

CANCER INCIDENCE AND CAUSE-SPECIFIC MORTALITY FOLLOWING BALKAN DEPLOYMENT

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Background and aims: In 2000 the media reported on cases of leukaemia among Balkan-deployed soldiers, which some attributed to alleged exposure to depleted uranium (DU), originating from DU-containing ammunition. These media reports prompted questions about the occurrence of leukaemia, and its relationship with Balkan deployment and DU exposure in particular. Although the NATO reasoned the DU-related health risk to be very low, it was nevertheless recommended that the NATO countries would perform epidemiological studies on cancer among Balkan veterans. This study describes the results of analyses comparing the risk of different types of cancer and mortality among 18,000 Dutch Balkan-deployed military versus 140,000 non-Balkan-deployed military personnel. In addition, a comparison is made with cancer risk and mortality in the general population of the Netherlands.

Methods: A historical cohort study was performed, comparing military personnel deployed to the Balkans between 1993 and 2001 and their peers by using Cox regression analysis. In addition, expected numbers of cases of cancer and deaths in the Balkan-deployed group were computed according to the person-year method, based on rates for the general population in the Netherlands. Cancer and mortality data from 1993 to 2008 were provided by the Association of Comprehensive Cancer Centres and Statistics Netherlands, respectively.

Results: Final results will be presented at the ISEE. Results are strictly confidential until publication of the report in April 2011 (available at www.rivm.nl by that time, in English).

Conclusions: Similar studies have been performed in Denmark, Sweden and Italy, but this is the largest study with the longest period of follow-up.