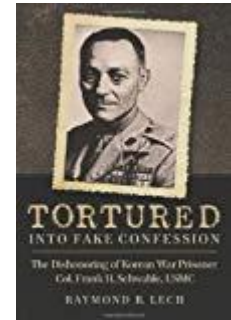


**Raymond B. Lech.** *Tortured into Fake Confession: The Dishonoring of Korean War Prisoner Col. Frank H. Schwable, USMC.* Jefferson: McFarland, 2011. xi + 192 pp. \$35.00, paper, ISBN 978-0-7864-6548-4.



**Reviewed by** David G. Williams (Army Logistics University, Fort Lee, VA)

**Published on** H-War (April, 2013)

**Commissioned by** Margaret Sankey (Air University)

## Menticide in the Court of Public Opinion

President Harry S. Truman believed that North Korea's June 1950 invasion of South Korea was the opening salvo of World War III, a battle between capitalist and Communist ideologies. Truman committed US forces on behalf of the young United Nations, then facing its first international crisis. Outnumbered and outgunned, US units failed to delay the rapidly advancing North Korean People's Army. General Walton Walker's Eighth Army, having deployed from occupation duties in Japan, finally established a perimeter that held around the southern port city of Pusan in August. General Douglas MacArthur's successful amphibious assault at Inchon and subsequent liberation of Seoul in September marked the first turning point of the war. Chinese Communist Forces intervened after UN forces crossed the 38th parallel and attacked north toward the Yalu River. By the summer of 1951, after a year of fierce fighting and rapid advances and retreats, the war bogged down into a bitter struggle over limited

objectives that each side hoped to leverage for advantage at the bargaining table.

The experiences of Korean War prisoners were new and shocking to Americans. Communist interrogators used a form of mental torture called "menticide," mistakenly called brainwashing, to eliminate a prisoner's ability to resist. On top of the large percentage of prisoners that died in captivity in the Korean War, a large number also collaborated with the enemy by signing confessions or recording peace appeals. In the midst of the Cold War, with Communist hysteria building toward its zenith, many Americans blamed the prisoners of war (POWs) for being weak. In *Tortured into Fake Confession*, author Raymond B. Lech explains how Chinese interrogators used menticide to force US Marine Colonel Frank H. Schwable, the second highest ranking officer in captivity, to sign a germ warfare confession.

The second year of the war witnessed the relative stabilization of lines on both sides. As lines

stabilized, the prison camp systems formalized. Communist camps offered “education” to POWs, explaining that Wall Street imperialists were behind the war. The Communists labeled prisoners as either “progressive” or “reactionary” based on the prisoner’s level of compliance or resistance respectively. The Communists incentivized cooperation with small rewards and discouraged resistance with such measures as solitary confinement, poor living conditions, or withholding medical treatment, among others. The Chinese hoped to sway Western public opinion and force a cease-fire agreement with POW peace appeal propaganda. A second aspect to the Chinese POW camp propaganda plan, and the one Lech focuses on, was the campaign to obtain germ warfare confessions from pilots.

An early 1951 report indicated that Chinese soldiers were dying of a mysterious disease similar to plague. Chinese officials claimed that the disease resulted from US germ warfare. China formally protested a year later, and the Soviet Union took the matter up with the United Nations. The Chinese bolstered their claim with confessions of captured US pilots. The Chinese saw in Schwable, a prominent senior officer, an opportunity to get a germ warfare confession that the international community would have to take seriously.

As a pioneer of US aviation night-fighting capability and a man whose assignment history suggests that the Marine Corps was grooming him for promotion to general, Schwable was very influential. Schwable assumed duties as the chief of staff of the First Marine Aircraft Wing in Korea in May 1952. Wing policies prohibited Schwable from flying combat missions because of his position and rank, but distasteful staff work and pending assumption of command of MAG-12, he found a loophole. Schwable believed that reconnaissance flights of MAG-12’s area of operations, as opposed to combat missions, were appropriate despite the proximity to enemy lines. On July 8, Schwable and copilot Roy Bley took off in a twin-engine recon-

naissance plane to meet with Colonel Robert Galer, the man Schwable would replace at MAG-12.

