

# War Crimes: Agent Orange, Monsanto, Dow Chemical and Other Ugly Legacies of the Vietnam War

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*Fifty years ago this next month (December 1965), with the urging of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the rubber stamp approval of President Lyndon Johnson and Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara, the United States Air Force started secretly spraying the forests of Laos with a deadly herbicide that was known as Agent Orange.*

Operation Ranch Hand, whose motto was “Only We Can Prevent Forests” (a shameful takeoff of Smokey the Bear’s admonition), was a desperate, costly and ultimately futile effort to make it a little harder for the National Liberation Front soldiers from North Vietnam to join and supply their comrades-in-arms in the south. Both the guerilla fighters in the south and the NLF army had been fighting to liberate Vietnam from the exploitive colonial domination from foreign nations such as imperial France (that began colonizing Vietnam in 1874), then Japan (during WWII), then the United States (since France’s expulsion after their huge military defeat at Dien Bien Phu in 1954) and then against its own nation’s US-backed fascist/military regime in South Vietnam that was headed by the brutal and corrupt President Diem.



Four specially-equipped US Air Force cargo planes spraying a Vietnamese triple canopy forest with dioxin-contaminated Agent Orange during what the Vietnamese called the “American War” (those aren’t benign “contrails”, they’re toxic “chemtrails”)

(Incidentally, the nepotism in the US-backed, Roman Catholic Diem’s iron-fisted rule was

almost laughable, with one brother being the Catholic Archbishop of Vietnam, a second brother being in charge of the Hue district, and a third brother being the co-founder of the only legal political party in South Vietnam [as well as Diem's principal adviser]. It needs to be pointed out that true democracies do not criminalize political parties.)

The aim of the National Liberation Front was to unite the north and the south portions of the country and free it from the influence and occupation of foreign invaders. The leader of the liberation movement since its beginning was Ho Chi Minh, who had made sincere appeals to both President Woodrow Wilson (after WWI had weakened France's colonial system) and President Harry Truman (after the Japanese had taken over Vietnam during WWII and then surrendered to the US in 1945).

Each appeal asked for America's help to liberate Vietnam from their French colonial oppressors, and each one fell on deaf ears, even though Ho Chi Minh had frequently incorporated the wording and spirit of America's Declaration of Independence in his continuous efforts to achieve justice for his suffering people.

#### Agent Orange's Ecological Devastation of Southeast Asia



A once thriving forest that was dosed with Agent Orange

Operation Ranch Hand had actually been in operation since 1961, mainly spraying its poisons on Vietnam's forests and crop land. The purpose of the operation was to defoliate trees and shrubs and kill food crops that were providing cover and food for the "enemy".

Operation Ranch Hand consisted of spraying a variety of highly toxic polychlorinated herbicide solutions that contained a variety of chemicals that are known to be (in addition to killing plant life) human and animal mitochondrial toxins, immunotoxins, hormone disrupters, genotoxins, mutagens, teratogens, diabetogens and carcinogens that were manufactured by such amoral multinational corporate chemical giants like Monsanto, Dow Chemical, DuPont and Diamond Shamrock (now Valero Energy). All were eager war profiteers whose CEOs and share-holders somehow have always benefitted financially from America's wars.

Such non-human entities as Monsanto and the weapons manufacturers don't care if the wars that they can profit from are illegal or not, war crimes or not; if they can make money they will be there at the trough.

They are however, expert at duping the Pentagon into paying exorbitantly high prices for inferior, unnecessary or dangerous war materials. One only needs to recall Vice President

Dick Cheney's Halliburton Corporation and that company's no-bid multibillion dollar contracts that underserved our soldiers during the past three wars, but enriched any number of One Percenters.

Agent Orange was the most commonly used of a handful of color-coded herbicidal poisons that the USAF sprayed (and frequently re-sprayed) over rural Vietnam (and ultimately – and secretly – Laos and Cambodia). It was also used heavily over the perimeters of many of its military bases, the toxic carcinogenic and disease-inducing chemicals often splashing directly upon American soldiers. (But “stuff happens” as Donald Rumsfeld would say).

The soil in and around some of the US and ARVN (Army of the Republic of Viet Nam) military bases continue to have extremely high levels of dioxin. The US military bases where the barrels of Agent Orange were off-loaded, stored and then pumped into the spray planes or “brown water” swift boats are especially contaminated, as were those guinea pig “atomic soldiers” who handled the chemicals. The Da Nang airbase today has dioxin contamination levels over 300 times higher than that which international agencies would recommend remediation. (Guess which guilty nation is doing nothing about Agent Orange contamination of the sovereign nation of Vietnam?)

