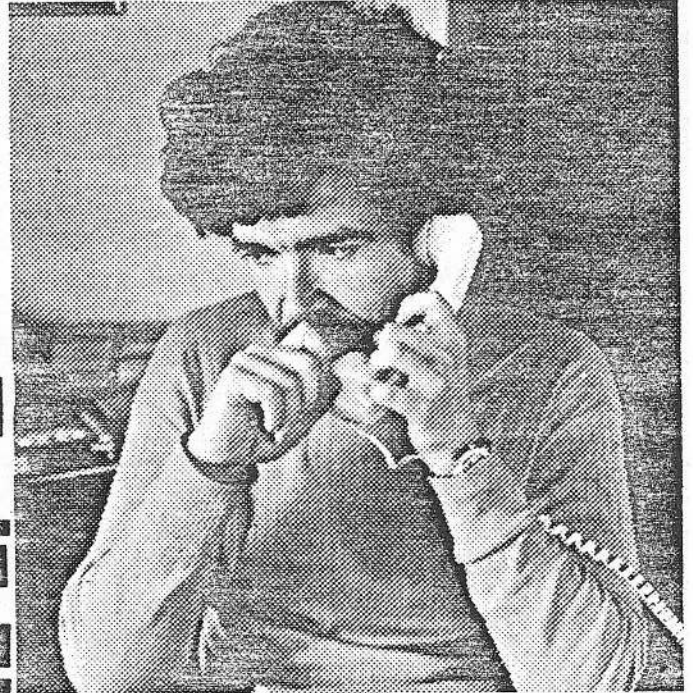


AGENT ORANGE



A Souvenir Of War

BY
MICHELLE
BOGRE

The war hasn't ended for many Vietnam veterans, only they aren't fighting "Charlie" anymore. They now combat a sinister enemy hidden in the cells of their own bodies.

This new enemy is dioxin, TCDD (2,3,7,8-tetrachlorodibenzoparadioxin). It is one of the most toxic chemical substances known. Dioxin is a contaminant by-product in the synthesis of an herbicide called 2,4,5-T (2,4,5-trichlorophenoxyacetic acid). Manufactured by Dow Chemical Co., 2,4,5-T was used as a defoliant in Vietnam in a formulation which the Army code-named Agent Orange.

The defoliation activities were known collectively as "Operation Ranch Hand," a legacy from former President Lyndon Johnson's military advisors. Forty-four million pounds of Agent Orange (AO), containing 368 pounds of dioxin, were sprayed from C123 cargo planes, helicopters, trucks, and backpack tanks and nozzles.

Recently, Vietnam veterans have claimed that dioxin exposure has caused a variety of terrifying symptoms. These include cancer, sterility, birth defects in their children, chloracne, skin rashes, liver dysfunction, numbness and tingling in the extremities, and radical mood change.

Caught In A Pesticidal Web

Exposure to dioxin was relatively common for as many as 4.2 million soldiers. The Department of Defense (DOD) described Agent Orange as "relatively non-toxic to man [sic] or animals." Soldiers spraying the chemical from backpacks worked in fatigues and t-shirts, sometimes engaging in mock battles by spraying the chemical at each other. Those soldiers who dutifully dropped purification tablets into water just scooped from contaminated streams didn't know that dioxin is not water soluble. They had no way of predicting that the toxin would be stored in the bodies' fat cells, livers, nerves, brains, and reproductive organs.

To date, over 4,800 veterans have filed claims with the Veteran's Administration (VA) citing AO-related illnesses. So far, the VA has approved only two claims

for chloracne — but both have been regarded as service-related illnesses, not as Agent Orange poisoning. Officially, Agent Orange poisoning doesn't exist; the government has continually denied that Agent Orange ever did anything but kill plants.

And it does do this job well. So well, in fact, that millions of pounds of 2,4,5-T are sprayed annually in this country. Recently, the herbicide's use has become an environmental issue and the focus of a tangled assortment of scientific, legal, political, and social questions. The most pressing of these questions is, Who carries the burden of proof in a pesticide dilemma? Until this question is answered, action will apparently remain at a standstill.

