

Jeffrey C Byron

“Poisoned Patriots”  
Contaminated Drinking Water at Camp Lejeune

June 8, 2007

Good morning. My name is Jeff Byron. I served my country honorably in the United States Marine Corps from June 1981 through June 1985. I have been invited to give testimony here today on the events surrounding the toxic water contamination that occurred at Marine Corps Base, Camp Lejeune. The contamination took place between the years 1957 through 1987. I am here to tell you of the negative impact that exposure to VOCs has had on my family's medical history, past and present. After boot camp and Air Traffic Controller school I was assigned a permanent duty station at Marine Corps Air Station, New River, Jacksonville, North Carolina. The Air Station provides air support for Camp Lejeune. When we arrived in Jacksonville I applied for base housing. None was available, it would be a six month wait, and therefore we lived out in town. My oldest child, Andrea, was born in June of 1982. Two months later our family moved to Midway Park base housing complex. Midway Park is directly across from the main gate of Camp Lejeune. In August of 1983 renovation of Midway Park forced our family to move to other base housing. We were assigned quarters at 3114 Bougainville Drive in Tarawa Terrace base housing complex. During our stay in base housing my daughter, Andrea, was seen by doctors at the Naval Hospital on Camp Lejeune 57 times in 30 months for such illnesses as rashes, urinary tract infections, yeast infections and unexplained fevers. Most of the time the medical personnel on base did not have an explanation for her

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symptoms. We were told to give her tepid baths and children's Tylenol to reduce the fevers. During this time my wife and I conceived our second child, Rachel. She was born April 27, 1985, 6 weeks prior to my discharge from active duty. On her initial newborn profile from Onslow Memorial Hospital there were no abnormalities listed. But when we took her to the base hospital for her first newborn check, up the hospital officials noted the following medical concerns:

- Slow weight gain
- A heart murmur
- Double ear infection
- Umbilical hernia
- Brachial dimples and posteriorly rotated ears
- A large hemangioma (raised birthmark) on her lower back
- ASD

It was noted “Speak to pediatrician as soon as arrive home-are leaving in 4 days-may need EKG, CRR & cardiac referral”. She had to be fed in an infant seat because of projectile vomiting. She was labeled “a failure to thrive baby”. Two weeks later, June 25, 1985, I was discharged from active duty service from the Marine Corps.

Six months after being discharged from the Corps, Andrea, our first born, was diagnosed with a rare bone marrow disorder called aplastic anemia. Andrea

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was treated at CCHMC (Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center), which at that time was considered the #2 hematology department in the country. The head of the hematology department asked us what chemicals we had been exposed to, our answer, none. They asked us for all of the names of cleaning and hygiene products that we were using. All of the products were ruled out. Andrea was in the hospital under quarantine for 30 days. Andrea was given blood and platelet transfusions. She was treated at Children's Hospital until she was 12 years old. Can you imagine, I had my oldest daughter in the hospital with a bone marrow disease, under quarantine. While my youngest daughter was seeing multiple medical specialist for birth defects, and my wife 6 months pregnant with twin boys. I don't know how we did it. Andrea's aplastic anemia is in remission now, but her doctor has told her that there is a 50% chance the disease could return, if Andrea decides to have children of her own and becomes pregnant.

It was fifteen years after my discharge, May 27<sup>th</sup>, 2000 we received a letter from The National Opinion Research Center who was contracted on behalf of the Department of Health and Human Services to do a survey and contact people that lived at Marine Corps Base Camp Lejeune. They were requesting that our family participate in a survey concerning toxic water contamination, specifically those children who were in utero and born while residing in base housing, (Tarawa Terrace, Hadnot Point). They requested that our youngest

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daughter, Rachel, participate in the survey. When the survey results came out we were shocked to find out that our daughter was not identified as a study participant, since her documented medical records confirmed that she had two of the birth defects of interest, cleft pallet, and spina-bifida. After we confronted ATSDR officials with her medical records, which we had previously provided to them, they agreed that she had one birth defect of interest, and therefore qualified as a study participant. It was quite clear to me after reading questions that were part of the survey, that the Marine Corps had been aware of this situation for a very long time. From documents that we obtained through the Freedom of Information Act requests, we were able to determine that the Marine Corps/DoD environmental personnel on base were well aware of the VOC contamination before our family moved into base housing. And therefore could have intervened and prevented the adverse health effects suffered by my family as well as other families, whose medical history is very similar to my own.