It is fair to speculate that any American G-I that spent any time at bases such as Da Nang, Phu Cat and Bien Hoa in the 1960s and 1970s may have been exposed. US Navy swift boat crews that sprayed Agent Orange on the shores of the bushy rivers that they patrolled were often soaked by the oily chemicals that were sprayed from the hoses. Secretary of State Kerry, are you listening?

The poisonous spraying continued for a decade until it was stopped in 1971. The South Vietnamese air force, that had started spraying Agent Orange before the US did, continued the program beyond 1971.

Agent Orange – the Chemical That Never Stops Giving/Poisoning



A photo of some of the barrels of leftover Agent Orange. This storage dumpsite was only one of many, and it contained over a million gallons. Many of the barrels can be seen leaking into the sand of Johnston Island (near Hawaii). The island is not only heavily contaminated by Agent Orange, but also by highly

radioactive plutonium from three nuclear disasters from plutonium bomb tipped THOR missiles, one of which exploded on the launch pad in the early 60s, permanently and lethally contaminating the island. The Agent Orange from these barrels were eventually incinerated at sea by a contract commercial vessel. The incineration process at times heavily contaminated its civilian crew as well as large portions of the Pacific Ocean. (Most of the radioactive hardware was either buried in the sand or dumped in the ocean.)

Agent Orange was a 50/50 mixture of two herbicides: 2,4-D (2,4-dichlorophenoxyacetic acid) and 2,4,5-T (2,4,5-trichlorophenoxyacetic acid). Other herbicide agents were mixtures of other equally toxic polychlorinated compounds, but every barrel was contaminated by substantial amounts of dioxin, one of the most toxic industry-made chemicals known to man.

The toxicity of the herbicidal chemicals known as “dioxins” or “dioxin-like compounds” is due to the chlorine atoms and the benzene molecules (or phenyl groups) in the compound to which they are attached. Dioxins have very long half-lives and are thus very poisonous to the liver’s detoxifying enzymes that humans and animals rely on to degrade synthetic chemicals that get into the blood stream. The fatty tissues of exposed Vietnam vets, even decades after exposure, continue to have measureable levels of dioxins.

Just as there is no safe level of mercury or aluminum (both of which are in many injected vaccines) there is no safe level of dioxin or Agent Orange. Parts per trillion are considered toxic! For those victims of chemical-induced disorders, such as those who are exposed to other toxic substances in the medicine cabinet or the environment, herbicide exposure may represent the tipping point that leads to ill health – and the other way around.

Dioxin’s chemical name is TCDD (2,3,7,8-tetrachloro-dibenzo-para-dioxin). It has no commercial value but is an unintended and undesirable by-product of the industrial-strength manufacture of polychlorinated pesticides, PVC plastics, the burning of municipal waste and the wood pulp/paper industry (in the process of bleaching of pulp wood products by chlorine – as has been the case with the generations-long contamination of the St Louis River with various toxic chlorocarbon by-products from various paper mills). Included in the class of “dioxin-like” compounds are PCBs (polychlorinated biphenyls) which were once widely used as coolant fluids in electrical transformers, cutting fluids for machining operations, carbonless copy paper and in heat transfer fluids and are now commonly found in fish and other animals.

Should it be a War Crime to Use Disease-inducing Herbicides as an Instrument of War?

According to Wikipedia,

“War crimes have been broadly defined by the Nuremberg Principles as “violations of the laws or customs of war”, which includes massacres, bombings of civilian targets, terrorism, mutilation, torture and the murder of detainees and prisoners of war [realities that abounded at places like My Lai and other massacre sites]. Additional common crimes include theft, arson, and the destruction of property not warranted by military necessity.”

According to that definition, anybody with a smidgen of awareness of what really happens in any combat zone would have to conclude that every war that the US military has ordered its young soldiers to go off and fight and kill in, especially the many corporate-endorsed, Wall Street wars, was laden with war crimes.

Four million innocent Vietnamese civilians were exposed to Agent Orange, and as many as 3 million have suffered diagnosable illnesses because of it, including the progeny of people who were exposed to it, approximating the number of innocent Vietnamese civilians that were killed in the war. The Red Cross of Vietnam says that up to 1 million people are disabled with Agent Orange-induced illnesses. There has been an epidemic of birth defects, chronic illnesses, fetal anomalies and neurological and mental illnesses since the “American War”.

