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Team Concludes Agent Orange Investigation in South Korea

By Walter T. Ham IV

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A joint U.S.-South Korean investigation team announced that it discovered no evidence of Agent Orange during its probe into claims that the toxic defoliant was buried on Camp Carroll.

Led by Dr. Gon Ok, Pukyong National University's chief professor, and Army Col. Joseph F. Birchmeier, U.S. Forces Korea engineer, the team concluded its eight-month investigation Dec. 29 at a press conference in South Korea's Chilgok County Office.

The investigation began in May following a report on KPHO TV in Phoenix where U.S. veterans claimed they buried Agent Orange on the military base in southeastern South Korea in 1978.

Birchmeier, the lead U.S. investigator, said the bilateral investigation found no evidence that Agent Orange was buried on Camp Carroll and discovered no risk to public health on the U.S. Army post. "I want you to know that we have found no definitive evidence that Agent Orange was buried or stored on Camp Carroll," Birchmeier said.

During the investigation, the team interviewed 172 former Korean civilian employees and U.S. soldiers and worked with 32 different government agencies.

A document review revealed that all 380 barrels of Agent Orange brought into South Korea in 1968 were used by the Republic of Korea Army to reduce areas for enemy concealment inside the Korean Demilitarized Zone that same year.

The team also conducted an exhaustive geophysical survey with ground-penetrating radar, electrical resistivity and magnetometers of the area where the Agent Orange allegedly was buried. Based on the results of the geophysical survey, water and soil samples were taken to check for the compounds of Agent Orange and its specific dioxin byproducts.

All samples were tested by South Korean and U.S. scientists. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Far East District verified the U.S. analytical results, and Seoul National University, Pohang University of Science and Technology, and Pukyong University analyzed the samples.

The investigation was conducted in consultation with the status-of-forces agreement environmental subcommittee, which will handle future environmental issues. "Nothing is more important than the health and safety of our people and our Korean neighbors in the surrounding communities," said Army Brig. Gen. David J. Conboy, deputy commanding general for Eighth Army. "This joint investigation was thorough, scientific and complete, and I'm happy to report that there is no threat to public health and no evidence that Agent Orange was buried on the post."

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