

# AGENT ORANGE AND THE NEW YORK TIMES 1961 – 1979

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## I. Introduction

**A**gent Orange is a term that is commonly used in two contexts. First, it is used to describe the chemical 2,4,5-T itself, and secondly it is used to describe any singular chemical or group of chemicals as herbicides or defoliants associated with the Vietnam War. Today, the controversy surrounding Agent Orange has still not been fully resolved. Many scholars and scientists continue to study the effects of the chemical on Vietnam, on places it was sprayed in the United States, and in laboratory tests. Why has nothing been found conclusively? The answer to this is not simple, but the closest simplification is that Agent Orange has been surrounded by domestic and international political conflict. Any conclusive discoveries revealing the toxic nature of Agent Orange or of the Pentagon knowledge of this toxicity before its usage would have implications about the United States government and might have consequences to the powerful country's reputation and pocketbook. Agent Orange is an issue connected to many greater issues in science, public policy, ethics, public health, and others.

The New York Times, first published in 1851, is one of the oldest and most successful newspapers still published today. The paper has covered major events in war and peace time. Looking into its coverage of an event over time can reveal subtle, gradual, and sudden paradigm shifts. This paper will use the New York Times as a lenses for observing and analyzing the attitudes, events and controversies surrounding Agent Orange.

## II. Goals, Procedure, and Limitations

### 1. Goals

This paper is meant mostly as a tool for examining Agent Orange rather than a list of conclusive answers about any aspect of the controversy. It will ask questions about why about why events were covered in a certain way, but any answers provided will be more useful if seen as this author's best guess and a launching point for further papers and discussions. The goal of this paper is to bring out information available to the public during the Vietnam War and the years directly after. The first newspaper

article found is from 1962, and the last one used is from 1980.

The Analysis and Chronology section will look at articles in order to develop a chronology of general shifts in how Agent Orange is approached. It will look for trends in the general assumptions of the articles, trends in the groups and individuals being covered and quoted, and trends in what solutions the articles are pointing to. These categories are broad, and they will by no means encompass every single article of the Times from that time period, but clearly definable eras are definitely present. Era might not even be the right word because what it is more like starting points because once an issue or idea becomes relevant it might continue to come up in the newspaper's discussion of Agent Orange to the present. This section will also seek to provide a brief examination of the players and events involved in the Agent Orange controversy as they arise. It will look at broad groups and agencies more often, but will also discuss individuals whose views are presented frequently. This section of the paper will examine the evolution of the positions of these players and characterizations of their treatment of the issues.

The paper will conclude with suggestions for further research. Hopefully topics in this paper will inspire other work using resources that can delve into issues and history more deeply than a newspaper might.

## **2. Procedural Notes**

To find the New York Times articles I used the search string "herbicides"-or-"defoliants"-and-"Vietnam" in the Proquest database of the Historical New York Times. This query brought forth approximately 950 articles with dates ranging from 1962 to 2005. In the pertinent time period, between 1961 and 1980, the search revealed approximately 400 articles.

Once the articles were obtained, they were all scanned to find the most pertinent articles to the analysis intended to be attempted. Around seventy articles were selected to be looked at more closely either for containing especially pertinent information or because they were representative of a number of very similar articles.

Next the articles were summarized for easy access, and to make looking at their relationships to each other easier. Then many lines and arrows were drawn all over the printed pages, attempting to follow threads and ideas. The chronology was split into categorized sections, and articles with similar voices were grouped together. The final outcome is a little messy, but the connections are nonetheless clear for it.

The list of concise summaries of all the articles is attached to the end of the article for easy reference. The authors of the articles can also be found there since for simplicity's sake I will not be citing the author of every article mentioned. On looking at the articles connected to certain articles over time, no obvious connections to specific authors and certain viewpoints emerged. This is not surprising since, given the size of

the New York Times, journalists working in a section do not remain the same over more than a couple of years for the most part. Also, since Agent Oranges issues span so many topics, they are found in different sections of the newspaper. All of the complete articles are available through the Proquest database.

