

"A Plague Upon Humanity: The Secret Genocide of Axis Japan's Germ Warfare Operation"

By J Daniel Barenblatt, 2004, 260 pages, HarperCollins

Review by Norman M. Goldfarb

"A Plague Upon Humanity: The Secret Genocide of Axis Japan's Germ Warfare Operation" is the second of several books that have been published on Japan's World War II biological warfare program in China. While some of the main players in the Nazi program of medical experimentation were prosecuted and convicted of criminal acts, their counterparts in the Unit 731 program traded their research data for liberty, even though U.S. prisoners of war numbered among the victims, and Unit 731 went beyond experimentation to actually conduct biological warfare. In both cases, U.S. authorities played the leading role in the post-war trials.

The book's final chapter includes the following passage:

For decades, the conventional wisdom had held that several thousand prisoners were killed in gruesome studies at secret bases in Manchuria and that a number of Chinese civilians, perhaps a few hundred or so, were also killed in so-called field tests of germ weapons. It was in these terms and numbers that the Japanese military's germ warfare program was usually explained to an audience — when there was an audience for the subject.

But the latest research...shows that in two bio-war campaigns alone, those in Yunnan Province in southern China and Shandong Province in the north, more than 400,000 people died of cholera. Special army forces waged germ attacks across China at countless locations under Imperial Japan's heel of occupation, and even in unoccupied regions that were subject to fly-overs by Japanese planes. Plague literally rained down upon people's heads, sprayed from special bio-war air team planes; cholera, typhoid, dysentery, anthrax, paratyphoid, glanders and other pestilences infected their food, drinking wells, crops and livestock.

As of 2002, historical researchers in China had estimated the number of people killed by Japanese germ warfare and human experiments to be approximately 580,000. This is the figure that was presented and mutually agreed upon at the International Symposium on the Crimes of Bacteriological Warfare, a conference on the subject of Japanese bio-war attended by scholars and investigative journalists, held in December 2002 in the city of Changde, Hunan Province. Yet even the total of 580,000, large as it is, must be considered only a preliminary accounting, as it stems from the summing up of mortality totals from places where researchers are still conducting house-to-house interviews with survivors, victims' relatives, and eyewitnesses, in the growing number of investigations that are now taking place throughout China. And each set of interviews continues to bring forth additional cases, incidents and outbreaks to be reckoned.

The number of physicians and scientists involved in these germ attacks and in the human experiments totaled more than 20,000. Most of them were biomedical professionals in the civilian sector of society, men of healing who were recruited into the secret bio-war projects by Ishii and his colleagues in the military. With their expertise, the Japanese army exterminated large numbers of Asian people through its covert harnessing of the ancient and dreaded scourge of infectious disease. The

objective was to depopulate, make miserable, and demoralize the Chinese people through the spreading of vast man-made epidemics in strategic areas. The microbe became an instrument of imperial rule. Comparisons with the genocides of Japan's ally and ideological brother, Nazi Germany, are entirely appropriate. By the standards of today and those of 1948, when the United Nations recognized and codified the term "genocide" as "calculated acts of human extermination resulting in the mass murder of enormous numbers of civilians, targeting a certain population group," the Japanese germ warfare program more than meets the definition.

The book includes 10 chapters:

- A Doctor's Vision
- Fortress of Fear
- The End of Humanity
- Science Set Free
- Worlds Collide
- The Gathering Storm
- Epidemic
- What America Knew
- The Secret Deal
- What the Deal Bought

Reviewer

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A Plague Upon Humanity: the Secret Genocide of Axis Japan's Germ Warfare Operation, HarperCollins, 2004. ISBN 978-0-06-018625-8. Gold, Hal. A Higher Form of Killing: The Secret History of Chemical and Biological Warfare, Random House, 2002. ISBN 978-0-8129-6653-4. Barnaby, Wendy. The Plague Makers: The Secret World of Biological Warfare, Frog Ltd, 1999. ISBN 978-1-883319-85-4. ISBN 978-0-7567-5698-7. As Daniel Barenblatt, author of A Plague Upon Humanity: The Secret Genocide of Axis Japan's Germ Warfare Operation, explains: Germ warfare was cheap in terms of budget expenditure and the raw materials needed, frightening, and, under the right conditions, extremely effective at killing large numbers of people and causing social disruption. Germ warfare was also, more importantly, deniable.¹⁰ Ishii noted that "there are two types of bacteriological warfare research, A and B. A is assault research, and B is defense research. Vaccine research is of the B type, this can be done in Japan. However,