietnamese physician, Dr. T. That Tung, whose observations of health problems among North Vietnamese civilians sparked the controversy.

These steps, Cleland said are in addition to follow up studies by other government agencies of the populations of Nitro, W. Va., and Seveso, Italy, which were heavily exposed to the suspect chemicals through industrial accidents. The West Virginia explosion, more than 30 years ago, is expected to serve as the best laboratory for possible long range effects.

Cleland said, "I believe these are appropriate initiatives which will define the effects of Agent Orange. I urge Vietnam veterans who are concerned to call their local VA for further information on VA's toll free lines."

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May 29, 1979



VETERANS ADMINISTRATION

NEWS RELEASE

INFORMATION SERVICE (202) 389-2741
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20420

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

A broadening of the inquiry into possible effects of Agent Orange on veterans who served in Vietnam was announced today by Max Cleland, Administrator of Veterans Affairs.

Supplementing Veterans Administration research in the matter of Agent Orange, which has been underway for more than a year, Cleland said other government agencies are or will be engaging in companion studies of populations most heavily exposed to herbicides similar to those sprayed in Vietnam from 1963 to 1971.

The Air Force will conduct a detailed study of some 1,200 servicemen and veterans who engaged in "Operation Ranch Hand" in Vietnam. The military personnel engaged in this operation were directly exposed to Agent Orange as they handled the herbicide containers and flew the spraying missions.

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The purpose of this long-range study will be to determine if any causal relationship can be established between herbicide exposure and long-term health status. Data gathered on the Ranch Hands will be compared to a large control group not exposed to herbicides. The Air Force estimates the study will take about six years.

In a joint study involving American and Italian scientists, the National Academy of Sciences is probing the consequences of a 1976 industrial accident in Seveso, Italy. The accident in a herbicide manufacturing plant heavily exposed 134 plant workers, and also exposed about 100,000 citizens when a gas cloud drifted over the area.

The NAS study in Seveso is funded by the Environmental Protection Agency and the Department of Health, Education and Welfare's Center for Disease Control, and the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences. A report on the study, already underway, is expected to be made in January or February 1981.

Another study of an industrial accident - in Nitro, West Virginia, - is being correlated by HEW's National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health. The Nitro study involves a chemical plant explosion in 1949 that grossly exposed 288 employees to herbicides containing dioxin, and also exposed to some degree much of the local populace.

VA Administrator Cleland also revealed that good progress is being made in VA's search for a clinical procedure that might determine the presence of dioxin in human body fat. A VA pilot study in this area is expected to be completed this summer.

Although VA physicians and scientists have been consulting with leading authorities on herbicides within and outside the government on an ad hoc basis since its research was undertaken early last year, Cleland said a formal VA Advisory Committee on Herbicides is being established and will hold its first meeting June 11.

The 15-member advisory committee will be comprised of outstanding physicians and scientists and will also include a Vietnam combat veteran. The committee will monitor all research and claims activities involving Agent Orange.

Cleland said VA's research thus far has found no conclusive evidence that Agent Orange exposure causes long-term health effects. The only clearly related effect of Agent Orange established to date, he said, is chloracne, a skin rash developing immediately after or within a few months of exposure.

The VA Administrator also disclosed that VA physicians recently met with Dr. Ton That Tung, the Vietnam physician who has been visiting America reporting on his studies of the impact of Agent Orange on the civilian population in his country.

Dr. Tung, who has reported increased incidents of children born with deformities and spontaneous abortions among Vietnamese women exposed to Agent Orange, told VA doctors the incidents were related only to pregnant women exposed to herbicides. Dr. Tung said he knew of no birth defects which might have been transmitted by a

father who had been exposed to Agent Orange to a mother who had no herbicide exposure.

Cleland said VA continues to urge Vietnam veterans concerned about Agent Orange exposure to request a medical examination at any VA medical center. Veterans who feel any present disability is related to Agent Orange should call any VA regional office on toll-free lines for assistance in filing disability claims, he added.

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June 1, 1979



VETERANS ADMINISTRATION

INFORMATION SERVICE (202) 389-2741
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20420

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

The establishment of a Veterans Administration Advisory Committee on Health Related Effects of Herbicides was announced today by Max Cleland, Administrator of Veterans Affairs.

