

Japan Focus

The United States and the Japanese Mengele: Payoffs and Amnesty for Unit 731 Scientists

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By Christopher Reed

[Tsuneishi Keiichi of Kanagawa University had already been unearthing secrets about Japan's biological warfare (BW) program for a quarter century when he made a vital discovery about Unit 731 in summer 2005. The two memoranda he discovered from July 1947 were written by Brig. Gen. Charles Willoughby, head of GHQ's intelligence unit during the American Occupation, and found in the U.S. National Archives. The documents shed new light on GHQ's carrot-and-stick method of obtaining BW data at the outset of the Cold War as the arms race against the Soviet Union heated up. The Americans offered the Japanese scientists far more carrots—in the form of cash payments and other rewards as well as immunity from prosecution—than was previously understood.

(Japan Focus is posting these declassified Willoughby memos online below. In future, we will make available Japanese translations.)

In exchange for cooperation from the Japanese side, the horrific war crimes of Unit 731 were suppressed by the International Military Tribunal for the Far East. Not only were the unit's members not prosecuted for war crimes, they were rewarded and went on to occupy prestigious positions in postwar Japan's medical and academic communities. More recently, as in other reparations movements stemming from Japanese war conduct, Japan's courts have played the contradictory role of validating plaintiffs' descriptions of historical events but rejecting their claims to compensation on legal grounds.

A Foreign Ministry spokesman was quoted by Reuters on April 19, 2006, as saying: "The government is not in possession of materials that tell us about the activities of this unit. If we do find some materials, we would accept it as a solemn fact of history." The Japanese government, then, does not currently view Dr. Ishii Shiro's atrocious programs as historical truth. The hypocrisy is striking: the Japanese state and military destroyed the very records it now says are necessary to prove Unit 731's actions, while the issues were covered up with American complicity.

This characteristic attitude toward its war responsibility places Japan yet again on a collision course with China regarding history. China's Unit 731 Exhibition Hall near Harbin announced in 2005 that it would seek UNESCO World Heritage status for the main BW and medical experimentation site. Last year 200,000 people visited the state-run museum, which is undergoing major expansion and restoration. "Our goal is to build it into a world-class war memorial and educate people all over the world," the facility's curator said in a Washington Post article last April 7. "This is not just a Chinese concern. It is a concern of humanity."

Critics accuse the Chinese government of manipulating historical issues to foster nationalism and bolster the regime's domestic legitimacy, while scoring easy points against Japan in the global arena of public opinion. But it was Japan, not China, which carried out the biological terror of Unit 731 and continues to evade accountability for it today—with more than a little help from its American ally.

We invite readers to examine ongoing Japan Focus coverage of the efforts by Chinese, Korean and other victims to secure justice through the courts and other venues in related cases involving forced labor, the military comfort women, and the Nanjing Massacre among others. We thank Yasuhara Keiko for translation into Japanese of the US archival documents. –William Underwood]

Everyone has heard of Auschwitz, but what about Pingfan? This Japanese germ warfare headquarters and laboratory in Manchuria, northern China, did not hold as many victims, but atrocities committed there were physically worse than in the Nazi concentration camp, and lasted much longer.

Many people know of Dr. Josef Mengele, the Nazi SS "Angel of Death" and a physician (though not chief medical officer) at Auschwitz from 1943-45. There, he deliberately infected prisoners with deadly diseases and conducted fatal surgeries, often without anesthetic. He escaped and lived in South America undiscovered until after his death at 68 in 1979 in Brazil.

But what of Army General Dr. Ishii Shiro? He was the chief of Japan's well financed, scientifically coordinated and government approved biological warfare program from 1932-45. Ishii rose to general and supervised deliberate infection of thousands of captives with deadly diseases. He also conducted grotesque surgeries, but the unique medical specialty of Ishii and his surgical team were dissections, without anesthetic, on an estimated 3,000 live, conscious humans. In 1959, Ishii, a wealthy man, died peacefully at home in Japan at the age of 67.



Why the discrepancy of knowledge about these two monsters? After so long, why does it still matter? The answer to both questions lies in policies of secrecy and complicity that continue today. They should concern Japanese, of course, but also Americans and many others.

It is because of U.S. connivance in Japanese secrecy that Tokyo's biological war has yet to be fully disclosed. An estimated 400,000 disease deaths, almost all Chinese, remain uncompensated. Japan, unlike Germany with its commendable atonement and billions of dollars in reparations, has yet even to apologize specifically to biological war victims, let alone pay compensation for suffering from its nationally driven medical torture program.

