

The Agent Orange Association of Canada

By Art Connelly

In May, 2005 the Canadian media reported that Agent Orange was sprayed at Canadian Forces Base Gagetown, New Brunswick, in 1966 and 1967. The Department of National Defence (DND) in response to this story, claimed that a mere 2 barrels were sprayed by the U.S military, for a total of 7 days in 1966 and 1967.

Through the "Access to Information Act" it was determined that DND was not forthcoming in revealing that it also had sprayed defoliants at CFB Gagetown. It had sprayed over 1.3 million litres of Agent Orange, Purple and White containing Dioxin and Hexachlorobenzene from 1956 to 1984. In addition, 2 million lbs. of "dry" Agent White, also containing Hexachlorobenzene, were sprayed at CFB Gagetown during the same period. The soldiers, wives, children and civilians who had lived at Gagetown, armed with this information now knew that what had been whispered about for years was true. Families had suffered many illnesses without explanation, and now they knew why.

On June 23, 2005, DND held a hastily organized public meeting at CFB Gagetown at 1:30 p.m. Many were convinced that the meeting was held during the day to prevent those who worked from attending. Others believe that the meeting was held on the base to discourage any current military members from attending. The meeting, televised on CBC Newsworld, was explosive. Representatives from the Government of Canada, Veterans Affairs and the Department of National Defence remained steadfast in that 2 barrels of Agent Orange Defoliant had been sprayed by the U.S. Military for a total of 7 days in 1966 and 1967.

Kenneth Dobbie, who had driven all night from Kingston, Ontario, stood and calmly addressed the government representatives and

audience. He displayed the Access to Information document clearly showing the amounts of defoliants that had been sprayed. He told the world the truth that day. The audience listened, and one after another told of heartache and loss and illnesses. The anger and frustration was palpable. Still the government representatives stood steadfast in their resolve.

Public uproar instigated the government to create the "Base Gagetown and Area Fact-finders Project" in August of 2005, whose mandate was to find the facts and present them to the government. The project Coordinator was Vaughn Blaney, a former politician. Many people including present day Veterans Affairs Minister Greg Thompson, during his term as an opposition MP, have referred to the BGAFFP as an "Elaborate public relations exercise". Many feel the BGAFFP is merely in place to appease the public into believing that a genuine effort is being made to find the truth.

In October 2005, Vaughn Blaney resigned as the Coordinator of the BGAFFP citing health reasons. Mr. Blaney's replacement is Dr. Dennis Furlong, another former politician. Dr. Furlong, according to reports, is working at the BGAFFP on a part-time basis as he still runs his medical practice in New Brunswick. A concern for many is that the project is not being taken seriously. In June 2005 the internet website www.agentorangealert.com was created focusing on the spraying of deadly defoliants at CFB Gagetown. This website was an epiphany for many as it was a connection that individuals could locate and share information pertaining to the tragedy.

At this website the victims started to band together, and they were able to share their stories. Many found the website to be therapeutic in the sense that victims suddenly realized that they were not alone. They realized that so many illnesses were shared by

others. Since June 6, 2005, www.agentorangealert.com has received over 1.4 million "hits" and thousands of e-mails from around the world. The Agent Orange Association of Canada (AOAC) was born from the individuals who had suffered the most.

AOAC is a non-profit corporation with members living coast to coast. The membership consists of veterans, wives, widows, children of veterans and civilians. AOAC is calling for a public inquiry into the CFB Gagetown sprayings, and is also requesting testing and compensation for those who have suffered. AOAC is calling for acknowledgment and an apology from the government of Canada.

A class action lawsuit has also been implemented with over 1500 members. It is the opinion of the Agent Orange Association of Canada that the government is trying to stall the judicial process at all costs, even going so far as to try and have the chemical companies as co-defendants. At this writing the Minister of Veterans Affairs, Greg Thompson, has announced the government is considering a "compassionate" compensation package in the range of \$20,000.00. This package will be for those who suffer from 5 illnesses listed on the U.S Institute of Medicine list of diseases caused by agent orange.

The Agent Orange Association of Canada states that this is not acceptable, because the dioxin in agent orange which caused the diseases was a mere 2% of the defoliants sprayed. The other 98% of defoliants contained Hexachlorobenzene which is linked to a host of other diseases. The members of the Agent Orange Association of Canada will continue the fight to ensure that a public inquiry is implemented to ascertain the truth. Each and every day AOAC's membership grows larger. Each and every day it resolve grows stronger.

The Agent Orange Association of Canada's members are determined to "Do the right thing".

Art Connelly is the Vice President of the Agent Orange Association of Canada.

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