

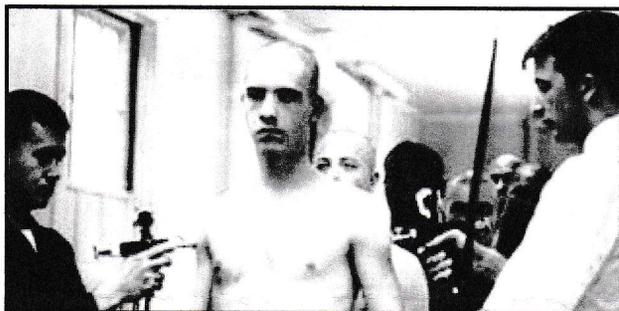
Gunned Down in Basic Training

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Hepatitis C in Vietnam Veterans? Of course all those shots you got while in the service were meant to protect you from some really bad diseases. Unfortunately, there were some unexpected consequences caused by the method of injection. The air-gun was deadly on diseases, but now we know it also (unknowingly) helped at least one virus spread from person to person to person.

Decades after Vietnam, Richard Darling discovered that he had Hepatitis C (HCV), and as his illness progressed, he went through liver cancer, liver transplants, heart attacks, and comas. He is reasonably sure that his exposure came from the air-gun vaccinations he received while in the Army.

By Dr. Richard Darling, DDS



Hepatitis C in Vietnam veterans

Has it really been over 40 years since we formed a long line of new recruits at Fort Dix and other basic training camps to get our air-gun vaccinations? Yes, and I'm sure you also remember that at times there was blood running down a fellow trainee's arm at the injection site. The medic who was doing the injections might clean the gun nozzle with an alcohol gauze pad, but in many instances no

cleaning was done at all. Even an alcohol gauze pad does not kill the hepatitis C (HCV) virus, so air-gun injections became the most efficient method known to man of spreading this virus.

In a study conducted by the Veterans Health Administration, involving 26,000 veterans, up to 10 percent tested positive for HCV. (The government's estimate for HCV in the general public is 1.6 percent.) Of the total number of persons who had been exposed to hepatitis C, 63 percent were noted to be from the Vietnam era with all other wars each accounting for 5 percent or less.

If you received the air-gun vaccinations, you should be tested for HCV.

HCV infection can be serious – however, it should be noted that approximately 75-80 percent of those infected with HCV will never progress to severe liver disease, commonly called cirrhosis of the liver, in which the liver becomes scarred from the damage done by the hepatitis virus attacking and killing liver cells.

Nevertheless, if you received the air-gun vaccinations, you should be tested for HCV, and if your results are positive, you should also have a "liver panel" blood test to determine if you have ongoing damage to your liver. Existing drugs to eradicate the HCV virus are effective, on average, in only 50 percent of those who take the treatment. Clearly, better drugs are needed.