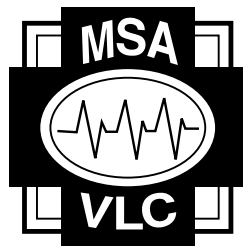


VIETNAM LAOS CAMBODIA



NATIONAL LOTTERY
CHARITIES BOARD
United Kingdom

MEDICAL & SCIENTIFIC AID NEWS BULLETIN

No. 135 - May 2003

50p

AGENT ORANGE UNDER FRESH SCRUTINY



FIRST STEP IN RESTORATION: landscape in central Vietnam, once covered by tropical rain forest, destroyed by Agent Orange spraying, now planted with fast-growing trees and shrubs prior to replanting with slow-growing forest trees. (NB: soil erosion)

A FRESH STUDY OF THE SPRAYING OF AGENT ORANGE AND OTHER HERBICIDES ON VIETNAM HAS FOUND THAT THE TOTAL AMOUNT OF DIOXINS SPRAYED DURING THE WAR WAS UP TO FOUR TIMES AS GREAT AS PREVIOUSLY ESTIMATED.

The new analysis has been carried out by a group of scientists at Columbia University in New York. Until now, research has relied on an electronic record, compiled by the US military, including data on flight paths and types and volumes of herbicides used in 10,000 spraying missions. The Columbia University team has discovered archive data previously overlooked, such as the daily logs completed by pilots after spraying missions, as well as details of crashes, dumps, leaks, troop locations, land

features, soil types and location of Vietnamese population.

The authors say that, with the new data, it is now possible to calculate an exposure index for individuals and population accurate enough for epidemiological research. The US Institute of Medicine has declared that the new work makes possible large-scale epidemiological studies of the link between herbicide spraying and the health of the Vietnamese population and US veterans and is calling on the US government to support such studies.

This is a momentous breakthrough, for hitherto it has been maintained by the US and other governments that there is no proof of any link between exposure to dioxins and the large numbers of cancers among men and women who had been exposed to Agent Orange and other herbicides or the gross deformities with which so many of their children were born.

MSAVLC has always been of the opinion that statistical evidence (such as that a mother exposed to Agent Orange was 117 times more liable to have a molar pregnancy – and thus to be at risk of developing *chorionepithelioma*, probably the most aggressive of all cancers - than a mother not so exposed) was highly significant.

Let us hope that this latest scientific study will lead speedily to action rather than another call for “further research”.

As we go to press, news has just reached us that the documentary film “Battle’s Poison Cloud” which shows some of the effects of toxic chemicals on victims and their families and a copy of which on video we have been fortunate to obtain, was shown recently at an international film festival where it received an award.

PRIMARY EAR HEALTH CARE IN CAMBODIA



Adjusting headphones during pure tone audiometry

In his talk at the Annual General Meeting, Glyn Vaughan stressed the scale of the problem of deafness in “Third World” countries with, of course, particular reference to Cambodia, where he has only recently started a programme similar to that which he initiated – and MSAVLC has been supporting – in Laos.

Deafness and hearing impairment impact on the individual. His or her educational progress, vocational potential and social integration are all at risk. Ear disease and its associated disability are potentially preventable, through early identification and treatment of the disease and both are most appropriately and cost-effectively undertaken as part of primary health care.

Unfortunately, it seems to be a common

misconception with many involved in provision of primary care services that ear disease and hearing disorders are a specialised field of practice that requires a sophisticated – and hence unaffordable – level of skill and equipment in order to adequately treat and manage these problems.

Disabling hearing impairment is generally defined as “being unable to hear normal conversational voice with the better ear” and it is estimated that at least 250 million people throughout the world have disabling hearing impairment and that two-thirds of these live in the developing world – **and that an estimated 50% of these cases may be avoidable or treatable.** There is no exact prevalence data with respect to Cambodia but interpolation from the global estimate

suggests that several hundred thousand have disabling hearing loss and that the majority of these live in rural areas.

The importance and urgency of providing appropriate services at primary health care level – and therefore of teaching primary health care workers the fundamentals of diagnosis and treatment of common ear diseases – could not be clearer and this is the starting-point for the projects in Laos and Cambodia.

Glyn Vaughan has kindly furnished us with a paper on this subject, a copy of which can be obtained from the Hon. Sec. on payment of £1. We can also supply copies of a 50-page illustrated Review of the audiology programme established at Pakse, Champasak Province in Laos, on payment of £3.

