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WWII experiments and US cover-up?

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During World War II, American prisoners of war were among thousands of human guinea pigs who died in Japanese germ warfare experiments, yet American officials decided, after the war, to make a deal with the Japanese officers responsible for the experiments, trading immunity from legal prosecution in return for the data the Japanese had accumulated on their biological warfare program. These disclosures were made in last Sunday's London Observer, in an article based on a "fully documented report" appearing in the October issue of the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists.

The Bulletin's report drew on previously classified documents obtained under the Freedom of Information Act. One of the released documents indicated that, although most victims of the Japanese experiments with biological warfare were Chinese prisoners of war, Americans, and perhaps some British, were also used "because of Japanese interest in studying the immunity of Anglo-Saxons to infectious diseases."

According to the Observer's account of the report, "The experiments involved giving prisoners massive doses of lethal diseases, including bubonic plague, typhus, anthrax, smallpox, gangrene and cholera, with some being slaughtered at various stages of illness so that researchers could check on the progress of the disease."

The American POWs known to have perished in this program were held at a Japanese facility in Manchuria known as "Unit 737," the largest of seven such biological warfare laboratories in occupied China and Japan. The report said Unit 737 comprised "a large self-contained installation with sophisticated germ and insect-breeding facilities, a prison, testing grounds, an arsenal for making germ bombs, an airfield, its own special planes and a crematorium for the human victims."

This installation, under the direction of Lt. Gen. Shiro Ishii, a Japanese army surgeon, was hurriedly dismantled in the last days of World War II as Soviet tanks crossed the Siberian-Manchurian border shortly before the Japanese

surrendered. The Japanese staff killed and cremated those prisoners who were still living, and then fled through South Korea, taking their laboratory records with them, according to the report.

The documents cited in the Bulletin report indicate that senior American officials promised Gen. Ishii and his staff immunity from prosecution in order to gain possession of his germ warfare research data, and that the United States made a successful effort to keep any reference to Japanese germ warfare programs from entering the Tokyo war trials, so that evidence of the research could be kept out of Russian hands.

One top secret cable from US military headquarters in Tokyo to the War Department in Washington promised that a guarantee of immunity from war crimes prosecutions "will result in exploiting 20 years experience of the director, former Gen. Ishii, who can assure complete cooperation of his former subordinates."

Two US Army doctors who traveled to Tokyo to investigate Gen. Ishii's materials were so impressed by the extent of Japanese germ warfare research that they urged a deal be made with the researchers. Said the doctors: "Such information could not be obtained in our laboratories because of scruples attached to human experimentation."

A State Department memorandum from the postwar period summarized the rationale for the 1947 deal with Gen. Ishii: "The value to the United States of Japanese biological weapons data is of such importance to national security as to far outweigh the value accruing from war crimes prosecution."