



VETERANS FOR PEACE
HUMBOLDT BAY
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THE FOGHORN

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“Cutting Through the Fog of War”

Rethinking The Cost of War

What if casualties don't end on the battlefield, but extend to future generations? Our reporting this year suggests the government may not want to know the answer

by

Mike Hixenbaugh for The Virginian-Pilot, and Charles Ornstein, ProPublica

The Department of Veterans Affairs Building on Vermont Avenue in Washington, DC. (Photo: JeffOnWire/flickr/cc)

There are many ways to measure the cost of U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War: In bombs (7 million tons), in dollars (\$760 billion in today's dollars) and in bodies (58,220).

Then there's the price of caring for those who survived: Each year, the Department of Veterans Affairs spends more than \$23 billion compensating Vietnam-era veterans for disabilities linked to their military service — a repayment of a debt that's supported by most Americans.

But what if the casualties don't end there?

The question has been at the heart of reporting by The Virginian-Pilot and ProPublica over the past 18 months as we've sought to reexamine the lingering consequences of Agent Orange, the toxic herbicide sprayed by the millions of gallons over Vietnam.

We've written about ailing Navy veterans fighting to prove they were exposed to the chemicals off Vietnam's coast. About widows left to battle the VA for benefits after their husbands died of brain cancer. About scores of children who struggle with strange, debilitating health problems and wonder if the herbicide that sickened their fathers has also affected them.

Along the way, we noticed some themes: For decades, the federal government has resisted addressing these issues, which could ultimately cost billions of dollars in new disability claims. When science does suggest a connection, the VA has hesitated to take action, instead weighing political and financial costs. And in some cases, officials have turned to a known skeptic of Agent Orange's deadly effects to guide the VA's decisions.

Frustrated vets summarize the VA's position this way: “Delay, deny, wait till I die.”

This month, after repeated recommendations by federal scientific advisory panels, Congress passed a bill directing the VA to pursue research into toxic exposures and their potential effects across generations. But even that will take years to produce results, years some ailing vets don't have.

The questions we've posed have no easy answers. But science — and our own analysis of internal VA data — increasingly points to the possibility that Agent Orange exposure might have led to health problems in the children of veterans. And we can't help but think of the words displayed at the entrance to the VA headquarters in Washington: “To care for him who shall have borne the battle and for his widow, and his orphan.”

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We noticed the phrase, a quote from Abraham Lincoln's second inaugural address, during an evening stroll through D.C. in June, a day before hosting a forum on Agent Orange's generational effects and policy implications. With us that night was Stephen M. Katz, the Virginian-Pilot photographer who initiated our reporting project when he shared the story of his estranged father, a Vietnam vet who'd gotten back in touch to warn that he'd sprayed Agent Orange.

Does the VA's motto apply to Katz? His brother born before the war is healthy. At 46, Katz suffers from myriad health problems, including a heart defect, type-2 diabetes, an underactive thyroid, immune and endocrine deficiencies, and a nerve disorder that severely limits the use of his right hand.

What about the thousands of other children of Vietnam veterans who shared their stories with us over the past year? What about the children of Gulf War veterans exposed to depleted uranium? The children of Iraq and Afghanistan war veterans exposed to toxic burn pits? The children of future service members exposed to yet unknown toxins on the modern battlefield?

What responsibility — if any — does a nation have to those who weren't drafted into service, but who may have been harmed nonetheless?

We posed the question to Dr. Ralph Erickson, the VA's chief consultant of post-deployment health services, who's involved with the agency's research efforts. Erickson, who's had the job since last year, wouldn't comment on the VA's past reluctance to study these issues, saying only that his team is committed to it.

And if research someday proves a wartime exposure has harmed veterans' children or grandchildren? Erickson, whose father served in Vietnam, said that's a question that would have to be answered by VA lawyers. We pressed him for his personal view, and he too cited Lincoln's words. But even then, he said it was a "hypothetical" and didn't directly answer the question.