### **3. Limitations**

Using only the newspaper articles this paper is somewhat limited as a source of accurate and complete information. If something was not covered by the newspaper, or if an article concerning an issue was left out because of the sampling procedure employed then it will not be included in this paper. Because sampling was used instead of all the articles, this paper should be viewed in some ways a little incomplete and preliminary. It does, however, provide a starting point for the important and lengthy process of examining the historic documents recording the events surrounding Agent Orange.

Also at some points in the section examining the voices of the Agent Orange section it is hard to tell what an article mean by the “U.S. government” or who they mean by “some scientists.” At other places anonymous sources within government and scientific agencies are used, but determining the exact nature of validity of these sources is impossible. Please try to look past some of the confusion involving who is who into the greater connections that can be made.

## **III. Analysis**

### **1. Chronology**

This chronology will outline the addition of popular viewpoints or new issues to the previous discussion of Agent Orange.

#### 1962-mid 1966:

This era is characterized by little information being volunteered from the government. The government’s responses during this period are confident reassurances to countries bordering Vietnam who complained about poisons being dropped on their peoples. The United States gives no evidence and sites no studies to prove the safety of the chemicals. Yet the articles seem to suggest that the government was not even discouraging people from coming into contact with falling chemicals.

Agent Orange was first reported on in January of 1962 in an article titled “U.S. Spray Strips Foliage Hiding Vietnam Reds.” The article reports of the recent start of the defoliation program in Vietnam. The most interesting piece of information in this

article is that “[t]he spraying operation along the high was accompanied by the dropping of pamphlets assuring farmers that the chemicals were harmless to humans and animals.

Despite these assurances, in March of 1963 Communists in the Soviet Union and Vietnam began to accuse the United States of using poisoning the Vietnamese people in warfare. The Soviets first thought the damage was done by some sort of poison gas, which is described in the first article published “Washington Rebuts Poison Gas Charge.” In the second article the results of the gas seem to be eerily similar to the reported affects of dioxin and Agent Orange. The Communists charge that poison gas used by the United States “caused damage to crops of many villagers in highly populated areas and had led to the deaths of many Vietnamese.” The United States denied these charges. Their spokesmen said that the only chemicals being used were the “harmless herbicides”-a description seen in many articles of the early and mid-sixties.

Another poisoning charge came from a country loosely allied to the U.S., Cambodia in the article “U.S. Urges Inquiry On Poison Charge” published August 15, 1964. Cambodia accused them of using a substance similar to the one that the Communists described. The article also blames accounts of poisoning on “lies and false Communist propaganda.” The United States in so confident in its innocence, however, that members of the State Department urged an investigation by an impartial international body like the United Nations, so at least parts of the U.S. government must have believed strongly that the chemicals were harmless.

Cold War rhetoric of needing to build the biggest arsenal, and the framing of all Communists as the worst kind of evil is seen even in the early years of the Vietnam war. This mentality threads its way through all of the time periods studied in this chronology. In the article “Vietnamese Lifelines” published on March 26, 1964 reports on a debate within the Congress initiated by Senator Barry Goldwater urging the use of nuclear weapons to clear out large areas of dense forest. According to the article some Pentagon officials were supportive of his ideas. It is difficult to deny that in the public eye, using Agent Orange, even if all the worst published about it in 1964 was true, would seem merciful next to dropping atomic weaponry on the countryside.

In 1965 and the first half of 1966, several articles come out about Agent Orange. All of them are very positive about the role the chemicals are playing in the war. United States military officials stated that all of the crop destruction missions had been initiated by the South Vietnamese in the article “Weed Killers Aid War on Vietcong” published on March 28, 1965. An article entitled “Defoliation Unit Lives Perilously” published on December 20, 1965 paints the heroic portrait of the pilots involved in Operation Ranch Hand (the code name for the defoliation and herbicide missions) because they are in increased danger compared to ordinary pilots because their planes fly so low. The men risk their lives because they feel the benefits of defoliation are so important. The strongest statement about the lack of danger connected with Agent Orange came in the

article “U.S. Spray Planes Destroy Rice in Vietnam” where officials describe chemicals as “not poisonous [...] and that any food that survives its deadening touch will not be toxic or unpalatable.” These claims are supported by the fact that chemicals are the same as those used in much smaller quantities.

