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March 31, 2011

President Barack Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20500-0004

Dear President Obama,

I am the current president of the Airborne Battlefield Command & Control Center (ABCCC) Association.

The ABCCC was an EC-130E airborne command post that conducted the secret war on the ground and in the air over Laos during the Vietnam War.

Our squadron, the 7th Airborne Command & Control Squadron (7 ACCS), was stationed first in Vietnam and then in Thailand during the entire course of the Vietnam War.

During our stay in Thailand, 7th ACCS ground support personnel and aircrew personnel were first stationed at Udorn Royal Thai Air Force Base (RTAFB) and then at Korat RTAFB.

For the past three years, the ABCCC Association has been trying to convince the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) that Agent Orange and other carcinogenic herbicides were used in Thailand, as well as in Vietnam. After denying for years that Agent Orange and/or other herbicides were ever used in Thailand, the Department of Veterans Affairs, Office of Health and Environmental Hazards, published a February 15, 2011 advisory entitled: Agent Orange: Thailand Military Bases.

The advisory states the following:

“Vietnam-era veterans whose service involved duty on or near the perimeters of military bases in Thailand anytime between February 28, 1961 and May 7, 1975 may have been exposed to herbicides and may qualify for VA benefits.

Preserving The Legacy of ABCCC

The following Veterans may have been exposed to herbicides:

- **U.S. Air Force Veterans who served on Royal Thai Air Force (RTAF) bases at U-Tapao, Ubon, Nakhon Phanom, Udorn, Takhli, Korat, and Don Muang, near the air base perimeter anytime between February 28, 1961 and May 7, 1975.**
- **U.S. Army Veterans who provided perimeter security on RTAF bases in Thailand anytime between February 28, 1961 and May 7, 1975.**
- **U.S. Army Veterans who were stationed on some small Army installations in Thailand anytime between February 28, 1961 and May 7, 1975. However, the Army Veteran must have been a member of a military police (MP) unit or was assigned an MP military occupational specialty whose duty placed him/her at or near the base perimeter.**
- **To receive benefits for diseases associated with herbicide exposure, these Veterans must show on a factual basis that they were exposed to herbicides during their service as shown by evidence of daily work duties, performance evaluation reports, or other credible evidence.”**

Mr. President. Although the above VA advisory was published on February 15, 2011, Agent Orange officers (AOs) of the Department of Veterans Affairs continue to deny the valid claims for Agent Orange compensation by United States Air Force (USAF) veterans who served on USAF bases in Thailand during the Vietnam War based on the following February 15, 2011 advisory criteria: “near the air base perimeter anytime between February 28, 1961 and May 7, 1975.”

Mr. President. What constitutes being “near” a base perimeter? The word “near” is a totally arbitrary term that has absolutely no definitive value. By using the term “near” in their February 15, 2011 Agent Orange advisory, the VA has provided every AO with a mechanism to disapprove any Agent Orange claims submitted by USAF veterans who were stationed in Thailand during the Vietnam War.

Mr. President. I personally served at Udorn RTAFB from July 1970 to July 1971 as technical sergeant EC-130E ABCCC aircraft radio operator and communications team chief. One of the enlisted “additional duties” assigned to all ABCCC radio operators was to drive the aircrew bus during the day of a mission. This duty entailed picking up the entire aircrew from their quarters, driving the aircrew to the Udorn RTAFB inflight kitchen to pickup the aircrew box lunches and then driving along the base perimeter road to our assigned mission aircraft. Because it was consistently hot and humid at Udorn RTAFB, the aircrew bus drivers always kept all the aircrew bus doors fully open during our drive around the base perimeter road to our assigned aircraft.

Since our squadron aircraft were assigned two permanent flying orbits over the country of Laos and these orbits were manned 24-hours-a-day, 7-days-a-week, our squadron provided

four EC-130E aircraft per day for those two orbits. Each aircraft carried a crew of approximately 20 aircrew members. That means that 80 aircrew members per day were exposed to the toxicity of Agent Orange as the aircrew buses drove along the Udorn RTAFB base perimeter road.

Each aircrew member assigned to the 7th ACCS was required to fly a mission every four days for the one-year period that they were assigned to Udorn RTAFB. This meant that approximately 240 different aircrew members during a four-day period were exposed to the toxicity of Agent Orange. Since our 7th ACCS aircrew personnel were allowed to take a 30-day leave during their one-year tour at Udorn, our squadron had enough extra aircrew personnel to fill in for those 240 aircrew members. Thus at least 480 aircrew members assigned to the 7th ACCS were exposed to Agent Orange per year.

