

September 1997

Wu Zhili, 'The Bacteriological War of 1952 is a False Alarm'

Citation:

"Wu Zhili, 'The Bacteriological War of 1952 is a False Alarm'", September 1997, Wilson Center Digital Archive, Yanhuang chunqiu no. 11 (2013): 36-39. Translated by Drew Casey. <https://wilson-center-digital-archive.dvincitest.com/document/123080>

Summary:

Wu Zhili's claims that bacteriological warfare allegedly conducted by the United States in Korea in 1952 was a "false alarm."

Original Language:

Chinese

Contents:

Transcript - Chinese
Translation - English

([《炎黄春秋》]编者按：本文系原中国人民志愿军卫生部部长吴之理同志的遗作。除个别句子以及明显的文字错误外，只要不影响对内容的理解，本刊发表时均不予删改。)

朝鲜战争停战距今(1997年)已44年，至于1952年轰动全世界，美帝国主义有口难辩的细菌战的真相如何？

答案是一场虚惊。

当年党中央是确实(至少开始的时候)认为美军是进行了细菌战，我们动员了全军和全国，

花了大量人力和物力进行反细菌战运动，美帝国主义也是一时臭名扫地，原驻朝美军司令李奇微，1952年末调任欧洲盟军司令，到达机场时，群众骂他是瘟神，一时下不了台。他说凭上帝之名发誓，美军没有进行细菌战，才让他走。

事件的缘起是冬季的雪地上出现大量苍蝇和跳蚤。后来知道是雪蚤，不是人蚤，朝鲜语称oguli，是冬季雪地自然现象。雪蚤是弹尾目(Collembola)黑跳虫属(Iso tomopalustris)。我东北也有雪蚤的报告。那时我们以为雪地上不可能有苍蝇和跳蚤，加上外国报纸报导日本细菌战犯石井来朝鲜前线调查美军不明死亡，于是中央判定美军进行了细菌战。

事件的主要经过如下：1952年1月29日，志愿军卫生部和志愿军司令部收到42

军电报称：美机于1952年1月28

日飞过平康郡该军驻地，战壕雪地上发现多种昆虫，内有蚤、蝇和类似蜘蛛的昆虫。42军送来23个跳蚤(雪蚤)，33

个苍蝇和类似蜘蛛的昆虫标本。我们化验室进行培养，没有发现致病菌。42

军卫生部部长是高良，是我在三师时卫校的教育长，一个很细心和有水平的卫生干部。他一定对细菌战有所警惕，才发这个电报。42

军的电报同时报总司，引起彭德怀司令员的高度重视，转报党中央，又电告各部队警惕和要及时报告类似情况。一时几乎所有部队都有类似发现的电报(两个月中有

近千次报告)，报告敌投的东西是五花八门，有死鼠，有苍蝇，还有大蚊子，有昆虫容器(是美军撒宣传品用的铁四格弹壳和带降落伞的纸筒)，有树叶和蛇，还有

一两个单位报告有朝鲜居民突然死亡；报告河中漂来大量死鱼，并送来10

余条小死鱼(鲫鱼)标本，经细菌学培养出是纯沙门氏杆菌。《人民日报》又报导美机多次侵东北投撒细菌、死鼠和其他东西，恰巧此时，美军前线发现不明死亡，

美军派日本细菌战犯、原731部队的头头石井来朝鲜调查此事，并公布此消息。党中央根据以上情况判断美军进行了细菌战。不几天，1952年2月22

日，《人民日报》头版头条醒目消息，发表以中国人民志愿军和朝鲜政府的名义，谴责美帝在朝鲜和我东北进行大规模细菌战并附有投撒物和细菌涂片的照片，在全世界引起震动和纷纷谴责。事先我们并不知《人民日报》这么快公布。公布后，我对卫生部朱直光副部长(已故世)说，这下我们要被动了。朱说今后只有做文章。

