Camp Lejeune Contamination Rocks Veteran's Entire Family

Water contaminates have life-altering consequences

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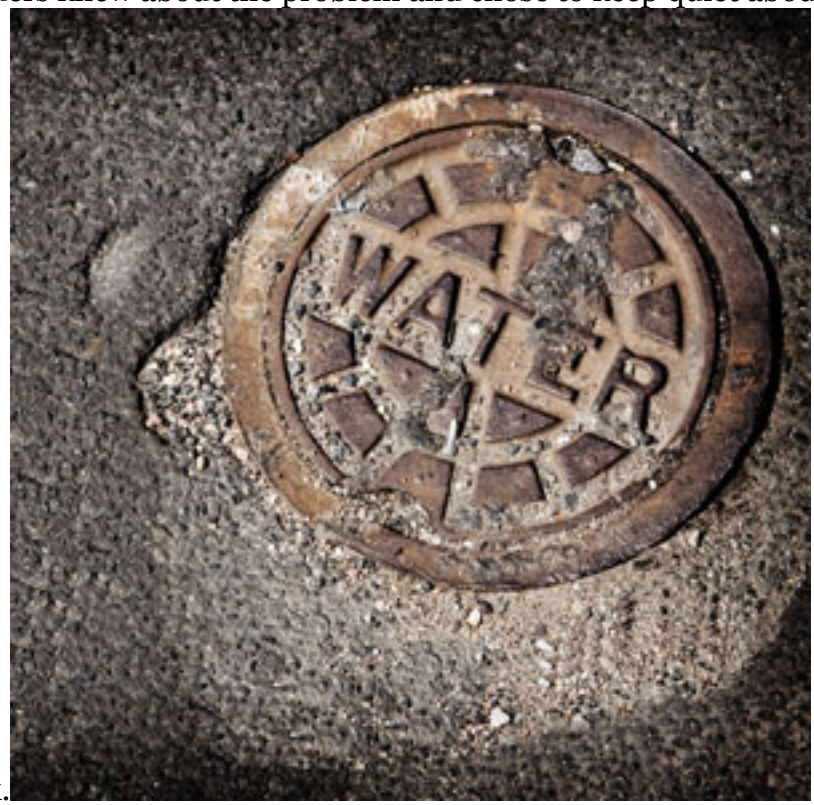
From the 1950s through the 1980s, those living at Camp Lejeune, N.C., were exposed to drinking water contaminated with industrial solvents, benzene and other chemicals.

The contamination is said to have caused 15 known conditions in those exposed, including infertility, neurobehavioral problems and several cancers. The worst part' Many military leaders knew about the problem and chose to keep quiet about the risk.



Korean War veteran Richard Lien and his wife lived at Camp Lejeune in the '50s, and they

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have health problems to show for it.

“I had rectal cancer and had my whole rectum removed,” said Lien. “Now I have Non-Hodgkin’s lymphoma, which is an after-effect of the rectal cancer.”

But it wasn’t just Lien who was affected. His wife suffers from Parkinson’s disease as a result. And his kids weren’t spared either. His daughter passed away from a related nerve disease and his son is currently battling prostate cancer.

Despite his family’s decades-long struggle, the VA denied Lien any benefits. That was seven years ago.

Today, Lien has a 100% rating from the VA. He finally got what he deserves thanks to VFW Appeals Consultant Chance Sizemore, who took his case to heart.

“VA doctors were saying his illness was unrelated to Camp Lejeune,” said Sizemore. “The key here was to get private opinions from specialists who didn’t have any skin in the game. I took this case very personally because it just seemed wrong. I went above and beyond and really encouraged him to keep fighting.”

When Lien received news that his claim had finally been approved, he was more exasperated than excited.

“All I could say was ‘finally,’” said Lien. “I was so exhausted from fighting this cancer and fighting the VA.”

Sizemore seconded that sentiment. “Many times by the time these veterans come to us, they are so exhausted from fighting, they just quit. That’s what made this case so gratifying. He never quit, and it paid off in the end.”

Lien, now 85, is focusing on his wife, whose health has greatly deteriorated.

“She has Parkinson’s and dementia,” said Lien. “I’m keeping her at home right now and doing my best to take care of her.”

Lien is grateful to Sizemore for not giving up on his case and hopes other veterans will learn from his story.

“Get all the information you possibly can,” said Lien. “And talk to your doctor! Doctors were the deciding factor.”

Ironically, this elderly man who spent nearly a decade fighting the VA once worked as a veterans service officer for the Department of Veterans Affairs in South Dakota.