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DEPARTMENT OF THE AIR FORCE
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OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY

MEMORANDUM FOR THE SAFLL

SUBJECT: Ranch Hand Study - Senate Veterans' Affairs Hearing, 21 Feb 80

The Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs held a hearing today on Vietnam veterans' readjustment. The hearing was conducted by the chairman, Senator Alan Cranston (D-CA). Senator Robert T. Stafford (R-VT) was also present. The hearing was designed to inform the committee on the status of veterans who served during the Vietnam era in the interest of oversight activity regarding present programs and possible future legislation. A dozen witnesses testified on this general subject lead by the Honorable Max Cleland, Administrator of Veterans' Affairs. A complete witness list is attached and statements are available for review in SAFLLL.

Major General William S. Augerson, MC, USA, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense (Health Resources and Programs), and Major General Murphy, A. Chesney, USAF, Director of Medical Plans and Resources, Office of the Surgeon General, testified for the Department of Defense relative to Agent Orange and Ranch Hand Study matters. Their statements and the question and answer period consumed approximately one-fifth of this hearing.

During questioning of DOD witnesses, Senator Cranston again raised the concern that the Air Force was being asked to investigate itself or at least the public could perceive Air Force control of the Ranch Hand Study as a bias which would impede establishing the true relationship between Agent Orange and service-connected diseases. He asked that the Air Force provide reasons for not contracting out the study. He also asked for the additional costs of contracting out. Senator Cranston repeatedly asserted that none of his comments or questions in this area should be interpreted as impugning the integrity of those associated with the Ranch Hand Study. Quite the contrary, he complimented the Defense officials on their efforts. In response, General Chesney said the Air Force was interested in running the Ranch Hand Study to satisfy its own concerns. Vietnam veterans still in the Air Force would be the beneficiaries of this study and he stated that the study was necessary to the medical needs of the Air Force family.

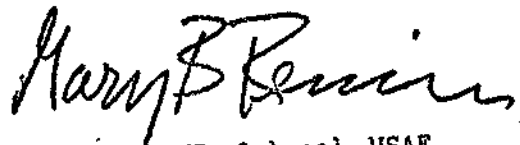
Senator Cranston pointed out a difference in a GAO report and Defense statements regarding whether aerial spraying was accomplished in areas occupied by our military personnel. General Augerson stated that there was no intent to misrepresent the actual state of events in Vietnam. At the time of the aerial spraying, Agent Orange was considered absolutely safe. He believes the GAO report attempted to correlate certain Marine Battalion Headquarters and Air Force records of spraying. This matter will be dealt with in response to the GAO report in a detailed manner within the near future. Senator Cranston also asked for the elapsed time between a field commander's request for a defoliation mission and the time of the actual spraying.

Senator Cranston called attention to an enactment of the 94th Congress which called for investigation of the efforts of Agent Orange on the indigenous people involved, and the lack of response by DOD. General Chesney stated that the Services took this language as a request to examine the effects upon the Vietnamese. Such an effort was almost impossible then and even harder now.

The chairman requested that the DOD witnesses take a look at correlating Army ground records relating to utilization of Agent Orange and Air Force computer tapes relating to Ranch Hand missions. He also suggested that we examine our organizational structure with a view to creating an entity within DOD to correlate records searches by concerned veterans who may have been exposed to Agent Orange.

In response to questioning by Senator Cranston, General Chesney said the Air Force plans to release all peer review comments on the proposed study protocol to interested agencies at such time as it does not jeopardize the development of the protocol.

The question of the propriety of the Air Force running the study was again raised by the chairman in asking whether self reporting could possibly jeopardize one's flying status. General Chesney stated that he did not think that was a particular problem within the Air Force, that Air Force flying personnel are given periodic physicals and that the Ranch Hand Study was not designed to jeopardize flying status. Senator Cranston responded that this may raise skepticism with the public regarding the validity of the Air Force's study and repeated his interest in contracting out the study. General Chesney repeated that the Air Force is interested in the study for its own purposes - the medical health of Air Force personnel. He also stated that the rough estimate for contracting out this study could result in an additional \$5M in increased costs to the taxpayer.



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