

# AGENT ORANGE ISSUE

### Agent Orange

By Pete Poirier

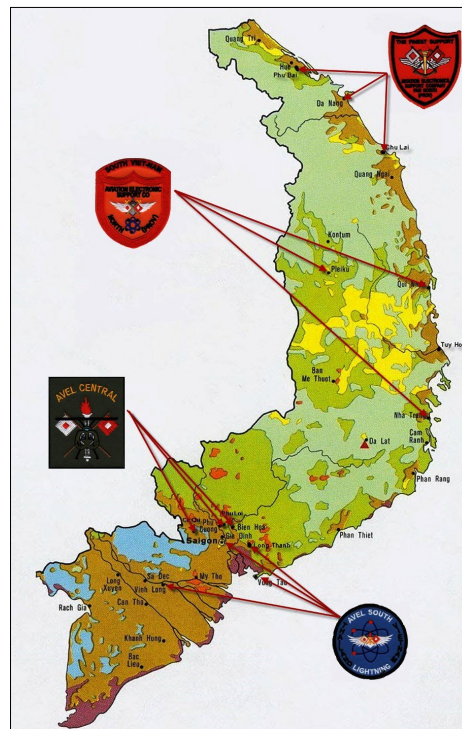


Agent Orange was a now outlawed defoliant used primarily in South Vietnam to deprive Viet Cong and North Vietnamese troops the cover of jungle foliage and to eradicate rice paddies in order to limit food supplies for a largely guerrilla warfare cadre. This herbicide got its name from the orange stripe on the barrels in which it was contained. The main toxin was a particular form of dioxin known as TCDD, actually the most deadly form of over 400 kinds of dioxin. The U.S. sprayed over 12,000,000 gallons of the poison across the Vietnamese landscape.

As we now know it destroyed more than plants; it was extremely harmful to human beings who were exposed. It has been estimated that more than 3,000,000 Vietnamese were exposed to the chemical. Also there were some 3,000,000 American soldiers deployed to Vietnam to fight in that war. Today many veterans suffer from medical conditions that appear certain to be the result of exposure to Agent Orange. The range of disease processes presumed to result from such exposure includes ischemic heart disease, diabetes, lymphoma, lung cancer, prostate cancer, leukemia, and Parkinson's disease. All of those conditions are present in the non-veteran population but not to the extent that they are present in the Vietnam cohort.

There are many factors involved in who gets these conditions and when they first appear. Obviously, people who were hit directly suffered the soonest and with the most dramatic consequences. There is war time footage of Vietnamese civilians emerging from a village that had been sprayed recently and one of the people tells a reporter that everyone in the village is dying; their insides are melting out. That's what happens when the immune system over responds generating radical inflammation in the intestines. In fact one of the earliest scientific studies of the effects of Agent Orange concluded that "...the immune system is exquisitely sensitive to (TCDD)."

Continued on Page 2



Smaller doses appear to have had less intense immediate reactions; however, due to latency and to the fact that this dioxin seems to accelerate all manner of inflammatory disease processes, veterans presumed to have been exposed get sick and die sooner than their peers. Fifty years ago very few people had a well-developed understanding of the interplay between the immune system and the so-called gut biome. Today we know a lot more. We know that dysregulation of the immune system can lead to many common diseases. We also know that TCDD affects the immune system. We are aware that there is a certain background level of dioxin contamination all around us. History tells us that the concentration of TCDD in Agent Orange was up to twenty times the concentration needed to kill jungle plants and rice. Therefore, it now comes as no surprise that so many Vietnam veterans suffer from the effects of TCDD exposure.

When the gut biome is disrupted, some microbes are lost, others take their place and the body's response to challenges is altered. Research done in the past few years describes in detail the effects of TCDD on the immune system as well as the underlying chemistry; that's more information than I am competent to share. I can speak only from personal experience. I served in Vietnam in 1967 and 1968; first in Chu Lai and then at Camp Viking, near Red Beach north of Da Nang. I was an electronic specialist - I worked on radios and navigation equipment from all kinds of aircraft except when mortars or rockets and or sappers distracted us from our mission. I served a second tour on board the Army's Floating Aircraft Maintenance Facility The USNS Corpus Christy Bay anchored off Cam Ranh Bay. That ship is included on a list of seaborne assignments presumed to have caused exposure to Agent Orange. The CC Bay used to be the USS Albamarle, a sea plane tender that converted sea water into potable water for the crew. That sea water was contaminated with large amounts of dioxin from run-off that drained into the bay. The desalination process didn't eliminate dioxin, it concentrated it in the water we drank and the water we used for showers.

