

# Local

## 'Ranch Hand' history to tell of Agent Orange spraying

By GLENN KRAMPOTA  
Battalion Reporter

A lead ship called a forward air controller marked the target with smoke. Then the formation of three unarmed ships, sometimes more, coasting at tree-top level dropped a fine mist of spray over the selected section of the lush Vietnamese landscape. Ground fire that sounded like "a baseball bat on a tin building" when it hit the plane's fuselage erupted while fighter support for the sprayers roared overhead. The UC-123s dropped herbicides that within days would strip the green angle canopy and undergrowth of its foliage, leaving it bare to expose

notoriety today comes not from the success of its program or the punishment it bore, but instead the chemical it dropped.

Agent Orange, as one of the herbicides used is known now, has been charged by some veteran's groups of causing cancer and birth defects among children, according to an article in the August 9, 1980 issue of Science News.

The article said studies have not been conclusive one way or the other that Agent Orange's toxic ingredient, dioxin, leads to these things. Cecil himself doubts that Agent Orange caused health problems.

But he and other Ranch Hands are due to take part in a government

study next summer that hopefully will determine once and for all the effect of the herbicide.

By charting air flow patterns, the government knows exactly how much exposure to the chemical the crews received and when they were exposed to it, Cecil said. "The air crews received a minimum of 1,000 times as much as anyone on the ground," Cecil said.

When Cecil finishes his thesis, he will have covered the important medical questions, he said, but he is chiefly interested in writing a military history, not a medical one.

It will be "an interwoven story of official things and people things ... the missions and the orders, and what happened to the people involved," Cecil explained.

Cecil has already talked to 60 or 70 different Ranch Hands, some of

them key personnel. He is bulk-mailing questionnaires for letter response, he said.

One aspect of research that is nearly complete, he said, is his utilization of official documents. Interestingly enough, Cecil said he cannot get access to some documents he wrote while in the Air Force, because they are classified as top secret.

There is a Ranch Hand Association, he said. At a recent reunion he got a lot of fine interviews. "There are a million war stories, some wild ... funny ... sad. I lost 12 good friends in one instance when a plane crashed into a mountain. Other people have the same stories."

Cecil has high hopes of finishing up within the year. He said the University Archives has shown a willingness to take his finished document for scholarly research.



Paul Cecil

## 10,000 hamburgers a reminder of home

United Press International  
FOUNTAIN HILLS, Ariz. — What a day to be in the ketchup, lettuce or tomato business.

The "world's largest take-out order" was served up in Fountain Hills residents Saturday — 10,000 White Castle hamburgers flown to the Phoenix-area community from the Ohio-based hamburger chain.

"The order represents over 555 pounds of hamburger and breaks the Guinness Book of World Records entry for the world's largest take-out order," said Tammi Gates of the Fountain Hill Chamber of Commerce.

The burger-fest was ordered up to celebrate the community's 10th anniversary this weekend by city officials conscious of the suburb's large segment of transplanted Midwesterners.

"With 5,000 hamburgers already pre-sold, we're sure to sell out," said Gates.

The shipment was met at Phoenix Sky Harbor International Airport Friday night by a band of "armed guards" sporting cowboy garb and fake rifles, who stood watch on the shipment overnight.

The burgers were then distributed for sale Sunday in five Fountain Hills restaurants.

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enemy troop movement or war installations.

In other cases the herbicides would destroy papayas or turn rice black, causing the enemy to carry food in on their backs instead of more ammunition.

This highly effective defoliation technique went on for 12 years and the 1,200 men who were involved with such missions were known as Ranch Hands.

Now, a Texas A&M University instructor and doctoral student in history, himself a pilot in the operation, is writing the Ranch Hands' history as his doctoral thesis.

Paul Cecil, 46, said, "The Ranch Hands were the most fired-on ranch unit in Vietnam. In fact, the first U.S. airplane shot down in Vietnam was a Ranch Hand craft."

