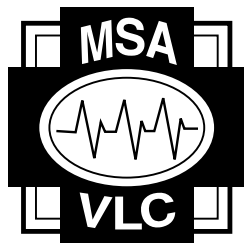


VIETNAM LAOS CAMBODIA



MEDICAL & SCIENTIFIC AID NEWS BULLETIN

No. 150A - February 2006

50p

THE TRAGIC LEGACY OF AGENT ORANGE



We have recently received, from the Vietnamese Association of Victims of Agent Orange (VAVA), a copy of the Public Appeal of International Lawyers concerning the responsibility of the United States toward Vietnam for the spraying of Agent Orange/Dioxin, the first two paragraphs of which make a powerful humanitarian call to readers. (The wording of the first few lines has been modified to make it more acceptable to the English ear.)

"During a period of ten years, to destroy the forests and deprive the Vietnamese resistance fighters of cover, to destroy harvests, and to incite the rural population to flee the countryside, the United States Air Force sprayed 72 million litres of herbicides on a total area of nearly two million hectares of forest and rice fields. These herbicides included 41,635,000 litres of "Agent Orange" which contained dioxin, a substance one million times more toxic than the most powerful natural poison known at the time, and whose harmful effects are such that, during the Second World War, President Roosevelt prohibited the U.S. Army from using it, and concerning which U.S. Senator Nelson in August 1970 declared in Congress: 'It is not impossible that our country has dropped a delayed-action bomb

that will reverberate on the affected populations with consequences that will only be possible to evaluate in a distant future.'

Highly stable, dioxin tends to remain in the environment. The concentrations are extremely important in soils, in sediments as well as in animal fodder, thus contaminating the food chain. Seventeen years after the spraying of defoliants stopped, they were still found in fruits and vegetables cultivated in soils contaminated during the conflict. The "Stellman Report" estimated the number of potential or "silent" victims to be 4,800,000, not counting victims poisoned later, due to the processes of the food chain. The victims, past, present and future, thus number in the millions."



Much of the above will, of course, be familiar to readers of our News Bulletin, but it is very useful to find it in a document such as this, particularly as it must surely draw public attention to a tragedy about which there is still widespread ignorance.

The news in the article reprinted from "Vietnam Report" that the United States is planning to cooperate with Vietnam in cleaning up the former U.S. Air Base at Da Nang is to be welcomed, since it seems to indicate acceptance that AO has indeed been responsible for the injury to so many Vietnamese men, women and children. For too long, it has been customary to maintain that these injuries are due not to AO but to malnutrition or some other factor, and this belief unfortunately persists in some quarters.

Certainly, it is not possible to say that any particular case of congenital abnormality can definitely be attributed to AO alone (for example, maternal rubella in early pregnancy can cause hare lip) but the statistical evidence is overwhelming: a survey some years ago found that a woman in an area sprayed with AO was 117 times more at risk of having a molar pregnancy than one in an unsprayed area, and many other pathological conditions have a less dramatic but still significant increase in incidence associated with AO.

In general, we just do not know what so many families in Vietnam are having to cope with. In the early stages of the tragedy – before the connexion between spraying of the forests and the birth of

deformed babies was realised – families hoped that a subsequent pregnancy would give them a healthy child. Consequently, in many families in Vietnam, where there is one affected child, there are likely to be several. **We have often remarked that one handicapped child in a family in our comparatively affluent society is a heavy burden financially, socially and emotionally. If that is the case, then the plight of many poor families in Vietnam can scarcely be imagined.**

Since the 1980's, MSAVLC has been doing what it could to publicise the facts. Following its Annual Conference in 1984, the Campaign for Compensation for the Vietnamese Victims of Chemical War

(CCVVCW) was set up and was active until 1988 (See report in Bulletin 140). It has also done what it could to alleviate suffering. Many women exposed to AO developed cancers of the uterus and ovaries and, in 1987, a special "Mother and Child Campaign" was launched to facilitate early detection (and



therefore possible cure) of cancer of the cervix, at clinics under the direction of the Tu Dzu Hospital in Ho Chi Minh City; in 1994, funded a programme in Thanh Hoa Province for surgical

repair of hare-lip/cleft palate (another condition associated with AO); and, in 2005, in cooperation with the City of Coventry's Month of Peace Activities, a collection was taken and given to VAVA for the purchase of wheel-chairs for AO victims in Ky Anh district.

