Agent Orange Essay, Research Paper

Agent Orange

Agent Orange is a plant killer, which was used during the Vietnam War to destroy the massive amount of trees (Nguyen, 1). The destruction that occurred, however, is far more extensive than once believed. Complications in health occur much more frequently to those exposed to the chemical than those who managed to avoid contact (Nguyen, 2). The use of Agent Orange in the Vietnam War affected the American soldier s health and genetics.

Agent Orange is a 50:50 mixture of two major compounds, 2,4-dichlorophenoxy acetic acid and 2,4,5-trichlorophenoxy acetic acid (Nguyen, 2). This defoliant also contains dioxin, which is one of the most lethal compounds known to man (Nguyen, 2). Ironically, the dioxin, which makes Agent Orange lethal to humans, isn t intended to kill plants at all (Vancil, 1). It is extremely hard to prove, however, that dioxin is responsible for the countless illnesses acquired by many Vietnam veterans because each individual has their own tolerance to dioxin (Vancil, 1).

Many soldiers in the Vietnam War encountered Agent Orange repeatedly. Their lives revolved around the 55-gallon drums, which once were filled with an extremely harmful herbicide. Unaware of the possible consequences, many soldiers built showers and hibachis out of these discarded drums (Doyle, 139). They also used the barren drums to store potatoes and watermelons (Doyle, 139). One man described to his wife how they would bathe and swim in water contaminated with Agent Orange because their superior said it was safe (Brooks, 2). After the LZ was sprayed, we walked around the perimeter, strung barbed wire all around it, and this stuff [Agent Orange] was blowing all over the place. Most of us drank out of bomb craters, showered in bomb craters and all that water was polluted with Agent Orange, a First Air Cavalry veteran recalled (Doyle, 139). Agent Orange played a very key role in the lives of the American soldier.

Complications in veterans health occur much more frequently to those exposed to Agent Orange than those who managed to avoid contact. A platoon in Vietnam was heavily sprayed by the herbicide. Five of the 20 members suffered from dioxin poisoning which is 500% above the national average for this disorder (Vancil, 1). In 1978, 41 Vietnam veterans were suffering from the exposure of Agent Orange. They linked this illness to Agent Orange because they all had very similar backgrounds with the herbicide. The effects brought about from this exposure were diminished sex drives, psychological problems, numbness, and skin rashes (Buckingham, 7). Veterans also have a lower sperm count (Nguyen, 3) and have a 50% higher rate of non-Hodgkin s Lymphoma than veterans that didn t serve in Vietnam (Nguyen, 2). A study of 1,200 Ranch Hand veterans, whom have had the most exposure to herbicides, has concluded there is evidence which links Agent Orange with soft-tissue sarcoma, Hodgkin s disease, and chloracne (Buckingham, 8). The effects of Agent Orange have done a great deal of damage to the health of the American soldier.

The children of the veterans show greater signs of disability however. The veterans offspring are more prone to birth defects pertaining to the skin, nervous system, heart, kidneys, and oral clefts (Nguyen, 3). It is not uncommon for infants to be born without legs, arms, shoulders, and even ears in Vietnam (Nguyen, 3). My hands hurt. The skin falls off when it s touched, says Thoa, a 13 year old who suffers from a war, which ended almost 20 years before her birth ( Agent Orange blamed for child defects, 1). Thoa is just one of the 300,000 children worldwide who are victims of chemical warfare ( Agent Orange blamed for child defects, 1). Sudden Infant Death Syndrome is four times more likely in children born of Vietnam veterans (Nguyen, 3). Tu Du Obstetrical and Gynecological Hospital has been the site of at least five Siamese twins born every year since 1975 (Nguyen, 3). These facts point very much toward Agent Orange as the cause for such illnesses.

The use of Agent Orange in the Vietnam War provided an advantage to the militaristic point of view. After all is said and done, however, it becomes clear that the use of Agent Orange merely to defoliate the jungles of Southern Vietnam caused more harm than good fortune. It has affected the American soldier and people throughout the world very greatly. Hundreds of thousands of lives have changed dramatically due to the use of Agent Orange.

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