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Agent Orange: Basics

Part of the United States' strategy in Vietnam was to conduct an herbicide program to remove foliage providing cover for the enemy. Agent Orange was the most widely used of the herbicide combinations sprayed.

Learn about:

- ▶ [What Agent Orange Is](#)
- ▶ [When and Where Agent Orange Was Used in Vietnam](#)
- ▶ [Agent Orange and Other Herbicide Exposure Outside of Vietnam](#)

What Agent Orange Is

Agent Orange is the name given to a blend of herbicides the U.S. military sprayed from 1961 to 1971 to remove plants and leaves from foliage in Vietnam that provided enemy cover.

The name "Agent Orange" came from the orange identifying stripe around the 55-gallon drums in which it was stored. The U.S. military sprayed other herbicide combinations in the so-called Rainbow herbicides program, identified by the color of their storage drums, including Agent White and Agent Blue. Agent Orange was the blend used most widely.



Plane spraying jungle foliage with herbicides

The Agent Orange herbicide combination contained minute traces of 2,3,7,8-tetrachlorodibenzo-p-dioxin (also known as TCDD or dioxin), which has been shown to cause a variety of illnesses in laboratory animals.

The two active ingredients in Agent Orange were equal amounts of:

2,4-dichlorophenoxyacetic acid (2,4-D)

2,4,5-trichlorophenoxyacetic acid (2,4,5-T), containing minute traces of 2,3,7,8-tetrachlorodibenzo-p-dioxin

When and Where Agent Orange Was Used in Vietnam



Herbicide-sprayed areas and unsprayed areas

Agent Orange was the combination of herbicides the U.S. military used most often in its herbicide program in South Vietnam; it was sprayed between January 1965 and April 1970.

The U.S. military herbicide program in South Vietnam took place between 1961 and 1971, and spraying occurred in

all 4 military zones of Vietnam. More than 19 million gallons of various herbicide combinations were used. Heavily sprayed areas included:

Inland forests near the demarcation zone

Inland forests at the junction of the borders of Cambodia, Laos, and South Vietnam

Inland forests north and northwest of Saigon

Mangrove forests on the southernmost peninsula of Vietnam

Mangrove forests along major shipping channels southeast of Saigon

Agent Orange and Other Herbicide Exposure Outside of Vietnam

During the Korean war, Republic of Korea forces used small amounts of Agent Orange in 1968-69 in the area from the Civilian Control line to the southern boundary of the Demilitarized Zone. According to the Department of Defense, only Republic of Korea troops were involved in the actual spraying of Agent Orange in Korea. However, it is possible that some U.S. military personnel may have been exposed to herbicides in Korea.

Agent Orange and other herbicides used in Vietnam were tested or stored elsewhere, including many military bases in the United States. Learn more about [herbicide tests and storage in the U.S.](#) and [herbicide tests and storage outside the U.S.](#) [Download information from Department of Defense on herbicide tests and storage outside of Vietnam.](#) (224 KB, PDF)