Annotated Bibliography

Primary Sources:


This journal article gives early insight into the developing class action lawsuit against Agent Orange manufacturers. Many statistics provided in this short report establish the early stages of the trial in 1980 as well as the motivations behind the veterans preparing for the impending legal battle against the implicated chemical companies.


This image of a spraying plane (property of the United States Air Force) demonstrates the close proximity at which the herbicide Agent Orange was sprayed as a defoliant for the Vietnamese jungles. The thick undergrowth in the image completely obstructs the pilot from viewing what lay beneath the trees suggesting that although the jungles may have hidden insurgents of the Viet Cong, it may also have been residencies of local Vietnamese farmers. Furthermore, the image displays the haphazardness of the toxic fumes, which appear to be engulfing the plane. Undoubtedly, the pilot was directly exposed to the herbicide, which explains the large number of Vietnam Operation Ranch Hand veterans that eventually became sick due to the repercussions of their exposure.


This report on effects of herbicides on trees in South Vietnam is a part of the Congress authorized study conducted in 1974 by the National Academy of Sciences (NAS). This lengthy report touches on the methods and calculations the research utilized to reach its shaky conclusions. The report not only provided me with numerous useful statistics and images, but also gave me an idea through the use of such visuals of the appalling sources and data the expert panels had to work with in 1974. Blurry images undoubtedly resulted in incorrect or inconclusive findings.


This article lays out the foundations of the political atmosphere around the beginning of the lawsuit instigated by Paul M. Reutershan. It helped me immensely in establishing the context of the times around the beginnings of the trial.
This article is one of many that spread the cause that Veterans were taking against the government regarding Agent Orange. The article also offers insight to what exactly veterans were seeking from the government in their class action lawsuit against the manufacturers of Agent Orange.


This article reports on the major setbacks the Center for Disease Control (CDC) faced due to the lack of reliable military data regarding Agent Orange related studies. Also, the article highlights the notable length of time that has passed between the start of the sprayings in 1961 and the authorization of the studies in the mid 80s.


This document released by the United States Air Force entails the entirety of Operation Ranch Hand from its shaky beginnings in 1961 to its quick demise in 1971. The author provides incredibly detailed documentation of the interactions between policy makers regarding the start of the defoliation program as well as the studies and researches that accompanied it. Overall, it appears that while risks and negative effects of aerial spraying were identified, the ‘benefits’ outweighed the detriments of the programs and they were allowed to continue until 1971. Routine annual reports studying the possible effects, positive and negative, of the sprayings were conducted by U.S. government entities indicating that government and military officials were definitely aware of the possible harms that Agent Orange eventually brought.


This report is part of a series of studies authorized by Congress conducted by the National Academy of Sciences (NAS) in regard to the effects of herbicides sprayed by the American military during the Vietnam War. This particular report investigates the problems attributed to determining the number of indigenous Highlanders that were likely to have been affected by the use of such herbicides in South Vietnam. Research suggests that the number of affected Highlanders is, proportionately speaking, greater than that of ethnic Vietnamese. While I have narrowed much of my research to focus on events occurring in America during the hype of the Vietnam War, this document is still crucial to my research as it continues to help establish the significant errors that existed in the plethora of NAS reports published at the time.

An extremely early outlook on the arising prevalence of Agent Orange, this short article highlights the author’s defense of the use of the chemical agent in Vietnam. Chamlin responds to anti-chemical defoliant comments made in 1970 by justifying its use in saving the lives of American soldiers. He deems the loss of the environment a necessary sacrifice that must be made.


This source is a letter from the U.S. General Accounting Office Community and Economic Development Division Director reporting on the findings and implications of the U.S. Department of Defense’s involvement in Agent Orange to a congressman in the House of Representatives. The letter included enclosures of most government-aided studies that had been conducted at the time in 1978, giving me perspective on the government’s take on the findings published. Speaking for the government, the Director stated the government’s point of view regarding their involvement in the issue, which was that no causal link could be established between exposure to Agent Orange and adverse health effects.


Instead of using the sprayings and activities that occurred in Vietnam, I will be focusing on the 1980’s struggle for Agent Orange recognition and reparation as my “actual event” for my essay. This article has proved that the legal battle fought by the veterans is no less arduous than the physical and mental war they waged back in Vietnam. This source, my first primary newspaper article, has led me to a wide array of other news clippings pertaining to the prominent debate of Agent Orange in the eighties.


This article narrates and justifies the rising anger from Vietnam veterans toward the Veterans Administration (VA) and the American government regarding their inaction in light of the increased cases of Agent Orange side effects. The VA was documented as to have said that this phenomenon was merely a result of dissatisfied veterans who cannot be pleased. Although there was, at the time, insufficient evidence to prove the direct causal link between Agent Orange and experienced side effects, by 1979, thousands of veterans had already rallied together to submit their class-action lawsuit against the manufacturers of the deadly chemical agent.
This article reminisces the deceased Paul M. Reutershan, a helicopter pilot, whose battle with abdominal cancer—a presuming side effect of Agent Orange exposure—sparked the eventual class-action lawsuit against the manufacturers of the chemical agent. This article introduced me to the significant role Reutershan played before his death in instigating and rallying support from fellow veterans to approach lawyer Victor Yannacone to start the largest class-action lawsuit in the history of the United States.


