H-Net Reviews
in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Sheldon H. Harris. *Factories of Death: Japanese Biological Warfare, 1932-1945, and the American Cover-up.* New York and London: Routledge, 2002. x + 385 pp. $24.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-415-93214-1.

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Published on H-US-Japan (March, 2003)

Legacy of Denial: The Pacific War Shame

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By the time Sheldon H. Harris, Professor Emeritus at California State University, Northridge, published the first edition of this landmark work in 1994, the focus of his research had already been the subject of special reports on CBS's *60 Minutes* (1982); a British Independent Television documentary (1985); an excerpt of the British broadcast on ABC's *20/20* (1985); Congressional hearings (1982 and 1986), the latter prompted by the British broadcast; and numerous newspaper articles dating as far back as 1946 (*Pacific Stars and Stripes*) and 1950 (Kyodo News Service) in such key cities as New York, Washington, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Miami, Chicago, London, Hong Kong and Tokyo–to name just a few.

Probably the most prominent English-language book on this subject prior to the publication of Harris's text was *Unit 731: The Japanese Army¹s Secret of Secrets*, published in London by Hodder and Stoughton in 1989, and written by Peter Williams and David Wallace, co-producers of the 1985 British broadcast; numerous books, TV documentaries, and news articles have been published since Harris's work first appeared. In Japan, a comparable bombshell of a book was Seiichi Morimura's three-volume novel, *The Devil's Gluttony*, published in 1983-85 by Kadokawa Shoten. Seiichi shocked his countrymen by describing Japan's biological experiments on humans.

But what sets Harris's work apart is the depth and painstaking thoroughness of his research, as well as the impressive amount of material which he was the first to uncover. A glance at Harris's extensive bibliography listing archival depositories, private collections, diaries, personal interviews, journals, periodicals, United States Congressional reports, television documentaries, books, and pamphlets allows the reader to see at once why Professor Harris spent nearly ten years preparing the first edition of this work, and nearly all of his subsequent waking hours adding to it in order to produce this revised 2002 edition. If anyone can be said to have become obsessed in his determination to get at the full truth of what went on in Unit 731 and the other "factories of death" operated by the Imperial Japanese Army, that person would surely be Sheldon Harris.

And a glance at his acknowledgments, thanking individuals all over the globe for their assistance to him, gives the reader an inkling of why Professor Harris was so deeply mourned when he died in Los Angeles, Calif. on August 31, 2002. The loss of this scholar who had become an icon to the Chinese community, both in mainland China and the United States, as well as a respected resource person much in demand at symposia in Japan, the United States, and the global academic community, has indeed been keenly felt. It is a testament to his research that Japan's wartime biological and chemical warfare, and the experiments of Unit 731 in particular, have continued to be the focus of so much media, academic, and United States government attention.

Those who had worked with Professor Harris in China, Japan, and the United States were gratified that he lived long enough to see his research vindicated by a court in Japan. Four days before he died, a Tokyo District Court made a decision which admitted, for the first time in that country's judiciary, that Japan had used germ warfare in occupied China in the 1930s and 1940s. The ruling was bittersweet for the plaintiffs, Chinese victims seeking compensation from Japan. The court ruled that postwar treaties prevented such compensation. But Professor Harris's points had at last been acknowledged in a Japanese court of law.

Sheldon Harris first became aware almost by accident of the plagues visited by Imperial Japanese Army units on the Chinese countryside, causing the death of over 250,000 Chinese; and the even more horrible death of, by his estimates, an additional 10,000 to 12,000 prisoners

subjected to medical experiments at Unit 731 main headquarters at Ping Fan, near Harbin, Manchuria, during Japan's wartime occupation of the region. By his own account, it was during an academic exchange trip to China in 1985 that Professor Harris was informed by the late Professor Ding Zemin of Northeast Normal University in Changchun, China that during the Japanese occupation, a suburb of the city, Mokotan, had been the site of a "death factory": biological experimentation by Japanese military medical personnel. Harris was astounded. He was then invited to travel to Manchuria to see the ruins of Japan's other major biological experimentation site, at Ping Fan, near Harbin. The visit literally changed Harris's life. Learning, writing, and talking about what really went on at Ping Fan and elsewhere became his mission for the rest of his days.

In compiling *Factories of Death*, Harris divides his material into two parts. Part 1 describes how Japan's factories of death came into being, and provides extensive details about their operations; part 2 details what Harris terms the American government's efforts to cover up the extent of Japan's biological warfare, and our United States military and governmental knowledge of and subsequent possession of some (but not all) of Japan¹s BW research.