However Mr. President, the 7th ACCS was not the only flying squadron assigned to Udorn RTAFB. There was an entire wing of RF-4C aircraft assigned to Udorn and thus all the RF-4C pilots and weapons controllers would have also been exposed to the toxicity of Agent Orange, as well as all aircraft maintenance personnel who also drove on perimeter road to reach their duty locations at Udorn RTAFB.

Besides the Udorn aircrew and aircraft maintenance personnel, the Udorn security police personnel who consistently guarded and walked the base perimeter were also exposed to Agent Orange, as well as the base plumbers, electricians, carpenters and other base civil engineering personnel, etc., who worked in buildings adjacent to the base perimeter. Thus, in a one-year time frame, approximately 1000 people could have been exposed to the toxicity of Agent Orange at Udorn RTAFB.

Since there were seven USAF bases located in Thailand during the Vietnam War and all of those bases had various flying units, security police units and plumbers, electrician and carpenters assigned to them, it would not be unrealistic to say that approximately 7,000 USAF airmen per year were exposed to the toxicity of Agent Orange in Thailand.

With regards to the current Department of Veterans Affairs Agent Orange Policy for USAF personnel stationed in Thailand during the Vietnam War.

As a 30-year veteran of the United States Air Force who accumulated more than 15,000 flying hours, I am very familiar with the geography of USAF bases throughout the world. Every USAF air base that I have ever been to has a "perimeter road" that completely traverses the base perimeter. On the base side of the perimeter road are always buildings housing work areas and living quarters.

Our Association has been able to acquire photographs and maps of Udorn Royal Thai Air Force Base (RTAFB) during the 1969 to 1973 period.

Enclosure 1 is a copy of the Department of Veterans Affairs, Office of Health and Environmental Hazards Advisory, published February 15, 2011 entitled: Agent Orange: Thailand Military Bases.

Enclosure 2 is the ABCCC Association's June 8, 2010 letter to Mr. Bradley G. Mayes, Director, VA Compensation & Pension Service.

Enclosure 3 is the September 13, 2010 letter to the ABCCC Association from Mr. Thomas J. Murphy, Director, VA Compensation & Pension Service.

Enclosure 4 is the ABCCC Association's September 22, 2010 letter, (without enclosures), to Mr. Thomas J. Murphy, Director, VA Compensation & Pension Service.

Enclosure 5 is the ABCCC Association's December 28, 2010 letter to Mr. Thomas J. Murphy, Director, VA Compensation & Pension Service.

Enclosure 6 is a 1969 aerial photograph of Udorn RTAFB. From this photograph one can see the base perimeter and the buildings adjacent to the base perimeter.

Enclosure 7 is a 1969 base map of Udorn RTAFB. From this map one can see the base perimeter and the buildings adjacent to the base perimeter.

Enclosure 8 is a 1970 photograph of a section of the Udorn RAFB perimeter road. From this photograph one can see the base perimeter and the buildings adjacent to the base perimeter.

Enclosure 9 is a 1973 photograph of the Udorn RTAFB flight line. From this photograph one can see the base perimeter and the buildings adjacent to the base perimeter.

Enclosure 10 is a 1970 photograph of the Udorn RTAFB flight line. From this photograph one can see the base perimeter and the buildings adjacent to the base perimeter.

Enclosure 11 is a 1971 photograph of an Udorn RTAFB work area found adjacent to the base perimeter road and base perimeter. This area was employed to burn classified documents used at Udorn RTAFB by command post personnel, aircrew personnel and base operations personnel.

From viewing the enclosed maps and photographs provided with this letter, it is evident that any Agent Orange used to defoliate the Udorn RTAFB base perimeter also drifted into the various buildings and work areas located in the vicinity of the base perimeter and also drifted into the aircrew buses that continually traveled the base perimeter.

Therefore, Mr. President, the ABCCC Association membership is requesting that you honor the sacrifices of Vietnam War veterans who were stationed in Thailand during the Vietnam War by requiring the Department of Veterans Affairs to revisit their Thailand Agent Orange policy and make the appropriate wording changes to include all base personnel who were either living or working on a RTAFB base during the Vietnam War instead of any personnel who were “near” the base perimeter.

Sincerely,



Command CMSgt Kenneth D. Witkin, USAF (Ret.)
ABCCC Association President

Enclosures (11)

1. Department of Veterans Affairs, Office of Health and Environmental Hazards Advisory, published February 15, 2011 entitled: Agent Orange: Thailand Military Bases.
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