This article highlights the inconclusiveness of the eventual litigation settlement reached by the veteran plaintiffs and the Agent Orange manufacturers. The article significantly highlights the moral obligation the U.S. government has to the Vietnam veterans, particularly those exposed to the herbicide; however, the article also contends that the government would be unlikely to show mercy toward the afflicted as they are protected by federal doctrines from being sued by military servicemen.


This article reports on the later statements of the U.S. Air Force stating that the findings of its earlier studies on Vietnam Air Force veterans are inconclusive and flawed. The initial reports assured veterans that they should not be excessively concerned about negative health effects emerging due to their exposure to Agent Orange; however, their newer statements expressed that side effects could not be ruled out.


This article draws attention to the stalled 1979-Congress authorized health study to be conducted by the CDC on the adverse health effects of Agent Orange. The author conveys that while the government has promised much, very little has been delivered. With no aid in sight, state houses extend a helping hand toward ailing veterans in health studies with the state of New Jersey personally conducting health research on 150 in-state Vietnam veterans.


Nearly a year after the prior New York Times article written in May of 1985, the efforts to seek a final resolution to the matter of herbicide spraying have fallen apart. The article cites the difficulties of classification, and how Congress was a major obstacle in allowing any advances to
be made in conducted research. Once again, such obstructive actions demonstrate unwillingness on part of the United States government in responding to and taking responsibility for the sprayings of Agent Orange in Vietnam. The article provides insight into the turbulent times for those involved (Veterans and Congressional Experts) in affairs relating to Agent Orange during the 1980’s.


This article provides a detailed synopsis of the entire Agent Orange litigation process leading up to 1984. Many first-hand quotes from major participants from both the plaintiffs and the defendants provide an excellent outlook into the major arguments of each side. This article contains great depth and insight to the inner workings of the trial, aiding me exponentially in establishing the necessary connections amidst the craze of the Agent Orange litigation process.


This article provides an excellent premise to the impending class action Agent Orange lawsuit at the time. The author explicitly cites the various details that contributed to the specific progressions of the legal suit in 1984. There are many quotes and excerpts that helped me gain a historical perspective regarding the lawsuit of Agent Orange.


News of breakthroughs in the New Jersey state-sponsored Agent Orange studies reverberate throughout the U.S. However, government officials continue to claim that the paucity of evidence linking the reported side effects to Agent Orange exposure are still too significant to ignore. Thus, numerous veterans are still barred from receiving illness benefits. The article provides an extremely germane quote giving insight to the development of the entire struggle against the pernicious chemical agent.


This journal article, written early on in 1974, hints at the impending lawsuits and turmoil that would embroil the Vietnam veterans of the United States. While the article does not make any conclusions about the effect of Agent Orange on humans and birth defects, the article definitely highlights the detriments the herbicide brought to the vegetation of Vietnam. The article provided me with important statistics regarding the missions of Operation Ranch Hand.
Supreme Court of United States, 1950. "FERES, EXECUTRIX, v. UNITED STATES."

The *Feres* doctrine provides the legal basis upon which the United States government is able to wield ‘sovereign immunity’ against class-action lawsuits from American servicemen. The doctrine dictates that the United States Government cannot be held responsible under the Federal Tort Claims Act for any injury to service members while on active duty. This doctrine serves as the principle reason why the Agent Orange class-action lawsuit was filed against the manufacturing companies of the chemical and the actual user of the chemical agent, the United States Government.


Public Law 102-4 signed into legislature by George H.W. Bush in 1991 gave the Department of Veterans Affairs the authority to research and declare certain conditions health effects of exposure to Agent Orange making exposed veterans eligible to receive treatment and compensation. The law also required the National Academy of Sciences to regularly review studies on dioxin and herbicides in hopes of establishing more evidence between exposure to Agent Orange and experienced conditions.


This published paper from an advisor on the actual panel assembled to assess the herbicide spraying in Vietnam offers insight regarding the initial studies and research that was conducted in 1974 by the National Academy of Sciences. Though authorized by the government to determine the toxicity and the effects of Agent Orange, the appointed panel faced numerous difficulties, which Thomas highlights frequently. While I was aware that there were obstacles facing the research, Thomas clearly lists them out, emphasizing their impact on the results of the study itself. Consequently, it is likely due to the aforementioned difficulties that later researchers now generally consider the 1974 studies made by the Academy to be faulty.


