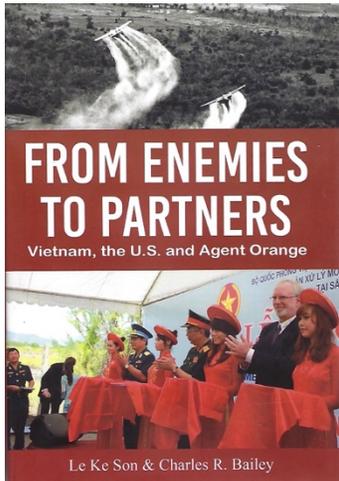
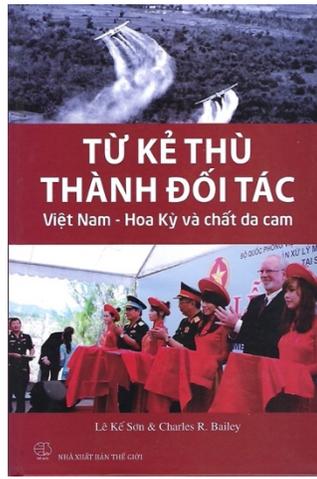


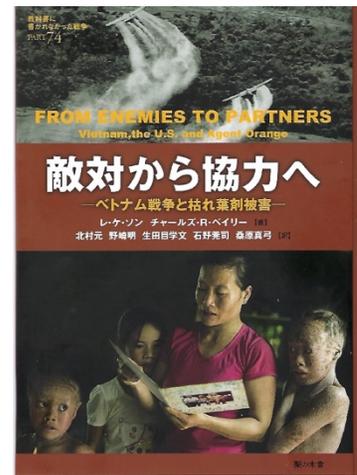
From Enemies to Partners: Vietnam, the U.S. and Agent Orange
by Le Ke Son & Charles R. Bailey



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Letter to Japanese Readers*
Charles R. Bailey

I am honored to write this letter to our Japanese readers.

When we wrote *From Enemies to Partners* in 2017 Dr. Son and I agreed our book needed to provide accurate answers to questions about the victims of Agent Orange and their future. It should be both a work of reference and a road map to resolve, to the maximum extent possible today, the human tragedy and environmental contamination left by the American use of Agent Orange during the Vietnam War. It would not be a book about us, or the roles we played prior to becoming authors. This is the book you have in your hands.

In this letter though, I want to tell you a more personal story of how I moved from ignorance to understanding.

In 1968, at the height of the U.S. herbicide spraying campaign during the Vietnam War, I was teaching agriculture in a school in a remote corner of Nepal. I had brought tomato seeds with me and my students carefully planted them. They were sure these tomatoes would be bigger and juicier than any they had eaten before. The seedlings grew in the school garden but one day a horde of grasshoppers appeared and began to devour the tomatoes. I brought out a hand sprayer to beat back the ravenous horde. At that moment some older students happened by. Seeing the spraying, one of them cried, “That’s how the Americans are killing the forests in Vietnam!” This is how I first heard of Agent Orange.

I went on to a career with the Ford Foundation, a private, nonprofit philanthropy independent of government, and this eventually brought me to Vietnam. In 1998 I went to visit an

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agricultural project in the Central Highlands. The mountainsides were still scarred from the destruction of the forests, and people confirmed that the Americans had sprayed Agent Orange there. So, 30 years after that incident in Nepal, I realized, “Wow, that student was right!” I was finally seeing the impact of Agent Orange and I was surprised and dismayed that nothing was being done about it.

The U.S. and Vietnam, I soon learned, were stuck at an impasse. The U.S. government worried about the unknown but potentially huge scale of the impact and they said the Vietnamese were exaggerating the consequences. They appeared to be trying to skirt responsibility by focusing solely on disagreement over the science and this angered me. As an American I thought we should do something about Agent Orange. Our government should listen, respond, take the initiative, be proactive ... but things were not on the right track. Other groups and governments hesitated, or even feared, to get involved. I had the motivation, and all we needed was an opportunity. There were few opportunities for the next seven years, but the three I found brought me and others to a deeper understanding of Agent Orange.

In 2000 the Vietnam Red Cross used a \$150,000 Ford grant for direct assistance to Agent Orange victims in three sprayed provinces. I saw the urgent and compelling needs of the many victims and their families. Our donation also signaled to the Vietnamese that the Ford Foundation was sincere, sympathetic and listening. These feelings set the stage for everything that came later.