中央卫生部是贺诚副部长当家，他在东北工作过，知道日本的731

部队是搞细菌战的部队，知道石井其人其事，是他的错误判断，党中央同意了。他派昆虫学家何琦教授和细菌学家魏曦教授(二人均故世)来朝鲜调查。他们来前，

我们已多次派员(包括我本人)到报告单位去核实情况，结果是雪地上有昆虫和其他投撒物，但未发现突然死人和可疑病人，前报死人的单位说是道听途说的事。至于

苍蝇，几乎家家灶前灶后都有，它们可随时飞到门口雪地上。我个人分析：(1)帝国主义是什么坏事都能干得出来的，细菌战也不例外。(2)但严冬不是进行细菌战的好季节，天冷昆虫活动能力弱，也不利于细菌繁殖。(3)在前线战壕一带投，人烟少，有病也难传染，而且离美军战壕不过数十米，还有反弹的可能。(4)朝鲜本有虱媒传染病流行，城镇房舍多被炸毁，百姓都住防空洞中，生活很困难，朝鲜民族极顽强，再来个细菌战也不会有更大灾难迫使他们投降。(5)我们的初步调查尚不能证实美军进行细菌战。我向洪副司令汇报我的看法，他同意我将

意见发报报告彭总和中央，我并建议暂勿大事宣传，以免将来被动和浪费人力物力。(这是何、魏二教授尚未来到前的事。)中央即来电批评我警惕性不高，说就是

敌未进行细菌战，也可乘此

加强卫生工作。后来何魏二教授下去作了调查，并看了昆虫标本和细菌涂片。何发现所谓跳蚤是雪蚤，魏发现雪蚤染色涂片是有形如鼠疫杆菌的细菌，但呈格兰氏阳性（鼠疫杆菌是阴性），也培养不出鼠疫菌。我问他们的看法，何琦说（原话），"我看是false alarm（虚惊）。"彭总看到我的电报后，要我当面汇报。洪副司令要我如实地向彭总说说我的看法。恰巧朝鲜人民军防疫局的金局长奉命来找我摸摸底和商量如何办，因为他们也拿不出证据。我带他一同去见彭总，希望金能作个找不到细菌战证据的旁证。当晚到了桧

仓郡志司所在地。（我们住成川郡，离志司大约两小时的汽车路程。）彭总、邓华、宋时轮副司令等十余人在座。我汇报了我们调查的结果和上边看法。彭总严厉地说（大意）：我们的卫生部长是美帝国主义的特务，替敌人说话，志愿军的健康能有保障吗？他接着说，还有人反映你们对伤病员不关心，战场上死一千死一万都可以，下来后死一个，我都找你算账。我说，我可以不当卫生部长，我别无所求，但请让我留在朝鲜打仗。彭总宣布临时休会，常委讨论。复会后，彭总说，常委还要你当卫生部长，好好干，成立总防疫办公室，你当副主任（邓华的主任）。和金局长回志后的路上，他说他当时吓得发抖，以为真要杀头了。又说你们彭总真好，他爱兵，对你又教育又器重，你们有好党，好司令。回到志后，向洪副司令汇报，包括彭总和我个人的谈话内容。洪不吭声，说你好好干吧！不几天后，东北军区卫生部戴正华部长（已故世）受军委卫生部之托，来检查反细菌战工作，我向他汇报彭总的指示。戴说，你不要怕，就按彭总说的去做。当日半夜，我接到驻志司的苏军参谋团长的翻译的电话，说斯大林问细菌战是否真有其事。我答，你去问彭总，挂了电话。我心想，真难办！搞不好真会杀头，要有个杀头的精神准备。

过不几天，贺诚和宫乃泉组织一个连何琦和魏曦在内有30余人阵容强大的防疫检验队来朝协助反细菌战，他们之中有：

昆虫学家何琦
跳蚤专家柳支英
寄生虫专家吴光，包鼎丞
细菌学家魏曦，陈文贵（鼠疫菌专家，抗战时证明过日军投撒鼠疫），方亮（朝鲜族），谢知母，郭时钦，程知义
病毒学家郭成周
流行病学专家何观清、俞焕文
立克兹小体专家刘维通（也是流行病学专家）
青年科学家10人左右（任民峰，吴滋霖，胡介堂，李义民，李振琼，高韵调，刘育京等）
摄影师和技术员10余人

