Ex-Air Force pilot, Jack Spey, reflects on his career in the Air Force, and his stint as a pilot spraying the herbicide, Agent Orange in Vietnam.

# Former pilot discounts dioxin effect

By Bill Kaczor
*Asspociated Press*

FORT WALTON BEACH, Fla. — Jack Spey doesn't mind being a guinea pig in the U.S. Air Force's study to determine if Agent Orange caused the illnesses that many Vietnam veterans blame on the dioxin-laced herbicide.

"We've focused on the emotionalism, the sensationalism and we've ignored most of the science on this thing," Spey said. "It's sad in a way. A lot of people have been unneccessarily worried."

The outspoken former Air Force pilot is convinced neither he nor any other veteran was harmed by Agent Orange, despite the fact that it contained small amounts of dioxin, a highly toxic byproduct of the manufacturing process.

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the Ranch Hands' age group, the study said. Four Ranch Hands died from cancer, a slightly lower rate than normal, it added.

But some critics still aren't convinced.

They said the first report dealt only with the the question of mortality and didn't consider whether Agent Orange affected veterans' physical or mental health or caused birth defects in their children.

More results — focusing on whether the Ranch Hand veterans are experiencing more health problems than other veterans — will be announced next month.

"It's good news for the Ranch Hand personnel but I don't think it guarantees a clean bill of health for the ground units who served in Vietnam," said Rep. Thomas Daschle, a South Dakota Democrat who is chairman of the Vietnam Veterans in Congress Caucus.

Spey has testified before congressional committees in support of the Air Force's contention that Ranch Hands had more exposure to Agent Orange than other servicemen, a point contested by some critics.

"I've tasted it, I've had it in my mouth," Spey said. "We had daily intimate contact with the chemical."

It blew in the fliers' faces through open windows from planes flying ahead and sloshed over them from spills, some routine and others the result of battle damage, he said.

The C-123 Provider cargo planes took 8,000 hits during the 10-year spraying period. One plane, nicknamed Patches because it was riddled with 600 bullet holes, is now on display at the Air Force Museum in Dayton, Ohio.

Critics of the Agent Orange study con-

# Acid rain has acquired a new sting

By Richard Worsnop
*Editorial Research Reports*

WASHINGTON — For years there has been more talk than action about acid rain, which is blamed for killing trees and aquatic life in New York, New England and parts of Canada. But a number of recent developments suggest that a consensus is forming in the scientific and governmental communities on where acid rain originates and, possibly, on how to contol it.

A report issued June 29 by the National Research Council of the National Academy of Sciences represented a key breakthrough in the acid-rain debate. Contradicting the claims of industry groups, it concluded that a 50 percent reduction in the emissions of sulfur and nitrogen gases will result in a comparable decrease in the acids falling on land and water downwind of the emission source.

The council also asserted that 90 to 95 percent of the Northeast's acid rain comes from man-made pollutants, such as industrial smoke and automobile exhausts. However, the panel acknowledged that it was not yet possible to pinpoint the source of acid rain in a given area. Carl Bagge, president of the National Coal Association, cited that finding to support his group's argument that "it is premature to impose additional emission controls" on coal-burning industrial and the power-generating plants.

Bagge may have spoken too soon. Dr. Liaquat Husain of the New York State Health Department in Aibany claims to have found a method of "fingerprinting" acid rain to determine its exact source.

Until recently, the Reagan administration maintained that existing data do not tell enough about the origins of sulfur and nitrogen in acid rain to justify government action to reduce industrial emissions. But the first annual report of the Interagency Task Force on Acid Precipitation, seemed to break with administration policy. It is stated that "Man-made atmospheric pollutants are probably the major contributors to acid deposition in northeastern North America."

Later, two members of a White House review panel on acid rain briefed reporters on the advice the group was feeding to presidential science adviser George A. Keyworth II. Chairman William A. Nieren-

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The outspoken former Air Force pilot is convinced neither he nor any other veteran was harmed by Agent Orange, despite the fact that it contained small amounts of dioxin, a highly toxic byproduct of the manufacturing process.

Spey, known as "Mr. Ranch," is president of the Ranch Hand Vietnam Association. Its membership includes the more than 1,200 veterans who sprayed Agent Orange and other herbicides on Vietnamese jungles and crops during a 10-year defoliation campaign known as Operation Ranch Hand. These men are now the subjects of a 20-year Air Force study.

The study's first finding — that there was no evidence of ahnormal deaths among the Operation Ranch Hand members — was released by the Air Force in July.

Fifty of the 1,247 Ranch Hands who survived the Vietnam War have died since, a mortality rate matching that of a 6,171-member comparison group and the general U.S. population of white males of the Ranch Hands' age group, the study said. Four Ranch Hands died from cancer, a slightly lower rate than normal, it added.

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Spey, a 45-year-old retired major, who served six years in Southeast Asia — three as a Ranch Hand — isn't one of the worriers.

Today he operates a sailboat charter and rental business in this beach resort just a few miles from Eglin Air Force Base, where another Agent Orange study is going on.

Ranch Hands, including Spey, sprayed a bombing range there with the berbicide. Scientists are monitoring the range for long-term impact on flora and fauna.

The Ranch Hand association was initially formed and still serves mainly as a social group. It holds reunions — this year's is scheduled for next month in Fort Walton Beach.

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Critics of the Agent Orange study contend Ranch Hands were able to shower off the herbicide after each mission, while ground troops spent days and weeks wearing clothes, eating food and drinking water contaminated with it.

Then, if troopa were down there, be argued, the spray they'd receive would be so fine they would hardly feel it, much less be soaked by it. Very little of even the fine spray could get through the thick jungle canopy to ground level, Spey contended.

Another criticism of the study is that it often takes 20 years or more for cancer to show up and that's too late for veterans who are seeking benefits now. But Spey pointed out that it bas been 20 years since the first exposure he and many other Ranch Hands had to Agent Orange.

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Later, two members of a White House review panel on acid rain briefed reporters on the advice the group was feeding to presidential science adviser George A. Keyworth II. Chairman William A. Nierenberg and panel member Kenneth Rahn said it was agreed that "steps should be taken now which will result in meaningful reductions in the emissions of sulfur compounds into the atmosphere."

Testimony at a field hearing of the House Select Committee on Aging Aug. 8 in Bangor, Maine, raised the possibility of a link between acid rain and Alzheimer's disease, the progressive neurological disorder that is also known as senile dementia. Victims of the disease have been found to have unusually high concentrations of aluminum in their brains. The aluminum buildup could be a product of the disease. Or the metal may have come from soil or drinking water supplies contaminated by acid rain.