

Russell Powell, Former U.S Army Staff Sergeant

The Exposure at Qarmat Ali

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I'd like to thank you for having me here at this Senate hearing. My name is Russell Powell, I reside in Moundsville West Virginia. I started my military career in January 1994; I was assigned to the 82nd Airborne Division as a paratrooper infantry medic. In 1997 I was reassigned as a flight medic at Howard Air Force Base Panama City, Panama. In 1999 I was again reassigned to 57th Dust off at Fort Bragg, North Carolina. August of 2000, I was discharged from the army and in April 2001 I joined with 1092nd West Virginia Army National Guard as a medic. The 1092nd was deployed to Iraq in March 2003. In April 2003 to June 2004 1092nd Charlie Company was assigned as security for the KBR Contractors, my duties consisted of battalion medic and supplied defensive positions and cover fire if needed to protect KBR contractors at Qarmat Ali Water treatment plant in Basra, Iraq.

When Charlie Company 2nd platoon arrived at the plant it was in total disarray and had been severely pillaged and destroyed. There was a coating of orange colored dust throughout the facility. At that time no one knew or made any concerns of what the powder was. The orange dust was located in large bags that were ripped open, causing the dust to be spread all over the facility. At times the orange dust was so thick there were at least two inches of dust on my boots. During my stay at the QA there were at least ten dust storms, they were like tornadoes blowing through the facility picking up the dust and other debris. At no time were we offered any kind of protective clothing, masks, or respirators to protect us from the elements. During these storms or shortly there after soldiers in the company, KBR workers and myself would have severe nose bleeds, coughing up blood, a hard time breathing, nausea, and/ or a burning sensation the lungs and throat. After a few weeks of being at the facility several personnel began getting lesions on their hands, arms, faces and nostril area. As a medic I felt very concerned for the safety and health of persons exposed. I questioned one of the KBR workers (I have forgotten his name), and he told me that his supervisors told him not to worry about it, that we were allergic to sand and dust. Shortly there after, there was another severe dust storm I ate an MRE (meals ready to eat) and my throat and stomach began to burn like nothing I have felt before, my nose began to bleed, and was nauseated. After this particular storm I was severely sick to the point that when we returned to Kuwait City, Kuwait (Camp Commando) I was told that I was not going out on the mission the following day.

The following day I went to the Infirmary at Camp Commando, and was seen by a Naval Doctor. After a brief examination he dismissed me as being sick and prescribed me Motrin and Tylenol. Approximately thirty minutes later I went to a bombshell bunker to give myself an IV, a couple soldiers found me I was delirious and coughing up blood. I do not remember anything until waking up the following day in the Kuwait Soldiers Hospital. My face and lips were burnt and my throat was sore to the point I couldn't swallow anything. I was there for almost a week getting antibiotics intravenously. The doctors had no explanation why I was sick or why my face and lips were burnt so badly. The day I was released from the Hospital I returned to Qarmat Ali

with Charlie Company 2nd platoon. Upon my return to QA numerous soldiers were complaining of the same symptoms I was experiencing. I prescribed those soldiers antibiotics, however the symptoms persisted. At the end of June 2003 the Indiana National Guard relieved us of our duties. Our unit moved into northern Iraq. The nose bleeds subsided a little, but the nausea was still present daily.

After leaving Iraq in April 2004 I went to the VA Clinic in Clarksburg, WV to talk to the doctors about my skin rashes and lesions, stomach problems, and nose bleeds. The doctors were unable to determine what the cause is of these problems were. In 2009 I received a letter from the WV national Guard stating we were possible exposed to Sodium Dichromate while serving at QA, and the VA doctors believe that this could be what's causing my health issues, but because they know little about Sodium Dichromate they are researching and trying to figure out the affects of it on the human body. I know for a fact that Sen. Rockefeller is giving veterans and soldiers alike, much needed support through the VA system in WV.

Once again I would like to thank you all of you for hearing my testimony.