An article titled “U.S. Will Step Up Defoliation Missions in Vietnam” published September 10, 1966 is noteworthy not only because it announces the United States’ plan to increase the frequency of Ranch Hand mission, but also because it addresses the accidental destruction of rubber trees, which are important to Vietnam’s economy. According to “officials associated with the program,” “When claim are made, prompt action is taken to pay damages. The current price of a mature rubber tree is \$87. With this statement, the government has taken responsibility for reparations for collateral damage done to the environment when it affects the livelihood of the South Vietnamese.

### Mid 1966- Mid 1968

In the next three years, debate starts to spring up about whether Agent Orange is as safe as the government had previously claimed. The strength of the voices of those claiming that Agent Orange is 100% safe is still much greater than their opponents. Nonetheless, the few articles that do express the contrary voices are very effective, and the reasons for their positions are described in much more detail than the government’s previously had been.

The September 21, 1966 article, “Pentagon Backs Use of Chemicals,” reports the early positions of both sides of the debate. Twenty-two scientists, including seven Nobel Prize winners, drafted a letter to President Johnson “asking him to halt the growing use of chemical antipersonnel and anti-crop weapons in South Vietnam not only to spare civilian suffering but also to prevent ‘a chemical and biological arms race’ throughout the world.” Pentagon sources countered this argument by pointing out that there is little difference in the results between traditional crop-destruction methods and using chemicals. The assurances about the dangers of coming in contact with Agent Orange lose their strength. Instead of “harmless” Agent Orange is called “not lethal”- is a big jump from edible!

The government continues to embrace Agent Orange as a useful tool, and the self-explanatory title of an article published on March 15, 1967, “Pentagon Triples Spending on Defoliation in Vietnam” announces the government’s plans to increase the operations significantly.

A few months later it is reported that they want to go even further than increasing the amount of missions occurring using their current herbicides and defoliants. The October 17, 1967 article “Use of New Defoliant in Laos Studied” the United States discusses a plan that is being considered to use stronger defoliants along the Laos-Vietnam border in order to completely kill vegetation and poison the ground so that new plants would not grow after one spraying.

A couple months later on January 4, 1968 scientist Dr. Charles Minarik, director of the Plant Science Laboratory at Fort Detrick, Md., takes the side of the government. He justifies the claims that Agent Orange is safe with the evidence (no mention was made of what study it is from) that “when eaten by cattle with their fodder the substance is excreted in their urine, and, unlike DDT, does not appear in their milk. He also reiterates the government’s position that the Vietcong just “believe their own propaganda.” The article also presents the views of an opposing scientist, Dr. Barry Commoner, who expresses frustration at the government’s unwillingness to release scientific data supporting their contention that Agent Orange has no ill effects.

Just a month later, Dr. Minarik’s position is backed by a study done by the Midwest Research Institute that is announced in the January 4, 1968 article “Defoliation Study Casts Doubt on Long-Term Damage in Vietnam. The study was done by reviewing already published literature on the herbicide and defoliant use, and it found that “there are no clear indications that widespread aerial spraying to strip Vietnamese war zones of foliage will do long-term damage.” However, it admits that “too little is known to assess the efforts with confidence.”

In July of the same year, the scientists are back in the Times when the American Association for the Advancement of Science urged the U.S. to sponsor a long-term study on the effects of Agent Orange, and urged the Department of Defense to pay attention to the part of the Midwest Research Institute’s report that said too little information exists to make a clear case either way.

#### Mid 1968- Mid 1969

During this year, more concrete evidence was being published by scientists and reported on by the New York times describing the dangers of Agent Orange on the environment. More scientists were traveling to Vietnam to get first-hand experiences and observations of the situation.

An September 21, 1968 titled “Study Find Defoliants Change Vietnam Ecology” reported the findings of Dr. Fred Tschirley of the United States Department of Agriculture, “an American authority on tropical plant life.” He finds that “defoliation has caused an ecologic change is undeniable,” but he “does not feels that the change is irreversible, but recovery may take a long time.” In April of 1969, another scientist, this time a zoologist- Dr. Pfeiffer of the University of Montana. He noticed significant damage to animal life as a result of defoliation, but he also notes that he would have never been able to get down the river safely to study the effects of defoliation had it not been for defoliants. Both announce that severe environmental damage is occurring, but neither came out and recommended that it be stopped.