Vietnam vet Mike Ryan thinks he knows what the answer will be. Nearly four decades ago, his family was among the first to draw widespread attention to the possibility that Agent Orange had harmed veterans' children. His daughter, Kerry, suffered from 22 birth defects, including spina bifida and other physical deformities.

After his wife died in 2003, he was left to care for his daughter until her death three years later at the age of 35. Lifting her out of bed several times a day to use the bathroom had damaged his back, leaving Ryan bedridden and alone. When we first reached the 71-year-old at his home in Boca Raton, Florida, he was reluctant to retell his tragic story.

"What's the point?" he said. "The government won't ever take responsibility."

In the end, Ryan agreed to talk. Maybe sharing his story one more time would help others get the recognition his daughter never received.

If that happened, Ryan said he could die in peace.

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"COLORFUL DEMONSTRATIONS AND WEEKEND MARCHES ARE VITAL BUT ALONE ARE NOT POWERFUL ENOUGH TO STOP WARS. WARS WILL BE STOPPED ONLY WHEN SOLDIERS REFUSE TO FIGHT, WHEN WORKERS REFUSE TO LOAD WEAPONS ONTO SHIPS AND AIRCRAFT, WHEN PEOPLE BOYCOTT THE ECONOMIC OUTPOSTS OF EMPIRE THAT ARE STRUNG ACROSS THE GLOBE. "

— Arundhati Roy, Public Power in the Age of Empire



Eureka VA Clinic News Bits

- ☺ **Town Hall Meeting** (in the clinic lobby)
 Tuesday, March 7, 2017, 4:30 p.m.
 930 West Harris Street, Eureka
 L Circle the date
- ☺ **VA Changes Medication Copay Regulations**
 Copayments for many generic and non-generic medications will decrease; annual copay cap is lowered. (learn more at the Town Hall Meeting)
- ☺ **Veterans Free Bus Pass**
 This is a limited time and availability program.
 To secure your pass contact:
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 1105 - 6th Street, Suite F
 Eureka, CA 95501
 (707) 445-7611
 or
 Eureka VA Clinic
 930 West Harris Street
 Eureka, CA 95503
 (707) 269-7500
 or
 The Job Market
 409 'K' Street
 Eureka, CA 95501
 (707) 441-5627
- ☺ **Veteran Appointment Request App**
 The San Francisco VA Health Care System is the first in the VA system to implement this app! A way to schedule or request appointments, track appointment details and much, much more through your mobile devices. Learn more at <https://mobile.va.gov/app/veteran-appointment-request>

Your VA Clinic Communications Council contact is:
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After Two Wars, Standing Rock is the First Time I Served the American People 'I've been on the wrong side of history'
 by Will Griffin

I was in Iraq when President Bush announced the “surge” in January 2007. I was in Afghanistan when President Obama announced the “surge” in December 2009. But it wasn't until I visited Standing Rock in October 2016 when I actually served the American people. This time, instead of fighting for corporate interests, I was fighting for the people.

The Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL), or Bakken Pipeline, is a 1,172-mile oil pipeline project that will transfer crude oil across four states: North Dakota, South Dakota, Iowa and Illinois. From the Bakken fields of North Dakota, the pipeline will carry in excess of 450,000 barrels per day of crude oil to Patoka, Illinois, and possibly on to Texas and near the Gulf Coast areas for refinement or export. The project will cost \$3.7 billion, while creating 8,000-12,000 temporary construction jobs and only 40 permanent operating jobs.

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Next VFP56 meeting will be held on Thursday, February 2nd at 7:00 PM. Meeting will be held at 24 Unitarian Fellowship Way, Bayside, Jacoby Creek Road. Veterans and non-veterans are more than welcome to come and help us dialogue about what we together can do to bring about peace in this complex world.



The Costs of War Loom Even Larger for Post-Vietnam Veterans

By Peter Aronson and 'Nate' Lomba

In much the same way proper evaluation and assessment of Vietnam veterans exposed to Agent Orange (AO) has been delayed or dismissed altogether by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA)—specifically the Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA)—a greater medical holocaust looms on the horizon for post-Vietnam and Gulf War veterans.