The committee, which includes representatives nominated by government, veteran organization, and academia sources, will monitor VA's continuing inquiry into the possible health effects of Agent Orange on veterans who served in Vietnam, Cleland said.

In addition to Dr. Paul A. L. Haber, Assistant Chief Medical Director for Professional Services, and Dr. Gerrit W. H. Schepers, VA physicians who have led VA's year-long research into Agent Orange, the advisory committee members are:

James R. Allen, Jr., Ph. D., of the Primate Research Center, Department of Pathology, University of Wisconsin School of Medicine;

Irving B. Brick, M. D., Senior Medical Consultant of the American Legion and Professor of Medicine at Georgetown University;

J. David Erickson, D.D.S., Medical Epidemiologist with the Center for Communicable Diseases in Atlanta, Ga.;

Jack Griffith, Ph.D., Acting Director of the Hazard Evaluation Program, Environmental Protection Agency;

Philip C. Kearney, Ph.D., Chief, Pesticide Degradation Laboratory, Department of Agriculture;

Richard A. Lemen, Assistant Chief, Industrywide Studies Branch, Robert A. Taft Laboratories, Cincinnati, Ohio;

Robert H. Lenham, combat disabled Vietnam veteran who is a Special Projects Officer with the Disabled American Veterans;

Carolyn H. Lingeman, M.D., Carcinogenesis Testing Program, National Cancer Institute, National Institutes of Health;

Walter W. Melvin, Jr., M.D., Sc.D., Professor of Environmental Health Sciences, Colorado State University;

John A. Moore, DVM, Associate Director for Research Resources Program, National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences;

Sheldon D. Murphy, Ph.D., Department of Pharmacology, University of Texas Medical School in Houston, and

Col. J. W. Thiessen, Medical Corps, U.S. Army, U.S. Army Environmental Hygiene Agency, Aberdeen Proving Ground in Maryland.

Expressing his gratitude that "such a distinguished group of Americans have agreed to assist us in resolving the vexing problems associated with Agent Orange," Administrator Cleland said in addition to advising VA on its studies and research, the advisory committee will assist in evaluating epidemiological studies also being conducted by other government agencies.

These companion studies, he said, include an Air Force study of some 1,200 servicemen directly exposed to Agent Orange as they handled herbicide containers and flew spraying missions in Vietnam; a government-funded study by the National Academy of Sciences of herbicide exposure resulting from an industrial accident in Seveso, Italy, in 1976, and a Department of Health, Education and Welfare correlated study of herbicide exposure resulting from another industrial accident in Nitro, West Virginia, in 1949.

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June 8, 1979

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VETERANS ADMINISTRATION

INFORMATION SERVICE (202) 389-2741
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20420

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Special reports on Agent Orange have been requested from members of the Veterans Administration's Advisory Committee on Health Related Effects of Herbicides.

The committee, representing a wide range of medical and scientific disciplines, met recently to advise VA on further exploring the question of whether exposure to herbicides in Vietnam could be a factor in the health of veterans today or in the future.

In a letter to all members, the committee chairman, Dr. Paul Haber, enclosed questions related to the effects of herbicides and designated a member to prepare an answer to each question.

Typical of the questions was: . . . "Is it possible for herbicides to have long term adverse effects on the male reproductive system? "

- more -

Responses were requested by August 15.

The advisory committee is the outgrowth of the special interest VA Administrator Max Cleland has in the subject of Agent Orange.

A wounded combat veteran of Vietnam, Cleland told the committee, "I want you to know that I have a personal interest in the resolution of the questions surrounding Agent Orange. The VA is quite concerned about the aftermath of exposure to Agent Orange, and we have picked you all to help us and lead us and guide us in the resolution of the questions surrounding Agent Orange."

Advisory committee members reported a wide array of continuing research that promises to shed more light on a question that has prompted some 2,000 veterans to request VA medical examinations and almost 500 to file claims for disability based on exposure to Agent Orange.

- The Air Force is studying the health records of the aircrews who had unusually heavy exposure to Agent Orange as they loaded and dispensed it in Vietnam.

- Two civilian communities exposed to the same chemicals through industrial accidents -- the populations of Nitro, W. Va., exposed in 1949, and Seveso, Italy, exposed in 1976 -- are being studied to determine how their subsequent health patterns might differ from unexposed groups.

