

not available. We do, however, know that malnutrition is widespread in the countryside and in refugee camps, so the potential for such abnormalities certainly exists.¹²⁻¹⁴

Birth defects

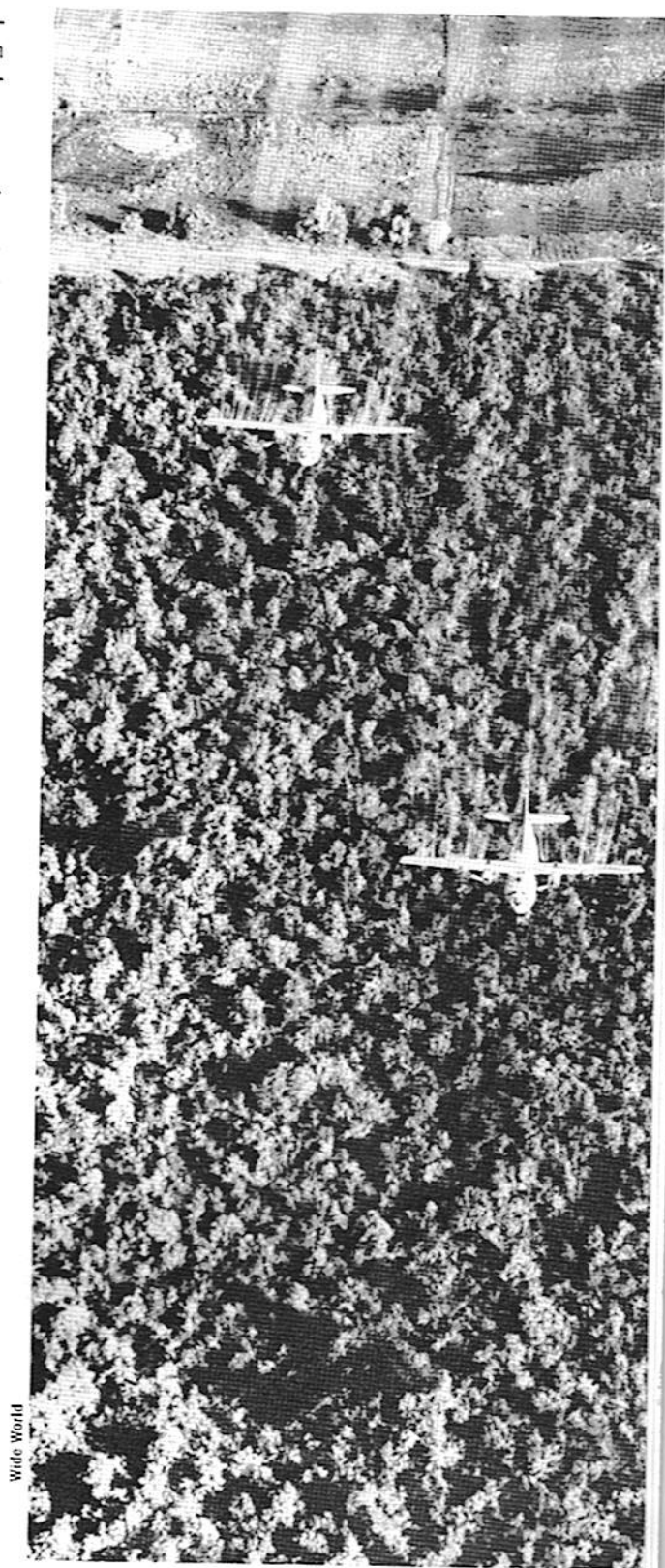
The teratogenic (fetus-deforming) effects of certain chemicals became a matter of public concern when Thalidomide was found to cause birth defects. Until 1965, 2,4,5-T (comprising 50 percent of Agent Orange) had never been tested for teratogenicity. Forty million pounds of this chemical have been sprayed in Vietnam,⁵ without knowledge of its possible effects on man or animals. The widespread use of any chemical, without detailed knowledge of possible effects, poses grave dangers. In the case of 2,4,5-T the danger is now coming to light.

In late 1967, after two years of greatly accelerated herbicide application, Saigon newspapers began carrying front-page stories of a novel and increasingly common birth defect described as "egg-bundle-like fetus."²⁰ Some newspapers reported a rise in the incidence of deformed babies in areas that had been sprayed, and questioned whether the defoliation might be causing this. These papers were closed by the Thieu government.¹⁷

News leaks in October, 1969, forced the National Institutes of Health (NIH) to release reports demonstrating that 2,4,5-T was shown in 1965-1966 to be an exceptionally powerful teratogen. During the time the report was inexplicably suppressed by our government, millions of pounds of 2,4,5-T were used in Vietnam— and, incidentally, in the United States as well.

Producers of 2,4,5-T claimed the teratogenicity shown in these tests was due to a contaminant called "dioxin" (2,3,7,8-tetrachlorodibenzo-p-dioxin), which is found in commercial preparations of 2,4,5-T. Later studies have shown that both extremely pure 2,4,5-T and dioxin cause birth defects in the three species of experimental animals tested.^{18,19} In hamsters, for example, commercial 2,4,5-T at dosages of 100 mg/kg (milligrams per kilogram of body weight) killed 80 percent of the fetuses and deformed many of the survivors.¹⁸ In rats, only 24 mg/kg deformed about 30 percent of the fetuses (seven-fold increase in deformations).^{18,19}

Chemical defoliation and destruction of Vietnamese forest, jungle and agricultural areas are carried out on a vast scale. Twelve percent of the land of South Vietnam has been deluged by many millions of pounds of powerful poisons.



Wide World