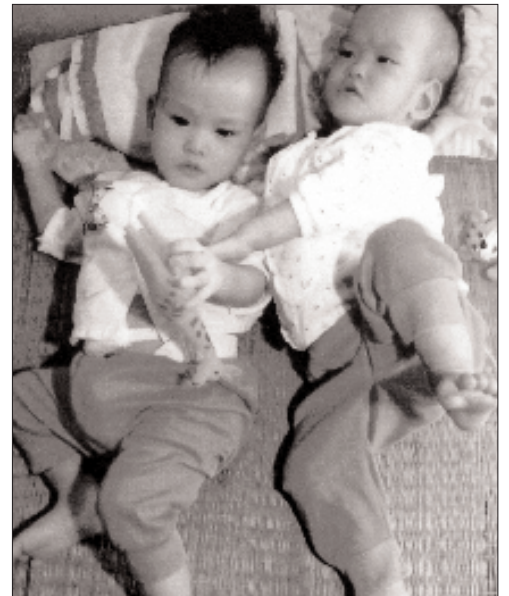


LE THU CUC AND LE THUY AN CONJOINED TWIN SISTERS SUCCESSFULLY SEPARATED: ANOTHER NOTABLE ACHIEVEMENT BY VIETNAM'S DOCTORS



Older supporters of MSAVLC will remember the remarkable operation in 1988 to separate the conjoined twins Viet and Duc at the Tu Dzu Hospital in Ho Chi Minh City. We had seen them on our TV screens when Ed Milner's documentary "Vietnam After The Fire" was shown on Channel 4 in 1987 and a report of the operation appeared in Bulletin 79 (May 1989). For the information of younger and more recent supporters, it is reprinted later in this issue.

Last October, another very difficult operation to separate conjoined twins was successfully carried out at the National Paediatric Hospital in Hanoi and we have received the following report from Professor Nguyen Thanh Liem, Director of the hospital..

"We are delighted to inform you that the twin girls have remained in a stable condition after being successfully separated

by surgeons at our hospital.

"The twin girls were born in January 2003 in Thanh Hoa province and were joined at the chest and abdomen and shared a liver, digestive system, diaphragm and breastbone. Their parents are factory workers in Thanh Hoa province and it was very hard for them to look after conjoined twins. The twins were admitted to the NHP in March 2003 and were cared for by our medical staff until the condition of their health was good enough for the separation operation.

"They had their first operation on 26th September 2003 to expand their skin surface. On 16th October, a team of 30 doctors and nurses in the NHP conducted the separation operation. The most complicated procedure was to separate their liver and to make sure all the structures were undamaged. After ten hours of operation, the twin girls were successfully separated.

"On 2nd December, the separated twins, Le Thu Cuc and Le Thuy An, were discharged from the hospital in good health. However, they have been held under close observation in order to prevent any complications. Cuc has a congenital heart defect and will perhaps be operated on when she is two years old. An has a blood clot in her arm which will be treated by her first birthday.

"The hospital has launched an appeal to pay for surgery and post-operation care for the twins. The total cost of the separation was about 8000 USD. But post-operation care and monitoring for the twins is also very important and requires financing.

"We highly appreciate your support and cooperation with our hospital. We look forward to hearing from you."

(The NHP is one of the hospitals in Hanoi to which we have sent a "Glostavent" anaesthetic machine)

NGUYEN VIET - DUC

(FROM BULLETIN 79 - MAY 1989)

Perhaps the most surprising and interesting news we learned during our visit to Vietnam was when we arrived at the Tu Dzu Hospital.

Here, we were told by Dr. Phuong that the well-known conjoined twins Nguyen Viet-Duc had been separated and that both boys were alive and living in the hospital. Indeed, we were allowed to see them and it was most inspiring to see Duc wheeling himself around in a wheel-chair. At the time, Viet was being held by a nurse and having his hair cut.

The conjoined twins were born on February 25th 1980 at a District Hospital in Gia Lai-Kontum Province. They were taken to the Vietnam-DUC (GDR) hospital in Hanoi – hence their name – but because of unsuitable climate in the north they were transferred to the Tu Dzu Hospital in 1983. The mother had deserted them soon after birth (Prior to their birth, she had had several very abnormal conceptions. Ed.) but she was found and, together with her daughter who was born in 1978, she was taken to the Tu Dzu Hospital. She still lives at the hospital, along with her daughter, a nice little girl now aged 11.

