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Agent Orange: New Navy Victims Considered for Help



Vietnam-River boat firing napalm to kill and rout the enemy

by Ed Mattson

"The Fleet Reserve Association (FRA) is a congressionally chartered, non-profit organization that represents the interests of the Sea Service community before the U.S. Congress. The Association is named after the Navy's program for personnel transferring to the Fleet Reserve or Fleet Marine Corps Reserve after 20 or more years of active duty, but less than 30 years for retirement purposes and its membership is comprised of current and former enlisted members of the U.S. Navy, Marine Corps, and Coast Guard".

FRA is a pronounced voice for all current and former enlisted members and is actively working with other groups to influence government in the heat of the budget cut debates going on in Congress. As I have been writing, we are going to need all the help we can get to maintain the benefit package we veterans were promised when we enlisted. It is groups like FRA that will be in the fight with us.

FRA is also actively involved in looking out for the many service members who served in Vietnam that were not “boots on the ground” but exposed to the defoliant Agent Orange from coastal and waterway duty. Again, it seems a little off the cuff that at every turn in the road, it’s the veteran who has to “prove” their case in order to qualify for assistance. This just doesn’t seem right, and without help from FRA, many would be up the creek without the proverbial paddle. When a veteran is experiencing a health problem that has all the earmarks related to herbicide exposure it is the veteran who has to jump through hoops to get help. Most of us know that if it is covered with feathers, walks like a duck and quacks like a duck...it is probably a duck.

To assist, FRA worked with the Veteran Administration to publish a list of ships and inland water vessels that patrolled the coastal waters for an extended period of time or that required crew-member to go ashore. This does not automatically qualify the serviceman for benefits, but can help facilitate a more timely determination of benefits. Those who feel they may qualify are asked to contact your nearest VA Regional Office or contact Chris Slawinski, FRA’s national veteran’s service officer, at vafra@fra.org or 1-800-FRA-1924 (ext. 115).

What about those who served offshore in Vietnam and are now experiencing difficulties with symptoms relating to Agent Orange exposure? A recent report by the Institute of Medicine (IOM) proves the distillation process used to generate potable water from sea water did not remove Agent Orange from the water. In fact the process actually enhanced the effect of the Agent Orange dioxin by a factor of 10. FRA believes the IOM report provides strong evidence for extending the presumption of exposure to blue water veterans. To get more information you can check out the report available on line at the Institute of Medicine.

In an effort to support FRA in their effort to include all those with possible defoliant exposure symptoms getting the Veterans Administration to revise their Agent Orange policy is a top priority and is repeatedly addressed in FRA’s congressional testimony and discussions with legislators and their staff. All veterans are being urged to contact their Senators and representative to urge them to support “The Agent Orange Equity Act” (H.R. 812), sponsored by Rep. Bob Filner (Calif.), ranking member of the House Veterans Affairs Committee. This legislation would authorize the VA to presume service-connection for veterans and retirees suffering from ailments related to exposure to Agent Orange if they served in the waters off the coast of or in the skies above Vietnam.

Our new website which is being established to make our combined veteran and military voice heard and to determine which legislators can be counted on to vote favorably on veteran’s issues (www.yourmilitaryvoter.us) is not 100% complete at this time, but we’re getting there. Unfortunately we only have been at it for 10 days and such a unique website, which we want to have in full operation going into the 2012 elections, is going to need a lot of work. However, please contact Congress at <http://www.contactingthecongress.org/> and follow the links to get contact information for your senators and representatives. You will need your 9-digit zip code to locate your Congressional Representative so find it first at the [USPO](http://www.uspo.gov) website.

<http://www.veteranstoday.com/2011/06/27/possible-assistance-for-agent-orange-victims-in-the-navy-2/>