

## **Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act of 2018**

### **VFW's Concerns:**

In Vietnam, veterans were exposed to Agent Orange, and those who served in the offshore waters of Vietnam during the war drank, bathed in, and cooked with water contaminated by Agent Orange. Veterans who served in the coastal waters of Vietnam during the Vietnam War are arbitrarily and unjustly denied benefits for illnesses associated with Agent Orange exposure, to include veterans who served on ships presumed to be exposed to Agent Orange but whose service did not fall between the specific presumptive dates.

From 1967 to 1969 the United States government authorized the testing and use of toxic herbicides, including Agent Orange, to improve observation and fields of fire for American service members patrolling along the Korean demilitarized zone (DMZ) and deny hostile forces concealment provided by vegetation. Due to direct exposure to these toxic herbicides, Korean DMZ veterans now suffer from conditions directly linked to Agent Orange. In 2003, Congress authorized the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to establish presumptive disability compensation benefits for veterans who served along the Korean DMZ between September 1, 1967, and August 31, 1971, which incorporates the earliest use of toxic herbicides along the Korean DMZ, and accounts for the half-life of such toxins. However, VA unjustly elected to begin the presumptive date on April 1, 1968 — seven months after Congress suggested. In so doing, VA requires veterans who served along the Korean DMZ between September 1967 and April 1968 to prove individual exposure, which is almost impossible to do more than 50 years after the incident.

Agent Orange was also sprayed at bases in Thailand during the war in Vietnam. However, veterans who were present during the spraying must prove they worked on the perimeter of the base in order to have their disability compensation claims considered under more streamlined presumptive rules. The spraying of vegetation allowed for the substance to go from a liquid state to one which is a mist that could float to other portions of the base. It is not improbable for veterans in other parts of the base to have been exposed to Agent Orange.

Additionally, research has determined that veterans who were exposed to Agent Orange are more likely than the general population and non-exposed veterans to have a child born with spina bifida, a debilitating spinal cord condition. VA administers the Spina Bifida Health Care Benefits Program, which provides a monetary stipend and health care services for the children, who are born with spina bifida, of certain Vietnam War and Korean DMZ veterans. However, the children of veterans who were exposed to Agent Orange in Thailand are excluded.

### **VFW's Solution:**

The VFW calls on the Senate to swiftly pass H.R. 299, the *Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act of 2018*, which was passed by the House on June 24, 2018, with a unanimous 382-0 vote, and would:

- Restore benefits for Blue Water Navy veterans who served off the coast in territorial waters during the Vietnam War.
- Expand benefits to Korean DMZ veterans who were exposed to toxins before April 1968.
- Provide spina bifida benefits to the children of veterans exposed to Agent Orange in Thailand.