The boys were joined at the pelvis

and shared three legs, one of which was mal-formed and protruded from the rear. They had only one large intestine and one anus, a common urethra linked to a common bladder and one set of genitalia, although there were four misplaced kidneys. They lived in symbiosis although they had separate blood systems.

In May 1986, Viet developed an acute cerebral syndrome (a particularly virulent strain of encephalitis .Ed) and they were sent to Japan for specialist treatment., returning in October. Viet made a full clinical recovery but was left with permanent brain damage which impaired sensation so that, when eating, food would go into his trachea, causing him to choke . There was thus the probability of his developing pneumonia and he was also suffering from urinary tract infections. This endangered the life of Duc as well as his own. It was thus considered desirable to separate them and, for two years, there were many discussions about this – whether to try to save Duc alone or whether to try to save both and, for the final six months, the way in which different and difficult operations should be carried out, etc.

On October 4th 1988, after fourteen-

and-a-half hours' surgery, employing 10 surgeons, 10 anaesthetists and 20 theatre sisters working in relay, the operation was successfully completed. Altogether, 70 specialists were involved in this exercise. The modern anaesthetic equipment, respirators, electrocardiograms and a kidney dialysis machine were provided by the Japanese Red Cross so that Japanese surgeons and anaesthetists were present to translate the instructions but otherwise the entire operation was carried out by Vietnamese.

Today, Viet is a “cabbage” although, since the operation, he will respond to a noise or shun a bright light but Duc is an intelligent boy, very caring for his brother and sister. It is expected that he will shortly be going to school. (As he has matured, Duc has shown particular aptitude for music and mathematics. Ed.)

What a remarkable achievement for a country so short of many of the essential necessities of life. The first time conjoined twins of such an age and complexity have been successfully separated and not a word about it in our press.



Viet-Duc 1983



Duc and his sister 1989

PUBLICISING AGENT ORANGE

MSAVLC has been concerned for many years about the disastrous effects of the spraying of the forests of the south of Vietnam with the defoliant Agent Orange. We have commended the documentary "Battle's Poison Cloud" which deals with the tragic results of its use and which is a revelation to all who see it. But even more effort is needed to bring the matter to public attention. We publish below an account of one such effort and we congratulate Mr. Aldis on his initiative.

In March of this year, I read that three Vietnamese had begun court proceedings in a New York court against 35 chemical companies which had manufactured the chemicals used by United States forces in their war on Vietnam. Like many others who had been aware of Agent Orange, and had seen the devastating effects it had had on the people and the land of Vietnam, I said to myself "AT LAST!"

Then came the question, how and what can we do to help? I discussed with several friends, here and overseas, who knew of Agent Orange, and decided to place a petition on the Internet.

Why a Petition and why on the Internet?

My answer is: Agent Orange and its effects have been spoken of, debated and researched, documentaries have been written and filmed.

The Vietnamese Government has raised this issue, as has the Vietnamese Red Cross,

the latter face to face with President Clinton when he visited Vietnam and met with the then President of the Red Cross. But public awareness of the tragedy is sadly lacking.

In March 2002, an international conference on the subject of Agent Orange was held in Hanoi and the hopes of thousands of people were lifted: here at last would come justice for its victims. Unfortunately, those hopes were quickly dashed. The outcome was "There needs to be more research."

But now, two years later, a court in the very heart of the country that used the chemicals will hear the case brought by Vietnamese victims and there will be the opportunity for the case to be heard in an open court of law. But lawyers will rightly argue the case, for and against, within the court-room. **So the danger remains that the case will not reach into the minds and hearts of millions of people around the world, as it needs to.**

It was interesting to discover that the judge who will be hearing the case is the same judge who sat in judgement in 1984 on the case brought by American veterans of the Vietnam war against some of the same chemical companies as are named in the present case.

In that 1984 case, the veterans were awarded \$180 million, an amount which, according to a recent article, was distributed among 219,000 veterans affected and has

now been spent.

