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***If Veterans don't help Veterans, who will?***

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# Vietnam's Lingering War: Agent Orange



**File photo**

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**By Katie Kocijanski / The Daily Mail, Columbia-Greene Media / New York**

U.S. Navy and Marine Corps veterans who were exposed to Agent Orange during their service in the Vietnam War can expect to have more federal government protection.

The House of Representatives has passed an amendment authored by U.S. Rep. Chris Gibson, R-19, in support of veterans who were exposed to the chemical while aboard destroyers and aircraft carriers off the coast of Vietnam and now have developed serious illnesses connected to the exposure.

Gibson's amendment is tied to the Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act of 2015 that expanded coverage for veterans affected by illnesses caused by exposure to herbicide agents. The legislation was sponsored by U.S. Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand, D-NY.

"This is a significant victory in our fight to secure justice for our Blue Water Navy Veterans," Gibson said. "With unanimous support, the House adopted my amendment to the Military Construction-Veterans Affairs Appropriations Act defunding the Department of Veteran Affairs' unilateral decision to restrict Agent Orange presumptive coverage to those who served on the land or inland waterways of Vietnam."

Gibson said the veterans drank and bathed in water contaminated by Agent Orange, causing a wide array of illnesses, but for years the Veterans Administration has denied the veterans the coverage they deserve.

According to the Veterans Affairs website, Agent Orange is a blend of tactical herbicides, or defoliant, that the U.S. military sprayed from 1962 to 1971 during

Operation Ranch Hand in the Vietnam War to remove trees and dense tropical foliage that provided enemy cover.

The name Agent Orange derives from “the orange identifying stripe used on the 55-gallon drums in which it was stored.”

Forests along the borders of Cambodia, Laos and South Vietnam were heavily sprayed.

“Sailors are dying every day and thousands more are awaiting proper care for diseases they acquired through service to our country,” Gibson said. “Time is of the essence, and we will not relent in our efforts on behalf of these brave Americans and their families.”

The congressman said Agent Orange followed a deadly progression starting with soldiers on land or the inland waterways in South Vietnam.

Then, Gibson said, when aircraft sprayed Agent Orange to deprive the enemy of cover in the jungle, the chemical brew mixed with runoff and flowed into the sea.

And then crews serving offshore got their drinking water from shipboard desalination units that were treating this same seawater, a process that actually made Agent Orange still more dangerous.

The contaminated water also washed over the decks of ships and was brought from inland reservoirs to ships by barges as another source of drinking water for offshore personnel.

“I have been working in close partnership with affected veterans and military families from the 19th district throughout my tenure in Congress,” Gibson said.

“Specifically, Carol Olszanecki of Ellenville, who lost her husband to illness caused by Agent Orange, and Susie Belanger of Gansevoort, who has been another leading advocate on this front.”

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