Reno Gazette-Journal
May 2, 2000
Editorial/P.5

Tuesday, May 2, 2000 — 5A

YOUR TURN

DAVID ROGERS

Chaff study independent, accurate

Several points need to be made in reference to the April 6 article on chaff ("Critics assail federal study on health and military chaff") and editorial on the same subject that appeared on April 7 in the Reno Gazette-Journal.

It is clear to me that the "critics" referred to in this article did your reporter a disservice, feeding him biased and incomplete information regarding this chaff study by claiming the study was biased toward the Department of Defense. Had either these critics or your reporter/editorial staff bothered to actually read the entire report or contact the Navy for an explanation, they would have discovered some of the following facts:

The 80-page study entitled "Environmental Effects of RF Chaff-A Select Panel Report to the Undersecretary of Defense for Environmental Security" was funded, but not conducted, by the Naval Research Laboratory at the request of the Sen. Harry Reid-initiated GAO report on chaff. Those who read the select panel's entire report would have found the biographies of the eight independent Ph.D.s from academic institutions including Harvard, MIT, Cornell, Pennsylvania State University, Duke, University of Arizona and Nevada's own Desert Research Institute who conducted the study. Hardly institutions with histories of hotbed military activism.

Furthermore, the study's disclosure on page vi of the introduction reads in part, "The opinions and assertions contained herein are those of the Select Panel on the Environmental Effects of RF Chaff and are not to be construed as official or reflecting the views of the Department of Defense or other agencies of the U.S. government." The fact that the report goes on to support the government's assertion that chaff is not harmful is obviously much to the dismay of our special-interest critics.

To put the amount of chaff expended by aviators training at NAS Fallon into perspective, I offer these facts: First, only about one-third of the 42,000 annual military flights based out of Fallon use chaff in the course of their training missions. Second, over the last five years, the amount of chaff annually dispensed of over the Fallon Military Operating Area averages about 1/4 ounce per acre. As the report describes, the chemical composition of chaff is essentially the same as desert dust, and the amounts expended into the environment are several orders of magnitude less than EPA standards for dust, vehicle exhaust, power generation and industry.

For special-interest groups and the Reno Gazette-Journal to cry foul and push for an "independent" study is ludicrous. This select panel study is independent, but the results don't happen to promote their (and perhaps your) agenda. Maybe such special-interest groups would've been happier to foot the bill for this study themselves so they could call it "independent," although the results would've been the same.

Expenditures of chaff and subsequent three-dimensional aircraft maneuvering in response to enemy radar systems on the Fallon range is arguably the most critical piece of our aircrew training. I have personally witnessed close friends die in combat who were not adequately trained in this type of maneuver. The Israeli Air Force considers training so vital that it expends eight times the amount the U.S. Navy does. Our combat success and the safety of our aircrew hang in the balance of this issue and I, for one, am not ready to sacrifice those.

Captain David A. Rogers is commander of the Naval Air Station at Fallon.