

Illness hits black vets harder

By Ed Wendt
HOUSTON FORWARD TIMES

Department of Defense documents obtained by the Houston Forward Times reveal that black soldiers may be among those most affected by war-related illnesses according to a study of Gulf War veterans.

The documents came to light as the CIA agrees to investigate reports that the government covered up evidence of possible troop exposure to Iraqi chemical weapons during the 1991 Persian Gulf War.

Former CIA agents Patrick and Robin Eddington recently said they had found evidence of up to 60 separate incidents in which nerve gas or other chemical weapons were released near U.S. troops. But they said CIA higher-ups had tried to prevent them from pursuing their personal investigation and that going ahead with it in effect destroyed their careers. The Eddingtons, who are married, resigned from the CIA earlier this year. They are now suing the government as well as writing a book about their case.

Patrick Eddington said he is convinced that a government cover-up is still underway and is leading the call for a congressional investigation. He pointed to 58 classified cables and logs he said showed Iraq had deployed chemical munitions into the Kuwaiti areas of operation. He has accused the CIA of trying to hide the information and cover up what he considers is criminal negligence.

He claimed the documents were given to a White House panel investigating Gulf War illnesses only because he had publicly insisted they be turned over. He added that the Pentagon and CIA were still hanging on to "literally tens of thousands of pages of unit logs," as well as other materials he did not have the clearance to see.

Shortly after serving in the Gulf War, many military men and women reported unexplained problems such as fatigue, muscle and joint pain, memory loss and severe headaches that have become known collectively as Gulf War

Some trace Gulf War malady to Iraq's chemical weapons

syndrome. However, the U.S. government has denied claims that the illnesses are related to exposure to Iraqi chemicals.

According to the Department of Defense study obtained by the Houston Forward Times, 697,000 U.S. armed service members were deployed to the Persian Gulf in 1990 and 1991 in Operation Desert Shield and Operation Desert Storm. Because of the massive numbers of reported illnesses by veterans, the Department of Defense and Department of Veterans Affairs launched a Comprehensive Clinical Evaluation Program. By December 1995, 27,000 individuals had enrolled in the program.

Eighty-eight percent of those participating in the program were male and 12 percent were female. Thirty-two percent were

African American compared to 57 percent whites and 6 percent Hispanic.

The 32 percentile representation of African Americans in the study indicates that a large number could be affected by Gulf War illnesses.

The study, as well as recently declassified Department of Defense and CIA documents, indicate that U.S. troops may have been exposed to Iraqi chemicals during the Gulf War. The Department of Defense report states, "Since Operations Desert Shield/Storm, some Gulf War veterans have reported persistent symptoms that they believe are related to their experience in the Persian Gulf War."

"A number of questions have arisen about the possible impact of certain environmental exposures and preventative medicine measures on service members during Operations Desert Shield/Storm," it says.

While the U.S. government continues to officially deny that U.S. troops were exposed to chemical and biological agents, declassified intelligence document obtained by the Houston Forward Times indicate otherwise. Those documents include top secret memorandums, and communications from the CIA, Department of Defense, Joint Chiefs of Staff headed by General Colin Powell, and British Intelligence.

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