Bonnie Hill, who lives atop the backbone of Oregon's coastal range, thinks that the burden of proof lies with the chemical companies. Between 1973 and 1977, Hill noticed that she and 7 other women had a collective total of 11 miscarriages, all of which followed a spring or fall spraying. Doctors offered no explanation, so in 1978 the women asked the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to investigate. This resulted in a 1979 emergency ban declaring 2,4,5-T "an imminent hazard" and prohibiting all uses except those on rangelands and rice fields.

Dow Chemical Co., the major manufacturer of 2,4,5-T, is fighting the ban. Claiming that 2,4,5-T is "one of the safest products we make," Dow condemns the EPA Oregon epidemiological study. Dow contends that "excessive liberties were taken in manipulating and selecting data to fit a preconceived result."

The ban comes rather late for veterans like Stephen Zardis, who is now confined to a wheelchair and suffers from a rapidly deteriorating neurological disorder. The VA finally diagnosed the illness as atypical multiple sclerosis. Zardis believes it to be dioxin-poisoning.

As a member of a forward flight air control unit, Zardis lived and worked at airfields cleared for helicopters which were sometimes used to disperse Agent Orange.

"I often worked in defoliated areas. It was like walking through mushy melted vegetation," Zardis

recalls. "The Army never told us Agent Orange was toxic. They never told us to wear protective clothing. We drank water from defoliated areas."

His condition began with numb limbs, which he ignored. When he began having trouble walking and writing, he got scared and went to the VA. Standard neurological tests were inconclusive. The doctors suggested psychiatry. Three months later Zardis was back in the neurology department. Again, the tests — which included a spinal tap — were inconclusive. When he insisted on a diagnosis, the doctors called it a typical MS and sent him home with a crutch. On his 30th birthday, he received his first wheelchair.

Zardis began to suspect a link to AO when he read about a chemical factory explosion in Seveso, Italy, which enveloped the residents in a dioxin-laced cloud. The town was immediately evacuated, but many of the people later displayed symptoms similar to his.

Zardis' initial requests to the VA for an investigation of dioxin poisoning were ignored. Finally, his suspicions were relayed to the VA Science Advisory Committee. His case is presumably still under investigation.

"I didn't die in Vietnam, but the war is killing me anyway," Zardis says as he sits in his apartment surrounded by boxes of handouts and questionnaire and stacks of information on herbicides. His apartment doubles as the Massachusetts branch of Agent Orange Victims International. AОВI is a national non-profit outreach program whose immediate goals are to increase public awareness and to aid AO victims by establishing a VA-recognized medical diagnosis of, as well as treatment for, Agent Orange poisoning.

Like most AОВI organizers, Zardis finances his local branch office with his own income, which in his case consists entirely of disability benefits. He spends his time publicizing the issue and counseling AO victims:

"Yesterday I got a call from a veteran whose wife had seven miscarriages. Because he served in a defoliated area, he wondered if it might be from AO . . .

"The only cure for the effects of dioxin is to stop

its use immediately. Then we've got to aid the victims, but we have to fight with dignity. We don't want to be thought of as a bunch of crazy Vietnam vets running around, but we also can't allow the government to continue to forget us. If legal methods don't work, we'll take to the streets out of desperation."

Undoubtedly, there was more to say. But Zardis had to excuse himself to answer a telephone call from another potential AO victim.

A Bicycle — Not A Wheelchair

If dioxin is the culprit, it has claimed victims even more innocent than the vets themselves: the children of veterans who were exposed to the chemical. Because dioxin is a suspected mutagen, it may be capable of altering DNA and producing a hideous array of birth defects. This can be true even if the father exhibits few symptoms.

Kerry Ryan, now 9, may be one of those victims. She was born with more than 18 birth defects, ranging from a defective heart to missing bones in her arm to various internal problems, including intestinal deformities, no rectum, and no reproductive organs. Michael and Maureen Ryan believe that their daughter's deformities were caused by Michael's exposure to Agent Orange while on active duty in Vietnam.

Remembering that he drank contaminated water, Michael recalls it as being "oily" and needing Kool-aid mix in order to be palatable.

"Maureen and I accepted it when we thought it was an act of God, but I'll be damned if I'll accept it when it is so blatantly the fault of the chemical companies," says Mike, who himself suffers from chloracne, the only scientifically-recognized symptom of dioxin poisoning.

