Agent Orange- A Fatal Mistake Essay, Research Paper

AGENT ORANGE- A FATAL MISTAKE

The Vietnam War was a major war in American history. It was a totally different war, with new tactics and technology. One example of this was the use of a chemical substance with the code name of Agent Orange, named after the orange tanks they were stored in. This liquid was sprayed on the dense Vietnamese forests by means of aircrafts and helicopters, and its objective was to kill the trees and shrubberies in which the “enemy” hid in (Agent Orange- Overview and Introduction).

But the use of this deadly material was a mistake, and unfortunately, the Americans recognized this only years after the war. Agent Orange was the cause the eradication of the rich Vietnamese forests and farmlands, which led to starvation of many of its people. It also had serious side effects on the villagers and soldiers who fought there. And despite all these horrible consequences, Agent Orange was still labeled as “useless” and “pointless”, for the VietCong, “the enemy”, still held advantage over the young and inexperienced American soldiers.

Agent Orange was developed in the 1940’s, but the actual usage of the product only began in the 1960’s. It was a 50-50 mixture of two powerful chemicals- 2,4,D and 2,4,5,T. It was proved to be effective especially “against broad-leaf foliage, such as the dense jungle-like terrain found in Southeast Asia [including Vietnam]” (Agent Orange- Overview and Introduction).

Imagining 18 million gallons of this deadly substance being concentrated in an area of 3.6 million acres can only lead to the feeling of abuse and aggression. Besides killing forests, it also darkened the waters of some areas, one of them being the Mekong Delta, where the US held navy patrol boats (Brooks, Clark). This violent act was an aggression to nature, and showed what a country could do to win a war.

The destruction of the forests and farmlands led to something even worse. Agent Orange was the cause of starvation and death among the Vietnamese. Crops, such as rice, which the Vietnamese heavily depended on, were all killed. Agent Orange’s effect over the farmland remained for many years, making the farmland unfertile and not suitable for farming (Agent Orange Survey).

But the worst result of the use of Agent Orange was over the people themselves. Not only simple villagers, but American soldiers themselves suffered serious side effects and many of them led to death.

Besides the 50-50 mix of the two chemicals, Agent Orange also contained a highly toxic substance called dioxin, now known to cause some cancers

(Brooks, Clark). Many other diseases are believed to be associated with Agent Orange exposure.

One common disease is Chloracne, linked to dioxin exposure. It results in acne-like eruptions in the skin that last for about 26 years, maybe even more. Another example of this type of disease is Porphyria Cutanea Tarda (PCT), which also show the development of crusts and scrabs, followed by scars. Skin conditions are one of the most common health problems reported by Vietnam veterans

(Agent Orange- Overview and Introduction).

Other diseases are chronic, and are often related to cancer. Some examples are Hodgkin’s disease, Non-Hodgkin’s Lymphoma, respiratory cancers, prostate cancer and Multiple Myeloma (Agent Orange- Overview and Introduction).

The problem is that the government does not want to admit the relationship of any of these diseases to the widespread use of Agent Orange during the war. Although many studies have been launched sine 1979 (when over 500 Vietnam veterans claimed Agent Orange had caused many of these diseases) all of these studies are biased. For example, in the famous Ranch Hand I and Ranch Hand II Studies, the government excluded ground troops. All the females who served in Vietnam were also excluded- this time from a birth defects study. The US government is trying to do everything to deny the people’s accusations, although the 2.9 million veterans that have actually been exposed to the war, the substance and the diseases, claim otherwise (Agent Orange Survey).

Despite all these horrible effects-deaths, diseases and starvation- Agent Orange was also useless. The VietCong, “the enemy”, would still have advantage over the Americans in the war. Firstly, the American soldiers were very young and inexperienced. Secondly, the Vietnamese knew their land better than the Americans, who were stepping on foreign and unknown territory. And last, the VietCong knew about better military techniques, that did not require the use of complex technology and tactics. They were skilled at setting up old tricks such as booby traps, which got Americans as effectively as their heavy weapons (Agent Orange and Related Issues).

Although the government doesn’t want to admit it, the people know that the use of Agent Orange during the Vietnam War was a fatal mistake. Besides destroying forests and farmlands, it also destroyed crops and starved many Vietnamese to death. Agent Orange has also caused many diseases and disastrous side effects on the Vietnamese and the American soldiers. This should serve as an example to prevent future disasters and to teach human beings about how precious life really is.

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