Veterans of all Middle East invasions may be affected by exposure to Depleted Uranium (DU) during their service, whether in combat zones or simply being in country. But the consequences of DU use reach far beyond the geographical boundaries of the battlefield.

All uranium is highly regulated because of its known dangers to humans and the environment. This includes DU, which is a byproduct of enriching natural uranium for use in nuclear power reactors or nuclear bombs.

Concentrating the most radioactive part of uranium results in “**enriched uranium.**” What remains from this process is “**depleted**” of the most radioactive part, and is called “**depleted uranium,**” or DU. It is still uranium; still a radioactive element highly regulated because of its known dangers. It is known to cause cancer, birth defects in children of exposed parents, and other mutations. It is also a chemically toxic heavy metal (like lead poisoning).

Aviation uses DU as a ballast in airplane wings, but it is used primarily by the military as an armor piercing, bunker busting penetrating munition in the form of bullets to huge missiles. DU rounds burn in air and ignite anything combustible nearby, including humans who are instantly converted to charred statues.

When a DU shell is fired from a gun, like from a tank or plane, the DU begins to aerosolize into very fine particles the size of smoke. When the DU shell impacts a target it produces clouds of DU ‘dust’ that settles on and around the target. Anyone coming in contact with the DU dust is likely to disturb and inhale some of it. Being “downwind,” miles away from impact, soldiers and civilians are exposed. External exposures are bad enough, but internal exposures—breathing into lungs; ingesting exposed water or food; shrapnel wounds—are far worse and can last a lifetime ... or foreshorten it!

Agent Orange (AO) and Depleted Uranium (DU) share a common history in that in both cases similar tactics were used to suppress the truth about their hazards. Both became coveted by the defense and chemical industries. Exposing the truth about each present important conflicts between their continued use and related liabilities. Tactics to deny, delay, and deceive for the sake of profit is not new.

For decades the tobacco industry successfully used these tactics to deceive policymakers and the public about risks and liabilities posed by their products. Similarly, the defense and chemical industries have used these tactics for 50 years to preclude prohibition of AO and DU.

In the case of AO and DU the scale and consequences of deception and lies are far greater than withholding the truth about tobacco products and public health. Legal, moral, political, and financial liabilities extend well beyond investors and stakeholders. **Withholding the truth prolongs benefits for industry and usually result in minor penalties**—“We didn’t know”—before laws and regulations are rewritten to protect investments and chastise those critical of AO or DU use.

The physics and chemistry of uranium is not political, but deception and lies are. In 1945 Manhattan Project physicists knew DU ‘dust’ was hazardous and could be used in combat to “render large areas uninhabitable.”

Later, the Department of Defense contracted with “Science & Applications International Corporation” (SAIC) to conduct many of its investigations and understanding of DU. Here is what the US government has known about DU for three decades:

✓ “Depleted Uranium is a low-level radiation alpha emitter which is linked to cancer **when exposures are internal** [and]



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chemical toxicity causing kidney damage.” (SAIC 1990, Vol 3,4, emphasis added)

- ✓ “Short term effects of high doses can result in death, while long term effects of low doses have been implicated in cancer.” (ibid, Vol 4-12)
- ✓ “Inhaled insoluble oxides stay in the lungs longer and pose a potential cancer risk due to radiation. Ingested DU dust can also pose a radioactive and a toxicity risk.” (U.S. GAO, Op Desert Storm: Army Not Adequately Prepared to Deal with Depleted Uranium Contamination, (GAO/NSIAD -93-90, Jan 1993, pp 17-18).

Further evidence the truth about DU is being intentionally suppressed is reflected in the following examples of **ignoring pertinent military regulations** that call for:

- ✓ DU safety training is required by military regulations for **any** soldier deployed to areas DU may be used. **Almost none** received this required training.
- ✓ All level I and II ^[1] DU exposures **require DU testing** yet so few have actually been tested the data is viewed a scientifically inadequate.
- ✓ The only testing facility the VA uses is known to employ methods inferior to testing methods available elsewhere.
- ✓ “The DU Program is in fact not considered a proper scientific study precisely because so few exposed veterans have been examined.”