"When I found out, I felt like I had been gang raped on a corporate level and by my own government," says Maureen. "If your car has a defect, at least they send you a letter. The government not only didn't warn us, they won't help us. I hope we are wrong, but if it is Agent Orange I think the government has a responsibility to Kerry and others like her to admit that her birth defects are the result of horrendous corporate genocide."

The Ryans have become leading advocates of AОВI, testifying before Congress, providing support groups for other parents like themselves, and speaking to any concerned citizens' groups who will listen.

When the Ryans testify, Kerry goes with them. She is alert, bright and mischievous — and she defies sympathy by correcting you when she overhears you refer to her as handicapped. "I am not handicapped, I am physically challenged," she tells you. Her parents call her Fat Face, she calls them Mike and Mickey.

"Now we realize that Kerry had every right to be on a bicycle instead of in a wheelchair," Mike says. "AO is the end of the Vietnam era. It's time we served notice on our corporations and our government that they must accept responsibility for their products. I want America to wake up."

Law Suits And Trust Funds

Like many other Vietnam vets, the Ryans have joined a class action law suit filed in Federal District Court by New York public interest lawyer Victor Yannacone, Jr. The suit, filed against manufacturers of dioxin-contaminated herbicides, is unusual in that it doesn't seek specific damages. Rather, Yannacone is trying to set a precedent. He wants the Court to require the chemical companies to establish a tax-exempt trust fund, the monies for which would come out of corporate earnings. The purpose of the trust fund would be to reimburse the Federal government and to compensate victims with herbicide-related health problems.

Plaintiffs in the suit include "all of those so unfortunate as to have been and now to be situated at risk, not only during this generation, but during those generations to come" from toxic effects of dioxin. The

defendants are Dow Chemical Co., Monsanto Co., Diamond Shamrock Corporation, Hercules Inc., and Thompson-Hayward Chemical Co.

In addition to the trust fund, the suit also seeks "an immediate injunction prohibiting advertising, promotion, marketing or sales of any pesticides containing dioxin." It asks for complete disclosures of everything the defendants know about the dangers of contaminated herbicides. The suit further requests that the corporate defendants be declared trustees of the public health, safety, and welfare with a fiduciary responsibility to the public.

"Agent Orange is what public interest litigation really is," says Yannacone. As co-founder of the Environmental Defense Fund, Yannacone led the fight against DDT, a battle which defined the basic concepts of environmental law.

"There are some organizations that are trying to use our suffering to make money," says AОВI president Frank McCarthy. "We get no support from anyone except Victor [Yannacone], who has been spending \$15,000 a month to keep this lawsuit going."

AОВI is, as usual, in financial trouble. The various branch offices, financed by the veterans who manage them, sporadically close when telephone bills or rent can't be paid. McCarthy, who could no longer maintain rent for the Manhattan branch, now works out of Yannacone's office.

He feels that part of the problem is that the organization is fighting the negative stigma attached to Vietnam. Himself a highly decorated but disabled vet, McCarthy has found funding to be doubly problematic.

"I have men dying on me every day," he says, "and we can't get enough money to run this office. Agent Orange isn't a political issue or a Vietnam War issue. It is a humanitarian issue. But when I approached the Environmental Defense Fund for money, they told me they wouldn't give us any money because the veterans went to Vietnam to fight a war they shouldn't have fought and it served us right."

In a voice tinged with anger and frustration, McCarthy refutes a slanderous myth about AОВI vets: "Our only objective is to go out of business. We're

not trying to destroy our corporations. We're not trying to destroy America. We're just trying to force the chemical companies to accept responsibility for what they have done, to alleviate the human suffering they have caused . . .

"We're not even asking for a settlement. We're only asking for a percentage of the chemical companies' profits to go to a public trust fund for research and aid for the victims."

"Orangegate"

The chemical companies deny liability and refuse to accept responsibility. In one advertisement, Dow Chemical claims "debating scientists of eight nations agree that pesticide 2,4,5-T is safe. It poses no cancer hazard to humans or animals. It does not cause abortions in women and poses no practical environmental harm."

