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WHITE HOUSE PRAISES AIR FORCE HEALTH STUDY

An important epidemiologic study of interest to nearly three million Vietnam veterans and their families was released today by the U.S. Air Force. The study is an investigation of possible adverse health effects in Air Force personnel who conducted aerial spraying missions in Southeast Asia with Agent Orange (Operation RANCH HAND). This White House directed study is the first major epidemiologic study to address the present health of Vietnam veterans who were heavily exposed to Agent Orange and its dioxin contaminant.

The [^{suspected} proposed clinical end points] of dioxin and Agent Orange exposure--chloracne, soft tissue sarcoma and porphyria cutanea tarda--were not found in the 1,045 RANCH HAND veterans, although one (1) case of soft tissue sarcoma was found within the 936 selected Vietnam veteran comparison subjects who participated in the study.

The study concluded that there is insufficient evidence to support a cause and effect relationship between herbicide exposure and adverse health in the RANCH HAND group at this time. However, the study disclosed numerous medical findings,

mostly of a minor or undetermined nature, that will require detailed follow-up. The results of the Air Force Health Study should serve two purposes. The first, is to offer some needed reassurance to the veterans and to their families about the exposure to Agent Orange. But secondly, it highlights the importance of obtaining scientific data on causality before legislating that causality as a presumed fact, a veteran issue that is currently pending before Congress.

The White House Office of Science and Technology Policy praised the Air Force for the professional manner in which the study has been conducted. [Following a commitment to the Carter White House,] ^{In 1979, by direction of the White House,} the Air Force initiated the development of the study protocol which was subsequently, extensively and independently reviewed by the University of Texas School of Public Health, Houston, Texas; the USAF Scientific Advisory Board; the Armed Forces Epidemiological Board; and the National Research Council of the National Academy of Sciences. In 1980, a special Advisory Committee of the White House Agency ^t Orange Working Group ^{accepted} ~~consented to the~~ oversight responsibility of the study and continues to monitor the conduct of this epidemiological investigation. (The Advisory Committee consists of some of this Nation's leading academic toxicologists, epidemiologists and biostatisticians.)

The preponderance of data was obtained from ~~the~~ in-home interviews and ~~the~~ physical examination, each conducted under contract to the Air Force by Louis Harris and Associates, Inc., New York City, and the Kelsey-Seybold Clinic, P.A., Houston, Texas, respectively. [All contacts with the participants were carried out with utmost professionalism and sensitivity.]

The Air Force Health Study will serve as a model to the public and scientific community as to how the government is capable of directing sophisticated and high quality research on difficult public health issues.

Additional studies related to health concerns of Vietnam veterans are underway by the Veterans Administration, Centers for Disease Control and the National Cancer Institute. Results of some of these studies will be released later this year.

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