

'They gave me an order ... and I refused'

Jessica Bond skipped the anthrax shot. The result was loss of pay and rank, and dismissal from the service.

[BY BOB EVANS](#)

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Senior Airman Jessica Bond of Yorktown knew what she'd say when the time came, and she knew what would probably happen as a result.

She'd already told her first sergeant what to expect, too.

So when she was ordered to take an anthrax vaccination last year at Seymour Johnson Air Force Base, N.C. - in preparation for deployment to Kuwait - she told him, "No, sir."

The next day, she was ordered to her commander's office, where she again refused and was busted from E-4 to E-1, the lowest enlisted rank. The commander-as-judge-and-jury is known in the military as an Article 15 nonjudicial punishment.

A week later, "they gave me an order to take it again. And again I refused."

Another Article 15 followed, and the military began the process of kicking her out of the Air Force, after nearly four years of otherwise unblemished service.

Since May, the military has not been able to make people take the shot. A federal judge forbid mandatory inoculations when he ruled that the vaccine wasn't properly licensed for protection against inhaled anthrax. The Pentagon wants to go back to the days of mandatory shots and has appealed that ruling. A decision is due by February.

Bond wasn't the only person who refused to accept the risk of the vaccine before the voluntary program began. Pentagon officials say that from 2000 through 2004, 147 people left the military for refusing. Those numbers do not include people who were allowed to leave without formal punishment or to just not get the shot. Ronald Blanck, a former Army surgeon general, says about 300 left the service after refusing to take the shot before 2000.

Bond says her reason for refusing was simple: When the orders came, she was the parent of a baby daughter and about to become a single parent because of a divorce.

"If I got sick from that shot, who was going to take care of my daughter?" she asked.

ILLNESSES AMONG FRIENDS CONVINCING

Bond had spent months researching the effects and use of the anthrax shot since enlisting in 2000, less than a year after graduating from Tabb High School.

She talked to a cousin who's a pharmacist and began reading the material that the Defense Department gives troops about the shot, she says.

The cousin advised caution, noting various ills attributed to the anthrax vaccine. And one statement from a military brochure stood out, she says: The vaccine, it said, had been given safely to veterinarians and veterinary students for decades.

"I called 50 different veterinary schools - every one I could find - and they said they didn't give it to any of their students. I figured that if they'd lie about that," she says of the military, "they'd lie about anything."

Bond also says she only had to look around the base for more evidence.

Her former husband had a bad reaction, and so did several of her friends - especially the women, Bond says.

One woman went into anaphylactic shock within two hours of vaccination. That's a rare event involving an allergic reaction, in which a person's breathing becomes difficult and death can result. The woman had seizures and convulsions, and she was hospitalized for a week, Bond says.

Another female friend got the shot six years ago and has suffered severe joint pains, chronic fatigue and migraine headaches that regularly require hospitalization, Bond says.

Bond says that when she joined the military, "I was proud to be a part of something that was bigger than me" and gave the Air Force her obedience.

When her daughter was born two years later, that changed.

MIDDLE EAST ORDERS MEANT SHOT SHOWDOWN

Bond's unit got orders to ship to the Middle East in late 2003. In January 2004, she was scheduled for her first anthrax shot.

At first, she says, her sergeant and others accused her of shirking her duty to stay home with her daughter.

"The deployment was no problem," Bond says. "I volunteered to go on a longer deployment, to Bosnia," which would have meant leaving her daughter with relatives. Bosnia isn't on the list of places where anthrax vaccination is prescribed.

Her bid for Bosnia was rejected, despite a need for her military contracting specialty, Bond says. Before her Article 15s, Bond was provided a military lawyer, who told her that there was essentially no legal defense for refusing to take the anthrax shot. It's considered a lawful order.

The Article 15 also meant that she couldn't appeal to a jury of her peers.

At one point, "my first sergeant asked me, 'Why would you think that your government would give you anything that's harmful?' " Bond says.

She says she listed a number of examples, including experiments involving exposure of troops to radiation in the 1940s and 1950s and use of Agent Orange plant-killer in Vietnam. All have been shown to cause health problems for thousands of troops.

"He said, 'The military's changed,' " Bond recalls. She wasn't buying it.

After the two refusals, the sergeant and her commander pushed for a dishonorable discharge, which would make it difficult for her to get a decent job in civilian life. The general of her unit rejected that proposal, noting Bond's good conduct and achievement medals, commendations for job performance and otherwise unblemished record.

"I ended up getting a general discharge," Bond says. That still makes potential employers suspicious and cost her any G.I. Bill post-service benefits that she'd earned.

Bond says other members of her unit understand her choice. "They were very supportive," she says, and nearly all said they wished that they'd had the courage to refuse.

"Courage" isn't the word that Bond uses to describe her choice, however. "I'm no hero," she says. "The people over there, fighting that war, are the heroes."

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