However, despite their own assertions, Dow has filed a precautionary countersuit against the Federal government, claiming that the Department of Defense knew—or reasonably should have known—of the hazards, if any, associated with exposure to phenoxy herbicides and that any injury was due "to factors and causes other than acts, misstatements or omissions of the corporate defendants."

The countersuit further alleges that the United States determined "the identity and the chemical composition of the phenoxy herbicides to be manufactured and sold by Dow . . . and that the USA specifications did not require or allow Dow to provide any warnings or instructions setting forth the recommended or proper method of using the phenoxy herbicides in question."

Dow's accusation seems to be that the government ordered AO to be contaminated, or implied that it should be contaminated, and that although Dow advised the government of the herbicide's possible injurious nature, the government still directed Dow to furnish the contaminated chemical.

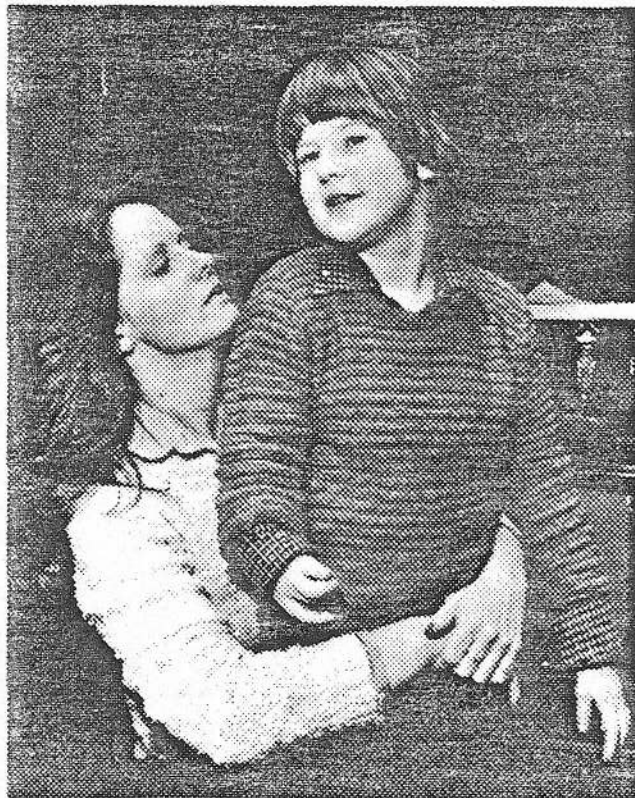
Such allegations of an "Orangegate" seem to be partially substantiated by recent evidence released by Congressional Representatives Thomas Daschle and David Bonier, Chair and Vice-Chair of the Vietnam Veterans in Congress.

As recently as February 25, 1980, the DOD testified that it had no evidence of chronic health hazards associated with dioxin exposure and that "the only human disorder which can be linked to herbicide exposure is chloracne." This testimony was presented by Captain Al Young, who was introduced by the Deputy Surgeon General of the Air Force as "probably one of the world leaders in knowledge of plant herbicides."

Daschle and Bonier recently acquired a VA memo which states "Both agents [Orange and Blue] contained chemical 2,4-D and 2,4,5-T. They are mutagens and tetragenetic . . . resulting in deformed children being born (similar to the Thalidomide situation). Therefore, the veteran would appear to have no ill effects from exposure, but he would produce deformed children due to this breakage in his genetic chain." Captain Al Young's name appears on the memo as "person contacted." The memo itself is dated October 12, 1977.

The memo also indicates that the VA was aware of chronic health hazards, including various cancers, associated with herbicide exposure and that they were "monitoring" the situation for possible litigation proceedings.

Continued on page 14



Photos: Michelle Bogre

THE HUMAN COSTS

Continued from page 11

addressed through a planned housing strategy. Seven million Americans without adequate housing find little solace in the fact that their Federal budget is balanced.

Economic Trade-Offs

The program reductions examined above aren't the only ones. Add them to the \$900 million reduction in grant-in-aid to cities, the \$400 million reduction in food stamps due to change in asset and income criteria, the \$500 million reduction in child nutrition programs, and the \$500 million reduction in Medicaid. It all culminates in a general downgrading in the quality of life for millions of American citizens.