(<http://doc.danfahey.com/VA-Memo-1991.pdf>)

The US invasions of the Middle East and Afghanistan have lasted longer than the US involvement in Vietnam. Use of DU weapons in combat and training continue unabated. Tens of thousands of US military personnel have been exposed to DU, most unknowingly. But since it may take years or longer for the effects of cancer-causing radiation to become recognizable many of those affected will be long out of the military and, perhaps, receiving care through the VA healthcare system. The level of care they receive will be dependant on how the VA views DU exposure. If the treatment of AO victims—military and non-military alike—is any indication, DU victims—and perhaps their progeny—stand a better chance of being hung out to dry than receiving the care they need.

It would be remiss to end this story without mentioning the potentially hundreds of thousands of non-military victims of DU and AO exposures. Innocent civilians whose homelands have been “rendered uninhabitable” but who still live there

because they have nowhere else to go. Ever since Gulf War I (1990-91) birth defects previously unknown have been showing up in Iraqi and Bosnian children. Children of returning US military personnel have exhibited similar birth defects. But few organizations are keeping records or seeking the best diagnostic tools least of all the DOD or US government. Birth defects in Vietnamese children from AO have reached into third and fourth generations. The extent of the boding DU medical holocaust—in military personnel and civilians—is mostly being ignored. ■

Readers interested in a more realistic reflection are referred to the website **Toxic Remnants of War** (<http://www.toxicremnantsofwar.info/about/>).

^[1] **Level I exposures** are assigned to those individuals believed to be struck by DU fragments, or who were in, on, or near (less than 50 meters) a target struck by DU. Level I includes first responders who entered vehicles to render aid.

Level II exposures include personnel, other than first responders, who routinely entered contaminated vehicles or equipment containing DU residues to perform maintenance and recovery operations, intelligence, or damage assessments. Level II also includes individuals who fought DU fires.

Peter Aronson, PA-C, is a retired physician assistant who served as an Army Medic at Ft. Lewis, Washington. He is Co-Chair of the DU/WMD Committee for the Humboldt Bay Chapter of Veterans For Peace.

N. S. ‘Nate’ Lomba, PE, SE (Ret.), LM-ASCE/SEI, is a retired civil/structural engineer. His US Navy enlistment began in 1965. He served aboard the USS Hancock (CVA-19) in 1968-69 as a member of the “*Gulf of Tonkin Yacht Club*.” ‘Nate’ is a member of the Veterans Education & Outreach Project (VEOP) Committee for the Humboldt Bay Chapter of Veterans For Peace.



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But I didn't visit North Dakota to learn about the whopping 40 permanent jobs. I traveled to North Dakota to stand with the people of Standing Rock. The Standing Rock Sioux tribe has called people across this nation and around the world to prayer, action and support for efforts to stop DAPL or, as the people of Standing Rock call it, the Black Snake. They, along with over 300 other Native American tribes, realize that the pipeline will eventually leak and spill oil into their fresh water supply. A spill into the Missouri River would affect 17 million Americans downstream that depend on the river for their drinking water. The people of Standing Rock are not just fighting to save themselves, they are fighting for tens of millions of others.

The Sioux struggle against the pipeline embraces so many other struggles in this nation. It encompasses struggles against climate catastrophe, a history of breaking treaties with Native Americans, attacks on the right to assemble, assaults on journalists, the militarization of police, and placing corporate profits over human rights.

While camping at Standing Rock (the official camp name is Oceti Sakowin; Standing Rock is the reservation), we were treated as family. Everyone called each other relatives, brother, sister, mother, grandmother and so on. Water, coffee, food, snacks, tents, clothes and various camping equipment were available to all without a price tag. The only request was for people to be unarmed and drug and alcohol free. There is virtually no cellphone service on the camp. If you wanted to find somebody, you had to actually walk around, look, or even ask people if they've seen who you're looking for! Fellow veteran Matt Hoh and I agreed the camp was a reminder of Forward Operating Bases (FOBs) in Iraq and Afghanistan, without the mortars or rockets blowing up everywhere.

