By **CBSNEWS.COM STAFF CBSNEWS.COM STAFF** / **CBS** / *July 26, 1999, 5:58 PM*

Pilots Quit Over Anthrax Shots

Share / Tweet / Reddit / Flipboard / Email

Combat pilots in the Air Force Reserve and Air National Guard are quitting rather than take Anthrax shots, **CBS News Correspondent Vince Gonzales** reports. The departure of veteran pilots, many with experience in Kosovo and the Gulf War, is creating huge holes in some military air units. **CBS News** spoke with over 100 pilots concerned about the vaccine.

"We're leaving the service of our country over fear of a shot," said retired Major Gary Blied of the U.S. Air Force Reserve. **"And it just doesn't seem fair."**

All military personnel are required to get the shots, despite doubts the vaccinations will protect troops from the deadly Anthrax virus in wartime. But it is fear of bad reactions to the vaccine itself that is leading many pilots to end long careers.

Randy Pzyk, a United Airlines pilot, quit flying for the Wisconsin Air National Guard rather than take the Anthrax shot.

"It was difficult," Pzyk recalled. **"I cleaned out my locker, stripped my name off my mailbox and packed up and left."**

Key units across the country stand to lose up to half of their pilots. At five bases combined, more than 100 reserve pilots quit this year. Major Ramona Savoie is one of them.

"The squadron is unable to do its peacetime and wartime mission," Savoie said. **"And this directly impacts the nation's readiness."**

Pentagon officials insist the vaccine is safe, pure and effective -- and say the vaccination program is going smoothly.

"Generally speaking, this is not a significant issue. It has not had any effect on readiness at this juncture," said Charles Cragin, Assistant Secretary of Defense for Reserve Affairs.

But military memos obtained by **CBS News** tell a different story. One squadron commander writes, **"Due to the controversy regarding the shots, compliance has been very low."** Another acknowledges, **"We are losing a lot of experience."**

Most experienced Guard and reserve pilots fly passenger jets as their main job. Pilots like Mike Angerole of Southwest Airlines are quitting the Air Guard rather than risk vaccine side effects that could endanger their passengers.

"Would you want your pilot to have any problem with remembering, and tremors, seizures," Angerole said. **"And this is all stuff that's attributed to the vaccine."**

CBSN LIVE WATCH





Watch CBS News Live

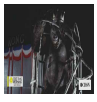
Watch CBS News anytime, anywhere with the our 24/7 digital news network. Stream CBSN live or on demand for FREE on your TV, computer, tablet, or smartphone.

Watch Now

WATCH CBSN LIVE


Apollo crew of 8 orbit the Moon 50 years ago


T.M. Landry Preparatory School falls under fire for the alleged use of fake college applications and false transcripts


King Kong returns to Broadway


A 7.0 magnitude earthquake rocks Alaska, triggering a tsunami warning


Anchorage, Alaska on edge after back to back earthquakes

FOLLOW US

So far, Pentagon officials are refusing pilot requests to make the shots voluntary. In a letter to the *Army Times,* Defense Secretary William Cohen writes, **"Just as soldiers must wear helmets, commanders must know all their troops are vaccinated against anthrax."**

"I'm more than willing to lay my life down for my nation. Is that not enough?" Angerole said.

Not for the Pentagon apparently, which says no matter how many pilots quit - the vaccinations will continue.

©1999 CBS Worldwide Corp. All rights reserved. This material may not be published, broadcast, rewritten, or redistributed

© 1999 CBS. All rights reserved.

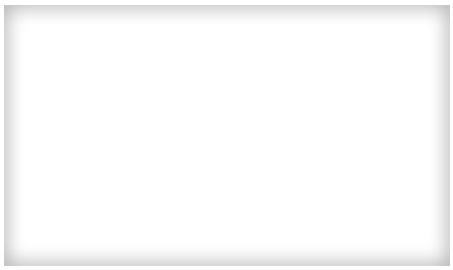
Share / Tweet / Reddit / Flipboard / Email

MORE EVENING NEWS



A soldier says a stranger's Christmas card got him through Vietnam. He just met the sender

John Metzler was fighting in the Vietnam War when he got a letter from a girl he didn't know, thanking him for his service



Young athletes abandon football as concussions rock high school teams

Timmy Ditka decided to leave the sport after a serious injury sidelined him at a young age

POPULAR

Evening News
A Twitter list by @CBSNews

CBS Evening News
@CBSEveningNews

George H.W. and Barbara Bush met at a school Christmas dance in 1941 and went on to have the longest marriage in U.S. presidential history. It was a marriage, as they and their children have said, marked by deep, abiding love.
cbsn.ws/2DWMI35



1h

CBS Evening News Retweeted

Jeff Glor
@jeffglor

We will be anchoring the broadcast from our nation's capital tonight @CBSEveningNews

Embed View on Twitter

POPULAR ON CBS NEWS

01 George H.W. Bush, 41st president, dies at 94
174860 *views*

02 Family, friends, political adversaries and others react to George H.W. Bush's death
36735 *views*

03 Hearty handshake between Putin and Saudi crown prince goes viral
16068 *views*

04 Officer who fatally shot neighbor inside his apartment indicted for murder
11734 *views*

05 Radio station drops "Baby It's Cold Outside" over #MeToo concerns
6847 *views*

THE UPLIFT — STORIES THAT INSPIRE

Thanks for the help of a loving neighbor

Post office delivers boy's "letter to dad in heaven"

Music teacher and special student perform in viral video

Bus driver's act of kindness caught on camera

Man to get new kidney thanks to billboard campaign

Puppies bring joy to dementia patients

CBS NEWS ON SAMSUNG TV

Copyright © 2018 CBS Interactive Inc.
All rights reserved.