In 2002 the 10-80 Committee in the Ministry of Health drew on a second Ford grant of \$289,000 which they and their partner, Hatfield Ltd. of Canada, used to find the dioxin hotspots at former American military bases in Vietnam. Their work was the evidence U.S. Senator Patrick Leahy and his aide, Tim Rieser, needed to arrange Congressional funding to begin to clean up the dioxin hotspots. Senator Leahy and Rieser then took a further step: funding to aid Agent Orange victims.

In 2003 Ambassador Le Van Bang, the Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs, called for a conference on the future of the bilateral relationship. We responded with a grant of \$76,000. Official and unofficial conferees, Americans and Vietnamese, reviewed every aspect of the relationship from burgeoning trade to regional security to war legacies. These discussions showed we could make progress on Agent Orange not by considering it just by itself but by placing it within the larger picture of U.S.-Vietnam relations. They also suggested that further progress might be possible outside strictly official channels.

These three experiences and other strands came together in 2006-- a breakout year for Agent Orange.

The 10-80 Committee report in January gave the Vietnamese a different point of entry on the issue—airport clean up. In March I discussed the Committee’s findings with U.S. Ambassador Michael Marine, who concluded that the U.S. did have a moral responsibility to help. At Ford we approved seven grants to launch aid to victims, hotspot clean up and further research. When President George W. Bush came to Hanoi in November he and President Tran Duc Luong agreed that the U.S. would help clean up the dioxin at former

U.S. military bases. Tim Rieser arrived in Hanoi at the end of December and told journalists that the U.S. Congress would appropriate funds for cooperation with Vietnam on Agent Orange. And a few weeks later the idea for a sustained informal exchange of views germinated in the U.S.-Vietnam Dialogue Group on Agent Orange/ Dioxin.

At this point I thought I was finished with Agent Orange, but just to be sure, I went to see Ambassador Bang at the Foreign Ministry. I asked him whether Ford Foundation needed to do anything more. He thought a moment and replied, “Yes, continue. You should work with Dr. Le Ke Son. Le Ke Son-- he’s your man!” He was right. Thus began my friendly and fruitful collaboration with Dr. Son, which has continued down to the present day.

The clean-up of dioxin, while technically complicated and costly, proved to be the easy part of Agent Orange and therefore a good place to begin. I arranged further Ford funding and Dr. Son proceeded to lock down the dioxin on the Da Nang airport and manage rainwater runoff. We felt deliriously happy when in January 2008 further testing showed that the Da Nang airport dioxin no longer posed an immediate threat to the health and well-being of people in the surrounding neighborhoods. The U.S. and Vietnam went on to complete the clean-up at Da Nang and embark on the remediation of dioxin at the Bien Hoa airbase.

As for the Agent Orange victims, the American system of divided government has produced both frustrating and exhilarating results. On the one hand, successive Administrations have never made long-term assistance for victims a priority by putting funds for them into the President’s annual budget. They continue to avoid any suggestion of responsibility and insist that U.S. disability assistance goes to Vietnam “regardless of cause.” On the other hand, for the last 15 years the Congress has appropriated increasing amounts of funds, currently \$15 million annually, as humanitarian aid to Agent Orange victims. The current appropriations law requires that the funds go to “health and disability programs related to the use of Agent Orange and exposure to dioxin, to assist individuals with severe upper or lower body mobility impairment or cognitive or developmental disabilities” wherever these persons may be found in Vietnam.

We want U.S. assistance to at least double and treble in the coming years as there are many Vietnamese victims of Agent Orange who have not yet been reached. Can our government do this? It’s a big step. So far, we have told ourselves that aid to Agent Orange victims is a humanitarian response. That makes us feel good. Can we take that next conceptual step though, from voluntary humanitarian aid to obligatory moral response? I am encouraged by the 70,000 visitors to my Agent Orange website in the last year, two-thirds of them Americans. Such people give me hope.

Many thanks to Mr. Hajime Kitamura for his initiative, to the scientists who translated the book and to Nashinokisha Publishing Company and the benefactors who have made the Japanese edition a reality. It is a special honor to have one’s work so publicly recognized by people one has never met! I hope one day to again visit your beautiful country and meet all of you.

Lummi Island, Washington
March 12, 2022