The military budget authority for FY '81 will increase by 14 percent to a total of over \$160 billion. This \$20 billion increase will fund massive procurement efforts, increase military construction for family housing by 29 percent, and provide a 13 percent increase for the testing and evaluation of new weapon systems which are destined for future procurement. Latest data available show that several Fortune 500 corporations will reap the benefits of our national security spending binge. Number 8, General Electric, receives nearly 9 percent of its total sales from the Department of Defense. United Technologies (number 32) receives 24 percent, Rockwell International (number 37) 19 percent, Boeing (number 40) 26 percent, and McDonnell Douglas nearly 70 percent.

Who will pay for this redistribution in Federal resources?

Not the unemployed. Because of recessionary pressures, the unemployed will be forced to apply for unemployment compensation, food stamps, and public assistance.

Not the highest income brackets. These people will receive more than \$150 billion in tax benefits designed to preserve their income and asset holdings. The corporate sector will share a similar luxury with over \$48 billion in foregone revenue predicted through tax benefits.

By a process of elimination, the working middle class and the working poor will again finance the Federal government through the perils of Federal inadequacy. For the lower economic strata, political expediency and a lack of economic planning will have serious detrimental repercussions.

Today's Economic Dogma Dictates Tomorrow's Tragedy

At present, 30 of the necessary 34 states have petitioned Congress for a convention to consider an amendment to require a balanced Federal budget. In simplest form, this would mean that all outlays must be offset by receipts. Given the trends in Federal redistribution of wealth and income, the financial responsibility caused by the imposition of economic dogma into the Constitution will severely impair the disposable income of the working class. It is the distinct feeling of this writer that any such limitation on Federal spending will be a serious economic mistake of tragic proportions.

David T. Kearns, President of Xerox Corp., recently wrote: "America's dismal economic record during the last decade reflects, more than anything else, an astonishing decline in research and development, innovation and productive risk-taking... The one great lie in this country—and it has to be exposed—is that it's all over for us, that the age of innovation has ended." It is through our technology and innovation that America will grow. We cannot afford to target the benefits of growth to a few while the masses pay the price through increased taxes and program cuts in the name of deficit politics. We cannot invalidate the future of America by allowing our children to become non-productive economic entities. Growth is a function of planning; planning is a function of commitment.

David W. Allen is an Economist with the Joint Economic Committee of the U.S. Congress and an advisor to Rep. Parren J. Mitchell (D-Md).

AGENT ORANGE

Continued from page 9

Bonier and Daschle have demanded that the VA clarify some important points. Who wrote the memo? To whom was it addressed? Was the information made available to the VA advisory committee on Agent Orange? And if not, why not?

The General Accounting Office (GAO) has recently released a report stating that the Department of Defense lied about the actual time lapse between spraying activity and ground troop activity. The DOD maintained that the mandatory lapse period was at least 6 weeks, but the GAO says that troops often entered areas within a few days or even hours of spraying.

Lately, other Congressional Representatives have become involved. Thomas Downey (D-Long Island) toured the Northport, Long Island VA hospital's herbicide clinic and concluded it was a "joke... grossly, inadequate... These VA hospitals don't even know what they are treating. We don't even know if Agent Orange has caused the defects. We have to stop working in the dark." Downey further called for Federal money to aid research.

AOVI president McCarthy agrees. "VA facilities are inept, inefficient and should be phased out. AOV doesn't even send vets to the VA anymore; all they give us is the runaround on Agent Orange. We have asked for an epidemiological study so doctors can formulate treatment, but so far we've only been told that an Air Force study is still in protocol stages."

The planned Air Force study is of the men who flew "Operation Ranch Hand," even though in many cases ground troops were exposed to greater quantities of the herbicide. The Air Force also seems to ignore the possible conflict of interest involved in studying itself.

The DOD refused to undertake a comprehensive study, even at GAO recommendation. And in the meantime, the VA claims that as long as no one conducts a study, no scientific casual proof exists which directly links Agent Orange with the alleged effects.

"There is nothing unique about the veterans' physical complaints, aside from chloracne," says Paul L. Haber, VA assistant chief medical director. "I've heard veterans complain of numbness, tingling and paralysis for as long as I've been at the VA."

