

## Preface

For almost four decades, controversy has surrounded the tactical use of herbicides in Southeast Asia by the United States military. Few environmental or occupational health issues have received the sustained international attention that has been focused on Agent Orange, the major tactical herbicide deployed in Southern Vietnam. With the opening and establishment of normal relations between the United States and the Socialist Republic of Vietnam in 1995, the time has come for a thorough re-examination of the military use of Agent Orange and other “tactical herbicides” in Southern Vietnam, and the subsequent actions that have been taking place since their use in Vietnam.

The United States Department of Defense has had the major role in all military operations involving the use of tactical herbicides, including that of Agent Orange. This included the Department’s purchase, shipment and tactical use of herbicides in Vietnam, its role in the disposition of Agent Orange after Vietnam, its role in conducting long-term epidemiological investigations of the men of Operation RANCH HAND, and its sponsorship of ecological and environmental fate studies. This book was commissioned by The Office of the Deputy Under Secretary of Defense (Installations and Environment) with the intent of providing documentation of the knowledge on the history, use, disposition and environmental fate of Agent Orange and its associated dioxin.

A large body of historical records and other data exist on the use of Agent Orange in Vietnam. Many of these primary historical records are now openly available, and they permit a comprehensive assessment of the procedures and supporting historical data related to spraying of herbicides in Vietnam. An extensive collection of environmental data has been assembled on Agent Orange and its associated dioxin. These data provide insight into the mechanisms of dissipation and degradation as they relate to the distribution and bioavailability of the herbicides and dioxin in the environment, i.e., issues related to human exposure. Procurement records from the United States Air Force and Defense Supply Agency, complemented by records from the Chemical Companies that produced the tactical herbicides, and from the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, permit new estimates on both the quantities of tactical herbicides sprayed in Vietnam and on the level of dioxin in those inventories. Lastly, workshops between the United States Department of

Defense and Vietnam's Ministry of National Defence have opened a dialogue on how the two governments can work together to resolve the remaining controversy over Agent Orange and "dioxin hot spots" in Southern Vietnam.

It is hoped that the history and science described in this book can correct many of the misperceptions about the use of tactical herbicides in Vietnam. In particular the science of the degradation of the herbicides and its associated dioxin and historical records, have not yet received the recognition in the debates of the issues that they should. It is my hope that this discussion and this book will make a positive contribution to society's effort to put the Vietnam War behind us and to look to the future relationships between both countries and their peoples.

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