A couple months later, in December, the A.A.A.S. voted to start a study of herbicides in war. They decided to delete mention of Vietnam in the proposal for fear of it hitting roadblocks if it seemed too political. The study would take place in

Vietnam, but some of the scientists thought the deletion was necessary in order to make sure they were able to get the proper permission from the government to study in the country during the war. The outcomes of this meeting of the A.A.A.S. was reported on in the December 31, 1968 article “Scholars: Study of ‘Risks and Benefits’ of the Use of Herbicides In War is Sought.”

#### Mid 1969- 1970

In this period, fears and studies concerning birth defects and Agent Orange start to come forward. During this year, however, they are not taken very seriously, and none of the articles describe the government as having any intention of permanently banning the use of herbicides and defoliants though some small points of progress are made. The Cold War mentality also shows strongly during this period as President Nixon tried to rewrite the rules of modern warfare to include Agent Orange and CS gas. Surprisingly to people today but understandable considering the fears of CB arms races with the Communists.

The first article primarily concerning Agent Orange and birth defects was a small paragraph printed in the July 3, 1969 Times titled “Saigon Shuts a Newspaper.” This article briefly reports without detail that a newspaper in Saigon, Tin Sang, was closed down by American forces by publishing stories of unnatural births caused by “B-52 raids, defoliant chemicals and consorting with Americans.”

In a letter to the editor published on October 2, 1969 by Yale biology professor Arthur Galston expresses concern about the ethical use of starvation tactics and chemicals that destroy the natural ecology of Vietnam. Surprisingly though, he is the first scientist without apparent government connections to call the defoliants “innocuous directly on human populations.”

Serious concern about deformities arrived in October of 1969 with the publishing of a study conducted by Bionetics Research Laboratories that was reported in the article “U.S. Curbs Use of Weed Killer That Produces Rat Deformities.” According to Dr. Dubridge, science advisor to the president, the study “indicated that offspring of mice and rats given relatively large doses of the herbicide (2,4,5-T) during early stages of pregnancy showed a higher than expected number of deformities.” The government was quick to respond to the study by banning use of 2,4,5-T in populated areas in the United States. Whether spraying in Vietnam would be altered was not directly addressed in the article, which is why it can only be counted a small victory for those opposed to the herbicide.

The two articles “Germ Warriors Retired” and “Nixon Renounces Germ Weapons” were published on November, 26 1969 in response to President Nixon calling for a ban on all chemical and biological weapons except for Agent Orange and CS gas. This announcement came as a relief to most people in the United States who feared an escalating chemical or germ warfare. In the minds of most Americans of the

time, Agent Orange must have seemed almost insignificant when placed next to the threat bubonic plague or botulism as weaponry in war. This event can also be seen from certain vantage points as a step in the right direction, a direction that could eventually bring the president to banning all chemicals.

In the last few days of December 1969, the A.A.A.S. scientists planned for a study of the ecological effects of Agent Orange over the next several years led by Dr. Meselson of Harvard, as reported in the article “Scientists Press Study of Defoliants in Vietnam”(December 28). Other scientists in the organization are pushing for faster action be taken to ban the chemicals without waiting for the results using already existing studies that connect Agent Orange to birth defects through experiments on laboratory science, which is described in “Scientists Call for a Ban On 2 Vietnam Defoliants”(December 31). The scientists feel limited by their tool, science because strong scientific evidence can take years to gather when they sense that damage is being done immediately.

#### 1970- Mid 1971

During this year and a half long period, the health risks attached to Agent Orange become more and more evident to the government because of domestic incidents and more scientific studies pointing to a connection between the chemicals and birth defects. Some parties involved with the chemical manufacturers and the government hold firmly by their positions, but that group seems to be shrinking and temporary bans are put on the chemicals.