Today, I am a cancer survivor. About eight years ago I was treated with chemotherapy and radiation for Diffuse Large B cell Lymphoma. It is one of the specific cancers on the VA list of presumptive diseases. I have Type 2 Diabetes that first developed several years ago resulting in renal insufficiency. I take medication, maintain the weight I had in basic training and eat a high fiber diet. I have two drug eluting stents in my left descending artery (AKA the widow maker) to correct one 80% and one 90% blockage. My ejection fraction at the time was so low (20) that I was diagnosed initially with congestive heart failure. I take medication and exercise regularly to protect myself against further damage. There is more but the details get gory so I'll skip most of them for now except to tell you that I have had seven abdominal surgeries which have caused me to become chronically dehydrated. That's a condition that can be life threatening all by itself.

What I would like all Americans to know is that the Vietnam War killed more than the 58,000 whose names are on The Wall and damaged more than the 350,000 who received Purple Hearts. Virtually everyone of the millions who served in Vietnam were presumed to have been exposed to Agent Orange and so many, too many, of them have become sick or have later died as a result of their service. Some day I would like to interview Vietnam survivors about their lives after Agent Orange. What did it do to them? How does that make them feel? How has it changed their lives? **I think it is time to share those stories with the world.**

Editor's note: Pete would like to know about your experiences dealing with agent orange. You can arrange an interview by sending him an email at [peterc.poirier@gmail.com](mailto:peterc.poirier@gmail.com).

---

## World War II Vet Who Approved \$180M Agent Orange Settlement as Federal Judge Dead at 99

Former federal judge who earned a reputation as a tireless legal maverick while overseeing a series of landmark class-action lawsuits and sensational mob cases in New York City like that of the "Mafia Cops," has died at age 99. A federal courthouse official, Eugene Corcoran, confirmed Jack B. Weinstein's death on 15 June 2021. The judiciary "has lost a national treasure," Corcoran said in a statement.



Weinstein, a World War II veteran appointed by President Lyndon Johnson, had spent more than 53 years on the bench in Brooklyn before retiring last year. In a 2012 interview with The Associated Press, he said his longevity had its advantages. “You don’t care really what people think of you,” the judge said. “You’re not going anywhere. You’re doing it for the joy. And as a public service.” Weinstein was known for championing class-action litigation as the little guy’s remedy for alleged injustices by big industry. 27 He made headlines in 1984 by approving a settlement requiring herbicide makers to pay \$180 million to Vietnam veterans exposed to Agent Orange in a class action suit.

Weinstein was born in Wichita, Kansas, but grew up in Harlem and Brooklyn. As a teenager in the 1930s, he played bit parts in Broadway shows and worked on the docks to put himself through school.

He was cremated.

---

## The Victims of Agent Orange the U.S. Has Never Acknowledged

The main focus of the War Legacies Project is to document the long-term effects of the defoliant known as Agent Orange and provide humanitarian aid to its victims. Named for the colored stripe painted on its barrels, Agent Orange — best known for its widespread use by the U.S. military to clear vegetation during the Vietnam War — is notorious for being laced with a chemical contaminant called 2,3,7,8-Tetrachlorodibenzo-P-dioxin, or TCDD, regarded as one of the most toxic substances ever created.

The use of the herbicide in the neutral nation of Laos by the United States — secretly, illegally and in large amounts — remains one of the last untold stories of the American war in Southeast Asia. Decades later, even in official military records, the spraying of Laos is mentioned only in passing. When the Air Force in 1982 finally released its partially redacted official history of the defoliation campaign, Operation Ranch Hand, the three pages on Laos attracted almost no attention, other than a statement from Gen. William Westmoreland, a former commander of U.S. forces in Vietnam, that he knew nothing about it — although it was he who ordered it in the first place. Laos remained a forgotten footnote to a lost war. To those who followed the conflict’s aftermath intimately, this was hardly surprising. Only in the last two decades has the United States finally acknowledged and taken responsibility for the legacy of Agent Orange in Vietnam, committing hundreds of millions of dollars to aiding the victims and cleaning up the worst-contaminated hot spots there.

While records of spraying operations inside Laos exist, the extent to which the U.S. military broke international agreements has never been fully documented, until now. An in-depth, months long review of old Air Force records, including details of hundreds of spraying flights, as well as interviews with many residents of villages along the Ho Chi Minh Trail, reveals that, at a conservative estimate, at least 600,000 gallons of herbicides rained down on the ostensibly neutral nation during the war.

For years, members of the War Legacies Project were aware of the spraying in Laos, but the remote areas affected were almost inaccessible. Finally, in 2017, with new paved roads connecting the main towns, and many smaller villages accessible in the dry season by rough tracks, they were able to embark on systematic visits to the villages of the Bru, the Ta Oey, the Pa Co and the Co Tu, four of the ethnic minorities whose homes straddle the Laos-Vietnam border. It was the first time anyone had tried to assess the present-day impact of the defoliant on these groups.