In Vietnam alone, it is estimated that there are over 3,000,000 victims and an important factor, in my view too often forgotten, is the effect on the families of the victims and the community.

Hence the need for people to be made aware of the tragedy and the urgent need for support for the victims and their families. And what better way than a petition and one that is on-line?

Signatures started to come in immediately, in large numbers at first, then more modestly but steadily, from countries across the world until, by mid-August, they totalled 45,163. Since then, the pace has accelerated again.

In May, I went to Hanoi for the anniversary of the battle of Dien Bien Phu and, while there, was interviewed for a TV programme about Agent Orange. The last part of the programme, showed people at their computers typing the address <http://www.petitiononline.com/AOVN/> and then signing the petition. Within two days of the broadcast, 1500 went online and signed.

As I write this piece, signatures total 185,407, with an average of 800 added every hour. By the time you read it, what will the number be? and will your signature be one of them?

Len Aldis

ANTI-TRACHOMA PROJECT

For some months, we have been seeking clarification concerning the expanded project. We had been under the impression that this would cover the remaining districts of Thanh Hoa province (apart from the two which were supplied with Pfizer's antibiotic through the International Trachoma Initiative) – twenty-five districts in all – but we wanted to be absolutely certain that this was so.

Communications with Vietnam have been difficult recently: faxes are uncertain – they may appear to have gone through but have not been received by the addressees, and this was the case with the Thanh Hoa Eye Centre. A letter, enclosing copies of faxes sent but not acknowledged, was sent by air mail on 23rd April but was only received by Dr. Ngo Hong in mid-June. We received his reply, by fax, on 25th June although it was dated 17th June.

We now know, however, that we were mistaken in thinking that the expanded programme would cover all remaining districts. Only twenty are included: the fifteen lottery-funded districts, the three of

the pilot project and two others.

Dr. Ngo Hong writes:

"As well as the two districts covered by the ITI there are 5 districts where no anti-trachoma project has been implemented. We have not done a survey on trachoma prevalence but we estimate it will be about 7% - 8%. So to reduce the prevalence of trachoma in Thanh Hoa Province to 2%, these districts should be treated.

"Because MSAVLC have already helped us so much with trachoma prevention and with the expanded project for three years, we cannot request further extending to these five districts. I think we will request local funds to treat these districts and try to free the province from trachoma by 2010"

Shall we agree to this or, having "put our shoulders to the plough" try to finish the job?

It would be good to celebrate the 40th anniversary of the founding of the MACV next year with a special push to achieve this, a splendid memorial to the work started by Joan McMichael-Askins.

Madeleine Sharp

A MEETING WITH THE PRESIDENT OF VIETNAM

During his State Visit to this country in May, Madeleine Sharp, Peggie Preston and I, with Mr. Len Aldis of the Britain-Vietnam Friendship Society, had the honour of meeting Mr. Tran Duc Luong at the Dorchester Hotel.

We spent half an hour with the President and had a useful discussion with him and members of his delegation concerning Vietnam's position in world trade and hopes for further links with British companies. We outlined some of our activities and the President expressed his thanks for the friendship and support given to Vietnam over the past forty years.

As the President and his party left, his interpreter, a tall young man with an excellent command of English, introduced himself to us as the son of Mrs. Nguyen thi Yen, who was at the Vietnamese embassy in London from 1989 to 1992.

(We had hoped to include photographs of the meeting but these have not yet arrived.)

Margaret Methley

THE CAMPAIGN FOR COMPENSATION FOR THE VIETNAMESE VICTIMS OF CHEMICAL WAR

(FROM BULLETIN 79 - MAY 1989)

At the Annual Conference of MSAVLK held in the autumn of 1984, reference was made to the problems facing the people of Vietnam, especially in the south, resulting from the massive Defoliation Programme carried out by the U.S. forces between 1961 and 1971 when more than 72 million litres of concentrated herbicides were sprayed over southern Vietnam. Most of this was Agent Orange - so called because of the colour of the drums in which it was stored - which contained an extremely toxic chemical, Dioxin as an impurity. The immediate effect was the destruction of more than 11,000 acres of deciduous and mangrove forests and the contamination of thousands of acres of fertile arable land with the loss of many tons of food crops.

