

MORE NEWS ABOUT DEPLETED URANIUM

On February 4th, a Scottish veteran of the 1991 Gulf War became the first to win a pension appeal on the basis of Depleted Uranium poisoning. The Ministry of Defence had previously dismissed medical evidence that Kenny Duncan, 35, of Clackmannan, had become ill after exposure to DU, but this decision was overturned by the Pension Appeal Tribunal Service, giving hope to many other Gulf War veterans similarly affected.

The tribunal accepted that Mr. Duncan had become ill as a result of moving tanks which had been destroyed by shells containing DU dust. His symptoms include aching joints and breathlessness, while his children, aged 10, 8 and 6, have symptoms which also affect many Iraqi children; these include deformed toes and low immune systems which render them vulnerable to infections and allergies. Mr. Duncan's pension, originally awarded at only 50% of the full rate, will now be reassessed.

Organisations such as the National Gulf War Veterans and Families Association (NGVFA), have long called for an independent enquiry into Gulf War illnesses, and the decision in Mr. Duncan's favour has greatly strengthened their case. NGVFA also calls for the government to offer more financial help to veterans suffering from illnesses contracted during the first Gulf War. Sadly, it seems likely that there will be a need for organisations to campaign on behalf of veterans poisoned by DU in the most recent war in Iraq, where many times more DU munitions were used than in 1991.

Mr. Duncan's medical evidence included research by German biochemist Dr. Albrecht Schott, who studied 16 British war veterans who had served in the Gulf, Kosovo and Bosnia and who had been exposed to ionising radiation during their service. Dr. Schott found that these veterans had 14 times the normal level of chromosomal abnormalities in their genes, raising fears that the veterans will pass on cancers and genetic illnesses to their children.

After the Tribunal decision, Mr. Duncan was quoted in the Glasgow Herald as saying: "It is just a huge relief to have someone in authority say that you have been poisoned by this stuff and that you are not telling lies. It is now time for the MoD to tell us what went wrong."

In a press release by the Campaign Against Depleted Uranium (CADU) in response to this case, Camille Warren writes that the day after Mr. Duncan's victory, the Government "tried to scupper potential future cases by releasing misleading



figures claiming that fewer than 10 soldiers in the current Iraq war have been contaminated by Depleted Uranium." She goes on to explain that the total is probably many times greater, since these figures are based on just 275 samples, a tiny fraction of the 70,000 British soldiers who have served in Iraq over the past year.

Two days after the Tribunal decision, on Feb 6th, the Uranium Medical Research Centre (UMRC) issued an information bulletin about laboratory tests on urine samples supplied by two of UMRC's field research workers who had toured Iraq for just 13 days in October last year, months after the bombing and ground force campaign had ended.

Both team members were found to have Depleted Uranium present in their urine, believed to be due to "inhalation of resuspended ultra-fine and dust particles saturated with uranium and airborne uranium oxides."

Back in November 2003, the MoD made a formal statement to The Guardian newspaper which refuted UMRC's findings of high levels of radioactivity in British-led battlefields. The statement argued that any uranium inside the Iraqi tanks destroyed by DU weapons exists in a stable form, and cannot be absorbed by humans. This new evidence, and the MoD's own research which has found abnormally high levels of uranium in the urine of the 1st Armoured Division troops who served in Basra, shows that the DU left after conflicts is far from stable. The findings "demonstrate the need to initiate immediate solutions to protect exposed civilians and foreign personnel in Iraq" writes UMRC.

UMRC concludes that exposure to DU in the Gulf presents an ongoing "risk to civilians, non-governmental organisations' staff, Coalition armed forces and foreign contractors and diplomatic staff," to which we should add: "and Iraqi ex-soldiers and civilians."