The first major domestic incident involving Agent Orange was reported in the February 8, 1970 New York Times in the article “Deformities and Hemorrhaging Laid to Forest Spray in Arizona.” 2,4,5-T was being sprayed in Tonto National Forest near family farms and a small town. The farms saw death and birth defects in goats and fruit trees, people experienced respiratory ailments, swelling feet, chest pains and extreme weight loss, pregnant women experienced a heightened rate of miscarriages and internal hemorrhaging. Dr. Dubridge quickly imposed a ban on 2,4,5-T near populated areas immediately. The ban from the rat study must already have been lifted if the forestry service was spraying within the vicinity of even a small population. This event is a major event in the Agent Orange chronology because the event brought Agent Orange’s health consequences to American soil where they are more difficult to hide of blame on Communist propaganda.

On March 15, 1970, as described by the title of the article reporting on it, the “U.S. Shows Signs of Concern Over Effect of 9-Year Defoliation Program in Vietnam.” The signs were not quite as large as this title might imply, however. The government cedes that ecological damage has been done to Vietnam, but points out that the health consequences are not proven. Reports of illness described as partially the result of psychological damage brought on by the war. The government still feels that the

benefits of Agent Orange outweigh this “psychological” consequences. The government does not seem to link the health problems linked to the Tonto incident to the claims of similar health problems in areas of Vietnam sprayed by Agent Orange.

Dow Chemical Company responds to concerns about Agent Orange three days after the government in the article “Dow Aides Deny Herbicide Risk.” This title is also misleading because what the article talks about is that the poison is not inherently in 2,4,5-T, but from a contaminant-dioxin- that can show up if it is manufactured in certain ways. Dow of course defends its own method of producing 2,4,5-T, but its announcement admits that something dangerous exists in the chemicals being used in Vietnam. Dr. Dubridge once again announced that the compound would not be used in populated areas.

On April 16, 1970 the United States announces a temporary ban on Agent Orange domestically and in Vietnam in response to U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare tests that show it might cause “abnormal development in unborn animals” as recorded in the article “U.S. Curbs Sales of a Weed Killer.” This is the 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> scientific study recorded in Times that connects Agent Orange and birth abnormalities. What is missing from the New York Times articles are the flaws that must have been found with the earlier studies that prevented them from having the effects of this one.

The ban on Agent Orange is extended the following June, but instead of health reasons the Pentagon points to the need to employ the planes for arms carrying missions. Military guarantee the Times that limited spraying will resume after those operations are finished on June 30. No mention of health concerns is made in the article. Whatever convinced the government in the D.H.E.W. study must have been forgotten or proven fallible.

On August 27, 1970, as the title of the Times article reporting on it suggests, the “Senate, 62 to 22, Rejects Herbicide Ban for Vietnam.” Senator Nelson of Wisconsin was one of the main advocates of the ban. He uses the arguments that use of herbicides legitimizes starvation tactics in warfare as well as destroying the country that the United States is fighting to protect. Also, he finds fault in using chemicals with unknown consequences to humans, animals, and the environment. Senator Dominick of Colorado is one of the leaders against the legislation. His main arguments stemmed from cost-benefit analysis favoring the salvation of American lives, and he says that nothing completely incriminating Agent Orange has been proven. This kind of debate is representative of conflict in different government bodies and agencies. Look back at Dr. Dubridge who becomes convinced by several different studies and events. He bans Agent Orange, but within months the bans are lifted; Agent Orange once again harmless.

On January 16, 1971 Jerry Friedheim, a spokesman for the Defense Department shared with the New York Times his unique ideas for why Agent Orange usage should

continues. In the article “Poison is Good For You” Friedheim says that Agent Orange is actually good for the Vietnamese economy because the all the wood in the dead forests can be marketed as lumber. The author of the article clarifies the fact that live trees are typically used for lumber because dead ones are eaten quickly by insects and lead to bamboo invasions that prevent future growth of new trees. The comments of the spokesman are almost comical because they are so off-target. The lack of pertinent knowledge lacking in the statement of spokesman for one of the most complicated government departments does not speak well for the competency of the minds at work behind the spokesman.

The article “Foes of Spraying Win Coast Round” report that groups advocating an end to domestic Agent Orange use won a small victory on July 11, 1970 when they convinced the U.S. Forest Service to stop spraying in national forests. The victory is small and likely temporary if it follows the trend of domestic bans in earlier years.

