# SCIENCESCOPE

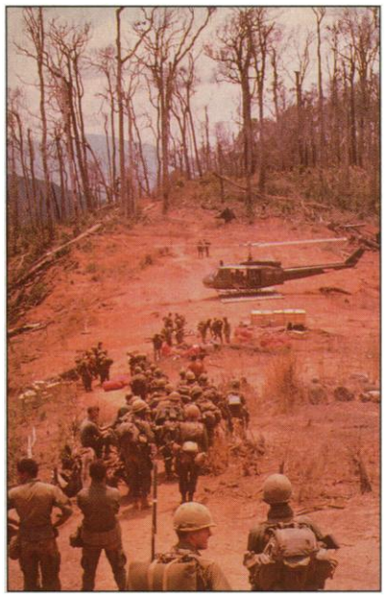
edited by RICHARD STONE

## IOM to Study Agent Orange

The controversial question of whether herbicides such as Agent Orange poisoned soldiers during the Vietnam War is going under scientific scrutiny once again. A panel of the Institute of Medicine (IOM) will begin to review all studies of the health effects of Agent Orange and related products after it holds a public meeting on the topic in Washington, D.C., on 9 September.

Vietnam veterans have long blamed a variety of health problems—ranging from ulcers and acne to cancer and autoimmune disorders—to these dioxin-containing defoliants used by the armed services, but the federal government has been reluctant to pay any compensation. The chief reason: Virtually every major study, including a 1987 report by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), has concluded that the evidence isn't strong enough to prove that the herbicide is the culprit. But the CDC report had been challenged and the Department of Veterans Affairs, which commissioned the IOM study, is hoping the panel will finally put the issue to rest (*Science*, 31 August 1990, p. 982).

In its hearing next week, the panel, chaired by medical researcher Howard Fallon of Virginia Commonwealth University, is expected to hear testimony from such organizations as the Environmental Protection Agency and Vietnam Veterans of America, although its major task will be to review the hundreds of studies addressing the topic. The panel might also recommend new studies to fill in gaps in the existing data. Already, panel members are warning that they may reach no firmer conclusions than previous panels have: "We won't put all the questions to rest," says epidemiologist and panel vice chair M. Donald Whorton.



**Dangers of defoliation.** Did use of Agent Orange in Vietnam cause illness?

## Hallum Resigns, Blasts New Misconduct Office

Critics of the way the federal government handles scientific misconduct investigations won't have one of their favorite targets to kick around any more. Jules Hallum, the first full-time director of NIH's Office of Scientific Integrity (OSI), resigned on 15 August, citing his frustrations with the job and misgivings over how the government plans to handle misconduct cases in the future.

Now is a "convenient" time to resign, says Hallum, a retired virologist from the Oregon Health Sciences University. A recent reorganization (brought on by the complaints of several thousand scientists last fall) moved OSI out of NIH, renamed it the Office of Research Integrity (ORI), and created a new layer of procedural hearings in the misconduct process (*Science*, 13 March, p. 1344).

To Hallum, however, all the shuffling and renaming has created a monster. With 57 staff members and six to seven new lawyers, ORI will be "too big" and "driven by lawyers, not scientists," he says. "Frankly, I think the scientific community made a mistake....We've created a review process where we're trading a scientific dialogue for an adversarial procedure. I think the scientific community will suffer for this."

Having returned to retirement, Hallum says he plans to spend some time writing the "stories of OSI," which he may try to publish in a general-interest magazine. Hallum aims to set the record straight on issues on which he says the press and the scientific community "missed the boat." Not to mention restoring his own good name: "I used to have a reputation before I worked for the government," he laments.

Clyde Watkins, Hallum's deputy at ORI's division of research integrity assurance has been named acting division director. Other key officials remain in place: Michael McGinnis as acting head of ORI, and Lyle Bivens as head of the division of policy.

## Ukrainian Academy Goes Green

As a sign of the times, a former Soviet military academy is being transformed into a private university with a "green" tilt. In December, the Ukrainian Ministry of Environmental Protection (MEP) plans to launch an environmental education and information center at Kiev's Mohyla Academy, which opened for university classes for the first time in 175 years.

MEP officials hope the center will do what the Ukrainian government has had a hard time doing: provide scientists and other interested parties with environmental information about Ukraine and other former Soviet republics, says the center's first director, Andriy O. Demydenko, a physicist and head of MEP's department of environmental education, information, and public relations. Since last year's coup, the task of monitoring the environment and disseminating such information has fallen primarily to "green" groups based in the former Soviet Union (*Science*, 28 August, p. 1210). "The problem's not secrecy," says Demydenko. Instead, he says, MEP has accumulated an "ocean of information" that isn't accessible.

Help in sorting through this pile of data will come in part from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. According to a draft agreement, the agency will chip in $100,000, which is expected to endow the center with such things as library materials, educational software, and visits from international environmental scientists. MEP itself plans to spend 9.2 million rubles (about $57,000) on the center for computer and video equipment, salaries for an initial 10-person staff, and refurbishments to the 350-year-old academy.

### Science Funding Scorecard

When Congress returns from its summer recess on 8 September, it will find an imposing stack of spending bills awaiting its attention. So far, legislators have not been particularly kind to science, despite a last-minute reprieve for the Superconducting Super Collider (SSC) in the Senate last month—and few observers are predicting that the situation will improve much at all before the end of the fiscal year in September. Here's a recap of the action so far.

| Agency | 1992 Budget | 1993 Request | House action | Senate action |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Billions of dollars | | | |
| NSF | 1.9 | 2.2 | 1.9 | 1.9* |
| NIH | 8.9 | 9.4 | 9.2 | — |
| NASA | 2.7 | 3.0 | 2.8 | 2.8* |
| Space station | 2.0 | 2.3 | 1.7 | 2.1 |
| DOE | 2.6 | 2.7 | 2.6 | 2.5 |
| SSC | .484 | .65 | 0.0 | .55 |

* Senate Appropriations Committee