The author begins with a summary of the history of Manchuria, and goes on to chronicle how Ishii Shiro travelled the world in pre-war days (including visits to facilities in the United States), gathering data and making contacts for his interest in biological research; how he rose to prominence in the Army Medical College; and how he used his influential contacts to obtain extraordinary funding for his research, finally seizing the opportunity to be posted to Manchuria where he could work relatively unfettered. Harris describes the building and operation of facilities supervised by Ishii at Ping Fan, Changchun, and Nanking. It is regrettable that Harris's new edition of *Factories of Death* went to press before his colleague (and the man he credits with being his mentor for this edition), Kondo Shoji published his remarkable 2001 volume, *Evidence of Unit 731 Crimes: Kwantung Army Documents of the "Specially Delivered"*, published in Harbin by Heilongjiang People¹s Publishers in 2001. After many years of requests, Kondo was able to obtain records and photographs of the Kwantung [Japanese] Army, now in Chinese police files, showing Chinese prisoners whose punishment was to be sent to Harbin to be experimented upon. ("Specially Delivered" was the court term used to approve sending a prisoner to Unit 731 to be used for medical experimentation.) This, in effect was their prison sentence–and their death warrant.[1] Harris was aware of these new findings, by his own account in his preface (p. xvi), but one suspects he would have loved to reproduce the evidence in some of the photos and records made available to Kondo.

Harris devotes a chapter to what is probably the most contentious unresolved issue of the Pacific war: whether Japanese medical personnel experimented on Allied, and particularly on American, prisoners of war. He cites (pp. 152 ff) the 1985 British TV documentary[2] which led to inquiries both in the British parliament and the United States Congress, and traces the issue of experiments on POWs back to 1946, when articles first appeared quoting sources on the subject, and American military action culminating in the decision to grant Lt. Gen. Ishii immunity from war crimes prosecution in exchange for his BW data, and more important, the decision to believe Gen. Ishii¹s repeated statements that he did not experiment on American POWs, despite data which surfaced in FBI memoranda, military records, and various publications. Next, Harris spotlights (pp. 156-162) the Congressional hearings of 1982 and 1986, at which ex-POWs from the Mukden, Manchuria POW camp testified. U.S. Army Chief Archivist John H. Hatcher in his remarks at the 1986 hearing stated that the United States government had returned files, including Unit 731 data, to Japan. This was not true, but it continues to be widely believed. Hatcher was not well informed about the contents of files returned to Japan.[3]

Finally in this chapter, Harris turns his attention to the POW camp at Mukden, Manchuria, whose survivors provide the strongest allegations about Japanese medical experimentation on Allied prisoners. He describes the arrival of the first group of (1,202) American POWs at Mukden in November 1942, most already sick and weakened from surviving the Bataan Death March, conditions at their Philippine camps, and a horrendous sea voyage in unspeakable conditions aboard a Japanese merchant ship. Harris quotes (pp. 165-169) excerpts from the diaries of the POW camp commander, British Major Robert Peaty, and American POW Sigmund Schreiner to detail conditions in the camp, the high death rate among Americans there, and the periodic visits by Japanese medical teams. Mukden was about 350 miles away from Unit 731 headquarters at Harbin, but the prisoners had no way of knowing about General Ishii¹s operation, so they had no idea where the visiting Japanese doctors came from, or what the purpose of their visits was.

In beginning his discussion of the Mukden camp, Harris states: "The paucity of available records makes it impossible for the modern researcher to offer a definitive

answer" as to whether medical experiments on POWs took place there (p. 163). "However," Harris notes, "some of the survivors do have memories of their experiences which can be substantiated with documentary evidence, and their comments, therefore, can be given a degree of credence." Despite this declaration, Harris concludes that the evidence available [to him at the time] "suggests strongly" (p. 170) that American POWs in Mukden were not subjected to BW experiments by the Japanese.

