

Chemical Warfare in Vietnam Called a Failure

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Two of the Nation's foremost biologists have charged that the United States is waging chemical warfare in Vietnam that is not only a tactical failure but may also be poisoning Vietnamese plant and animal life for years to come.

The two men charge in the current issue of *Scientist and Citizen* that spraying chemicals on rice crops believed to be in Vietcong hands has not caused suffering and starvation in Vietcong ranks. What it has done, the two men insist, is to trigger a shortage of food

for women, children, infirm and aged Vietnamese.

Dr. Arthur Galston, president of the Botanical Society of America and Dr. Jean Mayer, professor of nutrition at Harvard University, also write that the spraying of herbicides to defoliate the countryside has apparently failed to expose Vietcong trails and hide-ways. Instead, the two men claim, the spraying has resulted in widespread damage to fruit and rubber trees, spinach and bean crops.

The herbicides have also leaked into Vietnamese streams and rivers, Dr. Gal-

ston says, and "while they may not be directly toxic to fish they may prove toxic" by killing the microscopic animals fish feed on.

"There is not to our knowledge," writes Dr. Galston, "any data pertinent to the action of these herbicides on the soils of Vietnam," but the class of chemicals being used "take from two to 15 weeks to disappear after a single application and some of them may linger for more than a year."

The issue of *Scientist and Citizen* containing the charges has been in the works for almost a year, according to Dr. Barry Com-

moner, one of the journal's founders. It was planned, he said, after 12 physiologists wrote to President Johnson that the "massive use of chemical herbicides" could cause a "catastrophic upset" of the Vietnamese environment.

The entire issue is devoted to a discussion of chemical warfare (in Vietnam as well as in Yemen) and to the philosophical and political questions raised by such warfare.

Of particular concern to biologists, writes Dr. Galston, is the apparent escalation of the defoliation and

crop spraying program in Vietnam this year.

The spraying, dubbed "Operation Ranch Hand," began in 1961 with two C-123 transport planes flying a total of 60 sorties over Vietcong jungle posts. The next year, Dr. Galston says, 107 spraying missions were flown, and "included defoliation along canals and rivers in the heavily populated Mekong Delta and a mountain pass near Qui Nhon, the port city north of Saigon."

By January of last year, Dr. Galston says, U.S. planes sprayed 1,324,430 gallons of herbicides over more than

500,000 acres, and by the end of September had ruined 70,000 acres of rice-growing land and defoliated 1000 square miles of Vietnam—an area the size of Rhode Island.

This year, Dr. Galston says "plans were to spray 1.5 million acres, with as much as 500,000 acres being crop land"—about 5 per cent of South Vietnam's 8 million acres under cultivation.

So huge is the spraying operation in Vietnam now, Dr. Galston says that military demand for the herbicides used is four times what can be produced by U.S. chemical companies,

one of the largest being Dow Chemical Co.

The stated goal of the herbicide war, Dr. Galston says, has been "to clear jungle growth to reduce the hazard of ambush and to destroy food supplies in remote and thinly populated areas under Vietcong control."

More often than not, the defoliant actions have caused widespread damage to commercial crops and trees in friendly hands, Dr. Galston writes.

If the crop spraying has denied food to the Vietcong, writes Harvard's Dr. Jean Mayer, there is no evidence of it in Vietnam.

"The examination of past wars and famines makes it clear," says Dr. Mayer, "that the food shortage will strike first and hardest at children, the elderly and pregnant and lactating women; last and least at adult males and least of all at soldiers."

Evidence gleaned so far in Vietnam, writes Dr. Mayer,

indicates the Vietcong combat soldier is just as well fed as a South Vietnamese soldier, who weighs an average of 10 to 15 pounds more than his civilian counterpart. "Whether extra rations are enforced by an organized government structure or confiscated by armed bands of guerillas," he claims, "Viet Cong soldiers will get the fighter's share of whatever food there is."