GlobalResearch
Center for Research on Globalization

The Greatest Danger in the World. America's Vietnam War is Not Over…

By Dana Visalli
Global Research, April 30, 2015

Theme: Society

I am on a journey through Vietnam with a group of American Vietnam War veterans who now live in Vietnam and work to address some of the profound human problems still caused by a war that ended 40 years ago.

Known as VFP Hoa Binh Chapter 160, these men work to help people still being maimed by the estimated one and a half billion pounds of bombs ("ordnance") dropped by the United States on Vietnam during the war that did not explode at the time they were released (7 million tons, or 14 billion pounds of bombs were dropped on Vietnam and an estimated 10% of them failed to detonate). In addition, these American veterans work to help some of the approximately 1 million people (a Red Cross of Vietnam estimate) people born with genetic defects or otherwise disabled or in poor health due to exposure to the 20 million gallons of toxic herbicides sprayed on South Vietnam's tropical rainforests food and crops. The primary herbicide used was Agent Orange, which contains the known carcinogen dioxin. While the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency denies that dioxin is a mutagen (causing mutant genes), the rate of birth defects in Vietnam as quadrupled since the war.

We visited a number of the victims of unexploded ordnance and toxic herbicides, which brings home the human dimensions of suffering, misery and death that are the inevitable legacy of war. The primary causes of exploding war-era ordnance today are farmers working in their fields and scrap metal collectors. Scrap metal can earn a villager as much as $75 a year–a meaningful sum of money to the impoverished and one of the only sources of income available to them. Nguyen Xuan Thiet in Quang Tri Province made part of his annual income to support his family by collecting and selling scrap metal. In 2005 he found a mortar, and while moving it it exploded, blowing off both of his legs and one of his hands. For two years after coming home from the hospital he was completely incapacitated. The VFP-sponsored Project RENEW has now supplied him with prosthesis that allow him to walk. His family is so poor that they continue to collect scrap metal for income in spite of the tragedy that befell the father.

Friendship Village just outside of Hanoi is a facility for victims of Agent Orange that was initiated by an American Vietnam War veteran, George Mizo, who later died his own exposure to Agent Orange. The village currently cares for 150 people, many of them children severely disabled with genetic birth defects assumed to be from Agent Orange. Education begins at the most basic level, teaching the physically and/or mentally impaired children how to use the toilet and otherwise keep themselves clean. More advanced students might learn to cook and how to engage in a trade that will offer them some income. There are currently about 125,000 children in Vietnam with birth defects thought to be related to Agent Orange, so the work of Friendship Village barely scratches the surface of the depths of need. This is the third generation of such children; the dioxin–induced

deformities are expected to last for several more generations before the chemical breaks down adequately to no longer be a threat to human well-being.

We also visited the Tran Van Tram family of seven. The first son born to the parents of this family, now 30 years old, was a healthy child. The other four children born have severe mental and physical birth defects. They can neither stand nor walk, so they crawl about the house with rigid legs. Because their brains never fully developed nothing they cannot engage with the world around them. They can neither take care of themselves, interact with others nor do work of any kind. These children are between the ages of 18 and 28, so the parents have had to care for their totally incapacitated offspring for all of those long years, mostly with no help whatsoever. Vietnamese peasants are often poorly educated and live with many superstitions, so it is common for them to feel their disabled children are a punishment for some misdeed in life.

There is an intense rainy season in this part of Vietnam, and therefore for these children to use the nearby outhouse they had to crawl through a trail of mud to get there; impoverished peasants cannot afford home improvements. Project RENEW discovered the travail of this family had and has worked to ease their burden, including building a covered cement path to the toilet facilities for the children. The father spoke to express his profound appreciation for this small gift from the American Vietnam veterans. When the mother joined the family for a group picture, she cried inconsolably. The father said she was crying tears of joy, but it is more likely she was overwhelmed from her years of toil to care for her four incapacitated children, and moved by the presence of the only concerned foreigners she had ever encountered.

A young couple in Aloui had a daughter with severe birth defects 17 years ago; then four years ago the father died of a blood disease. Because her daughter cannot control here bodily functions, nor can she stand nor walk, she is spending her life on a wooden pallet in the family's kitchen/barn building (the family pigs are close by). A VFP-supported group called Hearts of Hue discovered this family and devised a plan to allow the mother to gain access to an income and meaningful work. They supplied the family a pregnant beef cow, and instructed them on how to care for the animal. The original cow was valued at $800, and the calf can be sold after one year for $700–a princely sum in rural Vietnam. They are also instructing the family in how to raise productive forage for the animals, and built a roofed loafing pen where the cattle can stay under cover in the rainy season. In this way a family that had been devastated by the after effects of the war was given renewed hope for a decent life.

Beyond the inestimable amount suffering and death inflicted on the Vietnamese people by the war and its after effects, the destruction wrought to the land, the air and the water of Vietnam by the United States was extreme. 'Not since the Romans salted the land after destroying Carthage has a nation taken such pains to visit the war on future generations', wrote Ngo Van Long of the US war against Vietnam. The damage was not the accidental by-product of war, but part of the attrition strategy which deliberately aimed to drive the peasants into the cities in order to deprive the National Liberation Front of a population and food base and safe jungle havens. 'Tell the Vietnamese,' said General Curtis LeMay, 'that we are going to bomb them back to stone age.'

Much of Vietnam was turned into "free fire zones", into which hurtled immense tonnages of explosives and herbicides. The intention was to crush a peasant army by the profligate use

of technologically advanced weapons and techniques. This involved truly massive rural area bombing, chemical and mechanical forest destruction, large-scale crop destruction, destruction of food stores, the destruction of hospitals, and large-scale population displacements; in short, the massive, intentional disruption of both the natural and human ecologies of the region. 5 million hectares, over 40% of the area of South Vietnam, were obliterated or badly damaged.

