

VIETNAM LAOS CAMBODIA



MEDICAL & SCIENTIFIC AID NEWS BULLETIN

www.msavlc.org

No. 189 – February 2017

Registered Charity No 252906

VIETNAM'S TOXIC LEGACY

In late October last year, Channel Four gave some much-needed publicity to Vietnam's Agent Orange victims. It was part of the 'Unreported World' series, where Channel 4 correspondents around the world give a twenty-minute insight into subjects which have been largely ignored by the world's media.

Reporter Ade Adepitan investigated the legacy of Agent Orange, the toxic herbicide dropped by US forces during the Vietnam War. He recounted how, in an attempt at deforestation, the American forces sprayed the Vietnamese countryside with 80 million litres of toxic chemicals, mostly Agent Orange. It contained nearly 400 kilograms of dioxin, the most lethal substance known to man. Whilst the vegetation in the sprayed areas died almost immediately, many of the soldiers and people living in the forests were also affected. Vietnamese doctors believe Agent Orange is causing life-threatening health problems in a new generation of children.

Adepitan, who is disabled himself, met with Doctor Nguyen Thi Ngoc Phuong former director of Tu Du Maternity Hospital in Ho Chi Minh City. Dr Phuong campaigns tirelessly to demonstrate the connection between Agent Orange and children born with deformities. She and many scientists believe the dioxin exposure leads to genetic mutations. She told Adepitan that her research showed that birth defects in Agent Orange sprayed areas were three or more times higher than



other places.

Doctors are also worried about the fact that there are still areas heavily contaminated with dioxin. Without admitting liability for the effects of Agent Orange, the United States government has recently donated 50 million dollars in aid to help clean up Agent Orange hotspots, in conjunction with the Vietnamese Government. But scientific knowledge of the effects of Agent Orange is still limited. As Adepitan concluded, more than 50 years after Agent Orange was first sprayed in Vietnam, no one is going to accept blame for what happened in that dreadful war. As in other countries around the world, the United States Government will not accept responsibility for the damage caused to people by its actions.

Dr Phuong showed Adepitan around The Hoa Binh Peace Village where some of the most disabled children live. MSAVLC has had a long association with the Peace Village and the Trustees have visited it many times. The charity has bought many items of equipment for the children, including specialist wheelchairs, bathing aids, tables, an ultrasonic therapy machine and other medical equipment.

The pictures of some of the children in the village were quite distressing, and we caught a glimpse of Khanh, the 16-year-old girl whom we have met a number of times there. She is blind and deaf and her head is so swollen due to hydrocephalus that she is unable to lift it from her pillow. Dr Phuong and her colleagues were kind and caring to her and the other children, as



Left: Paralympic swimmer Loi with Channel Four reporter Ade Adepitan at Hoa Binh Peace Village.

the Trustees have always witnessed on their visits to the village.

Adepitan had also travelled to the hospital in Da Nang where he met a poor lad called Diep, who was suffering from heart failure. His father had been affected by Agent Orange during the war, but as there was no proof that Diep's condition was caused directly by the chemical, the family had little help. Sadly Diep, who was obviously in great pain, died a week after the filming.

Perhaps the most heartening part of the 20-minute film was the interview with Loi, a teenage resident of Hoa Binh Peace Village. His parents had been unable to look after him and they took him to live in the Peace Village when he was four. He has stunted legs and only one arm, and yet he has earned medals for paralympic swimming, and he hopes to represent Vietnam in the Tokyo Olympics in 2020. When asked about his family, he said he felt like a big brother to the younger children in the Peace Village, and he wanted to inspire them to enjoy life

despite their disabilities. "I'm having a good life, I'm happy", he confessed.

For viewers who were not aware of the dreadful deformities caused by Agent

Orange, the film may have been quite shocking. I remember how shocked and angry I was when I first visited. However, readers will be pleased to know that over the past twenty years MSAVLC has sent many thousands of pounds to purchase equipment at Hoa Binh and other Peace Villages in Vietnam.