Most thinking humans would agree that destroying the health and livelihoods of innocent farmers, women, children, babies and old people (who had no interest in the war) by poisoning their forests, farms, food and water supplies qualifies as a war crime.

### Disrespecting Sickened Veterans Again and Again

According to Wikipedia, the chemical companies involved in an Agent Orange Vietnam veterans’ class action lawsuit in 1984 (against seven chemical companies that got Agent Orange contracts from the Pentagon) denied that there was a link between their poisons and the veterans’ health problems. On May 7, 1984, as is usual for Big Corporations that know when they are losing, the seven chemical companies settled out of court for \$180 million just hours before jury selection was to begin. The companies agreed to pay the \$180 million as compensation if the veterans dropped all claims against them.

45% of the sum was ordered to be paid by Monsanto. Many veterans were outraged, feeling that they had been betrayed by the lawyers. Fairness Hearings were held in five major American cities, where veterans and their families discussed their reactions to the settlement, and condemned the actions of the lawyers and courts, demanding the case be heard before a jury of their peers. The federal judge refused the appeals, claiming the settlement was “fair and just”. By 1989, the veterans’ fears were confirmed when it was decided how the money from the settlement would be paid out. A totally disabled Vietnam veteran would receive a corporate-friendly maximum of \$12,000 spread out over the course of 10 years. By accepting the settlement payments, disabled veterans would become ineligible for many state benefits such as food stamps, public assistance, and government pensions. A widow of a veteran who died because of Agent Orange would only receive \$3,700.

According to Wikipedia, “In 2004, Monsanto spokesman Jill Montgomery said Monsanto should not be liable at all for injuries or deaths caused by Agent Orange, saying: ‘We are sympathetic with people who believe they have been injured and understand their concern to find the cause, but reliable scientific evidence indicates that Agent Orange is not the cause of serious long-term health effects.’”

Talk about your governmental and corporate disrespect for military veterans who have been sickened by military toxins or physically or psychologically wounded in battle! Such shabby treatment of returning veterans has been the norm after every war, including the reality of the “bonus army” revolt of the 1930s when thousands of poor, disabled and/or unemployed World War I vets marched on Washington, DC, demanding the bonus that had been



promised them in the 1920s. Rather than receiving justice, Generals Douglas MacArthur and Dwight Eisenhower dishonorably ordered their troops to burn the bonus army's temporary villages and disperse the vets empty-handed.

What about the veterans that were poisoned and permanently sickened because of their exposure to the Pentagon's "depleted uranium" weaponry during both Gulf wars? What about those who were exposed to sarin gas or the toxic fumes from the burning oil fields in Gulf War I? What about the aspartame-poisoned soldiers who drank a lot of toxic NutraSweet-laced diet soda (that heated up beyond 87 degrees in hot warehouses in the desert and released methanol, formaldehyde and aspartic acid into their blood streams) and then came down with some of the many neurotoxic forms of "aspartame disease"?

What about the number of now chronically ill veterans who were over-vaccinated with experimental vaccines like the unapproved-by-the-FDA anthrax shots? And what about the approved-by-the-FDA mercury and aluminum-containing vaccines (that were given in batches and without informed consent) that we now know are capable of causing autoimmunity and chronic illnesses? And what about all the psychiatrically drugged-up veterans who were given unapproved-for-safety psych drug cocktails (also without adequate informed consent) that are known to contribute to suicides, aggression and homicides?

#### US Veterans' Diseases Caused by Agent Orange



A Vietnamese victim of Agent Orange, dramatically demonstrating one of the dermatological expressions of the disease.

I conclude this essay by listing the currently-accepted list of diseases that the VA acknowledges can be caused by exposure to Agent Orange. This applies to American veterans, but one can be certain that the consequences are a hundred times worse for the Vietnamese people who were sprayed and who are still being exposed to it in the soil for the last 50 years.

The VA says that certain cancers and other health problems can be caused by [exposure to Agent Orange and the other herbicides](#) during their military service. Veterans and their survivors may be eligible for benefits if they have one of these diagnoses.

Amyloidosis, Chronic B-cell Leukemias, Chloracne, Type II Diabetes Mellitus, Hodgkins Disease, Non-Hodgkin's Lymphoma, Ischemic Heart Disease, Multiple Myeloma, Parkinson's

Disease, Peripheral Neuropathy, Porphyria Cutanea Tarda, Prostate Cancer, Respiratory Cancers (including lung cancer), Hairy Cell Leukemia, Soft Tissue Sarcomas and spina bifida in infants of Agent Orange exposed Vietnam veterans.

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