我把他们组成4个组，最大的组放在卫生部附近，另3个组放到东、中、西三条线的兵团卫生处。这3个分组担任从基层送来的标本的初检，并负责到现场指导防疫工作。初检有问题的标本，送到成川大队本部作二检。标本是收到不少，有好几百份，也培养出病菌，但都是沙门氏菌之类，未出现鼠疫杆菌和霍乱弧菌。有1-2次在树叶标本中，查到炭疽杆菌。所谓大投撒物，形形色色都有，但很难和细菌战挂上钩。

我很快拟定了反细菌战的措施（加强个人卫生措施，注射多种疫苗，每人要扎裤腿和袖口，毛巾围颈，设对空监视哨，采标本送检方法，就地扑打空投昆虫，撒消毒药，发现可疑患者先隔离后报告等），颁发全军，并取得彭总的同意，可以对死者尸解（由志司和志政联合通知全军），对后来研究伤死原因，开了绿灯。

整个一年中，没有发现一名和细菌战有关的患者或死者。由于讲究卫生，病号减少不少。当时一些部队领导干部，1987年遇见我的时候说，美帝搞这么大的细菌战，我方竟没有一名死者，那时就觉得不可思议。

这一年我们忙于接待调查团：李德全和廖承志率领的国内名人的调查团，国际民主法律调查团和国际科学家调查团。后者团长是英国科学院院士李约瑟（Joseph Needham，著《中国科学技术史》）。副团长是苏联科学院院士茹科夫·维勒斯尼科夫院士，他很有这方面经验，曾任伯力审判日本细菌战犯的医学专家。他带一名青年英文翻译华斯基先生。团员有巴西生物学家贝索亚教授，法国兽医专家马戴尔教授，瑞典临床化验家安德琳博士（女），意大利生物学家奥利佛教授。我国钱三强博士担任联络员，陈述医师担任俄文翻译，热带病学专家钟惠澜博士和（妇科）严仁英教授（女）担任英文翻译。前两个调查团，一个全是中国人，当然全力合作。国际民主法律调查团员，不是自然科学家，我们讲什么他们都真记下了，都骂美帝国主义。国际科学家调查团就不一样，他们是相信美帝进行了细菌战，但我们的不能在证据上出一点问题。苏联茹科夫院士是受托于斯大林。他们来朝鲜的时候，正是美军对平壤进行大轰炸之后，平壤一片瓦砾。调查团先在东北调查美机在那儿投细菌的证据（7月12日至7月25日）。入朝朝方对他们说，朝鲜是战场，很危险，我们不妨对东北调查结果作个结论，签个字，免得万一有意外，我们劳而无功。其余的团员认为有道义，于是写了美军在中国东北进行细菌战的初步结论。在朝鲜（7月28日至8月1日），他们被安置在深深的地下旅馆，夜晚还受到美机的骚扰。开听证会那天，朝方先作两个案件报告，一个是霍乱死亡例，说是美机在平壤大同投下草包，内有带霍乱菌的蛙（文蛤），患者吃了蛙，得霍乱死亡。朝鲜多年没有霍乱了。另一个案件是鼠疫死亡，说是这家人某天在水缸表面发现了跳蚤，很奇怪，过了几天，家中有人病故。尸解是鼠疫。朝鲜从来没有鼠疫。（这是朝方请教陈文贵教授准备的案情，和他40年代日本在常德投撒带菌的跳蚤，在水缸中发现的情况相似。）志愿军拿出的是20

