

Monologue



By Doug Vaughan
Editor in Chief

\$180 million vets settlement encouraging

The myths, unknowns and questions that continuously surround Agent Orange, a defoliant used during the Vietnam War, may never be completely answered. But Monday a settlement was made that at least answered several thousand veterans' hopes.

A \$180 million settlement was made between Vietnam War veterans and seven chemical companies which produced the herbicide for the United States military during the war. The agreement was one of the largest product liability suits in history, according to a May 8 article in *The Oregonian*.

To the veterans, it showed the companies' confession of guilt, but a Dow Chemical Company spokesman, from one of the companies named in the suit, would beg to differ.

In the same article he was quoted as saying, "Agent Orange is not a plausible cause of the ill health experienced by veterans and their families...we believe it would have been very difficult for a jury to sort out the complex scientific issues of this highly emotional case."

Whether Dow admits their guilt, one thing is

clear in that it was a victory for the vets...and a first one at that.

The veterans have come up empty-handed time and time again. The government has failed to issue due compensation to veterans who claim that Agent Orange was a direct effect to their medical abnormalities.

Governmental studies on the prolonged effects of the agent will not be finished until at least 1987. In the meantime, they contend that there is no scientific data proving the herbicide has caused these ailments.

The vets are not worried about the minor ailments as much as the major league complications they are facing.

Their ailments range from liver cancer to mood swings, memory loss to extreme weight loss, and numbness to dizziness. Don't stop here, it has affected their families, too.

Wives of veterans have experienced high ratios of aborted fetuses and still births. Their offspring have had complications like cleft palates, missing body parts, water in the brain and as serious as missing or malformed parts of the brain.

What links the major defoliant used in Vietnam to these medical abnormalities? A by-product of Agent Orange called dioxin.

It is lethal to humans. A mere dose of 10 drops will put any human to the canvas for good. A safe

exposure is considered one part per billion. In other words, there is no safe level.

The Agent Orange which the United States used in the Vietnam War to destroy enemy cover in dense forests contained an average of 2,000 parts per billion, and some contained up to 47,000 parts per billion.

Add to that the more than 11 million gallons of the herbicide that was sprayed. That amount contained more than 400 pounds of dioxin alone. Remember, 10 drops will easily kill you or me.

The veterans contend that the chemical companies knew that Agent Orange contained amounts of dioxin unsafe for human exposure. That is why the companies will be shelling out a hefty \$180 million.

Before the settlement is final, though, hearings are set to make sure the negotiations were fair.

The \$180 million settlement will be used to initiate a global trust fund for veterans, affected by the agent, and their families. It will compensate for deaths and ailments linked to Agent Orange. With compounded interest, the account is expected to reach \$250 million by 1990.

For years, Vietnam veterans and their families have been denied compensation for their miseries. Finally, they have won a suit. Hopefully, it will be the catalyst for good things to come in their fight for compensation.

Reagan's defense budget cuts for real?

By Shelley Ball
News Editor

"Defense request cut \$13.9 billion by administration." This was among the various headlines that graced the front page of last Friday's *Oregonian*.

Upon reading the headline's accompanying article, I learned the Reagan administration had recently announced a plan to cut \$13.9 billion from its \$305 billion military budget proposal, which was made four months ago.

That's right, the Reagan administration, not some other organization, broadcast the defense cuts proposal. For one brief moment, I could entertain the idea that our warmongering president had begun to come to his senses over spending ridiculously enormous amounts of money for defense.

But alas, such hopes are foolish. Old war dog Ronnie hasn't learned any new tricks; he and his administrative pawns have just become the victims of pressure.

This pressure is being applied by Congress, as a protest

against the country's record-breaking federal budget deficit. As a result, the Reagan administration is getting its political arm twisted by Congress, and in desperation the defense cuts were proposed to try to alleviate the situation.

In making the proposed cuts known, Secretary of Defense Caspar W. Weinberger said the reductions would cause "some damage" to our country's effectiveness in defending itself. Likewise, Reagan has also been quoted as saying, "I strongly believe...that any further reductions would be counter to our national security interests and could not be accepted."

It looks as though Weinberger and Reagan would like the American public to believe that a mere \$13.9 billion cut out of a total \$305 billion defense budget is surely going to render our country utterly defenseless, and leave us waiting like sitting ducks to be preyed upon by that dreaded nine-letter concept: Communism. Believe it...or not!

For those who can't add,

a cut of \$13.9 billion would still leave the U.S. Department of Defense with the tidy sum of \$291.1 billion to play war games with. And although the cuts include 120 M-1 tanks, 322 AH-64 attack helicopters and 12,000 TOW anti-tank missiles, to name a few, major strategic weapons such as the MX missile, B-1 bomber and the Trident missile-firing submarine will not be affected whatsoever.

At a time when practically everyone (except Reagan's regime and his big business supporters) is being forced to scrape by on a meager income, the defense department could most assuredly get by with a \$13.9 billion cutback. It's about time the government came out of its hypocritical shell and do a little "sacrificing" (sound familiar, folks?) in order to help reduce our nation's budget deficit, even if it's just a little bit.

In any case, Reagan and his administration are not about to let themselves be bullied by Congress, at least not entirely. The rigid president has made it clear he will

not accept the proposed defense cuts unless Congress agrees to two other parts of his major budget cutting plan, which he announced in March.

These other two parts are: A variety of cuts in domestic spending, and action directed at closing tax loopholes in order to provide more federal revenue. By making "an offer you (Congress) can't refuse," Reagan has skillfully played, and subsequently left, the ball in Congress' court.



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