Chinese soldiers shot down the two men’s aircraft on their return flight and quickly captured them. The Chinese easily identified Schwable because he had personal identification in his wallet, and they quickly realized the potential of his capture. Schwable’s captivity began in what Lech describes as the third, or germ warfare, phase of the POW experience in Korea from January 1952 to July 1953. Lech labels the first two phases as the “starvation phase,” occurring from December 1950 to April 1951, and the “indoctrination phase,” lasting from April to December 1951, but spends no further time explaining them due to the very narrow scope of *Tortured into Fake Confession* (p. 22). The lack of description leaves the reader without context, an unfortunate aspect of this study. Readers must go elsewhere to discover the much broader and deeper aspects of the Korean War POW experience.

Chinese interrogators labeled Schwable “reactionary” and immediately subjected him to physical stress and a program of mental torture to break down his will to resist. He lived in solitude in a small hole in the side of hill until his transfer to “the house,” where he was confined to a room just big enough to lay down in (p. 63). In “the tent,” Schwable lived in mud, developed dysentery, and wrote for eleven hours per day under armed guard. He described the conditions of this part of his captivity as a time of “degradation, humiliation, intimidation, mental poisoning, and physical, moral, and spiritual oppression” (p. 67). In the fifth month of his captivity, Schwable capitulated and wrote a draft confession implicating the United States in bacteriological warfare.

Lech describes Schwable’s captivity in great detail, drawing primarily from Schwable’s court of inquiry records. He is sympathetic to Schwable and challenges readers to imagine what they might do under the same circumstances. Beyond

the deliberate menticide program, Lech also points out that each military branch issued simple, and ultimately inadequate, instructions for acceptable behavior in captivity. Understanding what POWs faced in Chinese camps, and how poorly prepared the prisoners were for it, largely explains the amount of collaboration with the enemy.

Schwable's captivity lasted until September 6, 1953, the last day of Operation Big Switch. He knew that the public and the Marine Corps would view his confession negatively, but he did not grasp the severity of the situation until Marine Corps commandant, General Lemuel Shepherd, ordered his appearance before a court of inquiry. Schwable thought that the country and the Marine Corps would see his confession as a literary fiction, not an actual betrayal. He did not realize that few yet understood the physical, mental, and moral degradation of Korean War POWs.

Schwable's was not the only confession, but his rank, his prestige, and the anger engendered among many of his fellow officers made it impossible to ignore. General Shepherd ordered a court of inquiry rather than a court-martial because it left the final decision in his hands while still appeasing Schwable's harsher critics both inside and outside of the corps. The defense argued that Schwable's collaboration resulted from menticide, a process that thoroughly broke his sense of identity and left him without the ability to choose. Among the twelve opinions and three recommendations that the court issued were that Schwable's confession resulted from menticide and "that no disciplinary action be taken" against him (p. 165). Shepherd, nevertheless, administratively punished Schwable, preventing him from commanding again and effectively ending his career. Perhaps the greatest outcome of Schwable's case was the subsequent adoption of the Armed Forces Code of Conduct, a standardized set of rules for all members of the armed forces that governs behavior in captivity.

*Tortured into Fake Confession* ends here, another unfortunate consequence of the limited scope of this book. The book would have benefited from a short chapter on the postwar experiences of Korean War POWs, a group often maligned by World War II veterans, the media, and the public as weak or treasonous. The book is more meaningful when read along with Lech's own *Broken Soldiers* (2000), a much more thorough accounting of the American POW experience in the Korean War. The limited scope is understandably due to the use of only one primary research document, but Lech misses an opportunity to better educate readers by placing Schwable's case in a broader context.

The biggest limitation of *Tortured into Fake Confession* is its style. Lech repeatedly interrupts his narrative for biographical or tangential asides. This technique is effective when he explains simultaneous events, but, for the most part, the abrupt transitions are jarring and distract readers from the story. The narrative would have benefited from smoother transitions, a consistent tempo, and expanded chapters that provide missing context. To his credit, however, Lech skillfully uses Schwable's own testimony to help readers imagine experiencing menticide, a worthwhile exercise. On the whole, *Tortured into Fake Confession* is a short and limited contribution of one man's experience to popular Korean War literature. Readers should pair this book with broader Korean War or POW studies.

c

.

.

.

.

.

.

c

s

.	-
.	,
C	,
C	,
such	,
.	11
.	a
.	.
.	.
Frank&#160;	the
.	services
.	each&#160;
G	C
C	C
S	the&#160;
,	

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at <https://networks.h-net.org/h-war>

**Citation:** David G. Williams. Review of Lech, Raymond B. *Tortured into Fake Confession: The Dishonoring of Korean War Prisoner Col. Frank H. Schwable, USMC*. H-War, H-Net Reviews. April, 2013.

**URL:** <https://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=34232>



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 United States License.