Matt and I also agreed that after our military "service" and multiple deployments to two wars, this was the first time we served the American people. After going to a few nonviolent direct action protests against the Black Snake, we realized what it actually meant to stand by the American people and fight in their interests. We suddenly had this feeling of honor, something we never had from our deployments to Iraq or Afghanistan.

We agreed that the only "people" we served overseas fighting were the likes of Halliburton, KBR, AECOM, DynCorp, Raytheon, Environmental Chemical, and so many more. We know that our own government lied to us. We know that the world is not a safer place than it was before the United States illegally occupied Iraq and Afghanistan; we understand that militaries don't bring peace. Looking into the eyes of the police at Standing Rock, we saw ourselves.

We also know now that not only is water life, as the Standing Rock Sioux continue to cry out, but water is also peace. None of us can have any peace without the basic necessities of life such as clean air and water, arable land, clothing, shelter and justice. As Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. said, "Peace is not merely the absence of war but the presence of justice." That's what we

were fighting for at Standing Rock, peace and justice.

The militarized police forces on the ground weren't keeping the peace or protecting justice, they were protecting corporate interests. The police were blocking peace and obstructing justice on behalf of corporations, greedy bankers and investors. During my 11 days there, I saw local law enforcement, out-of-jurisdiction police forces, private security forces, and the North Dakota National Guard—all on behalf of the corporations and the state, not the people. They arrested the people and protected the construction equipment.

We saw journalists being attacked and warrants issued for their arrests just for holding a microphone and interviewing people. We saw police forces using military-grade equipment that Matt and I used in combat zones overseas. We saw the infringement of constitutional rights such as the right to assemble. But most important, we saw Native Americans courageously continue to defend their land and people from a genocidal 500-year war against the state and corporations alike.

The Sioux and the hundreds of other tribes and supporters are joining forces to fight for their right to exist. This struggle is their life, and has been for too many generations to count. I've come to realize that too. At one time I thought the government, the military and police knew what they are doing and that they existed to protect us all. That's why I joined the military; to provide a selfless service to my country. That myth has been shattered. After two wars, PTSD and moral injury, I've come to realize I've been on the wrong side of history.

Will Griffin is a former US Army Paratrooper who served in both Iraq and Afghanistan. Upon his separation from the military in 2010, he has since become an antiwar activist and member of Veterans For Peace. His writings and film can be found at www.thepeacereport.com

¡Presente!: Charlie Liteky

by Bill Becker

Charlie Liteky passed away on Friday, January 20th, 2017. Charlie was an Army chaplain in Vietnam who won the Medal of Honor for rescuing more than 20 wounded men but later gave it back in protest and became a life long peace activist. Charlie was a huge hero to many who knew him in the Anti-War Movement. Not only did he give back his Medal of Honor (which was presented to him by President Lyndon Johnson for saving the lives of many soldiers in Vietnam) he also fasted for over 40 days with S. Brian Wilson, Duncan Murphy and George Mizo in 1986 on the steps of The Capitol Building in Washington DC - in their: 'VETERANS EAST FOR LIFE' - protesting U.S. policy in Central America. Charlie also participated many times in protesting: 'The School of The Americas', located at Fort Benning, Georgia and was arrested and sent to prison for crossing the line at Fort Benning. Charlie was long-time friends with S. Brian Willson, Father Roy Bourgeois, David Hartsough and many others in the anti-war movement.

In 2003, he traveled to Baghdad with other peace activists to bear witness to the U.S. war in Iraq. He published "An Open Letter to the U.S. Military" in objection to the war.



Four More Journalists Get Felony Charges After Covering Inauguration Unrest

By Jon Swaine, Guardian UK

A documentary producer, a photojournalist, a live-streamer and a freelance reporter facing up to 10 years in prison and a \$25,000 fine if convicted our more journalists have been charged with felonies after being arrested while covering the unrest around Donald Trump's inauguration, meaning that at least six media workers are facing up to 10 years in prison and a \$25,000 fine if convicted.