Unfortunately, Harris bases his conclusion on several misconceptions. First, he states that "Red Cross representatives visited the camp routinely and enjoyed free access to the inmates" (p. 171). Nothing could be further from the truth. Apparently Harris confused the notations about periodic arrivals of Red Cross parcels (slightly more frequently mentioned at Mukden than at other POW camp locations this writer has researched) with actual visits by Red Cross personnel. "There is no record of Red Cross complaints," he writes.[4] In fact, Major Peaty asked on August 27, 1943, for permission to contact the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in Geneva. Permission was denied, according to an entry in Peaty's diary. Finally, on November 13, 1943, a Red Cross official was allowed to make a first visit to the camp, but only Major Peaty and the senior American officer, Major Stanley H. Hankins, were allowed to speak to him. Major Peaty noted that the question and answer session was "very limited." The second visit by a Red Cross official was not until December 6, 1944, more than a year later. Again, only Majors Peaty and Hankins were allowed to see the ICRC official, and both were guarded in their remarks for fear of "reprisals," as Major Peaty put it, but they did manage to request dental and optical care, as well as food and boots. The third and final visit by a Red Cross official occurred just as the war was about to end, on August 5, 1945. Dr. Marcel Junod was on his way to Tokyo as the new ICRC representative to Japan, and his account of that visit is chilling.[5] Apparently Harris was not familiar with Dr. Junod's account of the visit. Dr. Junod was appalled at the intimidation of the POWs, and was especially disturbed that none of the POW doctors were allowed to talk to him when he insisted on visiting the hospital. Dr. Junod also mentioned seeing stacks of undistributed Red Cross parcels in the corner of a hut, and asking why they had not been given out to the prisoners. He was informed by the commandant that the were being "saved for later … at Christmas." And Major Peaty noted in his diary, "No one was allowed any contact with [Dr. Junod]," and that all prisoners were sent to the factory some distance away, "[p]resumably to keep them away from the Red Cross visitor."

Harris also believed that Gen. Ishii's associates at Ping Fan, after destroying that facility, would surely have killed any Mukden POWs who were the subjects of their experiments. But this assumption overlooks the fact that Russian troops, invading Manchuria on August 8, 1945, immediately captured all the Japanese personnel at the Harbin site. And most significantly, it was precisely to avoid such a massacre that a six-man team, led by American Office of Strategic Services personnel, parachuted into the Mukden POW camp on August 16, 1945, one day after Emperor Hirohito's radio address announcing acceptance of Allied surrender terms. Sure enough, the Japanese commandant had not yet heard of the surrender, so he had not implemented the long-standing instructions to Japanese camp commandants to dispose of all POWs prior to surrendering their position.[6] The next day, liberating Russian troops arrived at Mukden.

In his final footnote to this chapter, Harris cites the bill sponsored by Senator Dianne Feinstein in 2000, which became incorporated into the Nazi War Crimes Disclosure Act of 1998, and expressed hope that it would prompt fuller disclosure of material relating to Japanese war crimes. The official name of the Act thus became the Nazi War Crimes and Japanese Imperial Government Records Disclosure Act. In 1999, President Clinton ordered that under the aegis of The National Archives, a government Interagency Working Group (IWG) be created to implement the Act. (This writer is a member of the IWG Historical Advisory Panel.) Although in his preface Harris complains that government agencies have not been forthcoming enough in responding to the Act, it should be noted that when the revised edition of *Factories of Death* went to press, the IWG had only just begun to search for documents relating to Japanese war crimes, having concerned itself exclusively with Nazi war crimes during the first year and a half of its work. At this writing (March 2003), the IWG has made some progress in locating documents pertaining to Japan, and most government agencies are responding to the IWG search criteria. Much remains to be done, but the Feinstein bill has extended the time frame for IWG to complete its work. So like any good researcher, Harris leaves open the possibility that information may come to light in the future which will provide a more definitive answer to the question of experimentation on American POWs by the Japanese in World War II.

Following his own examination of the Allied POW experimentation issue, Harris, in a chapter titled "Who Knew?" (ch. 10) discusses efforts by Allied military and intelligence personnel to discover who in the Japanese hierarchy knew about Gen. Ishii's program, and whether

the experiments involved Allied POWs. This chapter makes fascinating reading, especially the follow-up interviews with American scientific experts who were flown to Tokyo to participate in the interrogations, and years later said they believed they had been misled by the Japanese involved in Unit 731, including Gen. Ishii himself.

In part 2 of his text (chs. 11-16) Harris discusses in sequence the American biological warfare program; the wartime discovery by Allied intelligence of information about Japan's BW and CW programs; postwar investigations, including the decision to allow Gen. Ishii and his associates immunity from prosecution; and in separate final chapters, evidence provided by Harris's own research and that of others documenting cover-ups by both scientific and the military personnel. Although new data since the 1994 publication is scattered throughout this edition, much of it is in part 2. The reader will find that Harris's footnotes deserve careful scrutiny; sometimes they contain the most intriguing tidbits of all.