Machinery known as Rome plows was popular with the American troops. These were large bulldozers equipped with sharpened ten-foot wide blades. Several of them would smash through the forests, linked together with huge chains, uprooting everything in their paths. The Rome plows completely removed the trees and significantly disturbed the topsoil of 325,000 hectares, or 3% of southern Vietnam's forests.

The flora and fauna of Vietnam have suffered profound losses due first to the destruction of the country's forests during the war, followed by the needs of a growing population of impoverished and traumatized people afterwards. Here is a sampling of the current condition of some of the large mammals in Vietnam: 1) The Lesser Short-horned Rhinoceros- extinct in Vietnam as of 2011. 2) The Indochinese Tiger- an estimated 10-20 left in Vietnam as of 2010. 3) The Kouprey- a very large ungulate weighing up to 2000 pounds, it was first discovered by the scientific community in 1937, and is now extinct in Vietnam. 4) The Saola- A forest-dwelling bovine found only in Laos and Vietnam, it was discovered by science in 1992. Only one has been seen in Vietnam in the interim, and it died in captivity. 5) The Asian Elephant- Formerly abundant in Vietnam, there are an estimated 75 wild elephants in the country and they are expected to be extinct there within 10 years. 6) Primates- Five of Vietnam's 19 primate species are on the list of the world's 25 most critically endangered primates, including the Golden-headed Langur (about 60 left in the world), Delacour's Langur (about 200 left), the Gray-shanked Douc (600), the Tonkin Snub-nosed Monkey (250), and the Eastern Black-crested Gibbon (110).

If one absorbs the fact that we committed genocide against the 3.5 million of the Vietnamese people that we slaughtered in the American War (this number being one of the most recent estimates), and ecocide upon the natural environment of Vietnam, and takes into account that there was no reason whatsoever for the war, one comes to fully appreciate just how dysfunctional and destructive the human mind and so-called 'leadership' can be. It is important to recall that the Vietnam War is not an isolated event. As I wrote about in my previous essay in this series (which can be read online by googling 'War is God's Way of Teaching Geography'), just before the destruction of Vietnam we obliterated North Korea; 15 years after Vietnam we were bombing Iraq. Today we are bombing five countries at the same time.

The greatest danger in the world today to the ecological integrity of the biosphere and the sanctity of life is the United States government and the masses of mindless young men who do its bidding, being incapable of thinking for themselves and starving for the identity of the uniform. If that seems like a radical statement, re-read the previous paragraph. At a deeper level the problem is the superstitious, almost religious response of the human mind to external authority. We know power corrupts, but we persist in putting mere mortals in positions of extreme power. The global situation will improve only when we take responsibility for our own financial, ethical and ecological lives, and cease to allow ourselves to be led around by the nose by so-called leaders who are inevitably corrupted by the positions of power into which we ourselves put them.

Civil disobedience is not our problem. Our problem is civil obedience. Our problem is that people all over the world have obeyed the dictates of the leaders of their government and have gone to war, and millions have been killed because of this obedience. Howard Zinn

Every tyranny must necessarily be grounded upon general popular acceptance. In short, the bulk of the people themselves, for whatever reason, acquiesce in their own subjection….If we led our lives according to the ways intended by nature and the lessons taught by her, we should be intuitively obedient to our parents; later we should adopt reason as our guide and become slaves to nobody. Etienne De La Boetie, The Politics of Obedience, written in 1552

History shows that most human beings would literally rather die than objectively reconsider the belief systems they were brought up in. The average man who reads in the newspaper about war, oppression and injustice will wonder why such pain and suffering exists, and will wish for it to end. However, if it is suggested to him that his own beliefs are contributing to the misery, he will almost certainly dismiss such a suggestion without a second thought, Larken Rose, The Most Dangerous Superstition

Dana Visalli is a biologist living in Washington State; his web page is http://www.methownauralist.com, email jdanavisalli@gmail.com

Notes:

Film: The Boy with No Face- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C2O7Sp-DoPo (full film)
Film: Lighter Than Orange- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wSn02VKm6Ek (3 minute trailer; highly recommended)
Book: Kill Everything That Moves: The Real American War in Vietnam by Nick Turse (required reading)
Book: The Most Dangerous Superstition by Larken Rose (on the question of authority)
Essay on Etienne de la Boetie's book The Politics of Obedience
www.lewrockwell.com/rothbard/rothbard29.html
Friendship Village- http://www.vietnamfriendship.org/
VAVA- Vietnam Association for Victims of Agent Orange http://vava.org.vn/?lang=en
RENEW- Restoring the Environment and Neutralizing the Effects of War- http://landmines.org.vn/

The original source of this article is Global Research
Copyright © Dana Visalli, Global Research, 2015

Comment on Global Research Articles on our Facebook page

Become a Member of Global Research

Articles by: Dana Visalli

Disclaimer: The contents of this article are of sole responsibility of the author(s). The Centre for Research on Globalization will not be responsible for any inaccurate or incorrect statement in this article. The Centre of Research on Globalization grants permission to cross-post Global Research articles on community internet sites as long the source and copyright are acknowledged together with a hyperlink to the original Global Research article. For publication of Global Research articles in print or other forms including commercial internet sites, contact: publications@globalresearch.ca

www.globalresearch.ca contains copyrighted material the use of which has not always been specifically authorized by the copyright owner. We are making such material available to our readers under the provisions of "fair use" in an effort to advance a better understanding of political, economic and social issues. The material on this site is distributed without profit to those who have expressed a prior interest in receiving it for research and educational purposes. If you wish to use copyrighted material for purposes other than "fair use" you must request permission from the copyright owner.

For media inquiries: publications@globalresearch.ca