The transcript of the interview provided in this article paints a vivid picture of an American family torn apart by the repercussions of Agent Orange. Admiral Zumwalt 3rd played a key role in authorizing the use of Agent Orange to defoliate Vietnamese flora as a means to stop guerilla warfare waged by the Viet Cong. There are numerous quotations that can be taken from this source that will provide evidence substantiating the pain caused by the harmful herbicide. These quotations also give first-hand accounts of a U.S. Admiral fully acknowledging the hazards of the chemical agent sprayed by his military during the Vietnam War, unlike many officials who continue to deny Agent Orange’s damage to human health.
Secondary Sources:


This article presents first-hand information regarding the logistics and statistics of herbicide sprayings throughout the duration of Operation Ranch Hand. The author, a retired colonel of the U.S. Air Force, re-examines the extent of exposure soldiers, particularly those piloting the spraying aircrafts, experienced in South Vietnam. This source is valuable as it provides a credible source to which I am able to make comparisons with statistics gathered through research.


Prior to studying this newspaper article, I was not completely aware of the public avoidance of Vietnam War issues during the late 70’s and early to mid-80’s among the American public. The article has significantly improved my understanding of the re-emergence of Vietnam related topics into American media at the time through the arts of films, paintings, literature, and the like. This information will aid me in establishing the context for my ultimate project. This newspaper article has been cited as a secondary source since it is more of a social commentary on a cultural phenomenon, and the author spends time attempting to explain the changes that were occurring at the time.


Every detail of the failed class-action lawsuit against the manufacturers of Agent Orange is documented in *Agent Orange on Trial: Mass Toxic Disasters in the Courts*, and Marcus provides a thorough analysis of the claims regarding large tort cases made by Peter H. Schuck. This document was extremely helpful in providing a specific, chronological map of the process of the failed trial from its initiation to its eventual settlement.


Although published in 1979, this extensive report on the legal repercussions of class-action Agent Orange lawsuits examines the aspects of the lawsuit, both from the plaintiff’s and the defendant’s points of view, in incredible detail. The arguments of the veterans and their representatives as well as those of the implicated chemical companies are clearly discussed by the law review. It was an excellent source for me to consult for the overall picture of the lawsuit and certain specific details.

This lecture provided me with the necessary premise of the Vietnam War, which lead to the ultimate aerial spraying campaign of the United States Military. This lecture is extremely important in helping me establish the context of the conflict in Vietnam.


This article objectively investigates the reasons why the United States of America continues to hide from its responsibilities of compensation and reparations for the repercussions of the war in Vietnam during the 1970s. By offering a background as a preamble to his assertion, Palmer primarily builds his case through careful notation of the plethora of reasons the U.S. offers in defense of its continued inaction regarding the use of the dioxin-containing Agent Orange herbicide as a means of defoliation during the war. In his thesis, Palmer establishes the reluctance of the U.S. Congress as well as the general public in acknowledging the actions of the U.S. military in Vietnam. This 15-page article was a great introductory contribution to my study of the history of Agent Orange during that era. The historical background provided presented me with a platform upon which further research can be built. The assertion of the article can also be taken into account during the analysis of later sources. The most helpful aspects of Palmer’s writing were the notes and reference cited given at the end of his piece, which will ultimately provide new paths of research with different insights and further investigations.


This paper from the *American Journal of Public Health* explores the effects of Agent Orange on the Vietnamese people through two studies conducted between a span of around 14 years. Human blood samples, milk, and adipose tissue were collected from willing participating locals, analyzed, and the results revealed the appalling truth of just how great the impact of the herbicide was. To date, rural Vietnamese people are still contaminated with high amounts of Agent Orange in their bodies. The environment of much of Southern Vietnam also shows heavy signs of adulteration. Schecter and a wide array of Vietnamese counterparts reveal a darker side of the issue—the effect of the herbicide on the Vietnamese themselves—that has generally been overshadowed by the lawsuits of and the pursuits for justice by American veterans.


The above article was found as the main source of reference for a previous source relative to the topic. The article focuses heavily on the components, uses, and abuses of the “Rainbow Herbicides” heavily utilized by the American military during the 1960’s and early 1970’s in war-
torn South East Asia. The authors emphasize many errors that can be found in early National Academy of Science reports that were published on the issue. These errors occurred likely due to recording miscalculations, reflecting badly on the significance Congress and the American public believed that these issues held for the U.S. The visual graphs, tables, and charts offered by the article are extremely helpful in presenting physical representations of the unimaginable numbers related to the spraying of dioxin-possessing chemical agents.


This article (published by the same authors of the first article I ever examined on the issue of Agent Orange) presents a conceptual framework through which information can be examined to determine the levels of exposure individuals experienced in Vietnam – civilians and soldiers alike. The authors include a plethora of visual aids such as graphs and tables to illustrate their findings. The article will aid me in quantifying the actual levels of exposure Vietnam veterans experienced during their tours in the region.


The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs provides this concise but detailed summary on the outcome of the 1985 class-action lawsuit against the manufacturers of Agent Orange. A brief history of the lawsuit and the resulting settlement fund is provided. I discovered that the fund was officially closed—its assets having been completely distributed—in September, 1997.


The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs provides this list of possible effects (with further links) of exposure to Agent Orange on its website. This long list consists of 14 overall known diseases associated to dioxin exposure not including more specific diagnoses within the umbrella afflictions presented. The identified birth defects in children of Vietnam veterans are also not included in the list. The list gave me insight on just how many diseases could be attributed to the dioxin exposure brought on by Agent Orange.