Of the 517 cases of disabilities and birth defects so far documented by the War Legacies Project in Laos, about three-fourths, like malformed limbs, are identifiable to the untrained eye as conditions of the sorts now linked to exposure to Agent Orange. “When we started the survey, I told American government officials we were doing it and said honestly that we didn’t know what we would find,” Hammond of the War Legacies Project says. “In fact, I hoped we would find nothing. But as it turned out we’ve found a lot.”

Since it began, their project has channeled modest amounts of material support to disabled people — things like a wheelchair ramp or a vocational training course or a brood cow to increase household income — in rural areas of Vietnam that were heavily sprayed.





---

### Continued from Page 3



More than half the cases identified by the War Legacies Project are children age 16 and under. They are the **grandchildren of those who were exposed during the war, and possibly even the great-grandchildren**, since the people in these villages have traditionally married in their teens. Club feet are commonplace. So are cleft lips, sometimes accompanied by cleft palate. There are disturbing clusters: five babies born with missing eyes in Nong District; a family with five deaf-mute siblings; an inordinate number of short legs, malformed legs and hip dysplasia in Samuoi District — the latter a condition that is easily treatable in infancy, but if neglected will lead to severe pain, a waddling gait and more serious deformity. The rudimentary health care system in rural Laos means that few if any infants even get a diagnosis.

In each village the women visited, groups of elders assembled to share their stories, many in their 70s yet still with sharp memories. At first, they recounted, they had no idea who was spraying and bombing their villages, or why. But in time they learned the names of the airplanes: T-28, C-123, B-52.

In most villages, dozens were killed by the bombings or died of starvation. The survivors lived for years in the forests or in caves. They dug earthen shelters, big enough to hide a whole family, and covered them with branches. “We had no rice for nine years,” one old man said. Sugar cane and lemongrass survived the spraying. So did cassava, though it swelled to an outlandish size and became inedible — Agent Orange accelerated the growth of plant tissue, killing most foliage.

For the most part, the old men told their stories dispassionately. But one Pa Co elder in Lahang, a place rife with birth defects, was bitter. He was an imposing 75-year-old named Kalod, tall, straight-backed, silver-haired, wearing a dark green suit with an epauletted shirt that gave him a military bearing. Like most of his people, Kalod saw the border as an artificial construct. During the war, people went back and forth between Laos and Vietnam, he said, depending on which side was being bombed and sprayed at the time. He leaned forward, gesticulating angrily. “Vietnamese people affected by the chemical spraying get compensation,” he complained. “In Laos, we need support from America, like they receive in Vietnam.”

The 600,000 gallons of herbicides dropped in Laos is a fraction of the roughly 19 million that were sprayed on Vietnam, but the comparison is misleading. Between 1961 and 1971, some 18 percent of South Vietnam’s land area was targeted, about 12,000 square miles; in Laos the campaign, which began on the Ho Chi Minh Trail between Labeng-Khok and the Vietnamese border, was compressed in time and space. It was focused on narrow, defined strips of the trail, 500 meters wide (about 1,640 feet), and on nearby crop fields, and the heaviest spraying was concentrated in a four-month period early in the war. It was as intense a ramping-up of the defoliation campaign as in any major war zone in Vietnam at the time.

To make matters worse, the newly examined Air Force records show that the first intensive period of spraying in Laos used not Agent Orange, but the much more toxic Agent Purple, the use of which was discontinued in Vietnam almost a year earlier. Tests showed that the average concentration of TCDD in Agent Purple, a different chemical formulation, was as much as three times higher than in Agent Orange.

---

### Agent Orange Wristbands



I had more of these made and in a larger size than last time. If you want one send me an email and I will get them to you at no charge.

[jmccabe51@gmail.com](mailto:jmccabe51@gmail.com)

---

## French court rejects claim in Agent Orange lawsuit

Landmark case pitched a former Vietnamese journalist against 14 firms, including U.S. multinational companies Dow Chemical and Monsanto, now owned by Germany's Bayer.

PARIS, May 2021 — A French court on Monday threw out a lawsuit brought by a French-Vietnamese woman against more than a dozen multinationals that produced and sold toxic herbicide Agent Orange, used by American troops during the war in Vietnam.



The landmark case, filed in 2014, has pitched Tran To Nga, a 79-year-old who says she was a victim of Agent Orange, against 14 firms, including U.S. multinational companies Dow Chemical and Monsanto, now owned by German giant Bayer.