There was supposedly a Notice to the Residents of Tarawa Terrace, that was distributed by the base commander in April of 1985. That showed that base officials were more concerned with water usage than informing the residents of the risk of drinking, bathing, and cooking with contaminated water. (The GAO report page 29, does not reflect this point because they have not presented the document in its entirety) The Marine Corps was morally responsible for providing clean potable water, no matter who the contaminator was, especially after the contamination was discovered. According to the GAO report, GAO

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repeats over and over that Head Quarters Marine Corp, / DOD, and MCBCL officials took no action .

Our family had already scheduled a vacation to North Carolina in 2000. We wanted to show our daughters where they were born. While we were in Jacksonville, we went to Onslow Memorial Hospital to request copies of our daughters' birth records; we were very surprised to find out that all records were destroyed after seven years. We then went by ABC 1 hour dry cleaner, which was the primary source of contamination from PCE at Tarawa Terrace base housing. I took my 35mm camera and took pictures of the facility that cost tax payers 4.3 million dollars to clean up. After the film had been developed it was apparent that safe operating procedures were not in place. There was also a Marine Corps well house across the street in base housing that had several blue barrels surrounding the brick structure. On subsequent visits to Camp Lejeune, these barrels were no longer visible.

To me it was apparent that the Marine Corps had known for 20 years, before they had decided to tell my family of the exposure. I felt that they had wronged my family and others that had served this country as patriots. It was quite obvious that “Semper Fi”, always faithful, did not apply to us. I was raised to believe that to get something done you had to do it yourself. That is what I and others are doing. Those of us that have become activists want to ensure that this American tragedy never happens again. I have attended all of the ATSDR meetings concerning Camp Lejeune with the exception of the Water

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Modeling Scientific Panel. I am a sitting member of the Community Assistance Panel with the ATSDR, tasked with evaluating the possibilities of doing further studies on children and adults exposed at Camp Lejeune. I accompanied Jerry Ensminger to the hill when he gave testimony to a subcommittee hearing for Energy & Commerce concerning DoD's request to obtain exemptions from environmental law. I am happy to say that with Jerry's testimony, DOD was denied exemption. I attended the Commandant's fact finding panel in Jacksonville, NC. where according to the GAO report (page 46) the panel made several finding criticizing Camp Lejeune and Department of the Navy. One said, "Communications to Camp Lejeune residents regarding drinking water contamination was not detailed enough to completely characterize the contamination found at the time of the well closures" Notice to Residents of Tarawa Terrace" from the base commander. In my opinion, misleading at best. We started a web site, The Few, The Proud, The Forgotten, [www.tftptf.com](http://www.tftptf.com), in an attempt to provide documented history to the former residents so that they can make informed decisions regarding their future. To educate the public and government officials, to the events surrounding toxic water exposures at Camp Lejeune.

Because of my involvement with ATSDR as a cap member the GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY OFFICE allowed me and others to read, and comment on a copy of their draft report, "DEFENSE HEALTH CARE Activities Related to Past Drinking Water Contamination at Marine Corps Base Camp

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Lejeune”. After reading the draft report I have come to the conclusion that the GAO had not done it’s homework and it had depended upon the Marine Corps Headquarter explanation of documentation, and did not check their source. A Marine Corps document providing the sampling result stated that ND meant “none detected.” (page 28 1<sup>st</sup> note of the GAO report) The document that is being referred to, GAO has removed the column that shows the instrument’s detection limit. On this same document a zero at the end of one PCE reading was missing, miss leading the reader to think that the meter read 158 parts per billion, in reality the reading was 1580 parts per billion. This is just one deception that I have uncovered in the GAO report.

While ATSDR did not always receive requested funding and experienced delays in receiving information from DOD for its Camp Lejeune related work, ATSDR officials said this has not significantly delayed their work. This was stated no less than 5 times in the GAO report. When something is overstated, it tends not to be true. I was also shocked to find out that ATSDR had come up with 548 COMPARISON Individuals for the in-utero study group, from the same base! Even after ATSDR officials repeatedly told CAP members that to do a credible study they did not need to use individuals from CAMP LEJEUNE. Since I am a member of the CAP I thought it might be important for me to know about this group. What happened to trust and transparency? I provided GAO with documents to refute many of their statements. When the final draft came out I was surprised to see that they had not listened to very much of what I had to

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say. They had written a biased report in defense of the DOD and Marine Corps.

I will be happy to dispel the rest of the GAO report with Congress at the  
upcoming hearing.

Submitted June 8, 2007

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