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U.S. herbicide tests at CFB Gagetown posed disease threat to some, study finds

CHARLES MANDEL, CanWest News Service

Published: Wednesday, August 22 2007

Only individuals who had direct contact with herbicides at CFB Gagetown in New Brunswick are at risk of contracting a number of diseases associated with exposure, including various cancers, Parkinson's disease and Type 2 diabetes, according to a study released yesterday.

"We know now that base Gagetown and area is a safe place to train our soldiers," said Dennis Furlong, the government-hired researcher of the effects of the use of herbicides at CFB Gagetown.

Calling it good news for the people of the area, Furlong said the epidemiological study of provincial cancer and mortality rates dating back to 1980 shows no difference in cancer or deaths in and around the base compared to the rest of New Brunswick's 700,000 people.

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The U.S. military tested Agent Orange at Gagetown for three days in 1966 and for four days in 1967. While probably only dozens of people were involved in the application, according to Furlong, he said, "we do know that a lot of members of the Canadian forces were in the area and in the vicinity."

Jim Burke, a former Gagetown base soldier who now lives in Saint John, N.B., reacted angrily when he heard the study results.

Burke says he was sprayed with Agent Orange when he was driving an anti-tank jeep at Gagetown in the early 1960s.

He recalls a plane flying in low and then covering soldiers in a white fog.

"It was like a white scum. That was Agent Orange, because within the next two or three weeks all the foliage on the left and right-hand side of that road died."

Today Burke, 63, says he has congestive heart disease and has suffered two heart attacks.

The report will be forwarded to the federal government over the next week. Ottawa is reportedly looking at a

compensation package for veterans.

The study says at-risk individuals included those directly involved with herbicide application, and that sufficient evidence existed to support conclusions of "positive associations" between exposure to the herbicides and the development of soft tissue sarcoma and non-Hodgkin's lymphoma.

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