

## DoD Seeks Gulf War Field Sanitation Teams' Observations

The Department of Defense Office of the Special Assistant for Gulf War Illnesses is asking U.S. Army Gulf War veterans who served as field sanitation team members during the war to provide eyewitness accounting of potential environmental exposures. Investigators are seeking information from Army troops who served in Bahrain and Saudi Arabia during Operations Desert Shield and Storm and in Iraq and Kuwait during Operation Desert Storm, in a search for potential linkages between environmental exposures and the illnesses that some veterans are experiencing.

"We really don't know a lot about what the Army field sanitation teams did and what they saw during the war. Their observations could have an impact on a variety of investigations," says a member of the environmental occupational exposure division.

Aside from hostile fire, the principal threats to force readiness are naturally occurring dis-

eases and illnesses caused by environmental exposures. For example, hot and cold weather injuries, insects, pesticides, unpurified water, vehicle exhausts and other potentially hazardous elements prevalent in a deployment area can be real threats to troops. The responsibility to minimize those threats rests with the unit commander.

A field sanitation team's key responsibility is to advise and assist the unit commander in reducing unit disease and non-battle injury. Ultimately, the success or failure of a military operation can rest upon effective preventive medicine measures within operational units.

Investigators in the Gulf War illnesses environmental division have had difficulty in obtaining feedback from Gulf War field sanitation personnel because this function is normally an additional duty and cannot be identified by occupational specialty codes. They request

individuals call the special assistant's office toll-free number at (800) 497-6261 to report their observations. Topics under investigation include food-service sanitation, water supplies, waste disposal practices, control of insects, medical threats associated with heat and cold during the war, and team training.

This effort is part of a Department of Defense initiative to ensure that veterans' accounts of their Gulf War experiences are incorporated into investigations. To date, the office has published 14 case narratives, two environmental exposure reports, and two information papers.

The Defense Department expects to use many of the findings and lessons learned from the Gulf War to implement changes to future DoD policy and doctrine that will increase readiness and improve service members' survivability in future deployments.