THIS YEAR'S WINNERS OF THE DR. JOAN McMICHAEL-ASKINS PRIZE

Dang Thanh Phong *Assistant Doctor*
Dr. Le Van Xuan *Vice Director*
Dao Duc Mau *Vice Director*
Dr. Pham Quoc Linh

Dr. Le Xuan Dinh *Director*
Phan Van Dinh *Assistant Doctor*
Dr. Le Hung Cuong
Dr. Nguyen Tien Dung
Le Anh Tan

Pham Hung *Assistant Doctor*
Nguyen Thi Dien *Nurse*
Nguyen Thi Hong *Nurse*
Nguyen Thi Can *Nurse*

WINIFRED LANGTON – A STAUNCH FRIEND TO THE PEOPLE OF VIETNAM

On 11th April, Margaret Methley and Madeleine Sharp represented MSAVLC at a celebration, in Ulverston, Cumbria, of the life of Win Langton, who died on 7th March 2003. We publish below the obituary by Sophie Laws, a shortened version of which appeared in The Guardian on 1st April.

Win had been a supporter of MSAVLC's predecessor, the Medical Aid Committee for Vietnam, from its earliest days and that support continued until her death. In his "Twenty-five Years of Devoted Support" published in 1990, Professor E. J. Shellard, writes:

"When the war ended, there was a gradual reduction in the activities by local committees and, by 1979, only a few remained, although individual members continued to send money and still do so today. One committee which has remained active is the Ulverston Medical Aid for Vietnam Group, under the leadership of Winifred Langton. Winifred, who was active in the Medway Towns Peace in Vietnam organisation, moved to Ulverston in 1968 and immediately set about the establishment of a group there. She was also responsible for the formation of a group at Barrow in Furness."

She was one of only four - the others being Dr. Joan McMichael, Eric Clarke, General Secretary of the Scottish NUM, Bob Morrison, a retired Kent miner (who replaced Alf Lomas MEP at very short notice) - to be invited to the opening of the British Friendship Hospital in 1980, in recognition of the Ulverston Group's contribution of almost £4000 to the Hospital Fund.

When Dr. Nguyen dinh Lan, the first Director of the Hospital, was invited to spend four weeks in the UK after he retired in 1994, he spent several days as guest of the North-West British Vietnam Association, a highlight of which was two days with Win, who had arranged meetings with local dignitaries and had put together a most impressive exhibition of photographs, posters, articles and correspondence regarding the war in Vietnam and the work of the Ulverston Medical Aid for Vietnam Group.

As a fitting memorial to Win Langton's outstanding work, the Executive Committee of MSAVLC decided that a bed at the British Friendship Hospital should be endowed in her name.

Visiting Win Langton's council house in Ulverston, Cumbria, the cups of tea and the home-made shortbread would be accompanied by an account of her latest letter to the local paper. On the mantel-piece, a bust of Lenin, carved for her father in 1930 by a work-mate on the wall, a large portrait of Yuri Gagarin.

Beside a banner in the corner would be jumble awaiting the next fundraising stall.

If you brought a present, it was likely to end up as a raffle prize.

Win raised huge sums of money for Medical Aid to Vietnam, both before and after her final move to Ulverston. She was invited to the opening of a hospital in Vietnam that she had helped to equip. She was awarded a Medal of Honour by the Vietnamese Government and, in 1988, the Vietnamese ambassador came to stay with her.

Known to many, including the Vietnamese ambassador, as Grandma, Win Langton was a tireless campaigner for peace and justice, against racism, for socialism and women's rights. Born in Plaistow, East London, she was one of three surviving children - another three siblings had died in the 1902 smallpox epidemic. Her mother was a working class suffragette and a founder member of the Communist Party. Her father, the son of a freed slave from Guyana, was an active trades unionist. Win said that she learned how to fight from

her mother and learned how to care from her father. She looked after her parents (especially her disabled mother) until they died in 1949, and fought for their values throughout her life.

Her lifelong campaigning for the Communist Party began at 12 or 13, selling the predecessor of the Daily Worker outside Woolwich Royal Arsenal, where her father was a foreman. During the General Strike, aged 16, she carried messages by bike; later, when the Jarrow hunger marchers arrived in London, she took them food. She



witnessed the anti-fascist "Battle of Cable Street" in 1936.

During the blitz, the family moved from Woolwich to the Isle of Sheppey. Win continued to carry heavy domestic responsibilities, caring for her own and others' children and later, her third husband. During the war, she worked as a motor mechanic; after it, as a hospital

cleaner and a ward orderly.

In 1967, Win led a vigil on Hiroshima Day, which was repeated annually for more than 30 years, braving all weathers. Naturally, she joined the protests at Greenham Common, together with a group of other "Pensioners for Peace".

