Doug DeWitt served his country in the U.S. Navy during the Vietnam War, but now he feels abandoned by the nation for which he fought.

Forty years after his service, the 67-year-old Anaheim, Calif., resident suffers from diabetes, high blood pressure and other ailments that he blames on exposure to Agent Orange, the main chemical the United States sprayed during the war. He has tried for years without success to get disability compensation from the Department of Veterans Affairs.

"I don't have the strength that I used to have. I can't do the walking I used to because of the pain in my legs," he said. He added that the VA has not been helpful in resolving his claim.

"They won't listen to you. You can talk till you're blue in the face," he said.

DeWitt is one of potentially thousands of so-called "blue water" Navy veterans who have been excluded from easy approval of their Agent Orange-related disability compensation claims by the Veterans Affairs Department. He's in a group of veterans who served on deep-water ships off the coast of Vietnam but didn't touch land or serve on waterways inside the country.

A study issued in May by the Institute of Medicine has dimmed the hopes of these blue water veterans. The report said there was too little data to conclusively determine whether they had been exposed to Agent Orange. Because it appears unlikely that the Veterans Affairs Department will change its policy on its own, veterans now are intent on finding a legislative solution.

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