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NEWSPAPER ARTICLE "AIR FORCE CREWS BEGIN REMOVAL OF TOXIC DEFOLIANT"
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Air Force crews begin removal of toxic defoliant

GULFPORT, Miss. (AP) — Air Force crews began the slow process of removing 850,000 gallons of a toxic Vietnam-era defoliant from a Navy Seabee base Tuesday for destruction at sea.

The defoliant, known as Herbicide Orange, has been stored in 55-gallon drums at the Gulfport base since 1969 and will be burned on an incinerator ship at a remote Pacific Ocean site in July.

Herbicide Orange was used to clear jungle trails of vegetation in Vietnam until 1970, when authorities said it contained chemicals which could cause birth defects.

The Air Force briefed newsmen Tuesday on how the aging drums of chemical would be handled.

The Air Force had first considered removing the toxic materials from the chemical and allowing it to be sold commercially as a farm herbicide. However, officials were not satisfied with test of the purification process and last month the Environmental Protection Agency approved the burning of Herbicide Orange.

In addition to the Herbicide Orange stored here, the Air Force has another 1.5 million gallons stock-

pled at Johnson Island in the Pacific. The Johnson Island stock is to be burned in September.

The Dutch incinerator ship Vulcanus arrived at the Port of Gulfport Monday and Air Force specialists began emptying the drums Tuesday, pumping the chemical into railroad tank cars for the trip to the port.

A spokesman said the operation, dubbed "Pacer Ho," called for the chemical to be mixed with diesel fuel in the tank cars at the rate of about 55,000 gallons a day.

The process of draining the more than 15,000 drums at the base is expected to take 15 to 17 working days, the spokesman said.

The spokesman said the first rail shipment from the base to the ship would be on Thursday. He said the tank cars would move at "creep" speed during predawn hours and that police would be stationed at roads and intersections.

The aging gray-painted drums, now stacked three deep and three high in long rows, are being moved to a small white building, where they are opened and their contents pumped into the tank cars.

Col. Stanley Morrow, project director, said the building was designed to trap vapor from the drums and to protect against a spill. He said a similar structure was at the port for unloading the tank cars.

The spokesman said that after ship is loaded at Gulfport, the Vulcanus would proceed through the Panama Canal and into the Pacific to a point about 1,200 miles west of Hawaii, where the cargo will be burned.

Morrow said the burning was expected to destroy 99.9 per cent of the herbicide.