



PHOTO COURTESY OF MATTHIAS LEUPOLD

Above, Do Thi Nga sits on the lap of her father, Do Duc Diu, next to her mother Pham Thi Nuc, who are featured in the documentary "Lighter Than Orange." Thi Nga's birth defects, and the premature deaths of her siblings, are believed to be caused by Agent Orange sprayed during the Vietnam War.

Top right, Vietnamese defoliant Agent Orange victims Nguyen Xuan Minh (L), 5, and Nguyen Thi Thuy Giang, 25, of Hanoi are seen at the Peace Village in Ho Chi Minh City. Brain-damaged babies and children with shortened limbs and other physical deformities are still being brought to hospitals for specialized care, four decades after the United States sprayed Vietnam with the highly toxic defoliant.

At right, 18-year-old Nguyen Thi Van Long, a Vietnamese Agent Orange victim, cuts a paper flower at the Friendship Village.



REUTERS/KHAM



REUTERS/STR NEW

## AGENT ORANGE, from page 5

victims out there. Many children are still dying from the consequences, so of course the central topic is to point out these defoliants," said Leupold.

Between 1961 and 1971, 19 million gallons of these defoliants — Agent Orange and other dioxin-based herbicides — were sprayed over the southern regions of Vietnam to kill the jungle's foliage to reveal the Vietnamese soldiers hiding below.

"We are talking about genetic damages that are passed on through generations, which means this affects all countries eventually," said Leupold.

The Institute of Medicine released a report in 2008 that stated, "It is considerably more plausible than previously believed that exposure to the herbicides sprayed in Vietnam might have caused paternally-mediated trans-generational effects." More recent reports do not expand on this finding, but the Insitute suggests that the effects of Agent Orange may be felt for generations to come.

Leupold believes his film will "open a door into this issue."

The film's interviews take place west of the Vietnam capital Hanoi, in Friendship Village, a housing and treatment facility for Vietnamese children and veterans who suffer from exposure to dioxin-based herbicides like Agent Orange. Many of the children are severely handicapped from birth defects passed on to them from a parent's exposure. Some of these children have lived in the village since its inception in 1998.

After returning from a trip he made with some of his students to Friendship Village, Leupold decided to make it the subject of his first film. "I thought of the old men sitting on the floor, on the steps, and I thought that someone ought to record their biographies," he said. "They are in their late 60s, some of them quite a bit over 70, and some of them, due to their being contaminated, if you will, are quite ill. I wanted to secure their history."

Both Do Thi Nga and another daughter of a Vietnamese veteran featured in "Lighter than Orange" will have difficulty surviving when their parents are no longer able to take care of them. All profits and donations raised by the film will go toward giving these two girls a more sustainable future. Leupold estimates he will need to raise about \$55,484 to accomplish this feat.

Portland resident Becky Luening has been involved with Friendship Village for 20 years, and today she sits on the organization's international board. Like Shea, Luening is also a member of Veterans for Peace and

took the lead in organizing the upcoming Full Disclosure Film Festival.

"It's very hard to be a disabled person in Vietnam," she said, explaining that not only is the country's infrastructure not handicapped friendly, but in addition, Vietnam is "further behind Western countries in recognizing that disabilities are not something to be ashamed of."

While the Vietnamese government provides benefits for its veterans suffering from Agent Orange-induced illnesses, it does not provide any assistance to their afflicted children.

Leupold said the focus of his next film will be a conference taking place in Germany next year under the title: "Toxic Legacies — Agent Orange as a Challenge." The goal of the conference, he says, is "to create a memorandum for a plan requiring several billion dollars on what can be done to really help people." He believes "Lighter Than Orange" gives decision-makers who will be in attendance arguments to convene.

"The way I see it, the entire subject of the Vietnam War is really an example of political failure, because we saw the world in a polarized way, in black and white, red and green. I think we have to get away from that kind of thinking and just look at what the tasks at hand are and how can we solve them. It's a matter of human life, but also of the environment — it's not only people who are important, but animals and plants too. And this conference could offer a way to start the process," said Leupold.