On my desk are two documents previously marked Top Secret and dated July 1947. They show not only full U.S. participation in allowing the Japanese medical torturers who escaped to Tokyo to go free in exchange for information, but that the Pentagon actually paid them. As General Charles Willoughby, chief of U.S. Military Intelligence (known as G-2) gleefully noted to his headquarters, these pay-offs were "a mere pittance... netting the U.S. the fruit of 20 years' laboratory tests and research" in this "critically serious form of warfare."

Meanwhile, as Ishii and his cohort pocketed U.S. taxpayers' money, the Soviet Union was preparing a criminal court hearing for 12 Japanese biowar scientists they caught at Pingfan, just after its

demolition by Ishii's men.

The trial in Khabarovsk resulted in all 12 being sentenced from 2-25 years. Three years earlier, in 1946, the Soviet prosecutor had given his U.S. equivalent in Tokyo the main evidence. But nothing happened. After the Khabarovsk verdict, the Soviet newspaper Izvestia demanded Ishii's arrest and trial. General Douglas MacArthur, Japan's occupation supremo, denounced Izvestia and the trial as "false communist propaganda". Docile Western media ignored the Soviet charges. Silence then reigned for decades.

Then in 1981 American journalist John Powell, who had obtained the Khabarovsk transcript, published in the Bulletin of Atomic Scientists details of open-air germ tests on captured Chinese and Russian men, women and children. Some were bound to stakes in a large field and bombarded with anthrax. Others were subjected to germs of bubonic plague, cholera, smallpox, typhus and typhoid, and women to syphilis.



Site of the Khabarovsk Trial

And, in an excruciating irony, he told how Chinese captives had been killed by having their livers exposed to X-rays. The world's first use of radiation against a wartime enemy was carried out by... Japan. Its biological warfare (BW) was also illegal, since all such experiments were banned by the 1925 Geneva Convention, which Japan signed but did not ratify.

The media then headlined what it called Unit 731. This was the name of the commanding Pingfan imperial army group, and the one that became best known. But at least nine units functioned with apparently random numbers, dotted all across China and Japanese-occupied Asia. All came under the Pingfan headquarters, which had been specially constructed near the town of Harbin. Occupying 65 square kilometers, it contained 150 buildings with cinema, a swimming pool, Shinto temple, lounge, bar, and laboratories, operating theaters, and prison cells. It was serviced by its own rail branch line and had fleets of vehicles and airplanes.

During the 1981 burst of publicity, Justice B.V.A Roling, a Dutchman and the only surviving judge from the International Military Tribunal for the Far East in Tokyo, Asia's Nuremberg, complained that no word about biological warfare had been offered in evidence. He wrote: "It is a bitter experience for me to be informed now that centrally ordered Japanese war criminality of the most disgusting kind was kept secret from the court by the U.S. government."



Remains of one of Unit 731's germ factories in Manchuria serve as a reminder of the atrocities that took place during Japan's occupation of China during World War II

General Willoughby and officials of MacArthur's Supreme Command for the Allied Powers in Tokyo had succeeded in suppressing evidence from Ishii and colleagues, but separate inquiries were made by the International Prosecution Section (IPS). Its lawyers gathered evidence including detailed statements from defecting Japanese bio-scientists from Pingfan. The latter testified to human live vivisection, the dumping of lethal germs in Chinese water supplies and food stores, as well as aerial spraying. Yet all was silenced even though the information went to the top.

IPS documents stamped "to be read by the Commander-in-Chief U.S. forces" were sent to President Harry Truman in 1947. No word has ever emerged on what Truman thought or said about this evidence. It is one of many still unknown facts about the Japanese-American conspiracy to conceal the complete account of the Japanese bio-warfare horror.

At Fort Detrick, Maryland, the main U.S. installation for BW, records remain on file of the thousands of tissue slides, preserved organs (some labeled "American") removed from living bodies, with medical schedules and reports on perverse surgical procedures on screaming and writhing human specimens.

General Willoughby listed the five most important items providing "the greatest value in future development of the United States BW program." These included the Japanese scientists' "complete report" of "BW against man" that Willoughby described as "the only information available in world"; "field trials against Chinese" such as Powell described; using animals as "deadly bacteria conveyors" ("U.S. has done little work in this field"); and a "summary of the human experiments." The G-2 heard it all.

The general's conclusion: "Data on human experiments may prove invaluable... and Japanese may now reveal research in chemical warfare [and] death rays." Did they? We do not know.

