

Cloud-Seeding Charge Denied

Washington

The Defense Department denied yesterday charges that the United States tried to change the weather over Cuba in order to damage that nation's sugar crop.

"It's not true," a Pentagon spokesman said of the charge that the United States, in 1969 and 1970, attempted to alter Cuba's weather. The claim was made Saturday by former Defense Department consultant Lowell Ponte.

Ponte formerly was an environmental researcher with the International Research and Technology Corp. of Washington, D.C.

He said the CIA and the Pentagon cooperated in a program to seed clouds near Cuba so they would drop their rain before reaching the island, thus causing a damaging drought.

"We have never conducted weather modification around Cuba," the Pentagon spokesman said.

He added that there has only been one classified weather modification program in the past. That one was over the Ho Chi Minh trail in Vietnam, he said, and was made public in 1974.

The spokesman said the only current weather-change program being conducted by the Pentagon involves fog dispersal at airports.

The CIA could not be reached for comment.

Ponte said the CIA embarked on a major cloud seeding program over Cuba after Cuban Premier Fidel Castro staked his honor in 1970 on producing a record ten million metric ton harvest of sugar cane.

He said that the 1970 Cuban sugar harvest fell two million metric tons short of Castro's goal. But Ponte added that there is "no way to say definitely" the CIA's cloud seeding caused the harvest shortfall.

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