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Agent Orange Used in Panama

Posted: Wednesday, August 25, 1999

The Associated Press

DALLAS (AP) - The U.S. military, in addition to using the herbicide Agent Orange in jungle tests in Panama, might have sprayed several military bases in the country, a former Army officer in charge of the testing program told The Dallas Morning News.

After testing, remaining barrels of the chemical were left in Panama and probably were stored for general use at several military bases, said Charles M. Bartlett, a retired Army major who was operational commander of the Agent Orange development program in the 1960s.

Bartlett said the U.S. government has not accounted for the "hundreds of barrels" of Agent Orange left in Panama, the newspaper reported Tuesday.

He said Agent Orange also was sprayed on numerous test sites inside the United States and Puerto Rico, he said, as the U.S. military attempted to test the herbicide's effectiveness in tropical conditions similar to Vietnam.

The addition of Panama and other locations to the list of sites where the U.S. government might have exposed military personnel and civilians to the danger of Agent Orange could significantly broaden the government's liability to health-benefit claims, said Bill Russo, an attorney for the Washington-based Vietnam Veterans of America.

Government leaders in Panama have long suspected that lethal chemical weapons and herbicides were used there and have attempted to obtain proof for compensation. The country is already seeking up to \$500 million from the U.S. military in damages and cleanup costs related to thousands of acres of rangeland used for ammunition and weapons tests since World War II.

Panamanian politicians demanded over the weekend that the United States provide a full accounting of the tests it conducted.

Use of Agent Orange or similar toxic herbicides is identified by the Veterans Affairs Department as a factor in the deaths of at least three U.S. servicemen stationed in Panama in the 1960s and 1970s who developed cancer and other symptoms.

Survivors of the servicemen, including a Texas widow, are receiving service-related death benefits as a result of their husbands' exposure, the newspaper said.

In 1997, Bartlett testified in a Veterans Affairs Department hearing for Pamela Jones of Pleasanton, Texas, who sought and was awarded Agent Orange-related death benefits after her husband, Donald, was exposed while serving in Panama during the early 1970s.

The Army says it is looking into the newspaper's report that large quantities of the herbicide were sent for testing in Panama during the 1960s and '70s.

"We're in the process of looking at old files to see if we can find any evidence that this happened. So far, we have no response," said Jim Steuve, an Army spokesman.

Bartlett said Agent Orange also was tested on the Caribbean island of Puerto Rico as well as in some locations inside the United States, including Texas, Maryland, Georgia, Tennessee, New York and at the Appalachian National Forest in Florida.

[SOURCE](#)