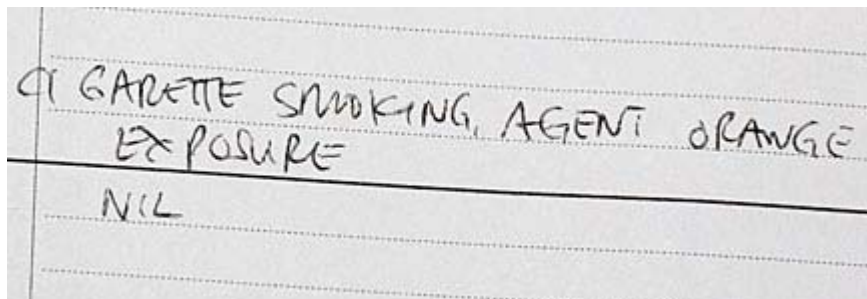


GP: Agent Orange key to Vietnam vet's death

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By [Craig Borley](#)



Pat Hauwai's death certificate shows that cigarette smoking and exposure to Agent Orange contributed to his death. He died of lung cancer last week. Photo / Paul Estcourt

Agent Orange exposure helped kill an Auckland man last week, his death certificate says.

Veterans have told the *Herald* it is the first time in New Zealand history a death has been officially attributed to the chemical. A herbicide used by the US during the Vietnam War to clear jungle, Agent Orange released cancer-causing dioxins.

The dead man, Pat Hauwai, was exposed to the chemical while serving in Vietnam as a private in Victor One Company in 1967.

About six weeks ago the 65-year-old Manurewa resident thought he was getting the flu. Doctors told him it could be anxiety or post-war trauma.

Two weeks later Mr Hauwai was diagnosed with lung cancer. Initially he was told there was an 80 per cent chance he would survive it. But within two weeks the cancer had rocketed through his body, entering his liver and spine. He died last Thursday.

The death certificate, signed by Dr Desmond Wong of Manukau, stated the cause of death as "metastatic non-small cell carcinoma of the left lung" – a form of lung cancer. He noted smoking and Agent Orange beneath the cause of death.

Mr Hauwai's wife Cavell Hauwai said she was told by doctors the cancer's unforgiving speed was a result of her husband's exposure to the chemical spray. She said the death, and the doctors' summation, had left her angry.

She said the Government needed to offer veterans free medical care with doctors used to dealing with soldiers exposed to such chemicals. Veterans are allowed one free health check each year.

Fellow Victor One soldier and friend Red Beatson said Mr Hauwai, a driver during the war, was constantly exposed to the chemical spray.

"They used defoliants to basically enable aerial observation. The area we worked in had been defoliated

so we were walking through it."

If it rained, the soldiers would turn their tents upside down and use the underside as water catchments to fill their canteens. In doing so, they would drink traces of the chemical.

Mr Beatson said he watched another platoon being sprayed by the chemical from an aircraft overhead. They never knew the spray was toxic.

He said it was hard to see his mates die of Agent Orange-related illnesses.

"You accept the Queen's shilling, and you go off and do what has to be done. But you have the expectation that when you get back you'll get looked after."

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