



DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS
Veterans Benefits Administration
Washington, D.C. 20420

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Memorandum for the Record

Subject: Herbicide use in Thailand during the Vietnam Era

The Compensation and Pension Service has reviewed a listing of herbicide use and test sites outside Vietnam provided to our office by the Department of Defense (DoD). This list contains 71 sites within the U.S. and in foreign countries where tactical herbicides, such as Agent Orange, were used, tested, or stored. Testing and evaluations of these tactical herbicides were conducted by or under the direction of the U.S. Army Chemical Corps, Fort Detrick, Maryland. The list does not contain names of individuals. Additionally, it does not contain any references to routine base maintenance activities such as range management, brush clearing, weed killing, etc., because these vegetation control activities were conducted by the Base Civil Engineer and involved the use of commercial herbicides approved by the Armed Forces Pest Control Board. The application of commercial herbicides on military installations was conducted by certified applicators. DoD has advised us that commercial herbicides were routinely purchased by the Base Civil Engineer under federal guidelines and that records of these procurements were generally kept no longer than two years. We have also reviewed a series of official DoD monographs describing in detail the use, testing, and storage of herbicides at various foreign and domestic locations. In addition, the *Project CHECO Southeast Asia Report: Base Defense in Thailand*, produced during the Vietnam era, has been reviewed.

Regarding your veteran claimant with Thailand service, the DoD list indicates only that limited testing of tactical herbicides was conducted in Thailand from 2 April through 8 September 1964. Specifically, the location identified was the Prانبuri Military Reservation associated with the Replacement Training Center of the Royal Thai Army, near Prانبuri, Thailand. The Report of these tests noted that 5 civilian and 5 military personnel from Fort Detrick, Maryland conducted the spray operations and subsequent research. This location was not near any U.S. military installation or Royal Thai Air Force Base.

Tactical herbicides, such as Agent Orange, were used and stored in Vietnam, not Thailand. We received a letter from the Department of the Air Force stating that, other than the 1964 tests on the Prانبuri Military Reservation, there are no records of tactical herbicide storage or use in Thailand. There are records indicating that commercial herbicides were frequently used for vegetation control within the perimeters of air bases during the Vietnam era, but all such use required approval of both the Armed Forces Pest Control Board and the Base Civil Engineer. In Vietnam, tactical herbicides were aerielly

applied by UC-123 aircraft in Operation RANCH HAND or by helicopters under the control of the U.S. Army Chemical Corps. Base Civil Engineers were not permitted to purchase or apply tactical herbicides. There are no records of tactical herbicide spraying by RANCH HAND or Army Chemical Corps aircraft in Thailand after 1964, and RANCH HAND aircraft that sprayed herbicides in Vietnam were stationed in Vietnam, not in Thailand. However, there are records indicating that modified RANCH HAND aircraft flew 17 insecticide missions in Thailand from 30 August through 16 September 1963 and from 14–17 October 1966. The 1966 missions involved the spraying of malathion insecticide for the “control of malaria carrying mosquitoes.” These facts are not sufficient to establish tactical herbicide exposure for any veteran based solely on service in Thailand.

While the Thailand CHECO Report does not report the use of tactical herbicides on allied bases in Thailand, it does indicate sporadic use of non-tactical (commercial) herbicides within fenced perimeters. Therefore, if a veteran’s MOS (military occupational specialty) or unit is one that regularly had contact with the base perimeter, there was a greater likelihood of exposure to commercial pesticides, including herbicides. Security police units were known to have walked the perimeters, especially dog handlers. However, as noted above, there are no records to show that the same tactical herbicides used in Vietnam were used in Thailand. Please consider this information when you evaluate the veteran’s claim.

If the veteran’s claim is based on servicing or working on aircraft that flew bombing missions over Vietnam, please be advised that there is no presumption of “secondary exposure” based on being near or working on aircraft that flew over Vietnam or handling equipment once used in Vietnam. Aerial spraying of tactical herbicides in Vietnam did not occur everywhere, and it is inaccurate to think that herbicides covered every aircraft and piece of equipment associated with Vietnam. Additionally, the high altitude jet aircraft stationed in Thailand generally flew far above the low and slow flying UC-123 aircraft that sprayed tactical herbicides over Vietnam during Operation RANCH HAND. Also, there are no studies that we are aware of showing harmful health effects for any such secondary or remote herbicide contact that may have occurred.

If the veteran’s claim is based on general herbicide use within the base, such as small-scale brush or weed clearing activity along the flight line or around living quarters, there are no records of such activity involving tactical herbicides, only the commercial herbicides that would have been approved by the Armed Forces Pest Control Board and sprayed under the control of the Base Civil Engineer. Since 1957, the Armed Forces Pest Control Board (now the Armed Forces Pest Management Board) has routinely provided listings of all approved herbicides and other pesticides used on U.S. Military Installations worldwide. The Compensation and Pension Service cannot provide any additional evidence beyond that described above to support the veteran’s claim. Therefore, unless the claim is inherently incredible, clearly lacks merit, or there is no reasonable possibility that further VA assistance would substantiate the claim [see 38 CFR 3.159(d)], regional offices should send a request to JSRRC for any information that this organization can provide to corroborate the veteran’s claimed exposure.

References

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