

Solano Veterans Scene – January 2012

Vietnam Veterans and Agent Orange

Today's column focuses on Vietnam veterans and the presumptive medical conditions that the Veterans Administration has identified as linked to Agent Orange exposure.

About 20 million gallons of herbicides were used in Vietnam between 1962 and 1971 to remove unwanted plant life that provided cover for enemy forces. These defoliants had dioxin as the main ingredient, which has since been proven to be a very powerful carcinogen and is banned in most of the world.

Shortly following their military service in Vietnam, some veterans reported a variety of health problems at very young ages, which some of the Veterans attributed to exposure to Agent Orange and the other herbicides used by our government to clear the foliage.

The Department of Veteran Affairs has developed a comprehensive program to respond to these medical and health concerns. The principal elements of this program include providing quality health care services and disability compensation for veterans with service-connected illnesses as well as conducting scientific research, outreach and education.

The following conditions are recognized as having a presumptive service-connection for Vietnam veterans, based on the veteran's exposure to herbicides during the Vietnam War:

- Diabetes Type 2
- Prostate cancer
- Non-Hodgkin's lymphoma
- Hodgkin's disease
- Chronic lymphocytic leukemia (CLL)
- Leukemia Type B (Hairy Cell)
- Parkinson's disease
- Ischemic heart disease (defined as heart disease caused by blockage or reduced blood flow)
- Respiratory cancers, including cancers of the lung, larynx, trachea and bronchus
- Multiple myeloma
- Chloracne (must have occurred within one year of exposure)
- Soft tissue sarcoma
- Porphyria cutanea tarda (must have occurred within one year of exposure)
- Peripheral neuropathy (must have occurred within one year of exposure)

The most common of the presumptive conditions are diabetes and ischemic heart disease. If you were in Vietnam and have had a stint, angioplasty or a by-pass procedure, you most probably have ischemic heart disease. The widows of Vietnam veterans who died of the aforementioned conditions could be eligible for death benefits.

To qualify for these benefits as a Vietnam veteran, the service member must be able to prove they were in country – even if boots on the ground was just for one day. Some Naval personnel could qualify if they were on certain ships; the list of ships is available on the VA website at <http://www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/agentorange/shiplist/list.asp>. Veterans assigned to specific units in Thailand and Korea may also qualify, as Agent Orange was used in very specific areas in these countries during very specific times. Use the VA website – www.va.gov/agentorange – to identify these specific units, times and locations.

If you feel that you qualify for these benefits, please stop by our office and bring proof of your Vietnam Service (usually your DD-214/Discharge) and a diagnosis of your health condition.

Ted Puntillo is director of Veteran Services for Solano County. Reach him at 784-6950 or TEPuntillo@SolanoCounty.com. The Solano County Veteran Services Office, 675 Texas St. in Fairfield, is open Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to noon and 1 to 4 p.m.