



Covert Mission was Burying Agent Orange in S. Korea, Veterans Say

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Steve House

WAEGWAN, South Korea (KPHO) -

This story begins in a tiny, ramshackle trailer in Apache Junction with one man. A self-proclaimed outcast, a biker more comfortable on society's fringe. A U.S. Army veteran who has been living with a dark secret for more than 30 years. "Why am I like I am?" asks Steve House. "Because I couldn't live with what I had done."

House can no longer bury his secret. "Nobody seems to give a s**t," House says. "Excuse my French. Nobody seems to care. I've told Senator (John) McCain's office about it. I've told the VA about it. Yeah, it haunts me."

In 1978, House was stationed at Camp Carroll Army Base in Daegu City, South Korea. He was just 22 years old, but was soon entrusted with a covert assignment.

"They hand-picked us," he says.

He was among six soldiers ordered to wear gas masks on this mission. But they shed their masks after several of them suffered heat exhaustion. House - a heavy-machinery operator - says he dug a ditch nearly the length of a city block. And what happened next changed these men forever. "They started bringing us truckloads of 55-gallon drums, four to a skid," House says. "OD (live drab) army green. Fifty-five gallon drums with bright yellow. Some of them had bright orange writing on them and some of the cans say 'Province of Vietnam, Compound Orange.'"

A chilling confession, considering the toxic defoliant was used during the Vietnam War to wipe out entire jungles. It was also sprayed in Korea along the Demilitarized Zone - which divides the North from the South. The herbicide was so harmful that the U.S. government says the excess Agent Orange was incinerated at sea. "There was a smell," says fellow soldier Robert Travis. "I couldn't even describe it; just sickly sweet."

CBS 5 Investigates traveled across the U.S. to track down other soldiers involved with the alleged burial, and to investigate whether a deadly toxin the U.S. government says was burned at sea, could have secretly ended up buried on a U.S. military base in Korea. "It had a stripe around the barrel dated 1967 for the Republic of Vietnam," says Travis. "And we were like, 'Why is this in Korea? And what is it?'"

Travis says he transported the drums from a hazardous-material storage warehouse known as the War Depo Zone to the ditch, where they buried the leaking drums. "I remember seeing it dated 1967 - and this was 1978 - and already eating through metal," he says. "I figured it ate through most of the drums."

At the time, Travis had no idea of the lasting effects of Agent Orange. And neither did the others. "My foot swelled up basically overnight and I couldn't walk and that's when basically my troubles started," says veteran Richard Cramer, who now lives in Illinois.

Cramer served alongside House and Travis. He was allowed to wear tennis shoes while at Camp Carroll because he says his feet went numb while on the secret burial. He says he eventually collapsed and had to be flown to a military hospital where he stayed for two months. "They had no record of me ever being there," Cramer says.

In fact, all three of these soldiers say their medical records disappeared after they finished that special assignment at Camp Carroll. "That's too coincidental that all our medical records were missing," Cramer says.

Another coincidence: All three of these men are extremely sick with illnesses known to be caused by Agent Orange exposure. "I had a rash all over my body," says Travis. "It never totally went away."

"I have swelling of the ankles and toes," says Cramer. "I have chronic arthritis in my back. I get eye infections. It also has affected my hearing."

"Then the diabetes started coming up," says House. "I had problems with skin rashes and neuropathy."

They say their afflictions are direct results of what they buried on this base more than three decades ago. "I did what I was told," says Cramer. "That's the military way. Do what you are told."

"I served my country for eight years," Travis says. "But out of those eight years, for at least a week I was a guinea pig. The least they can do is take care of it. But they're not going to."

"We basically buried our garbage in their backyard," says Steve House "And that ain't right!"

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