

A Postscript to the Da Nang Harbor Report

Throughout the entire project of returning veteran benefit rights for disabilities caused by herbicide contaminants to offshore personnel, one of the hardest factors to overcome has been the constant stream of disinformation given out by the Department of Veteran Affairs (DVA). Most of us know from experience that this is standard operating procedure for DVA. Unfortunately, the general public typically takes many of the items reported in the news as the cost of doing business, without question. Once the wrong data gets out and planted in the public mind, it is very hard to 'un-do.' We see for ourselves how these types of inaccurate statements of grotesquely twisted and erroneous data is common practice when the Directors of various departments of the VA present these bogus facts and figures to Congressional Committees.

These 'misstatements' could in no way be mistakes on the part of these VA employees, because the data had to emerge from within their own specific departments. They are intentionally contrived figures that obfuscate the current topic at hand and somewhat cleverly mislead the audience (in this case, Congress) into believing false figures. This has been happening for the past few decades and has laid a trail of lies that twists around on itself until the 'actual' facts become masked. Rather than consider such misstatements as errors presented to Congress, I see them as perjury, pure and simple. Congressman Filner, Chairman of the House Veterans Committee, has stated in public media on several occasions that the DVA continuously lies to him and his staff, and to Congress itself, and there is nothing he or the Congress of the United States can do about it. This, of course, is not quite true and indicates that it really takes two to play the game. By hiding behind the false belief that Congress is powerless, politicians become part of the problem, either because they don't care or because the lies fit some agenda of making a job simpler or offers press events where politicians can constantly be in the spotlight complaining about the problems they face and the great job they are doing to straighten things out.

Serendipitously, within days of posting "The Da Nang Harbor Report" (1) on the BlueWaterNavy organization web site, an AOL Health Report, picked up by Associated Press, got wide circulation. (2) It contains seriously erroneous data. It addresses the tremendously high costs related to paying earned benefits to Navy, Coast Guard and Marine personnel, and in part states: "[including] those veterans who served off the coast of Vietnam - which would add an estimated 800,000 people to the 2.6 million who served there on land." In order to understand this successful planting of the over-drawn budget fear, let's break this down by element to see what these numbers really are:

- During the Vietnam War (between 1962 and 1975), 2,594,000 servicemen and women served in "South Vietnam." This is specifically in South Vietnam as a sub-group of those who served in "Southeast Asia." So it is legitimate to round this to "2.6 million who served there on land (in-country)." (3)

- But that was nearly 40 years ago. Vietnam Veterans, like the general population, die as they get older. However, unlike the general population, Vietnam Veterans are dying at a much faster rate than the general population. Less than 40% of all in-country veterans are alive today. Some research puts that figure lower, to about 33%. (4) Annual deaths of the general United States population actually dropped in 2006 and is now holding fairly steady. (5) Vietnam veteran death count doubled between the years 2001 and 2010, from 52,587 annually in 2001 to 103,890 in the year 2010 projection (6). Even using

the 40% survivor rate, only 1,040,000 of all in-country veterans are still alive today. (7) But that 2.6 million number sticks in the mind.

- During the Vietnam War, there were 229,000 Navy personnel in all of Southeast Asia, which includes both those in-country and those offshore. (3) There's no possible way to expand that number to 800,000 without re-writing history from 1962 until now. The DVA has been attempting to re-write history on many aspects of the Vietnam War, but they will only succeed if the public never questions the sources available to them. And that 800,000 number sticks in the mind.

The grief that these inflated numbers cause occurs when they are computed into the cost of legislation which depends on headcount. VA numbers for various costs are traditionally overstated, but inflating the cost figure of offshore personnel by almost 300% is ludicrous. It would scare any legislator away if their attention were only focused on the numbers; or if they were looking for an excuse for not paying for veteran benefits and if they didn't check the sources of the figures. Unfortunately, that describes the majority of our legislators.

And it shows the basic flaw in considering costs when dealing with Veteran Benefits issues. We're not talking about numbers and not talking about dollars. We are talking about human lives. We are talking about separating the piles of dead, alive and wounded people -- people who have made a contract with the U.S. Government to agree to be trained and shipped off to some foreign land to fight for, and possibly die for, the U.S. Government. There is a middle ground between those two extremes, and those are the wounded. They are individuals who fought and did not die, but found themselves somewhere in the middle with varying degrees of injuries. These wounded veterans need to be cared for. They are a 'cost of war' and require this country to take care of them for the remainder of their lives. They often need to be compensated because their wounds and disabilities keep them from returning to the active workforce to make a living to pay for the necessities of life for themselves and their families. They automatically assume that the U.S. Government will be gracious enough to regard them as veterans so they can receive this compensation, along with health care and other benefits that have been devised by a department of our government specifically in existence to care for these wounded veterans. They generally assume that this care they receive from the Department of Veterans Affairs will be life-long and of such a quality that they are as comfortable as possible as they live out their lives with the limitations of their wounds, whether those are mental or physical.

Right now, in 2010, veterans are being abandoned by our government and the Department of Veterans Affairs is continuously in the headlines regarding their shortcomings based on malfeasance, ineptitude and outright fraud. To make things worse, this is occurring at a time when the general population of this country is malcontent about how their elected officials are currently performing. In my mind, this requires swift and decisive action from the citizens of this country to remove and replace what has become a corrupt and deceitful administration.

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(1) <http://www.bluewaternavy.org/danangcombo2.pdf>

- (2) <http://www.startribune.com/nation/101811968.html>
- (3) <http://siadapp.dmdc.osd.mil/personnel/CASUALTY/vietnam.pdf>
- (4) Blue Water Navy analysis
- (5) http://www.usatoday.com/news/health/2006-04-19-death_x.htm
- (6) <http://www1.va.gov/VETDATA/Demographics/Demographics.asp> - table 8D\
- (7) http://blog.cleveland.com/metro/2010/02/vietnam_vets_fight_final_battl.html