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Monday, July 23, 2007

Herbicides in Guam

Retired airman says he sprayed herbicides in Guam

By Mar-Vic Cagurangan

Variety News Staff

July 16, 2007

WHEN he was an active airman stationed on Guam as a fuel specialist, MSgt Roy Foster's job was to mix, prepare, and spray herbicides on Andersen Air Force Base facilities.

Now retired and disabled, Foster has been diagnosed with thyroid cancer and arterial disease, which he believes were caused by his direct exposure to the toxic defoliants.

He is now looking for witnesses from the Air Force or the Navy who were stationed on Guam between 1968 and 1978, to support his disability claims with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs.

The U.S. government has never admitted to storing herbicides on Guam but several soldiers who were on Guam during the Vietnam War have testified in various forums on the presence of drums of chemicals stored in military bases on island.

Foster was stationed at AAFB on three separate occasions between 1968 and 1978, working in the Supply Squadron Fuels Branch.

"I worked at on-base fuel storage facilities at Andy I and II during my first assignment from 1968 and 1969 preparing, mixing and spraying herbicides (bags of white powdery substance with oil and demineralized water in a 750-gallon trailer), spraying on fence lines, pipelines, building perimeters, fuel pipeline junction pits, fuel storage recovery dikes, etc.," Foster stated in an e-mail to Variety.

During his second and third deployments, from 1969 to 1971, and then from 1976 to 1978, Foster said he worked extensively on off-base fuel facilities, "working out of Anderson AFB Andy II fuel storage tank farm driving a six-pack pickup truck with a crew of six to 10 men."

"I was responsible for the cross country pipeline operations to include tank farms near NCS Yigo, Tumon Bay tank farm, NAS Booster Station Agana and the cross country pipeline to the Naval Station underground fuel storage facilities where the Air Force maintained several underground fuel storage tanks for transfer to those facilities mentioned above," he recalled.

Herbicides were used by the U.S. military to control jungle vegetation. The use of these defoliants was part of the U.S. military's chemical warfare program during the Vietnam War. Approximately 19 million gallons of Agent Orange were reportedly sprayed in Vietnam to thin the jungles and make it easier for U.S. troops to advance.

Degradation of these herbicides released dioxins, which have caused harm to the health of those exposed during the Vietnam War. The chemicals have been linked to cancer, lymphoma, and birth defects prevalent in Vietnam.

"When I was an airman, I was ordered to prepare, mix and spray those herbicides when others refused because they knew things that I did not know," Foster said. "I was a very young airman new to the Air Force and the Vietnam War." Foster said he learned that one of his supervisors, TSgt Edmund Schmitz, died from cancer many years ago.

"Others may and probably also have died of the same disease. I suspect from herbicide exposure as the wind would blow the stuff back into your face and dry quickly with a white powder surface," Foster said.

A report by the Dow Chemical Investor Risk Report revealed the heavy concentration of dioxin at Andersen Air Force Base, poisoning soldiers who were stationed in Guam in the late 1960s.

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs recently approved the disability claim filed by a Vietnam War veteran who developed a cancer of the larynx as a result of his direct exposure to Agent Orange when he was stationed on Guam between 1968 and 1969. Robert L. Burgett was awarded a full grant of benefits effective May 17 of this year.

The Blue Water Navy operates a Web site (<http://bluewaternavy.org/>) that provides comprehensive information related to dioxin and other toxic exposures by Navy personnel.

Posted by [Michael Lujan Bevacqua](#) at [7:53 AM](#) 

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