But let's suppose for a minute that the VA were listening. Some of the services which the veterans have demanded, such as the examination and treatment of children with birth defects, are not even allowed under existing VA legislation, which is controlled by Congress under the direction of traditional veterans' groups. Without such services, proving the dangers of AO will be beyond difficult.

The Struggle Drags On

It appears the battle over Agent Orange will be a long one. The opposing sides are still lining up, slowing down the process of correction by creating sub-issues which hide the real problem. Experts vs experts, chemical companies vs government, DOD vs itself, the VA vs all the victims — all these sides bicker and bog down in a scientific and legal maze, as if time were of no concern.

But while everyone fights over who is to blame for what, afflicted vets will continue to suffer and die, their children will continue to be born with birth defects, and dioxin will continue to be sprayed on rice fields and range lands.

The veterans can't settle for answers in ten years. They need satisfaction now. We all need it.

Agent Orange Hotline

Vietnam veterans who fear they may have ill effects as a result of their exposure to Agent Orange now have a toll-free hotline to call for information about the possible effects of the herbicide. The number has been established by Vietnam Veterans of America. The hotline number: 800-424-5402.

Michelle Bogre is a journalist based in New York City.

Job Seekers' Digest

Continued from page 2

ing decisions. Start and stop the meeting on time, adhere to your agenda, and discuss the simplest items first. Always try to reach a real decision on topics as they are discussed. Before breaking up the meeting, restate the decision you've reached and the assignments which have been delegated. Follow up later with a memo regarding these same decisions, assigned responsibilities, and deadlines.

NO: It's a simple word, but many people don't know how or when to say it. Learn to decline, with tact and firmness, any request which interferes with the achievement of your goals.

PLAN: Near the end of each day, plan tomorrow's Things To Do list. Place emphasis on important projects and, as usual, use pen and paper. However, be flexible. Allow for essentials, emergencies, and some unscheduled time. A rule of thumb is that when you take time in advance planning, you actually save time which you'll need to complete the entire job.

PRIME TIME: Determine the time of day during which you are most effective and then use this time period wisely. Spend your most productive hours—when you're alert, creative, and most energetic—on important and critical projects.

SIMILAR TASKS: Consolidate similar duties. This will help you to economize on the utilization of resources and efforts.

TELEPHONE: Group together as many of your out-going calls as possible. Always leave a message if the party you called for is out and keep a record of the call.

VISITORS: Unexpected visitors (the unwelcomed kind, that is) often waste valuable time. Solutions to this problem include suggesting a scheduled meeting time for a later date, continuing to work while the visitor tries to visit, making a phone call in the visitor's presence, and keeping your office door closed to intimidate the less than brash.

VITAL FEW: The significant items in any group usually consist of a relatively small part of the total. So, from a long list of projects select the vital few (most significant to overall productivity). Allocate time to work on these projects and follow them to successful conclusions.

WORK (ACCURATE): Do the job right the first time. Accuracy and thoroughness are much more important than speed.

WORK (COMPLETE): Once you've started a project, finish it. Avoid time-wasters like restarting, retracing, and reworking. When you pick up a piece of paper, do something with it - move it off your desk!

WORK DISTRIBUTION: Divide work tasks by order of priority into these five categories: Must Be Done Now; Important, Near Term; Important, Long Term; When Time Permits; and Busy Work. Most of your time (between 70 and 80 percent) should be spent on projects from the two highest categories. Whenever possible, delegate minor tasks or incorporate them efficiently into a higher priority project. Use five different folders to divide work easily, using a color-code system if you like. Review folder contents weekly and change task priorities as required.

Parcels And Piecemeal

Successful careers are built over the years, day by day. What you achieve depends upon what you bring to the job, not what the job offers.

Three hundred years ago, an English theologian named John Howe was struck by one of life's recurring ironies: "What a folly to dread the thought of throwing away life at once, and yet have no regard to throwing it away by parcels and piecemeal."

The confused, harried procrastinator lurks somewhere inside all of us. Are you making the most of each day?

The author of this article has published a 48 page 8 1/2 x 11 soft cover booklet titled *JOB SEEKING GUIDE*. A postage paid copy may be ordered for \$3.50 each by sending your check to Gary K. Himes, 1323 Doepp Drive, Carlsbad, New Mexico 88220.