### Mid 1970- 1979

During the nine years between 1970 and 1979 the Agent Orange debate changed so frequently that breaking the years up into small groups is extremely difficult. For Agent Orange, those years were pendulous; filled with win and losses great and small on both sides of the debate. Agent Orange is eventually removed from Vietnam, but issues with the legacies of its usage remain in contention. New problems also arise when it comes time to destroy or contain the chemicals. Many important event happened, so reporting on them is crucial. From previous sections, it is noteworthy to notice that the controversy and threads become harder to follow as the years progress. This phenomenon reaches its peak in this period.

The removal of Agent Orange from Vietnam started on November 21, 1971 according to the article “Defoliant Leaving Vietnam.” The current plans do not call for the immediate removal of all of the chemicals, but a sizeable amount of a million gallons were recalled to be destroyed. This action represents a final commitment to ending the use of herbicides and defoliants in Vietnam. According to the article, the April 1970 ban was permanent after all, and the returning of the chemicals is a direct result of that ban.

Problems with the destruction of Agent Orange are brought forward in the article “Lethal Defoliant To Be Destroyed” published on January 25, 1972. A report by the Air Force announced that the destruction of 23.4 million gallons of Agent Orange would tentatively take place at Deer Park, TX and Sauget, MO. The report also revealed that the incineration of such a large quantity of the chemicals would release 44.7 million pounds of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere and 12.4 million pounds of salt into local streams. Yet the report concluded that there would be “no adverse effect on the environment.” Later in April of 1977 the article “Plan to Burn Surplus Defoliant On Ship in Pacific is Protested” describes the United States’ readiness to bring this

“clean” process to the middle of the ocean near Micronesia instead of doing the burning in our own country this time. The protestors dislike the ideas of toxic substances being incinerated upwind from their country without their permission. If the burning of Agent Orange was actually environmentally friendly, this 2.3 million gallons of poison would be burned in the United States like the rest of it instead of being shipped to the middle of the ocean.

A really unusual article titled “Army Study is Said to Back Defoliants” came out in August of 1972. According to this article a Washington science writer revealed that “use of defoliants in Western Europe to help stall a Communist attack is recommended in a secret United States Army study.” He also says that the report recommended use of Agent Orange in counter-insurgency wars in Cuba, Ethiopia, and Venezuela. If this report is legitimate then it catches the United States government in the midst of hypocrisy; denouncing and changing policies while recommending them to others.

Dr. Meselson reports his findings on the effects of Agent Orange on Vietnamese fish in “Contamination of Fish in Vietnamese Waters Laid to U.S. Defoliant” published on April 6, 1973. The fish and shellfish had levels of dioxin that were significantly higher than average. The Pentagon had no immediate comment of the destruction of yet another of Vietnam’s primary sources of food and income.

On February 22, 1974 the New York Times ran an article using information from a not-yet-revealed study done by the National Academy of Sciences provided by anonymous sources. The article revealed that the government-backed study found major health and environmental damages resulting from Agent Orange. This information was later revealed to have been exaggerated, and the Times received harsh criticism about the quality of its coverage. In an article published on April 29 after the release of the report, titled “U.S. Panel to Study Steps to Heal Herbicide Damage in Vietnam,” the scientists who had conducted the study had much milder suggestions than implied in the earlier article. They recommended that the government give financial aid to the Vietnamese in order to help pay for the damages caused by Agent Orange to the environment. While in Vietnam, they heard many consistent stories about deaths linked to chemicals sprayings, but none of it was able to be proven scientifically while they were there. Passing the responsibility for funding the recommended environmental cleanup has already began, and every government agency seems to be pointing at someone else with no one stepping up to volunteer.

In the summer of 1974, described in the articles “E.P.A. Ends Drive to Ban Defoliant”(June 27) and “Herbicide Spraying Stirs Court Fight,”(August 4) court battles sprang forth as groups tried to get a permanent ban placed on Agent Orange domestically. In the first article, the E.P.A. backed out of their court case because it felt that due to a shifting burden of proof, they would need more evidence to present in order to make the case solid. And Environmental Defense Fund lawyer disagrees with decision of the E.P.A. He feels that the large amount of circumstantial evidence should

be enough to win the case, and he thought that accepting the shifting of the burden of proof would only legitimize it. In the second article, a court fight is just beginning between several states and the government over whether the Forest Service should be able to use Agent Orange.