Next came the self-praise and grumbles in which military men like to indulge. The results, said G-2, "were only obtainable through skillful psychological approach to top-flight pathologists bound by mutual oath not to incriminate each other in these disclosures. They were assisted by direct payments, payments in-kind (food, miscellaneous gift items, entertainment), hotel bills, and board (in areas of search for buried evidence, etc.). All of these actions did not amount to more than 150/200,000 Yen." This amounted to only \$2,000 at today's exchange rates, but substantially more in terms of its value in the Japanese economy of the time.

Then came the grumbles. The "pittance" in funds came from the military intelligence department's budget, but this was now restricted. Willoughby wrote to his boss in Washington D.C., General S.J. Chamberlin: "We shall find it successively more difficult to induce these people to disclose information" without more money. He mentioned "unanimous protests" from the spooks against

"the absurdity of these restrictions."

Today those crimes live on. Meanwhile, Japan continues to conceal other details of its wartime research. Masses of documents may have been destroyed. In 2002 in Japan, 180 Chinese victims and relatives from Hunan and Zhejiang provinces brought a court case. The Japanese judge agreed they had been infected by plague-carrying fleas dropped by Unit 731 planes during the Pacific War, but rejected their compensation claim on legal technicalities. The case continues on appeal.

Chinese anger against this and other unresolved Japanese war crimes increases as a new generation reviews the past. The issue will gain momentum so long as Japan continues to shunt aside its wrongs against Asian neighbors. The world should take notice. Why should Pingfan, Unit 731, and Dr. Shiro Ishii remain obscure names known mainly to historians?

Counterpunch editors' note: Under the overall codename Project Paperclip US intelligence agencies made similarly diligent efforts to acquire the research records of Nazi doctors working in the death camps. They also brought over several of the Nazi medical experimenters and set them to work in US military research centers such as Ft. Detrick. The Nazi research was quickly put into play in the field. In 1950, the CIA's Office of Security, headed at the time by Sheffield Edwards, opened a project called Bluebird whose object was to get an individual "to do our bidding against his will and even against such fundamental laws of nature as self-preservation." The first Bluebird operations were conducted in Japan in October 1950 and were reportedly witnessed by Richard Helms, who would later run the Agency. Twenty-five North Korean POWs were given alternating doses of depressants and stimulants. The POWs were shot up with barbituates, putting them to sleep, then abruptly awoken with injections of amphetamines, put under hypnosis, then interrogated. The operation was, of course, in total contravention of international protocols. The Bluebird interrogations continued through the duration of the Korean War. This history is laid out in detail in our book *Whiteout: the CIA, Drugs and the Press*, Verso, available from Counterpunch. AC/JSC.

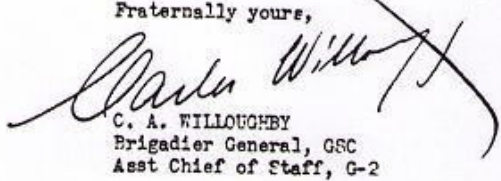
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~~TOP SECRET~~

In this connection, all intelligence and surveillance agencies in the field (Provost Marshal, Military Police, CIC FEAF, XXIV Corps, 441st CIC, 319th CIC) are unanimous in their protest against these restrictions. I have no hesitancy in stating that the objective of your letters (3 Oct 46 and 10 Jan 47) on "Soviet Dominated Areas," etc., is in complete jeopardy; in fact, in my entire career, notably as Military Attaché 1923-1929, I know of no more destructive weapon to kill intelligence procurement on an international level, than these restrictions. The absurdity of these restrictions lies in the claim that it is an anti-black market measure, enabling U.S. goods to be "spotted." This in the face of 50/100,000 gift packages a month passing into the country, and more to come!

Faternally yours,



C. A. WILLOUGHBY
Brigadier General, GSC
Asst Chief of Staff, G-2

1 Incl: Attached
Report on B.N.

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4. I would be lacking in candor if I did not point that this was possible only through the intelligent use of MID confidential funds (the direct purpose of these funds) without restrictions and that, under current restrictions, I do not foresee the merit of any further efforts. If we cannot maintain these people, as at present, loss of face combined with our inability to satisfy what they want, will destroy a relationship so far successfully developed.

/s/ C. A. WILLOUGHBY
C.A.W.

2 Incls:
Ltr, Dr. FellTab A
Repts, Dr. FellTab B

NOTED by CinC

BY C/S