But there were also serious long term effects, not only on the nature of the environment and the loss of fertile soil so that it was impossible to plant food crops but, most significantly, on the health of thousands of Vietnamese people who were in the affected areas at the time or who moved into the areas later. There was a marked increase in liver cancers. There was an increase in the frequency of miscarriages and still-births, an increase in the frequency of congenital malformations, especially anencephaly (shrunken, primitive brain), an increase in the frequency of deformities of the sense organs, especially anophthalmia (failure of the eyes to develop), an increase in the frequency of deformities of limbs often with only lumps instead of arms and legs, an increase in the frequency of oro-

facial clefts, from hare-lip to the more serious absence of the upper jaw, an increase in the frequency of conjoined twins and an increase in the number of molar pregnancies. During more recent years there has been a decrease in the number of abnormalities as described above but we have learnt of the increase in numbers of women with cervical cancer, cancer of the ovaries and cancer of the uterus. Hence our recent "Mother and Child Campaign."

It should be recalled that on February 3rd 1973, following the Paris Peace Treaty, President Nixon wrote to Pham Van Dong offering 3.25 billion dollars as "a contribution to post-war reconstruction". Not a cent had been paid by 1984 and nothing has been paid since then. As a result of that MSAVLK Conference, a number of men and women prominent in British life were invited to become sponsors for a Committee which would keep the British public fully informed about the situation and hope that, in time, sufficient pressure would be forthcoming to force the USA to acknowledge its responsibility for this situation in Vietnam. Eighteen men and women, prominent in the Arts, Theatre, Music, Religion, Politics, Medicine, Science and the Trade Unions, agreed and the organisation was established under the name as given above with Ernie Ross MP as Chairman and David Matthews as Hon. Secretary. Finances were generously provided by a number of Trade Unions, by donations from other organisations and the public. The CCVVCW immediately established a fine exhibition generously

financed by the Woodbrook College, Birmingham, and this exhibition was on view at many TU Conferences and at different centres throughout the country. Later, smaller versions of the Exhibition were prepared and used by speakers at many different meetings. A major achievement, thanks to donations from some Trade Unions, was the making of a video and this was used to good effect at the TUC Congress in 1986 when Bill Deal, President of the FBU, made such a fine speech. CCVVCW also produced a set of speakers notes and published a number of leaflets.

However, during 1988 it became apparent that owing to pressure of work on many of the Committee members it was becoming more difficult to organise different activities and, when David Matthews found it impossible to continue as Hon. Secretary, it was decided to disband and transfer its assets to MSAVLK. The balance of £301.95 was paid into the MSAVLK account for the Mother and Child Campaign Fund. MSAVLK thus has the responsibility of keeping the public informed about the situation, relative to this problem as it exists in Vietnam. Articles have appeared and will appear from time to time in the News Bulletin giving up-to-date information.

We would like to thank all Sponsors for their support.

This man-made catastrophe has cost the Vietnamese people dearly and it is our duty to ensure that as much help is given to them as possible.

WIN LANGTON REMEMBERED IN A PEACE FESTIVAL

On 23rd May, Margaret Methley and I attended the Ulverston Search For Peace Festival at the Lanternhouse, Ulverston.

This was a pilot project to create a day of art, music, theatre, performance and activism which it is hoped will grow into an annual celebration and search for peace, drawing together creative work from a wide range of sources from Ulverston and beyond.

As well as local people, four postgraduate students from the Bristol

University/Welfare State International MA degree course in Cultural Performance devised an enjoyable and thought-provoking programme much of which was inspired by the work of Win Langton who had campaigned throughout her life for human rights and political harmony. A central exhibit was the stool on which she had sat when collecting signatures to petitions or money for deserving causes, in particular for MSAVLK.

£138 was raised by one of the Bristol

students from a raffle where the prizes were beautiful pieces of Vietnamese handicraft.

Win Langton's life was also the inspiration for "From Apathist to Activist" - an installation exploring what sparks an individual into translating concern into positive action.

Madeleine Sharp

OBITUARY

We were saddened to learn of the deaths of two long-standing supporters.

Dr. J. N. Montgomery and Mrs. G. Francis.

We extend our deepest sympathy to their families and friends.

THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 31ST MARCH 2004

(REPORTED FROM BULLETIN 139)



Dr. Ann McLaren, temporarily in the chair



AFTER CONCLUSION OF FORMAL BUSINESS



A MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIRMAN OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

We have had a most interesting time since I wrote my last message. We have been in London several times - to attend the celebration of President Ho Chi Minh's birthday outside the New Zealand High Commission; to meet the President of Vietnam, Mr. Tran Duc Luong, during his State Visit; to attend an event, organised by Vietnamese Airlines to coincide with the President's visit, at which it was announced that they have acquired several new aircraft and that they hope by next year to fly direct from London

to Hanoi; and to celebrate the fifteenth anniversary of the opening of the Thanh Binh restaurant.

Then, of course, we have had our usual activities connected with the various projects in Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia - projects only possible because of the generosity of you, our supporters and what we raise by sale of goods (such as Vietnamese craft and cards) donated to us. It is exciting to realise how far our money will stretch towards helping the people of Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia to help

themselves. It is exciting when we think of how the people will benefit from our help. But at the same time it is saddening to realise that we cannot help everyone.

However, your faithful support encourages us in doing what we can for individuals and organisations most in need.

In June next year, we shall be forty years old. What a lot we have achieved in that time! How we wish we could have done twice as much!

MINE ACTION AFTER DIANA

Detailed information about the continuing dangers and difficulties posed for Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia by the presence of land mines and other unexploded ordnance, more than 30 years after the end of the Indochina conflict, is presented in a new book, published for Landmine Action and the Diana, Princess of Wales Memorial Fund by Pluto Press.

The author, Stuart Maslen, has ten years' experience in anti-mine action; his doctoral thesis for the University of Tilburg in the Netherlands, for which he gained a Ph. D. in international humanitarian law, discussed the legality of anti-personnel mines. He has also written a legal commentary on the 1997 Ottawa treaty banning anti-personnel mines, published earlier this year by Oxford University Press.

The three countries of Indochina are among the world's 13 most heavily contaminated by unexploded ordnance (UXO). In Vietnam, 16,478 square kilometres are affected, 5% of

the total land area; UXO accounts for an estimated 90% - 95% of the problem, which affects all 61 provinces and major towns.

An estimated 300,000 tons of ordnance are involved; from the end of the war in April 1975 up to September 1999, there were 38,248 people killed and 64,064 injured by explosions of such ordnance, and a further 2000 incidents were reported in 2000.

In Laos, 15 out of 18 provinces were affected by land mines in 1997, with more than 900 villages, a third of the country's total, reporting the presence of UXO. The area deemed at risk covered 87,200 sq. km., of which 12,400 sq. km. were at high risk. There were about 1000 known minefields in the country.

In Cambodia, 800 people were killed or injured by mines or UXO in 2002, bringing the total of casualties since 1979 to more than 54,000. Between 2001 and 2003, civilians accounted for 97% of the casualties and, in

2002, a third of the casualties were under 18 years of age.

Mr. Maslen describes the Cambodian army as a "critical asset" in dealing with the problem, given its "extensive" clearance skills, but observes that NGO's and aid donors are "put off" by its political power and by reports that it is "riddled with corruption". Most of the country's mines have been cleared by villagers, he says.

Mr. Maslen also criticises the Vietnamese government for delays in setting up a national landmine authority and approving a US-financed landmine survey, for which a memorandum of understanding was signed in January 2003. He also refers to a "challenging environment posed by a suspicious security establishment", to "labyrinthine bureaucracy" and to corruption.

However, Vietnam's military de-mining personnel "have considerable experience and are said to work fast and cheaply", reportedly clearing 1,500 km. of the Ho Chi Minh highway in about ten months. Vietnam is not a signatory to the Ottawa treaty.

Roderick Prince.

MSAVLC PUBLICATIONS

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Short History of MSAVLC

(1965 - 1985)

(Joan McMichael-Askins)

£3.50

(1985 - 1990)

(Madeleine Sharp)

£1.50

(1990 - 1995)

(E. J. Shellard)

£1.50

Children of Vietnam

(pub. 1968 by MACV)

Reprinted 2003

£5 00 (£2.50 concession)

This is an excellent publication which, although it was published 36 years ago, is still 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 the outcome but whose flouting led inexorably to conflict.

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