Sadly, it is the Agent Orange victims who are living at home, with little support, apart from their families, who are often the most pitiful. MSAVLC works with VAVA, the Vietnam Association for Victims of Agent Orange who try to support those who live at home. VAVA provide support, food and medical equipment including wheelchairs to victims, who without them, would never be able to leave their homes.

On our last visit to Hanoi we went to see some of the victims who had received wheelchairs donated by MSAVLC. We met Mr Quy, shown in the photograph, and his family. Our interpreter told us that Mr Quy was delighted to receive his wheelchair, as it meant that he could at last go into his village to meet his friends, and visit the pagoda. He was cared for by his aging parents and he was unable to speak. But he seemed to enjoy our visit, and he smiled a lot.

*Peter Lidgard
Chairman*



Mary Lidgard (Honorary Secretary) with Mr Quy

The Unreported World programme "Vietnam's Toxic Legacy" is still available on Channel Four's 'On Demand' service.

A21 - Walk For Freedom



On Saturday 15th October, 2016, some Trustees and supporters of MSAVLC were proud to support A21 on a 'Walk for Freedom' through the streets of Cheltenham.

A21 is an organisation which works to raise awareness, and to fight against human trafficking, sexual exploitation and forced slave labour. Walks were organised in 250 locations in 40 countries around the world.

A21 estimates that 27 million men, women and children are being held as slaves today, and that another person becomes a victim every 30 seconds. The money raised from the walks will be used to help the prevention of human trafficking by education and awareness, protection of survivors through restoration programmes, and prosecution of

traffickers.

In Cambodia, MSAVLC works to help victims of sexual exploitation by financially supporting the work of 'Daughters of Cambodia'. They help young women and men escape the horrors of sex-trafficking and start sustainable new lives for themselves. Dignified and rewarding employment is found for them, paired with vital health and support services needed to aid their physical, psychological and social recovery from exploitation.

MSAVLC hopes to continue to support the vital work that 'Daughters of Cambodia' is doing, well into the future.

*Mary Lidgard
Honorary Secretary*

THE BRITISH FRIENDSHIP HOSPITAL, KY ANH

As part of the Monitoring and Evaluation visit to Vietnam in April 2015, Mary Lidgard and I visited the British Friendship Hospital in Ky Anh, District, Ha Tinh Province in northern Vietnam. We have visited the hospital five times before, and on this occasion we noted that it has expanded greatly over the past few years.

We were met at the entrance by Dr. Phan Thi Xuan Lieu, who has been Director of the hospital for eight years and is a true friend. Dr Lieu introduced us to Dr Le Thanh Binh, who is one of the Deputy Directors, and to the heads of all hospital departments.

We then went to see the tree which had been planted as a present to MSAVLC, in recognition of 50 years of aid to Vietnam. We did a mock planting ceremony with

spades and buckets of water, and photographs were taken.

The tree is a Barringtonia, it is a fine specimen and will produce red flowers in the summertime. There was a plaque on the tree to commemorate the occasion. The plaque recorded the date when we planted it, and that it symbolised 50 years of friendship and co-operation between MSAVLC and the hospital. Dr Lieu told us that a picture of the planting would be posted on the hospital's website.

Following the tree-planting, we returned to the meeting room and Dr Lieu said that she hoped that we were impressed by the rebuilding at the hospital; it was bigger, with more equipment and more patients. However, she said that staff numbers had not kept pace with the hospital's expansion, and that her doctors were overloaded with

work. There were only 42 doctors in total employed by the hospital, but there are about 350 in-patients and often 400 or 500 out-patients per day.

The population of Ky Anh District has grown considerably over the past few years, mainly due to the development of the deep-water port at Vung Ang. This had caused an increase in the local population, and an influx of foreign workers. These workers often attended the hospital with injuries and introduced new diseases to the district, and many of them were unable to speak Vietnamese. All of these factors had put a great strain on the hospital and its staff.