Shopping in town, if she sat on her stick/stool to rest, passers-by would ask what petition she would like them to sign. Children came to her door asking her to help them phrase a petition for new play equipment. In 1999, Ulverston Town Council honoured her with a certificate of appreciation.

In her 80's, Win wrote a book about her parents' lives, titled "Courage". The book was deposited with Greenwich Library, and inspired a librarian to research early Black residents. They feature in a poster and teaching pack produced last year to celebrate Black and Asian people's historical contribution.

Her 90th birthday party was held in her estate's community hall, built partly through her efforts. It was attended by numerous relatives, neighbours and friends, including a Caribbean woman who flew in from the US. Win had fostered her disabled daughter in the 1960's. Asked by a young friend there what was the best thing she did in her life, she unhesitatingly replied "having my children".

She is survived by her two daughters, four grand- and six great-grandchildren.

A MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIRMAN OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

In April, Madeleine Sharp and I went to the Lake District to a Memorial Service for Win Langton. We met many of her family and friends and were reminded of some of the many causes she worked for, including raising money for the building of the British Friendship Hospital at Ky Anh, to the opening of which Win went in 1980.

Her family had a display of Win's work, which included a photograph of her with Dr. Nguyen dinh Lan during his whistle-stop tour of Britain in 1996.

As we watched our TV screens during the recent attack on Iraq, we could not

avoid thinking about toxic chemicals and other deadly weapons, the forerunners of which were used in the Vietnam war. The residues of Agent Orange and other chemical weapons are impossible to dispose of quickly and will be affecting people for perhaps as long as a century. In recent years, **grandchildren** of war veterans who were exposed during the war to Agent Orange have been born with severe deformities, some incompatible with life and others who will require constant care as long as they live.

Although the latest study of the effects on the environment and population of

spraying with Agent Orange and other toxic chemicals, to which reference is made on the front page of this issue of the Bulletin, suggests that the levels of dioxins in the soil are much greater than had been thought hitherto, the data given will make possible the comprehensive scientific study needed to prove or disprove a direct link between exposure and foetal damage and cancers, so this black cloud may have a silver lining. Meantime, we must do whatever lies within our power to make life easier for children affected and their families.

MSAVLC PUBLICATIONS

Thirty-five Years of Devoted Support

(E. J. Shellard)

Part 1 (1965 - 1990)

Part 2 (1990 - 2000)

£3.50 each

£5.00 for both

A Short History of MSAVLC

(1965-1985)

(Joan McMichael-Askins)

£3.50

(1985 - 1990)

(Madeleine Sharp)

£1.50

May be had from the Hon. Secretary

49 Baginton Road,

Coventry, CV3 6JX

Please make cheques payable to

MSAVLC

Children of Vietnam

(pub. 1968 by MACV)

Reprinted 2003.

£5.00 (£2.50 concession)

This is an excellent publication which, although it was published 35 years ago, is highly relevant today. As well as describing the suffering of the people during the war, it gives a brief history of Vietnam, explains the Geneva Conference of 1954 and the Accords which were its outcome but whose flouting led inexorably to conflict.

May be had from Miss M. Methley

22 Barnack Avenue

Coventry, CV3 6LA

Please make cheques payable to

MSAVLC

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

This was held on 2nd April 2003 at the House of Commons with Chris Mullin MP in the Chair.

The Annual Report for 2001 was presented by the Hon. Secretary and approved.

The Financial Report for 2001 was presented by the Finance Officer and approved.

All officers and members of the Executive Committee were re-elected unopposed.

A vote of thanks to Mr. Arthur Prior for his valuable work as Hon. Auditor was passed.

In addition to formal business, Glyn Vaughan gave a brief account of his work with deaf children in Laos and Cambodia and Dr. Le thi Hao, a medical scientist from Ho Chi Minh University of Medicine and Pharmacy, currently at the North-East Wales Institute (NEWI) spoke of her research study of inherited neuromuscular disease in children. A short version of her talk will be published in a future News Bulletin.

At the conclusion of the meeting, Mr. Mullin took Dr. Le thi Hao, Professor Glen Morris and Dr. Nguyen thi Man (from NEWI) and Mr. Glyn Vaughan on a brief tour of the House of Commons.

Published by:

Medical & Scientific Aid for Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia,

49 Baginton Road, Coventry CV3 6JX

Telephone 024 7641 4512

Registered Charity No. 252906

Printed by W. H. Sharpe (Printers) Ltd. 83-87 Cambridge Street, Coventry CV1 5HU

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