- The Center for Disease Control is monitoring United States birth statistics to determine whether the recognized rate of defects, one per 1,000 births, remains stable or if types of defects change in any way.

- The National Cancer Institute, in collaboration with the Armed Forces Institute of Pathology, is studying the possible role of chemicals such as those in Agent Orange in the development of cancer.

- The National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences is in the midst of a long range study of the effects of environmental chemicals on the health of men.

- The Environmental Protection Agency is monitoring the continuing use of Agent Orange chemicals in this country and following health statistics of populations in the areas where they are used.

Although numerous scientific investigations have thus far found no link between exposure to Agent Orange in Vietnam and the medical conditions observed in veterans, VA chief Max Cleland said, "This agency is keeping a completely open mind on the subject.

Cleland added, "Until all controversy surrounding Agent Orange is resolved, I will continue to urge veterans concerned about Agent Orange exposure to be examined at any VA medical center. Veterans who feel any present disability is related to Agent Orange should call any VA regional office or our toll-free lines for assistance in filing disability claims."

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July 22, 1979

594931-P



News Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

In the most definitive statement on Agent Orange yet made by a high government official, Veterans Administration chief Max Cleland told Congress that "despite major efforts by many agencies and individuals it remains unclear" whether exposure to the herbicide used in Vietnam can cause "any long term effects on human health."

But Cleland, a triple amputee veteran of fighting in Vietnam, told a House Veterans Affairs subcommittee, "I want you to know, as one who has a personal stake in this question, that we at the VA, including the 39,000 Vietnam veterans employed by VA, are committed to obtaining and disseminating accurate information as soon as humanly possible. In the meantime, we shall continue to provide every eligible veteran in need of treatment appropriate medical care regardless of causation. We owe them no less."

Cleland and VA's Chief Medical Director, Dr. Donald L. Custis, testified orally on February 25 and also presented an exhaustive, 99-page report on Agent Orange findings to date.

Cleland told the committee that most of the available data on the effects of a toxic element of Agent Orange called dioxin or TCDD, comes from experiments on animals, not humans.

He said that while these experiments have shown that harmful and even fatal effects can be produced by concentrated doses over a prolonged period, "the relevance of these animal studies to humans is unclear at the present time.

"The only way to determine their relevance," he added, "is through meticulously designed, long-range epidemiological studies of humans exposed to TCDD in industrial or laboratory accidents or, as in this case, possible exposure in Vietnam."

Noting that human studies on TCDD exposure so far have been very limited in size and do not resolve questions concerning human toxicity, Cleland said:

"Thus far, no human study has shown any evidence for a delayed syndrome of toxicity of any Agent Orange constituent encountered under accidental conditions. In fact, the only long term disease in humans clearly associated with such exposures is the skin condition chloracne. Therefore, there is not now any proof that a definitive 'Agent Orange Syndrome' exists in our Vietnam veterans."

He outlined the results obtained in a recent VA study of the levels of dioxin in the fat of veterans known to have been exposed to Agent Orange compared to a control group of unexposed veterans.

"In this study we showed that small amounts of dioxin could be found in the fat of some but not all of the veterans included in the study who were possibly exposed to Agent Orange in Vietnam.

"However, we discovered that dioxin could also be found in the unexposed study participants. This suggested that Vietnam veterans could be exposed to dioxin outside of Vietnam.

"At any rate," Cleland said, "no correlation could be established in this study between fat levels of dioxin and the occurrence of symptoms of disease."

He outlined for committee members the steps the VA has taken and is taking to provide definitive medical information on the subject. He noted the development of a VA epidemiological study of possible health effects building on a data base obtained from agency examinations of nearly 10,000 veterans since July 1978 and submission of tissue specimens from Vietnam Era veterans treated in VA hospitals to a special unit at the Armed Forces Institute of Pathology.

To date, Cleland said, 1,233 disability claims involving exposure to Agent Orange have been decided by VA regional offices around the nation. In 21 instances, the disorders claimed to be due to the herbicide were found to be service connected, but in none of them was it necessary to determine whether Agent Orange was a causative factor.

The VA Administrator said the agency will continue to "conscientiously and expeditiously perform those Agent Orange studies which are within its scientific competence and will encourage others to undertake the additional studies which we cannot reasonably perform."

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February 26, 1980