Dr Lieu thanked MSAVLC for all the equipment which we had provided over the last 30 years. Since the Trustees' last visit in 2013 the hospital had purchased a transcutaneous electrical nerve stimulation (TENS) machine, an ultrasound therapy machine and an acupuncture machine for the traditional medicine department: beds for the resuscitation department, and sterile hand-washing facilities for the obstetrics department. We carefully checked all the receipts for the new equipment. Dr Lieu said that the equipment was being properly maintained and used effectively, contributing to the improved health of the population. She hoped that we would be able to maintain and develop the strong relationship between MSAVLC and the hospital well into the future.

Mary Lidgard explained that since our last visit there had been a number of changes to the Trustees and Officers of MSAVLC. She said that although the names and faces may change, the spirit of friendship and co-operation between our two organisations would remain the same.

We handed over the £300 (9,600,000VND) for the Joan McMichael Fund Prize for 2015. The Fund provides about 15 annual prizes for outstanding performance of staff at the hospital, and is a great motivator for the staff in all of the hospital's departments.

We toured the hospital and we were shown all of the equipment which we had bought since 2013. Most of it was being used during our tour, and there were many patients there who had obviously benefitted from the aid given by the charity. We saw the beds which had been



Patients at the British Friendship Hospital, using equipment provided by MSAVLC.

donated in the names of Dr Madeleine Sharp and Professor Ted Shellard.

As we toured the Joan McMichael Paediatric Unit, we noted that it was in a poor state of repair. Dr Lieu hoped that it would soon be refurbished.

Finally we visited the radiography department which was overflowing with patients waiting for x-rays. The corridors were full of people sitting or standing along the walls because although there were two x-ray machines, one had been so heavily used that it was continually

breaking down. Dr Lieu asked if the Trustees of MSAVLC would consider replacing it with a new one.

We said that we would convey her request for funding to the Trustees and we would give her a reply as soon as possible.

*Peter Lidgard
Chairman*

Footnote: At the subsequent meeting of the Trustees, it was agreed to fund the X-Ray machine. It has been purchased and is now in use in the hospital.

CURRY AND QUIZ NIGHT

In November 2016 a fund-raising Curry & Quiz Night was held at the Organic Farm Shop in Cirencester. It was a sell-out, and it was a great success. The evening was organised by MSAVLC supporter, David Smethurst.

About 80 people in teams of four to six had fun competing in the quiz, and afterwards enjoyed a delicious, organic, vegetarian curry.

Over £1200 was raised for charity, being shared equally between Amnesty, Action Aid and MSAVLC.

This is the second time that David has run a quiz in Cirencester, and we send him, his helpers, and everyone who attended, our sincere thanks for all their efforts.

*Mary Lidgard
Honorary Secretary*



A lasting memorial to Dr Madeleine Sharp in the British Friendship Hospital in Ky Anh District, Ha Tinh Province

MEDICAL AND SCIENTIFIC AID FOR VIETNAM, LAOS AND CAMBODIA ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

TO BE HELD AT
ST MARK'S METHODIST CHURCH HALL,
GLOUCESTER ROAD,
CHELTENHAM GL51 8PX
AT 2.00 pm ON SATURDAY 22nd APRIL 2017

Two minutes walk from Cheltenham Spa railway station.
Free parking. Refreshments will be available.

WILLS AND LEGACIES

In 2016 MSAVLC distributed over £68,600 to our projects in South East Asia, thanks solely to you, our generous donors.

We could not help the poor and sick in Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia without your support. And a little goes a long way in the developing world.

Please remember the charity when you are making, or updating your will. The Trustees will ensure that your money is wisely spent.



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Published by:

Medical & Scientific Aid for Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia,
Anchor Cottage, 3 Horsefair Street, Charlton Kings, Cheltenham GL53 8JF
Registered Charity No. 252906

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SCIENTIFIC AID NEWS BULLETIN
Editor: Peter Lidgard