

My name is Mark T. Jackson. I am the Resident Agent in Charge of the Florida Fraud Resident Agency, Major Fraud Unit, US Army CID, Melbourne, Florida. I am a GS-1811-14 (Supervisory Special Agent). I am a current resident of West Melbourne, Florida.

I was active duty Army from 1997 through 2005. My primary military occupation code (MOS) was 31D: CID Special Agent.

From about July 2003 through April 2004, I was deployed to Karshi-Khanabad (K2) Airbase in Uzbekistan. Like many others have noted, there were uranium and chemical weapons debris and chemical ponds everywhere. Black goo oozed from the ground. Signs everywhere warned of nuclear and chemical agents.

Upon return from my deployment, I left the Army and moved to Melbourne, where I still live and work. Within a year of returning, my thyroid ceased to function. I was diagnosed with hypothyroidism and prescribed an increasing dose of Synthroid (currently at 325 mcg). In addition, I developed a series of strange but seemingly related Gastrointestinal (GI) issues ranging from Gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD) to Irritable bowel syndrome (IBS). The few people I'd remained in contact with reported similar issues.

During my time at K2 in Uzbekistan, I kept a daily, hand written, dated journal for all of 2003 and most of 2004. It contains observations, dreams, events, and how I was feeling day to day. As I re-read these hundreds of pages in recent years, I was surprised how much I wrote about my health at the time, as well as the toxic air and soil and so on. Re-reading these journals has been like consulting whispers and ghosts, but it also shows a healthy 26 year old soldier transitioning into an individual suffering from the variety of maladies I now present to you.

In 2008, I went the VA for the first time and was eventually gave a 10% disability for service related thyroid disorder. The VA denied the rest. I was provided about \$120/month for additional medical expenses and prescriptions. I would describe the experience as terrible and can elaborate if necessary. This experience forced me to give up pursuing this issue for nearly the next decade. However, in 2017 my endocrinologist referred me to a Gastroenterologist and an Oncologist for a series of cascading issues: non-iron deficient anemia, low bone density, diabetes, and on and on.

My body – and those of my brothers and sisters in service – have become living *memento mori* (or a symbolic reminder of the inevitability of death), broken homages to the legacy of K2, and injuries as deadly as any bullet. Living with symptoms is difficult, but living without validation and causation of your symptoms is maddening. The one organization chartered to help has by and large done the opposite, only adding insult to chronic injury. The VA has failed at its primary function “to care for him who shall have borne the battle” for those who served at K2.

Congressman Bill Posey's office reached out to my wife a few weeks after we sent him a letter on this matter. His office has been receptive in these early days of advocacy and offered their assistance. Multiple news outlets have already begun the process of making the public more aware of this issue. We need Congress to force the VA to act.

I am amongst the lucky ones: I am alive, a morning concoction of pills mimics an endocrine system, maintains the iron in my blood, and soothes the stabs and aches of IBS. I have good health insurance. I have a loving family and a large network of friends. This is not about me nor is it for my personal benefit. This is for those other volunteers whose only request is recognition and assistance. Like most of them, I would do it all over again, knowing my life could end. I only ask you help us force the VA to recognize that our sacrifice mattered. That it still matters.

Thank you.