It is easy to fault United States military and government decisions to grant immunity from prosecution to Gen. Ishii and his associates, but the context of the immediate postwar period needs to be understood in making such judgments. The threat posed by the Soviet Union to American security was considered to be very real in the immediate aftermath of World War II, and the nomer "Cold War" is apt. The fact that information about experiments on American prisoners of war came from Soviet sources and the Communist party in Japan was undoubtedly a key element in the U.S. decisions to discount such information as Soviet propaganda, although belief in its veracity has lingered to this day, as Harris notes so well in these chapters. And American prosecutors were indeed on the horns of a dilemma: how to discuss such information in open court without sharing biological data with a power now poised to use such warfare against Americans? The interests of "national security" seemed much more logical in 1947 than they may seem today. Harris seems more disturbed about the cover-up of data than about the decision not to hold General Ishii accountable in a court of law, and most scholars would probably agree with him.

It is certainly one of the ironies of history that Josef Mengele, General Ishii's counterpart in Nazi Germany, was indicted and sought for trial at Nuremberg, but slipped through the Allied net because of a series of bureaucratic bungles, while General Ishii came into custody and was allowed to escape prosecution for essentially the same crimes.

In his new concluding chapter, Harris updates the powerful new evidence disclosed by both Chinese and Japanese sources about the lingering effects of chemical and biological warfare in the Chinese countryside, and the deadly legacy of Unit 731 which is still being tallied. Most striking is the new information being made available from Japanese sources, and Harris's continuing screed on Japanese and American medical ethics which, in his view, have allowed so much information to remain out of reach for researchers, and have allowed collaborative biological research to continue.

At this writing, much attention is being focused on the potential threat for biological warfare to be waged by Iraq. Shipments of anthrax strains to Iraq during the 1980s have been widely noted in recent months. One can only hope that American policy makers can learn from our history, and are not condemned to repeat it.

Finally, one can hope that Professor Harris would be pleased to note that Greg Bradsher at The National Archives has recently (May 2002) compiled a 300-page "Finding Aid to Records at the National Archives at College Park, Maryland Relating to Japanese War Crimes, War Criminals and War Crimes Trials; Post World War II Restitution and Reparations; and to the Exploitation of Japanese Records During and After World War II." Many of these files are, in Dr. Bradsher's words, "under researched"; moreover, he is adding to them each month. This writer, who first met Professor Harris in 1996 at a Tokyo War Crimes symposium at the Admiral Nimitz National Museum of the Pacific War, intends to exploit those finding aids as fully as possible. Sheldon Harris's legacy is to demand no less of future research, with the goal of finding answers to the questions he has raised so compellingly with his work and writing.

Notes

[1]. Mr. Kondo has done considerable research and produced Unit 731 documentaries for Japanese TV. He testified as an expert witness at the Tokyo trial which concluded in August 2002. He has travelled the world gathering data on Unit 731 from various archives, and provided much new information to this writer about experiments on American POWs.

[2]. "Unit 731: Did the Emperor Know?" British Independent Television, August 13, 1985.

[3]. E-mail reply dated July 30, 2002, from senior archivist Greg Bradsher, Ph.D., the National Archives, to Ivy Lee, President of the Global Alliance for Preserving the Truth of the Sino-Japanese War, stating that "None of the records we returned [to Japan] were the records of Unit 731. I do not believe these records came into our

custody as part of the "captured Japanese records" collection we received in 1948 and returned in 1958.... Any Unit 731 records that came into U.S. government custody were not returned to Japan, but were incorporated into the files of one or more agencies (e.g. Surgeon General, Chemical Corps, SCAP, Far Eastern Command, Judge Advocate General).... It is also possible that some of the records may have been destroyed.... My best guess is that the Unit 731 records are still in the legal custody of one or more government agencies.... It is possible that some records are simply buried in some agency storage area." See also Dr. Bradsher[1]s October 21, 2002 report: "The History of the Capture, Exploitation and Return of the Captured Japanese Records, 1942-1962," posted on the National Archives website.

[4]. *Factories of Death*, p. 171.

[5]. Marcel Junod, *Warrior without Weapons*, ICRC pub. 1982, pp. 262-264.

[6]. See chapter 12 in my book, *Unjust Enrichment* (2001, Stackpole Books) for a full discussion and display of the extant copy of this instruction document, issued by the Japanese Vice Minister of War, August 1, 1944.

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Citation: Linda Goetz Holmes. Review of Harris, Sheldon H., *Factories of Death: Japanese Biological Warfare, 1932-1945, and the American Cover-up.* H-US-Japan, H-Net Reviews. March, 2003.
URL: http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=7334

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