

Evans

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7 Divinity Avenue
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July 30, 1982

Mr. Grant Evans
Department of Sociology
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Dear Mr. Evans:

Thank-you for sending me a copy of your manuscript. It is good that someone with an anthropological perspective has taken up this task.

I enclose a list of comments keyed to page numbers in the manuscript. The strongest point of the manuscript is its discussion of the evidence from interviews. In this connection, you may wish to make more extensive use of the US National Academy of Sciences Study of the effects of herbicides as reported by lowland ethnic Vietnamese and as reported quite differently by Highlanders. I enclose the corresponding sections from the Academy's 1974 publication. The Academy evidence is much more extensive than what we (the American Association for the Advancement of Science Herbicide Assessment Commission) found in 1970, but there is good agreement that lowland Vietnamese seldom reported serious human illness and death while highland tribespeople almost invariably did so.

In order to improve chapter 8, I suggest that you collaborate with a qualified expert in the field. Such a person is Dr. Daniel Cullen, Department of Plant Pathology, University of Wisconsin, Madison, Wisconsin. I have asked him to send you a copy of testimony he recently gave before a House Committee.

As I comment in the attached list, the absence of spent or unspent chemical munitions seems remarkable and may deserve a more separate and extensive discussion than you

continued.....

Mr. Grant Evans
July 30, 1982

Page -2-

give. Another thing that runs counter to the State Department line is that the government of Laos continues to allow outsiders to travel widely within the country.

I have asked Arthur Wang, the publisher of "A Higher Form of Killing" by Harris and Paxam, for his advice about publishing in the U.S. He was not encouraging. The Harris-Paxam book has sold only about 3,000 copies and even Seagrave's book only about 10,000. Wang would be glad to read your manuscript in order to provide further advice about vehicles for publication. But his present advice is to condense the manuscript into a magazine article, both in order to reach a wider readership and to avoid the long delay in publishing a book would entail.

Sincerely,

Matthew Meselson

Matthew S. Meselson
Professor of Biochemistry
and Molecular Biology

MSM/db

Enclosures:

COMMENTS ON "POISON GAS OR POISON PROPAGANDA"

July 29, 1982

Page 1, para 3

It is not clear what "directly linked" means. President Regan did not make one agreement conditional on the other.

para 4

The term "physical evidence" is used here and elsewhere in the manuscript without definition. Are not the samples analyzed for mycotoxins physical evidence?

Page 6, para 3

What is the first name of Dr. Weldon? Is he the Charles Weldon mentioned on page 15?

Page 7, para 4

Here and elsewhere minor revisions could be made in order to make the book convincing to the large number of readers who consider themselves to be strong anti-communists. Rather than "mystical anti-communism" you might refer to "mystical exaggeration of the communist threat", or some such.

Page 8, para 1

Give an example and a reference to Hamilton-Merritt's unlikely stories. That would be more effective than presenting only your judgement.

Page 10, para 3

Here or later on it would be helpful to tell the reader just what kinds of cross-checks of interview evidence must be performed in order to comply with reasonable standards of evidence. Ideally, one should seek out individuals present at the time and places of an alleged attack who are unlikely to have been in communication with the original informants since becoming refugees. It is correct that adequate confirmation of the occurrence of chemical warfare by such individuals has not not been sought by any investigator?

Page 24, para 1

Tell that Vang Pao is living in Montana.

Page 32, para 6

Reference is made to riot control "gasses". Essentially only one gas, CS, was used by US forces in Vietnam. Early in the war, a small number of CS and CS-DM hand grenades were provided to the RVN. I know of no reports of the use of these munitions by Americans.

para 6

CS is a white powder whereas all of the principal herbicide formulations used were liquids.

Page 40, table

Are there estimates available of the number of individuals returning each year from Thailand to Laos which might be included in this table?

Page 53, para 1

I enclose for your interest portions of the US NAS report "The Effects of Herbicides in South Vietnam". As you will see and as summarized in the Table on p. VII-65, montagnards tribespeople reported several illness and deaths from exposure to herbicides. Respondents from 10 locations representing six different ethnic groups reported serious illness caused by herbicides and in nine of the 10 locations, deaths, sometimes very numerous, were attributed to herbicides. In contrast, lowland Vietnamese did not report severe health effects. I have been most impressed by the results of this NAS study. I urge you to give even more consideration to it than you do, perhaps including the Table of page VII-65.

Page 55, para 2

Here and at other places the name of Seagrave is misspelled.

Page 56, para 4

I would not say that the description corresponds "closely" to defoliation. The herbicides are liquids not powders. It would be more correct to say that the description could have referred to defoliation.

Page 57, para 4

This seems to discount unduly the fact that riot control agent CS and the herbicides used in Vietnam are much less toxic than trichothecene mycotoxins. CS and the herbicides used in Vietnam are still used domestically in the US.

Page 60, para 1

The NAS series of interviews with montagnards was much larger than the series in which I participated. The NAS study should be given greater weight than mine.

Page 65, para 3

How much effort has been made to determine whether individuals in camps other than Ban Vinai and Nong Khai confirm the claims of chemical warfare? If you or anyone else have made substantial attempts to query refugees in the Northern camps and if those refugees were present at the places and times of alleged gas attacks, this would provide a cross-check of great importance. If you have such information it should be presented and explained at length. If however, very few inquiries have been made in the Northern camps, the lack of confirmation becomes less meaningful.

