

JULY 24, 1990

TO: LANE

FROM: LORI

RE: OTA'S REVIEW OF ADMIRAL ZUMWALT'S REPORT AND THE  
AGENT ORANGE SCIENTIFIC TASK FORCE.

Attached is a copy of OTA's review of Admiral Zumwalt's report on Agent Orange. Mr. John Gibbons of OTA states that "we conclude that many of the assertions made in the report supporting a conclusion that Agent Orange is responsible for a wide range of health problems among Vietnam veterans, are incorrect. These are not mainly matters of differing opinion, but matters of fact -- what did or did not happen."

Mr. Gibbons was responding to a request made by the House Veterans' Affairs Committee in a letter dated July 13, 1990. This is the same day that Chairman Applegate asked his subcommittee staff to draft an omnibus bill including the compensation bill, H.R. 3004 and H.R. 303. The OTA response was received by the House Committee on July 23, 1990.

A letter from the Committee was sent to OTA on May 21, 1990 asking them to review the Agent Orange Scientific Task Force study. The Subcommittee on Compensation, Pension and Insurance has not received a response to that letter.

In addition, the Committee has not responded to your motion made at the May 2, 1990 hearing on Agent Orange requesting that OTA review the report on non-Hodgkin's lymphoma made by the Department of Veterans' Affairs Advisory Committee on Environmental Hazards.

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JOHN H. GIBBONS  
DIRECTOR

Congress of the United States  
OFFICE OF TECHNOLOGY ASSESSMENT  
WASHINGTON, DC 20510-8025

July 23, 1990

The Honorable G.V. (Sonny) Montgomery  
Chairman  
Committee on Veterans' Affairs  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Mr. Chairman:

Enclosed is OTA's review of Special Assistant Admiral E. R. Zumwalt, Jr.'s "Report to the Secretary of the Department of Veterans Affairs on the Association Between Adverse Health Effects and Exposure to Agent Orange." This OTA review was requested by you and your colleagues in your letter to me of July 13, 1990.

Admiral Zumwalt's report gives a brief history of Agent Orange use in Vietnam; mentions early health studies related to phenoxy herbicides; reviews the history of compensation for Agent Orange-related health effects; discusses the work of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Advisory Committee on Environmental Hazards; discusses various aspects of the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) validation study, and gives brief mention to some conclusions of the Selected Cancer Study; discusses some findings of the Air Force Ranch Hand Study; mentions some other studies of phenoxy herbicide exposure; and makes recommendations to the Secretary of Veterans Affairs for compensating Vietnam veterans for health conditions he believes are related to Agent Orange.

The report seems to take the form more of a legal brief than of a scientific review of evidence; it makes an argument for finding that Agent Orange is responsible for a wide range of health problems among Vietnam veterans. The argument depends in large part on Admiral Zumwalt's attempting to discredit the VA Advisory Committee on Environmental Hazards and various Government researchers.

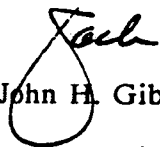
Our review is limited to questions of substance, particularly in those areas in which OTA has been involved. Most prominently, this includes the CDC validation study and the military records research leading up to it. OTA's considerable involvement in these issues stems from its statutory responsibility (stated in Public Laws 96-151 and 97-72) for reviewing study protocols and monitoring the conduct of studies of Agent Orange and the Vietnam Experience. OTA has also followed the progress of the Ranch Hand Study and reviewed the major reports from that study, as well as a large number of other Government and private sector studies relating to the

Agent Orange question, for the Veterans' Affairs Committees of Congress. However, OTA staff have not been involved in some of the areas covered by Admiral Zumwalt, e.g., the workings of the VA Environmental Hazards Committee, and no comments on those areas are offered.

Based on a review of the areas in which OTA has been involved, we conclude that many of the assertions made in the report supporting a conclusion that Agent Orange is responsible for a wide range of health problems among Vietnam veterans, are incorrect. These are not mainly matters of differing opinion, but matters of fact--what did or did not happen. For those aspects about which OTA staff have detailed knowledge, it appears that Admiral Zumwalt's arguments are based, in many instances, on faulty information or incorrect interpretation of data.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions, or contact Hellen Gelband in the OTA Health Program (8-6590), who was responsible for the review. I hope you find this material helpful in sorting out these difficult issues.

Sincerely,

  
John H. Gibbons

enclosures