Later that same summer on August 28, another domestic incident occurring in Missouri was reported. The article “Death of Animals Laid to Chemical” tells of the mysterious kidney-related illnesses of two girls and the death of many animals in Jefferson City. The deaths and illnesses were later attributed to a chemical containing dioxin that had been sprayed in the family’s barn to control dust.

A much awaited day finally arrives on December 16 when the Times reports in an article titled “Capping Chemical War” of President Ford’s plans to sign a treaty banning the use of Agent Orange and CS Gas in warfare, which Nixon had purposefully left out of his CBW treaties.

In July of 1976 disaster occurred in Seveso, Italy. A factory producing Agent Orange-like chemicals overheated and released a cloud of poisonous gas on to the surrounding areas. The first estimates, released in the article “20 More Evacuated From Area in Italy Hit by Poison”(July 29), said that about 4.5 pounds of dioxin was contained in the cloud. Animals on farms near the factory soon died, and children developed skin rashes. The article state clearly that “dioxin was implicated in numerous birth defects among Vietnamese children.” The use of the word implies a direct connection between dioxin and birth defects. The United States government has never made this connection. A later article published on August 3 titled “Poisonous Cloud’s Effects Still Baffle Italy’s Officials” and one from October 10 titled “Under the Poison Cloud” offer further physiological symptoms observed in Seveso resident and relates the shared concern about the long-term effects dioxin might have on the residents. About 10% of pregnant women from the area requested abortions after consultation with obstetricians about the risks of malformations. Two years later on June 25, 1978 the company that owned the factory announced in the appropriately titled article “Company Says ‘76 Blast in Italy Caused Little Injury.” The company decided that two years was long enough to determine if the dioxin released into the atmosphere had any long term negative effects on the population. It also announced that no deformities occurred in children born after the incident. The article does not take into account the women who decided to get abortions under the advisement of doctors. What did the doctors know about the women’s babies when they advised the mothers?

In March of 1979 2,4,5-T was finally banned- or was it? Dow immediately condemned the evidence used in the court case as “bad science” and “fallacious” in an article titled “Dow Condemns Ban on Herbicides”(March 10). A March 12 article titled “A Chemical in Balance”describes briefly the 10 year history of court challenges concerning the banning of 2,4,5-T. The article expresses a sense of frustration about the lack of a permanent ban despite evidence.

The articles “Two Crippled Lives Mirror Disputes on Herbicides” and “U.S., Despite Claims of Veterans, Says None are Herbicide Victims” published on May 27 and 28 respectively reflect a new issue that will color the treatment of Agent Orange in the 1980: the Veteran’s law suit. Both tell of victims with unexplainable symptoms and exposure to Agent Orange who think their diseases are related to that exposure, and the government’s unwillingness to admit that Agent Orange related illnesses even exist. The second article also briefly discusses the reports of stillbirths in Alsea, OR, the site of much spraying, as evidence that Agent Orange can have severe physiological consequences. This is another incidence of Agent Orange in America that ends with severe health problems. How can there still be doubt that dioxin in 2,4,5-T has the potential to do long-term damage, especially to children alive and unborn?

## **Conclusion**

Agent Orange articles in the 1980s will contain a lot of stories about the veterans’ lawsuits and their individual stories, more domestic Agent Orange-related health scares, and various new studies being done. The V.A. will emerge as a new character in the drama of Agent Orange, playing a role similar to those played by the government and government agencies. Further research should be done to follow up on the information reported in the New York Times newspaper articles. The chronology also might be re-organized and/or expanded for added depth and clarity. The complex issues of Agent Orange are difficult to fit into a straightforward diagram; there are just too many players and intricacies involved in the debate.

Will the Agent Orange controversy ever be completely resolved? In the next ten years, definitely not. As long as the victims still survive, Agent Orange cannot be forgotten. More lawsuits are emerging today in 2005. The ghosts of America’s poisonous past will continue to haunt the media and the courtrooms for years to come.

*5 January 2005*