But what MSAVLC and other humanitarian organisations can do for the victims and their families is dwarfed by the size of the tragedy: what is needed is generous financial support such as only governments can give, so that housing can be adapted and equipment provided to give the moderately disabled as much independence as possible and to lighten the burden on the carers of the severely-disabled.

Let us hope that this Public Appeal will be met with a sympathetic response.

Madeleine Sharp

With the kind permission of Len Aldis, Secretary of the Britain-Vietnam Friendship Society, we publish below two significant reports from the current issue of the Vietnam Report.

In the same issue, there is a very interesting account of the wedding of Nguyen Duc, one of the conjoined twin boys successfully separated in a 14-hour operation at the Tu Dzu Hospital in Ho Chi Minh City in 1988 and seen by a small group from MSAVLC (including Mr. Aldis) in March 1989. [Vietnam Report obtainable from BVFS, Flat 2, 26 Tomlins Grove, London E3 4NX]



*(Photograph courtesy of Len Aldis)
The wedding of Nguyen Duc and Thanh Tuyen, 16th
December 2007, Ho Chi Minh City*

MASSIVE UXB CLEARANCE

Vietnamese and Americans have begun the next phase of clearing hundreds of thousands of tons of unexploded Vietnam War ordnance and landmines that still kill and wound people more than 30 years after the conflict ended.

An expert group from each country signed an agreement a week before U.S. President George W. Bush's visit to Vietnam to attend an Asia-Pacific summit in Hanoi.

"We pledge that for as long as any of these

remnants of war remain, we will dedicate our energies to see them removed and destroyed, so that the land can be used to pursue better lives for the Vietnamese people", Tom Leckinger, representative of the Vietnam Veterans of America Foundation (VVA), said at the signing ceremony.

During the initial phase in 2004 and 2005, the VVA and the Centre for Bomb and Mine Disposal of Engineering Command (BOMICEN) at Vietnam's Defence Ministry cleared 421 hectares.

Weapons disposal experts found and destroyed 6,025 pieces of unexploded ordnance and landmines in the northern and central provinces of Ha Tinh, Quang Binh and Quang Tri. The second phase would complete any remaining work in these provinces and extend it to Nghe An in the north and Thua Thien Hue province in central Vietnam.

Since the war ended in 1975, bombs, artillery shells, mortar bombs and rockets have killed 38,000 people and wounded 64,000, and the Defence Ministry estimates that 350,000 to 850,000 tons of weaponry remains scattered across all 64 provinces.

The project has the support of the U.S. government. "As they begin this difficult, dangerous work, we wish them nothing but success", said U.S. Ambassador to Hanoi, Michael Marine.

DIOXIN WARNING IN BIEN HOA

Doctors have warned people living near the Bien Hoa military airport not to drink the water, eat the fish or grow fruit and vegetables because of wartime dioxin poisoning.

Brain-damaged babies and children with shortened limbs and other physical deformities are still being brought to hospitals for specialised care four decades after the United States sprayed Vietnam with the highly toxic defoliant Agent Orange.

In recent months, Vietnam and the United States have started to overcome years of frustration in both governments about how to deal with environmental and health effects of

the poison.

Americans and Vietnamese say they are perhaps just months from planning environmental clean-up and containment of dioxin, beginning at the former U.S. air base in the central city of Da Nang.

"Assisting Vietnam with this issue will help to clear the conscience of the U.S. government", said Le Ke Son, director of the 'Committee 33' working on the impact of an estimated 70 million litres of toxic chemicals used from 1961 to 1971 by the U.S. military and the South Vietnam government it supported.

"There has been a lot of work on the issue", said Michael Marine, U.S. ambassador to Hanoi. "The question is very complex. What you do is in part driven by how you intend to use the site, the land, the cost for the clean-up."

Bien Hoa is a bustling city of 500,000 people about 40 Km. (25 miles) north of Ho Chi Minh City in Vietnam's industrial heart. It is a typical Vietnamese city, teeming with motorbikes, construction sites and internet cafes. But its military airport and surrounding lakes, ponds and land are toxic.

The Vietnam military plans to clean up the site. "My dream is to conclude work on these hot spots in the next five years", said Son, a scientist at the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment, who serves on a joint Vietnam-U.S. panel of technical experts.

IMPORTANT POSTSCRIPT

It was announced on the BBC's Radio Four that the United States is very shortly to commence work on decontaminating the site of their former air base at Da Nang. However, subsequent fuller newspaper accounts reported that the US was to give \$204,000 towards the \$1,000 000 required for planning the clean-up, the remainder to be paid by the government of Vietnam and the Ford Foundation. We sincerely hope that this will not be the full extent of U.S. support.