A documentary producer, a photojournalist, a live-streamer and a freelance reporter were each charged with the most serious level of offense under Washington DC's law against rioting, after being caught up in the police action against demonstrators.

The Guardian learned of their arrests after reporting on Monday that the journalists Evan Engel of Vocativ and Alex Rubinstein of RT America had also been arrested and charged with felonies while covering the samHE GOLDEN RULE IS BACK IN EUREKA AFTER HAVING TRAVELED e unrest on Friday morning.

All six were arraigned in superior court on Saturday and released to await further hearings in February and March, according to court filings. The Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) said late on Tuesday that charges against journalists who were covering the protests should be dropped.

"These charges are clearly inappropriate, and we are concerned that they could send a chilling message to journalists covering future protests," said Carlos Lauría, the CPJ's senior Americas program coordinator. "We call on authorities in Washington to drop these charges immediately."

Jack Keller, a producer for the web documentary series Story of America, said he was charged and detained for about 36 hours after being kettled by police at 12th and L streets on Friday morning and arrested despite telling officers that he was covering the demonstrations as a journalist.

"The way we were treated was an absolute travesty," said Keller, whose cellphone has been kept by the authorities. Keller's editor, Annabel Park, said: "It is a maddening and frustrating situation. These are people who were there observing and documenting."

Matt Hopard, an independent journalist who was live-streaming the Friday protests, was arrested at the same site as Keller; Engel and Rubinstein, according to metropolitan police records. He said in a message that he denied the charge against him.

Also arrested while covering the demonstrations at 12th and L

streets and later charged were Shay Horse, an independent photojournalist and activist, and Aaron Cantú, a freelance journalist and activist, who has written for outlets including the Baffler, the Washington Spectator and the New Inquiry. Both deny wrongdoing.

In all, more than 200 people were arrested on Friday, after property was vandalized in the US capital in the hours around Trump's swearing-in as president. Police said that six officers suffered minor injuries.

The National Lawyers' Guild accused Washington DC's metropolitan police department of having "indiscriminately targeted people for arrest en masse based on location alone" and said they unlawfully used teargas and other weapons.

"These illegal acts are clearly designed to chill the speech of protesters engaging in First Amendment activity," Maggie Ellinger-Locke, of the guild's DC branch, said in a statement.

None of the arrest reports for the six journalists makes any specific allegations about what any of them are supposed to have done wrong. Keller's report, which also covers the arrests of an unknown number of unidentified other people, includes a note that a police vehicle was vandalized. "I had absolutely nothing to do with the vandalism," said Keller.

Reports on the arrests of five of the six journalists contain identical language alleging that "numerous crimes were occurring in police presence". They state that windows were broken, fires were lit and vehicles were damaged. "The crowd was observed enticing a riot by organizing, promoting, encouraging and participating in acts of violence in furtherance of the riot," the police reports said.

The US attorney's office for Washington DC, which is prosecuting those arrested, declined to comment on the journalists' specific cases but said it was continuing to review evidence from the day with the police.

"Based on the facts and circumstances, we determined that probable cause existed to support the filing of felony rioting charges," William Miller, a spokesman for the office, said in a statement. "As in all of our cases, we are always willing to consider additional information that people bring forward."

Preliminary hearings for Cantú, Hopard, Horse, and Keller were set for mid-March. Hearings for Engel and Rubinstein were scheduled for mid-February.

GOLDEN RULE NEWS

The Golden Rule is back in Eureka after having traveled north to different scheduled events. To read about her adventures go to her website and click on the Golden Rule Newsletter.

www.GoldenRuleProject.org





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LET US HEAR FROM YOU!

If you would like to submit an article, opinion, comment or response to anything you have read which might interest the members of VFP-56, please e-mail it to turtldncer@aol.com, in word format, or mail to Jim Sorter at 1762 Buttermilk Lane, Arcata, CA 95521. Submissions will be included on a first come basis until the newsletter is full. Late arriving submissions will be archived for future issues.



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