

Jerome Ensminger, MSgt USMC (Ret.)

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TESTIMONY OF:

Jerome Ensminger

Good morning! My name is Jerry Ensminger. I served our nation faithfully for nearly a quarter century in the United States Marine Corps. I want to personally thank you Madam-Chairman and, Senator Burr, the Ranking Member, and senior Senator from my home state of North Carolina, for providing me this opportunity to testify in support of S-277, the Caring for Camp Lejeune Veterans Act of 2011.

I became deeply involved researching the history of the water contamination at Camp Lejeune nearly 13 years ago after I first learned that my daughter, Janey was exposed to the base's contaminated drinking water. My daughter, Janey, was the only one of my 4 daughters to have been conceived, carried, or born while living aboard Camp Lejeune. When Janey was 6 years old, our entire world was turned upside down after she was diagnosed with acute lymphoblastic Leukemia (ALL).

Janey fought a valiant battle against her malignancy for nearly 2 1/2 years, but she ultimately lost the war. We watched Janey go through hell during her illness and all who loved her went through hell with her, but she succumbed to her disease on 24 September 1985, she was only nine years old. Unlike the tragic stories of combat troops who have died in the past decade overseas or come home with broken bodies and painful memories, the human tragedies caused by this massive contamination incident have been going on for many decades in private homes and hospital rooms in every state and territory of our nation. Many of the sick have been virtually bankrupted by the expense of the medical care and therapies required to combat the catastrophic illnesses which are inherent to the exposures to the chemicals found in the water at Camp Lejeune. Two known carcinogens- benzene and vinyl chloride, TCE, which is soon to be classified as a human carcinogen by the EPA, and PCE a probable human carcinogen were present in our tap water. Those of us who lived and worked at Camp Lejeune never gave a moment's thought that we and our families were being poisoned by the very water we drank and bathed in. I, along with many other Marines and their family members have devoted years of our lives and our money to comb through the historical record of Navy and Marine Corps documents to find the truth about how this contamination was allowed to continue despite the repeated warnings given by analytical laboratories.

My 13 year journey has taken me and my allies down many paths and led us to numerous revealing and very troublesome discoveries related to this issue. I must say that some of the most troubling discoveries have been the Department of the Navy (DoN) and the United States Marine Corps' (USMC) own documents which clearly reveal their leadership's knowledge that our tap-water was contaminated for nearly five years before they took any action to locate the source(s) and stop it from flowing. Another disturbing revelation has been the discovery of Navy and Marine regulations, some dating as far back as 1963, that required a protective standard of care for the base's drinking water systems. Had these regulations and orders been followed, most of

this tragedy more than likely would have been averted. As a career Marine, the most audacious realization has been a lack of honesty and transparency demonstrated by the Department of the Navy and Marine Corps relating to this issue, a problem that continues to this day and reaches the highest levels of leadership.

The documents we have uncovered indicate there have been many obfuscations, half-truths, and outright lies disseminated by these two organizations and their leaders through statements to the press, in correspondence to the affected community, in brochures for members of Congress, and even in congressional testimony. The examples of these mischaracterizations are too numerous for me to list in this testimony, but I would be more than willing to provide examples today if the committee is interested and I will gladly sit down with any Senator or staff member and point them out. I would also encourage everyone to visit our website www.tftptf.com and view the time-line of events linked to our home page. Our time-line of events is interactive; the reader can click on the “blue” document numbers embedded in each entry to access the DON/USMC’s own documents. This was done to assure the reader that we don’t speculate and that our time-line is factual.

Senator Burr’s bill, S-277 is a step in the right direction in rectifying this tragic situation. Some of you may not know this, but Camp Lejeune is the largest documented domestic DoD environmental contamination incident on record. I know that some members of Congress and a couple of national Veterans Service Organization (VSO’s) groups have expressed a lack of support for S-277 when it was introduced as S-1 518 in 2009, but much has come to light since then. In the past year and a half, significant discoveries of previously undisclosed documents show the Navy estimated that the contamination on the base was far greater than imagined in 2009. One Navy document states the total fuel loss from underground tanks on the base could have reached beyond one million gallons and caused massive amounts of benzene, a known human carcinogen, to have infiltrated the ground water used by the base. I would think that anyone here today who found out the water they had been drinking contained gasoline would find that alarming!

There are currently over 170,000 members of the Camp Lejeune community who have registered with the Marine Corps since 2008, they come from every state in the nation and I have heard their stories over the years as I have criss crossed the country looking for information and meeting veterans and their families who lived on the base. In the past two years alone, we have discovered over 70 men who lived at Lejeune who now have male breast cancer, a rare disease which afflicts only about 2000 men a year in the entire US.

This issue is the subject of an award winning documentary titled “Semper Fi: Always Faithful” which will be shown the evening of 23 June 2011 in the Capitol Visitor’s Center. I hope the Senators on the committee will take a closer look at this issue and seriously consider the scope and severity of the contamination and the duty we owe to those veterans, their loved ones and the thousands of civilian employees who were exposed at Camp Lejeune. I ask each of you to see the film or send a member of your staff to do so. This very real story is finally being told after years in the shadows and the people whose lives are directly affected by it need help. S. 277 is the first step toward doing the right thing.

Thank you and I look forward to your questions.