However, the Ranch Hands chief

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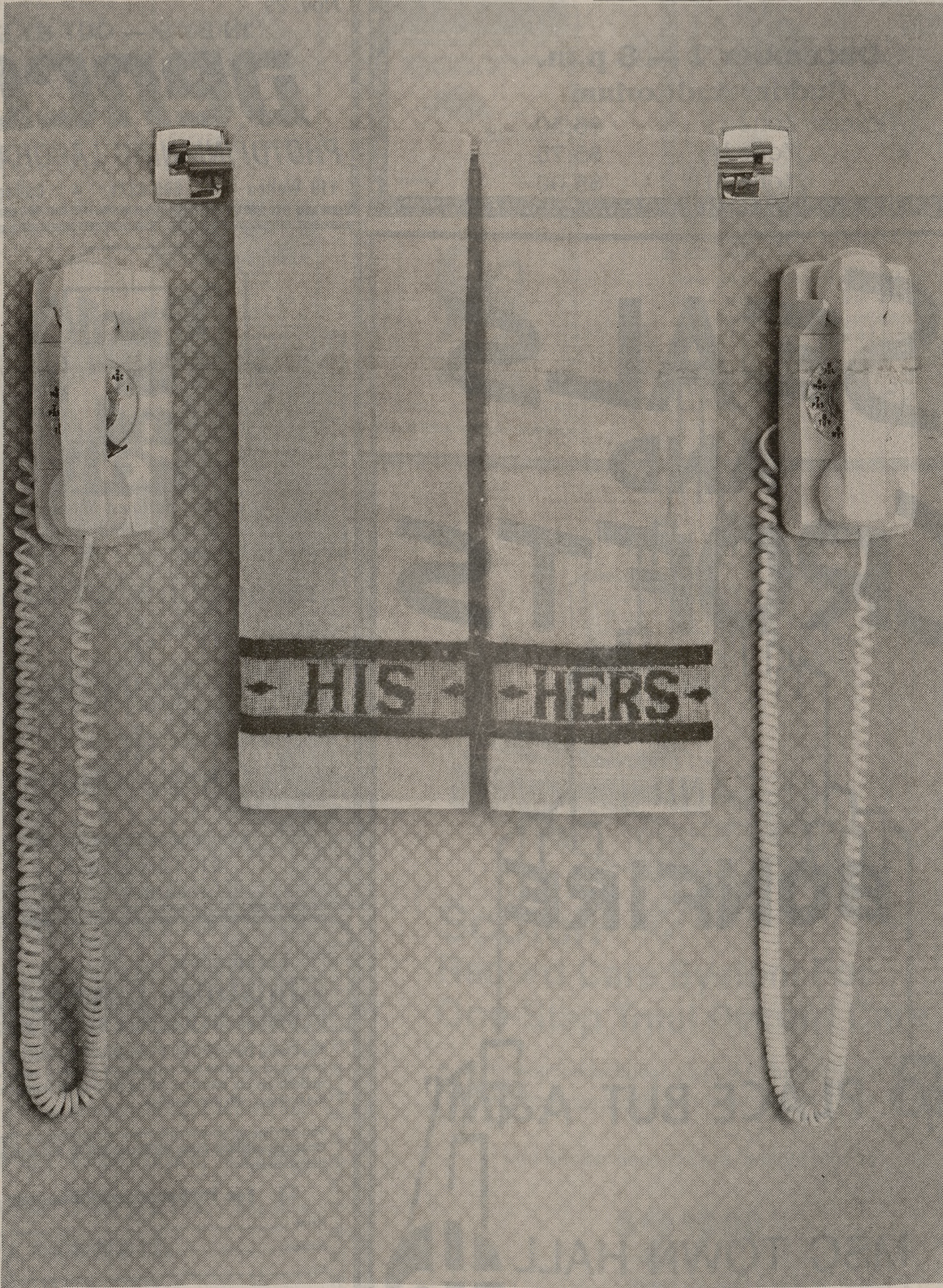
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