Page 66, para 3

Can you estimate a number of Yao who have returned to Laos?

Page 73, para 3

Some of the third group are included in the second group.

Page 75, para 2

Line 5 the word "professionals" may be more accurate than "liberals".

Page 78, para 2

I do not agree that the statement "necessarily implied" the use of lethal agents, nor do I have any evidence of the use of agents other than those widely known to have been used.

Page 80, para 2

Would you call mycotoxins "physical evidence"?

Page 82, para 3

"obviously clicked his heels ... " this interpolation weakens the presentation.

para 4

Civilians in a war zone might well be able to identify aircraft types. This argument is weak and not very important to the point being made.

Page 83, para 3

In the 39 interviews summarized by the Lewis team the majority reported yellow agent and lethal results.

Page 84, para 1,2,3

The assertion that the sacks "are an old story dressed up" implies a certainty going well beyond the evidence.

para 4

Crates and pallets dropped by US AID aircraft would not have exploded in mid-air.

Page 85, para 1

Do flechettes make holes as small (a few mm) as reported for the YR? Various chemicals as droplets, could cause necrotic spots on leaves that might be called or even develop into holes.

Page 88, para 3

Is the location site in the Lewis interview always the site of alleged attack or is it, at least sometimes, the home village of the respondent and possibly different from the alleged attack site?

Page 89, para 1

It might be useful to present quotations from the actual interviews side-by-side. Such presentation would more convincingly demonstrate whatever contradictions there may be.

Page 99, para 2, line 2

Is the "obviously" fully justified?

Page 112, para 1

Some chemicals are detoxified in boiling water.

Page 115, para 2

In the camps mentioned here is the relative absence of gassing stories significant? How many interviews have been conducted? Had the respondents been present where gas attacks have been alleged? Without more information it is difficult to determine whether the apparent differences between the camps cast serious doubts on the reports of gassing.

para 3

Is it Milton or Amayuan?

Page 117, para 1

This paragraph interrupts the principal argument of the chapter. It would be more appropriate in chapter 8.

para 2

Make it clearer that "US collected material" refers to interviews, not leaf samples etc. This last paragraph in chapter 6 could be strengthened if after the first sentence, one added words to this effect: "in particular the kinds of careful cross-checks which are essential to any serious study of this kind and which are well within the ability of the US government to conduct are almost totally absent." Also, at the end one might continue more or less as follows "... catastrophies encouraged by the political environment in which the respondent exists and by the fact that the interviewers were seeking to document what they have already assumed to be fact".

Page 120, para 2

The last passages seem somewhat exaggerated and over-simplified.

Page 122, para 4

Is the sweeping generalization "all revolutionary governments" justified?

Page 126, para 2

Was the Western Aid official at Ban Pha Mai late enough in August to provide the cross-check implied here?

Page 127,

Somewhere, perhaps in this chapter, there should be a map of Laos and the Thai border region showing the various camps and alleged attack sites cited in the text.

Page 131, para 2

"2.75" rockets: does this mean 2.75 inch?

Page 132, para 1

Comment more specifically on whether there are any buildings at this airfield in which highly lethal chemicals might be loaded with the appropriate security and safety precautions. This point is important enough to be given additional attention.

Page 138, para 2

Army 108mm Howitzer" is 105mm meant?

Page 140, para 3

The absence of reports from China is significant only if such reports have been sought. Have they?

Page 141, para 1

It would seem more appropriate to say that the talk appears to be idle rumor, rather than to say "it is" such.

Page 142 and following:

Chapter 8 needs extensive revision. A copy with comments is enclosed. I suggest you collaborate with an expert in the field.

Page 155, para 1

"Hanoi took action to dispose of him" would leave the author sounding less ideologically committed than does the present text.

Page 156, para 3

Some medical personnel associated with the camps are said to believe that chemical warfare has occurred even if they do not have adequate evidence. This paragraph gives a somewhat different impression.

Page 157, para 1

Did not the KPNLF recently claim it had been attacked with gas?

Page 159, para 2

T2 can cause severe necrosis and scars on the skin.

Page 160

Can you discuss any results which may have been obtained by the Thai Army Chemical Service in analyzing samples and munitions? What is the Thai evaluation of the gas story?

Page 161, para 1

Explain more fully why you find these stories to be more convincing.

Page 170, para 2

"... status as customary international law"

footnote

"the understanding" is of doubtful legal status because the Senate did not explicitly agree to it and because the report of the Foreign Relations Committee suggested that such an understanding might be in conflict with the terms and history of the Protocol.

Page 171, para 3

The renunciation was announced in November 1969. President Nixon also "reaffirmed" US renunciation of the first use of "lethal and incapacitating chemical weapons".

Page 172, para 1

Opposition to a comprehensive agreement was also based on lack of agreement regarding verification provisions for a chemical weapons ban.

Page 173, para 3

Give the date of the E. German manual.

Page 175,

See the new Soviet policy for verification of a chemical weapons treaty put forth by Gromyko in New York on June 15 of this year. My impression is that the US is more specific in actual negotiations than are the Soviets.

Page 178, para 1

This paragraph superficially covers a very complicated issue. Is it not the case, for example, that the government of the UK and the FRG have stated their preference for a "single key" system for Euromissiles?

Page 179,

Discuss the recent Soviet white paper on chemical warfare allegations.

Page 180, para 2

But Vietnam has not been able to eliminate PolPot. The argument on this page seems to me rather superficial and over-confident.