In the United States, the VA recognizes a number of birth defects in the children of female soldiers who fought in Vietnam, including cleft palate and congenital heart disease — two of the disorders that Shea's son Casey were born with — but spina bifida is the only birth effect it recognizes in the children of male soldiers. A House bill introduced by Rep. Barbara Lee (D-Calif.) last June would strike "woman" from the parental prerequisite so that any child of a Vietnam veteran affected with any of the recognized birth defects would receive benefits, regardless of whether the Vietnam veteran that parented them was a man or a woman.

Lee's bill, The Agent Orange Relief Act of 2013, also seeks to extend assistance to Vietnamese children suffering from Agent Orange related birth defects and to Vietnamese veterans living in the United States. The ambitious bill also proposes vocational employment training and assistance to repair and rebuild substandard

homes in Vietnam for affected individuals and their families.

In a statement to Street Roots about the status of her bill, congresswoman Lee said, "Despite the current political climate in Washington, I am working with my colleagues to build bipartisan support to pass this bill."

Sen. Richard Blumenthal (D-Conn.) introduced a bill last year to establish a center to treat, diagnose and research the health conditions of children, grandchildren and great grandchildren of veterans exposed to toxic substances, not only in Vietnam, but in all Armed Forces service.

To date, there is no hearing scheduled for neither Lee's nor Blumenthal's bill, which have both sat idly in committee review since last year.

Nationally, Veterans for Peace's Full Disclosure movement kicked off last month with an event in Manhattan. Organizers say the Full Disclosure campaign — intended to tell the other side of the war's legacy — will continue for the next 11 years, coinciding with the 13-year-long federal Vietnam commemoration project that was announced by President Barack Obama in 2012. This \$65 million federal project is overseen by the Department of Defense.

Members of Veterans for Peace say telling their stories and hosting events like the upcoming film festival is especially important now because it fills a void left by the federal project, the United States of America Vietnam Commemoration. This federal commemoration project, they say, is an attempt by the U.S. government to rewrite history by glorifying and mythologizing the war.

Some veterans and activists say that by excluding entire elements of the Vietnam War era — the anti-war movement and the veterans who joined it, rampant drug use among soldiers, the illnesses caused by the use of herbicides and other horrific costs of war — the federal commemoration project fails to tell a complete story. They say the result of this whitewashed, patriotic version is that many lessons learned might not get passed on to future generations.

## Agent Orange and Vietnam

■ The term Agent Orange actually refers to a collection of herbicides that were sprayed on the southern region of Vietnam between 1961 and 1971. The primary agents were:

Agent Orange: 13 million gallons  
Agent White: 4.5 million gallons  
Agent Blue: 1 million gallons  
Agent Purple: 420,000 gallons

■ Between 2.1 and 4.8 million Vietnamese people were exposed to Agent Orange and other herbicides sprayed by U.S. forces. According to statistics in Vietnam, more than 4 million are sick as a result of the dioxin in Agent Orange

Sources: 2012 Congressional Report on Vietnamese Victims of Agent Orange by Michael F. Martin Specialist in Asian Affairs | House Bill 2519 | "Lighter Than Orange" | Vietnam Veterans Against the War [www.vvaw.org](http://www.vvaw.org).

## Agent Orange Related Illnesses

U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs List of Diseases and Conditions Presumed to be Related to Service-Related Exposure to Agent Orange/ Dioxin

Chronic B-cell Leukemias  
Chloracne  
Non-Hodgkin's lymphoma  
Soft tissue sarcoma  
Ischemic Heart Disease  
Parkinson's Disease  
Early onset Peripheral Neuropathy  
Hodgkin's disease  
Porphyria cutanea tarda  
Multiple myeloma  
Respiratory cancers (including lung, larynx, trachea, and bronchus)  
Prostate cancer  
Type 2 diabetes  
Chronic lymphocytic leukemia  
Primary (AL) amyloidosis

See AGENT ORANGE, page 7