

# Agent Orange: Children Suffer Its Brutal Legacy

## VIETNAM VETS

Ricky Weidman

When I served as an Army medic in Vietnam, I often saw a 19-year-old soldier whose job was to spray an herbicide called Agent Orange on anything green inside my base. The same was true around the perimeter, to deny cover to any enemy intruders and to ensure a clear line of fire in case of enemy attack.

As I visited numerous American military bases in Vietnam during the war, they all looked like moonscapes. They were stripped of grass and foliage by the same

But what about the Vietnamese who were also exposed? And what about the leftover "hot spots" of dioxin that still exist there and continue to harm people to this very day?

The U.S. military shipped, stored, and sprayed millions of gallons of Agent Orange/dioxin over a quarter of the former South Vietnam, both for crop destruction and to deny cover to the enemy. In this country we know from our own

tional diseases as associated with Agent Orange/dioxin, thereby making veterans with those conditions eligible for compensation. In addition, women who served in Vietnam can receive compensation if their children are disabled with any of 14 birth anomalies. That's because Agent Orange/dioxin can cause DNA damage for generations.

The struggle is far from over. We have reason to believe that many additional adverse medical conditions in Vietnam veterans of both sexes also are caused by these exposures, including possible genetic problems in grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

Meanwhile, in Vietnam, Agent Orange/dioxin damage also lingers. While we have made some progress for Americans harmed by these exposures, our friends in Vietnam have a long way to go to match our modest gains. The Vietnamese Red Cross estimates that 3 million people, including more than 150,000 of today's children, are disabled because of the chemical. Former airbases like Da Nang contain dangerous toxic hot spots where Agent Orange was stored and handled and spilled into the ground. Dioxin is hard to break

up in the soil and it lasts in human body tissue for years.

Unlike the United States government, the Vietnamese recognized that Agent Orange/dioxin might

assistance to the Vietnamese disabled population, including those second- and third-generation children affected by the chemical.

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chemical for the same reasons.

Now, more than 40 years after the war, we know that Agent Orange contained dioxin, which is among the world's most lethal toxins. American veterans of Vietnam fought a long, hard postwar struggle to get our Veterans Administration to compensate troops for a dozen diseases associated with Agent Orange/dioxin.

experiences with dioxin at Love Canal and Times Beach that these toxic hot spots can cause death and disease to those who come in contact with the chemical. The diseases range from spina bifida to Parkinson's and certain forms of cancer.

However, the political battle still rages in Washington. VA Secretary Shinseki has classified three addi-

cause chromosomal damage in the second and third generations of original victims. My own experience is that families of American veterans also suffer. But the VA recognizes no health consequences from Agent Orange/dioxin in disabled daughters and sons of male veterans who served in Vietnam.

It's time to put this legacy of the war in Vietnam to rest once and for all. A blue-ribbon commission of prominent Americans and Vietnamese has called for a 10-year, \$300 million cleanup of Agent Orange/dioxin in Vietnam. The resources would eliminate the hot spots, restore damaged ecosystems and provide humanitarian

year for 10 years, from government, foundation and private sources, is a small price to pay to help remedy the damage caused.

This is a humanitarian concern we can do something about. Recent progress in methods of treating contaminated soils and helping Vietnam's disabled population shows that America is at its best when it steps up to heal past wounds.

If we make progress on nothing else regarding the ravages of Agent Orange and other toxic substances used in Vietnam, we must properly care for our future generations — on both sides of the Pacific.

## 'Play Ball!' — Curt Flood, Marvin Miller and Baseball Today

With the beginning of the baseball season I am always drawn back to the memory of African American St. Louis Cardinals player Curt Flood. Flood defied the baseball ruling establishment and led a court challenge to the "reserve clause," a mechanism that held most players in perpetual bondage to their teams. Though Flood lost the lawsuit at the Supreme Court, with the support of the Major League Baseball Players Association he set in motion the steps that would eventually result in the end of the reserve clause and the creation of "free agency." Having led such an important attack on an unjust system, what remains amazing is that he has been all but forgotten by most



TRANS AFRICA

Bill Fletcher Jr.

Flood his due and instead players are allowed to think that the fantastic salaries that they are able to earn are the result of their athletic prowess rather than a struggle led by one outstanding centerfielder and a union called the Major League Baseball Players Association (led at the time by Marvin Miller). Forgetting Flood means forgetting

lunge the system. Flood's failure in court ultimately led to his leaving his great love, baseball. Yet only a few years later the Player's Association was able to utilize the terrible publicity that the owners received in the midst of the Flood

court case in order to crack the wall of the reserve clause. As I have been saying every year around this time, "...so, when will Curt Flood and Marvin Miller go into the Baseball Hall of Fame for their contributions to baseball?"

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contemporary sports enthusiasts and even athletes. At his funeral, in 1997, contemporary players were absent, according to Brad Snyder, author of the must-read *A Well-Paid Slave* which details Flood's struggle against the reserve clause and the system. Today's Major League baseball players seem to have little knowledge of Flood's contributions, a problem that I would lay at the doorstep of the Player's Association for not having a new member education program that highlights the significance of this struggle for today's baseball player.

Yet, it is not just baseball. None of the major sports has given

that the owners of Major League baseball were never generous individuals looking out for the well-being of the players. For the most part, they were shrewd and greedy businesspeople who were and are looking for the big dollar. The reserve clause, like any form of indentured servitude, provided the owners with the power to hold onto their best players and eliminate the chance that the player could get a better deal with a separate team. The result? Simply that the owners, for years, kept making more and more and the players were stuck. This changed when Flood and the Player's Association were both prepared to take an immense risk and chal-

## Week on the Web

**Illmaculate and G\_Force** have released a complete hip hop rework of Al Green's 2008 comeback album "Lay It Down" ... in "Music Reviews"

**Adult Swim Channel** will be producing an animated show inspired by the critically acclaimed blaxploitation spoof "Black Dynamite" ... in "Movie Reviews"



Authorities have detained ousted Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak and his sons for crimes committed during his authoritarian regime ... in "Breaking News"

The FBI has released the case file for the murder of rapper Biggie Smalls ... in "Breaking News"

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