VIETNAMESE SCHOOLCHILDREN IN 1989

On the wall of one of the rooms in my home, there is a poster-sized version of the photograph above, which was taken eighteen years ago, when Vietnam was still suffering from many of the shortages of the war and pedal cycles were innumerable and motor cycles still a rarity and directors of provincial government departments, except when on official business, went on foot or bicycle. They were either on their way to school or coming from school, for a shortage of premises meant that all day schooling was not possible – but teachers must have been run off their feet. I often wonder where they are today and what they are doing. They were such an attractive bunch – so obviously happy and friendly and bubbling over with joie de vivre and



optimism – it was a tonic just to see them. Red scarves denote membership of the Vietnamese youth organisation, the Young

gift, they would pocket it and put their hands out, almost aggressively it seemed, for more. But these children were different. After taking the photograph, we gave a tube of Smarties to the boy with the satchel, who seemed the most senior, and as we walked away we saw him standing in front of the other four and dealing out the sweets – “one for you, one for you... one for me, one for you...”. It was very good to see. We felt that these “Uncle Ho’s nephews and nieces”, as Young

Pioneers are called, were a credit to his memory and to their country and this is an additional reason for wondering what they are doing today, what professions they have chosen to follow. Can anyone enlighten us?

Madeleine Sharp

MSAVLC PUBLICATIONS

Forty Years of Devoted Support

(E. J. Shellard)

£5.50 (postage included)

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

(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 39 years ago, is still highly relevant today. As well as describing the suffering of the people of Vietnam 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.,

Notelets - scenes of Vietnam

Packet of six - £2.00

Adhesive labels:

**Medical and Scientific Aid
for Vietnam, Laos and
Cambodia**

For information see

www.msavlc.co.uk

Registered Charity No. 252906

Sheet of 24 - £1

**All may be obtained from the Hon. Secretary,
49 Baginton Road, Coventry, CV3 6JX
Please make cheques payable to MSAVLC**

A MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIRMAN OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

It seems that we live in a very unfair world. While small charities, such as MSAVLC, continue to do their utmost to make their funds stretch as far as they possibly can, some of the larger ones seem to have no limits to their spending – indeed, according to a report published some months ago, are spending nearly two pounds to raise every additional one.

I and our Executive Committee prefer to spend what money we have in useful ways.

As you know, we have suffered a serious reduction in our income over the last eighteen months and we have tried to keep up our financial support for the

important projects to which we are committed. However, as the report of aid sent to Indochina during 2006 demonstrates, this has had to be drastically curtailed and support for several valuable projects has had to be temporarily suspended. **But things would have been infinitely worse without your generous response to my appeals in recent Messages.**

Although we are, as I remarked in my last Message, able to breathe a little more easily, we have still got to be extremely careful in our spending, so any suggestions as to how to boost our income will be most welcome. Please note that we

now have a website – www.msavlc.co.uk - which we very much hope you will find useful.

Website announcement.

We would like to apologise to anyone who has encountered problems when trying to donate via paypal, or when contacting us via email. We have unfortunately experienced a few “teething troubles”, but have been working hard to rectify this and would therefore like to encourage everyone to keep visiting the website and to continue to use these new facilities.

DURING 2006, MSAVLC PROVIDED MEDICAL AND SCIENTIFIC AID TO THE VALUE OF £36,432 AS FOLLOWS:

MARCH	£3,206	HEDO Training of 100 traditional midwives in Hoa Binh Province
	£5,000	Thanh Hoa Eye Centre Anti-Trachoma Project
JUNE	£2,965	HEDO Training of 100 traditional midwives in Hoa Binh Province
	£7,700	Thanh Hoa Eye Centre Anti-Trachoma project
AUGUST	£2,500	Thanh Hoa Eye Centre Anti-Trachoma Project
OCTOBER	£15,060	All Ears Cambodia Audiology Programme

*Our stall at the World Fair
December 2006*



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 Sharpe Media Ltd. 83-87 Cambridge Street, Coventry CV1 5HU

**VIETNAM, LAOS & CAMBODIA MEDICAL &
SCIENTIFIC AID NEWS BULLETIN**

Editor: Margaret Methley

22 Barnack Avenue, Coventry, CV3 6LA.
Telephone/Fax: 024 7641 6399