

The Forgotten Warriors

By Dennis McBride

Thousands, if not millions, of veterans have had illnesses and medical conditions related to Carbon Tetrachloride but the VA still refuses to say that their illnesses may be related to it. Illnesses from Carbon Tet are far more common because it was used by all branches of the military for a much longer time. It is difficult to prove connection when they lost many years of our medical records in the fire at the National Records Center in St. Louis.

There have been a few bills in congress like: H.R. 4179, Veterans Carbon Tetrachloride Benefits Act but none have been passed. This Bill was killed in Committee. Thousands of veterans continue to die from illnesses related to this chemical which was used as a cleaning agent and degreaser. It is an industrial solvent, often containing polyhalogenated hydrocarbons, used to remove grease from mechanical parts. All branches of the service used this prior to, and shortly after, the Vietnam conflict. The Navy used it constantly and in enclosed small spaces like engine rooms, auxiliary engine rooms, small special frequency generator rooms and fan rooms. Carbon Tetrachloride is also called carbon chloride, methane tetrachloride, perchloromethane, tetrachloroethane, or benziform. Or as we vets referred to it, Carbon Tet.

I have talked to many vets that have the same illnesses I have or medical problems related to Carbon Tet. I asked them if they ever used it and most all the older vets say yes. It was banned from our type of use sometime in the 1970s and banned entirely by 1980, except for some industrial uses that requires a permit and safety precautions because of human health hazards. A friend who was exposed in the Army had exactly the same medical conditions that I have and although we are the same age he died about 5 years ago.

I recently talked to a Navy airman that would stand underneath the airplanes on ship and spray Carbon Tet on the engines. Not only did they breath the fumes but their clothes became so saturated with it that often the clothes would have to be thrown away.

A shipmate and I were cleaning an unventilated fan room and other crew members didn't like the smell so they closed the hatch. We both became dizzy and my friend was losing consciousness. We crawled to the hatch under pipes, I got the hatch open and helped my friend out. We both sat on the deck for at least 20 minutes until we could stand. We were young and didn't think much of it. The next day I couldn't move my foot and when we got to Hawaii I was misdiagnosed with "peroneal nerve palsy" a brace was put on my leg and foot. The doctors were amazed that I could move it after about a month of wearing the brace.

A new study on Toxic Neuropathy lists associated medical conditions that may also be present. I have most of them. On the bottom of the list it states: "Motor dysfunction (eg, abnormal gait and foot drop): in severe cases." This information was important to help prove service connection. In 2005 I applied for compensation but was denied and they said they saw no evidence of a foot injury. A year ago I filed again and requested my active duty military records

from the National Record Center. The Record Center sent me a letter saying they sent the records to the Regional Office of the VA located at the Federal building in West Los Angeles. I wrote to the VA in LA requesting my records and a lady called to tell me they didn't have them. She said she would send me a release of information form for the Tripler Army Hospital in Hawaii where I was treated. Well a friend was driving down there to get his records and asked me if I wanted to go along. I went and got my records in 10 minutes. In my records were 6 documents covering over 3 months of my foot drop and two from Tripler Hospital. So they lied to me about not having them.

It is important for vets to know if their medical problems are associated with these toxins. Many of the illnesses related to Carbon Tet are also listed with illnesses from Agent Orange. One is Graves Disease, which occurs 3 times more often in Vietnam veterans than the rest of the military. Many Navy vets have Graves Disease like I do.

The Navy personal that served in the South China Sea have also continuously been denied Agent Orange benefits. The Navy still refuses to accept the Australian study on the water purification systems used on Naval vessels. The study shows that in the distilling process the Agent Orange dioxin's potency was actually increased up to 2,000 times. We were cooking our food in it and drinking it.

Some medical conditions are related to Carbon Tet. Besides a wide variety of cancers there is also:

1. As a Cardiovascular Toxicant; elevated blood pressure (hypertension), hardening of the arteries (arteriosclerosis), abnormal heartbeat (cardiac arrhythmia), and decreased blood flow to the heart (coronary ischemia).
2. As an Endocrine Toxicant; hypothyroidism, diabetes mellitus, hypoglycemia, reproductive disorders, and cancer and I might add Graves Disease (hyperthyroidism) which is 3 times higher for Vietnam Vets.
3. As Gastrointestinal or Liver Toxicants; Carbon tetrachloride and related chemicals, such as chloroform, are linked to cirrhosis of the liver.
4. As Kidney Toxicants; ureter, or bladder (Kidney Toxicity). "Toxic injury to the kidney is known to occur as a result of exposures to halogenated hydrocarbons, such as carbon tetrachloride..."
5. As a Neurotoxicant; induce confusion, fatigue, irritability, and other behavioral changes, weakness in the lower limbs, tingling in the limbs (paresthesia), and loss of coordination.
6. As a Respiratory Toxicant; Respiratory toxicity can include a variety of acute and chronic pulmonary conditions, including local irritation, bronchitis, pulmonary edema, emphysema, and cancer.

Also these from the Study on Toxic Neuropathy:

Signs and symptoms Patients with neuropathy typically present with symptoms of pain, tingling, or numbness in their feet, consistent with dysfunction affecting the longest and largest fibers of the peripheral nervous system (PNS). Other manifestations of neurologic dysfunction that may be present include the following:

- Hypohidrosis or hyperhidrosis
- Diarrhea or constipation
- Urinary incontinence
- Sicca syndrome
- Blurry vision
- Facial flushes
- Orthostatic intolerance
- Sexual dysfunction
- Cramping
- Tachycardia
- Rapid alterations in blood pressure.

During physical examination, the following symptoms of polyneuropathy may be found:

- Sensory loss in a stocking-glove distribution
- Distal to proximal progression: Consistent with the commencement of axonal degeneration
- Early loss of symmetrical ankle jerk
- Motor dysfunction (eg, abnormal gait and foot drop).

Information from: Chemical: CARBON TETRACHLORIDE CAS Number: 56-23-5 Chemical Profile for CARBON TETRACHLORIDE (CAS Number: 56-23-5) Human Health

Hazards http://scorecard.goodguide.com/chemical-profiles/summary.tcl?edf_substance_id=56-23-5#hazards

Complete report: <http://emedicine.medscape.com/article/1175276-overview#a0156>

Dennis McBride was in the US Navy from 1964-1966.