

22 June 1983

Mr. Edward G. Galian,
National Commander, DAV Magazine
DAV National Headquarters
3725 Alexandria Pike
Cold Spring, KY 41076

Dear Commander Galian:

Throughout the history of the Vietnam conflict, 1300 men served proudly in a unique United States Air Force unit known as Operation Ranch Hand. Operation Ranch Hand's mission included enemy crop destruction and denial of concealment to the enemy by defoliation. No one can challenge the fact that personnel of Operation Ranch Hand had the greatest degree and frequency of contact with herbicides while serving in Vietnam. In spite of our daily contact with these chemicals, no symptoms attributed to highly fluorinated hydrocarbons, such as dioxin, manifested themselves. There were no unexplained physical problems. All personnel received annual physicals. The men lived and worked closely together and any unusual problems such as chloracne (the hallmark symptom of exposure to dioxin) would not have gone unnoticed or unreported.

Since 1974, Veterans of Operation Ranch Hand have watched with astonishment as the "Agent Orange" controversy grew to the point where many Americans now believe that the herbicide 24D/245T causes health problems in humans. While virtually no scientific evidence supports this conclusion, a number of Vietnam Veterans also share this belief.

In 1980 the United States Air Force agreed to manage an epidemiology study (The Ranch Hand II Study); the boldest and most exhaustive epidemiological study ever undertaken by this country's scientific community on a military population. The Ranch Hand Vietnam Association has wholeheartedly supported this study.

To date, over 1050 of the original 1300 Veterans of Operation Ranch Hand have voluntarily participated in the Ranch Hand II Study; this time in the service of our nation's scientific community. Current data (mortality statistics) indicate that Ranch Hand personnel have a mortality rate identical to our comparison group, and the Ranch Hand mortality rate is significantly below the rate for the U.S. white male population.

It should be also noted that no cases of chloracne were observed during the physical examination phase conducted by the Kelsey-Seybold Clinic in Houston, Texas.

Thus far, initial data from the Ranch Hand II Study supports the previously accepted scientific conclusion that the herbicide 24D/245T does not cause health problems in humans.

The herbicide 24D/245T was used for twenty years throughout the United States and the free world before its application in Southeast Asia, and its safety and effectiveness were amply demonstrated. All credible science to date supports the premise that 24D/245T was and is a safe herbicide in spite of the presence of a minute amount of dioxin (a trace production contaminant). After scientific review, the governments of Great Britain and Australia have again allowed its use.

The Veterans of Operation Ranch Hand are proud of our accomplishments, past and present. Because of our involvement and close association with herbicides, the Ranch Hand Vietnam Association stands behind existing science, and hopes that this most current research, combined with volumes of past research, will end the "Agent Orange" controversy with fully documented and supported scientific data.

We believe that when the science of this issue is carefully examined, most will conclude that the "Agent Orange" controversy has little basis in fact. If one ignores valid science and reacts to other pressures based on sensationalism and emotionalism, unsupported by facts, a great disservice to our nation and the vast majority of our nation's Veterans will result.

Respectfully yours,

Jack Spey, Major, USAF/RET.
President, Ranch Hand Vietnam Association

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