The former journalist has described in a book how she breathed Agent Orange in 1966, when she was a member of the Vietnamese Communists, or Viet Cong, that fought against South Vietnam and the United States. “Because of that, I lost one child due to heart defects. I have two other daughters who were born with malformations. And my grandchildren, too,” she told The Associated Press.

Vietnam says as many as 4 million of its citizens were exposed to the herbicide and as many as 3 million have suffered illnesses from it, including the children of people who were exposed during the war.

“That’s where lies the crime, the tragedy because with Agent Orange, it doesn’t stop. It is passed on from one generation to the next,” Tran said.

Bayer argued any legal responsibility for Trans's claims should belong to the United States, saying in a statement that the Agent Orange was made “under the sole management of the U.S. government for exclusively military purposes.” Tran’s lawyers argued that the U.S. government had not requisitioned the chemical but secured it from the companies through a bidding process.

---

## NEW AVEL, AVIONICS AND VIETNAM VETERANS REGISTERED

### **Kamody, Dennis (SP5)**

8 Whitney Street  
Pittsburgh, PA 15213  
412-606-8680

*263 LEM, Avel Far North, Vung Tau, Nha Trang, Da Nang, Phu Bai: May 1969 to August 1970*

[dkamody@comcast.net](mailto:dkamody@comcast.net)

MOS: 26M20

Comments: No Agent Orange issues but did receive a Purple Heart for shrapnel wounds from a rocket in Da Nang

### **Pich, Michael (SP4)**

13200 Skyway Dr  
Ellicott City, MD 21042  
703-929-5319

Avel Central/539th Trans. Co., Phu Loi: May 1967-Jan. 1968

[mikepich7@gmail.com](mailto:mikepich7@gmail.com)

MOS:

Other units you were assigned to in Vietnam: 330th Transportation Company, Vung Tau

Comments: I was on the detail that secured a lot of the building materials and help to construct some of the new living quarters before I rotated back to the USA in January, 1968.

---

### **Gaffney, Robert Gary (SP5)**

3224 Shadow Ln  
Placerville, CA 95667

Avel North, 1st Platoon, Nha Trang: 24 March 1968 to 24 March 1969

[gary@dirtdogphoto.com](mailto:gary@dirtdogphoto.com)

MOS: 26B30 Weapon Support Radar Repair

---

---

## TAPS

**Ronald Pelczar**  
*Avel Central October 1967 - September 1969*  
He died on 17 March 2020.



---

## PHOTOS

Gary Kirk submitted photos of Avel South, Vinh Long. They are posted on the website.

---

## CHANGE OF ADDRESS/EMAIL/PHONE

None Submitted

*Send your change of address and email to [jmccabe51@gmail.com](mailto:jmccabe51@gmail.com)*

---

## ALL AVEL GATHERING/REUNION 2021

**Virginia Beach, Virginia**  
**October 14 - 17, 2021**

**DoubleTree by Hilton**

1900 Pavilion Dr.  
Virginia Beach, VA 23452  
757-422-8900

Room Rate is \$107.00/night plus tax

This special room rate will be honored 3 days prior and 3 days post event  
***RESERVE YOUR ROOM ASAP SO WE DON'T RUN OUT OF THE ONES BLOCKED.***  
***Tell them you are with the Avel Vietnam Reunion!***

**Early Bird, Tuesday October 12th, 2021**

Early Bird arrivals can explore Virginia Beach and the area on their own.  
There is a lot to see and do.

**Wednesday October 13th, 2021**

Early Bird arrivals can explore Virginia Beach and the area on their own.  
There is a lot to see and do.

**Thursday October 14th, 2021**

The Hospitality Room will be open and well stocked with adult beverages and snacks!  
There will be several possible carpool events.

**Friday October 15th, 2021**

The Hospitality Room will be open and well stocked with adult beverages and snacks!  
Avel will provide a bus to take the group to Colonial Williamsburg

---

Continued on Page 7

---

Continued from Page 6

**Saturday October 16th, 2021**

**John Veers Martini Golf Outing**

**Ladies Luncheon provided by Avel**

**Group Banquet. Cash bar during dinner. (*Dinner paid by Avel*)**

**The Hospitality Room will be open after dinner until 23:00**

**Sunday October 17th, 2021**

**Final goodbyes and head home until next year**

**If you are going please register on the website: [www.avelvietnam.com](http://www.avelvietnam.com)**

The Reunion cost is \$80.00 per person. Make your checks payable to AVEL REUNION. If we have to cancel the Reunion you will receive a full refund.

Mail your dues to: Jack McCabe  
2120 Augusta National Dr.  
Denver, NC 28037



**AVEL  
VIETNAM**



**July/August 2021 Newsletter**