

TESTIMONY OF CHAPLAIN BARRY WALKER
May 6, 1994

Good morning. My name is the Rev. Dr. Barry Walker, and I want to thank you for the opportunity to testify today for the veterans of Desert Shield and Desert Storm.

I first entered the Army in January of 1964, and spent time in active duty from 1966 through 1970, the era of Vietnam. I was mobilized in September, 1990, with the ^{476A} Quartermasters Group (POL). We were responsible for theater fuel and bulk water for all the services. As a Chaplain, I supervised four Chaplain Unit ministry teams in Saudi Arabia, and ultimately in Iraq and Kuwait. We had some 4700 troops in the command, which was made up of Army Active Units and now activated Army Units from the Army Reserves and National Guard.

I was very healthy except for a slight blood pressure problem when I went to the Persian Gulf, and had no health problems during the first few months there.

On January 16, 1991, I received the first of 2 shots of a vaccine, but we were not told exactly what it was. We were later told that the purpose of the vaccines was to protect us; rumor was that it was for protection against anthrax. Also in January, after the first SCUD was launched, we were ordered to start taking some pills, although we were not told exactly what they were, either. All we were told was that the pills would protect us against chemical and biological weapons. We were told to take the pills, and not given a choice, though some soldiers did not take them. I was expected to be an example to others, so I took them at first. I later learned that these pills were pyridostigmine.

To my knowledge, none of the 4700 troops, except maybe the command Headquarters, was given any real information about the risks of these drugs or vaccines. We were not shown anything in writing, or told anything other than that these would protect us. My chemical officer was asked to find out more about the pills, and she shared some of that information with the Group Commander and a few staff officers. She said there were no problems with the pills.

The fact that we were given the vaccine or drugs was not recorded in our medical records, although I insisted that the vaccine be recorded in my personal record. Many soldiers did not carry a vaccine record, and most wouldn't have thought to ask that it be recorded. I don't recall any list being made of who was given the vaccine.

A few people seemed to get the runs after the vaccines, but there were no major problems. After the pills were distributed, more people got the runs and so they stopped taking the pills. Even people who were not sick stopped taking the pills because

they wanted to avoid getting sick. The commanders directed everyone that they should take the pills, but since the pills were taken in privacy, it was thus possible not to take them. The fact that people got sick was not included in their medical records.

I do not remember thinking that the vaccine or the pills that I took were causing me any problems, although I stopped taking the pills when I saw that they seemed to make people sick. However, around the same time I was having major problems with what seemed like allergies. I didn't pay much attention because I didn't have time to get sick -- I was an officer and I had a job to do. I kept going.

I started having problems with my back after the February 25, 1991, SCUD attack. It was probably from moving bodies, lifting debris, and so on, after Quartermaster Groups headquarters and barracks were hit. The attack was horrible; soldiers were killed, others lost limbs, one soldier's head was half blown off. Afterwards, when my back hurt, I went to the Med Hospital for treatment. Since I told them I had been moving bodies on cots, the cause was reported as being from moving cots.

We left the Persian Gulf at the end of May, and I was discharged on June 19, 1991. I was so happy to get home that I didn't worry that anything was wrong with me. I did go as a walk-in to the Pittsburgh Oakland VA on June 18, 1991, for treatment of back pain.

It wasn't until the summer, when I went to the Pittsburgh Oakland VA for further back treatment, that I realized something else was wrong. The VA doctor arranged for an EMG, CAT Scan, MRI, etc., to try and find out what was wrong. With the EMG, they did find that the nerves from my waist down were not as they should be, and that my right leg was worse than my left, which I had not noticed.

Because of my symptoms, I was also checked for suspected alcohol abuse, diabetes, and other possible causes, but they found nothing.

Now my symptoms include headaches, rashes, fatigue, loss of memory, sweating, and I sometimes have blood in my urine. I am unable to concentrate, and I have trouble sleeping.

For the past three years, I have been spending much of my time helping other Gulf War veterans and their families. I have taken over 150 veterans to the hospitals for treatment, or helped them in other ways. Many of them have symptoms similar to mine. Some are much more serious. Some just plain get lost for periods of time and do not know how they got where they are, some have blood in their urine. Some have trouble walking, some will pass out and not remember it. Their wives are having trouble dealing with them because of their anger and quick tempers.

Again, thank you very much for this opportunity to speak and I will be more than willing to answer any questions that you may have.