

Title

Changteh, China Report

Source

Declassified by U.S. National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) 14 August 2009

Context

In the early hours of 4 November 1941, the city of Changteh, China, was attacked by a low-flying Japanese bomber plane that flew under the veil of heavy fog. The bomber plane disseminated plague-infected rice and particles by air, resulting in an estimated total of 400 to 500 fatalities across the city.¹ Learning of the attack, America became increasingly concerned with Japan's Biological Warfare (BW) capabilities and feared for its national security. To assess the depth of Japan's capabilities, the United States Army Chemical Warfare Service (CWS) was tasked with gathering intelligence on Japan and conducting its own BW research. This document is the result of such intelligence gathering by the CWS. This report was prepared by an American Army Medical Officer with CWS who interviewed infectious disease specialist Dr. Tang Hsueh-Huo in Changteh on 28 and 29 May 1945. As Dr. Tang was employed by the Presbyterian Mission Hospital in Changteh at the time of the attack, his investigation of the incident and the illnesses that followed served as the primary source of information in this report. It was determined by the Chief of the CWS Mission in China that this report was the strongest evidence obtained to date on Japanese use of BW in China.

As this report revealed compelling evidence of Japanese BW capabilities, it played a role in accelerating American interest in expanding and acquiring BW research. At the end of the Second World War, America obtained BW research data from Chief Medical Officer Ishii Shiro, of the Imperial Japanese Army, and his network of research labs in exchange for immunity from prosecution. Better known as the "Ishii Network," this system of research labs worked in concert to develop various BW and Chemical Warfare (CW) techniques for the advancement of the Imperial Japanese Army. The aerial attack on Changteh represents one of many BW field experiments executed by the Ishii Network through their principle research lab, Unit 731. As Japan was one of the leaders in BW research, America was motivated by its interest in strengthening its own BW program, and securing research data ahead of Soviet involvement. Adhering to their agreement, America withheld evidence from the International Military Tribunal for the Far East (IMTFE) to spare the Ishii Network from prosecution for their war crimes. The crimes committed by the Ishii Network went unrecognized until the Tokyo District Court acknowledged their actions for the first time in August 2002.² Declassified reports such as this serve as evidence of Japan's wartime atrocities that can be used to educate the public on this often-overlooked aspect of World War II in Asia, in the hopes that a greater understanding will lead to regional reconciliation.

¹ Peter Li, "Japan's Biochemical Warfare and Experimentation in China," in *The Search for Justice: Japanese War Crimes*, ed. Peter Li (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2003), 294.

² Suzy Wang, "Medicine-Related War Crimes Trials and Post-War Politics and Ethics," in *Japan's Wartime Medical Atrocities: Comparative Inquiries in Science, History, and Ethics*, ed. Jing-Bao Nie, Nanyan Guo, Mark Selden, and Arthur Kleinman (New York: Rutledge, 2010), 47.