兵团驻地两名中尉在砍柴时发现密密的跳蚤群，他们收集了不少，送来培养出鼠疫杆菌的案例。由于我们在反细菌战时，要求每人都要束紧裤腿和袖口，及时对投撒现场消毒，故该军无患者和死亡。此事件很顺利地被科学家接受，通过了证词。这个案件的真实情况是，跳蚤是在森林里的小茅屋里发现的，小屋里有柴草和杂物，适合跳蚤的繁殖。这就很难说是美帝投的。他们上报的时候，没有提到小茅屋。这次要他们出场作证时，他们中一人说，毛主席教导他不要说谎。僵住了。怎么办？只有说服他服从当前的对敌斗争，把发现跳蚤的地点说成是露天。蚤标本都是人蚤（Pulex irritans）。至于鼠疫杆菌，那好办，我们使它出现了。

大约在5月间，陈文贵在我们检验队的细菌室打电话告诉我说，方亮把敌投的鼠疫杆菌菌种丢了（原来是方亮负责细菌室，实际是从来没有过鼠疫杆菌菌种）。陈文贵在印度索克教授那里专门学过鼠疫，一下子就发现了。我意识到是大问题，马上发报给北京的贺诚部长和东北的王斌部长，说即派门新同志来取鼠疫菌种，一定要给，不然一切都办不好。门新（后在辽阳203军医院当院长，已离休）去沈阳，来回5天，取回两管鼠疫菌种（装在密封的铁管里）。我把一管交给陈文贵，一管当我们防疫队副队长李哲范的面交朝鲜保健副相鲁振汉。他向我要过菌种，这时他心中有数为何我给他菌种。事后我对李哲范说，万一到时难证明细菌战，你给我注射鼠疫菌让我死，就说卫生部长染上美军投撒的鼠疫，不怕不是铁证。他说，那不行，总有办法可想。可见当时压力之大。李是朝鲜族，解放前和苏联专家在东北一起搞过防疫鼠疫工作，已是出色的专家了。早几年我问他记不记得此事，他说记不太清了。

这一年里，我跑了三次北京，汇报有关反细菌战问题。每次都见到周总理。周总理虽日理万机，对此事过问非常之细。一次，朝方保健副相和我同去北京，向总理汇报对国际科学调查团的准备工作，总理问朝方有何困难，我插了嘴，总理马上问鲁副相对我的意见是何看法，使我非常感动总理尊重别人的高贵品格，同时使我感到我不该随便插嘴。一次，晚上8点多钟，总理一面吃饭一面和我们谈问题。他就吃一小碗饭，两小碟菜，一荤一素，一小碗汤。多俭朴的生活。

调查团回东北前，去朝鲜北边碧潼战俘营会见美空军几名飞行员，他们早在《人民日报》上发表了他们投细菌弹的经过。这次他们又自由地向调查团谈他们听过投细菌武器的课和投“不爆炸的炸弹”经过。停战后，他们被交换回国，美军审问他们为何乱说莫须有的细菌战之事。他们回答说，中方答应很快放他们回国。听说他们都为此受了处分。我真佩服战俘营我方人员的说服工作。

调查团回到北京，签了字，发表了500页厚的黑皮书《调查在朝鲜和中国的细菌战事实国际科学委员会报告书及附件》。毛主席接见了他们。

国际科学家向毛主席汇报后，毛主席说，我看美帝是实验性的搞细菌战。他们异口同声赞同这样的说法。

茹科夫院士回苏联向斯大林汇报后，苏共中央来电说，细菌战是一场虚惊。周总理马上找黄克诚总参谋长和洪学智副司令问，你们做了手脚没有。洪答，做了，不然那时没法交差。当时，我国正派人在欧洲作反细菌战宣传，总理即下令撤回。之后我国再不提此事，但下面并不知道。一些编书的人老要把美帝搞细菌战写进去。我总是建议用我们受到细菌战的“威胁”的口气，把文章做在“防”的方面。黄克诚病中要我向军事科学院编百科全书的同志转达他的意见，说美帝没有在朝鲜搞细菌战，现在两国关系也不坏，不宜再说这个问题。他们听到之后，派人来问我究竟有没有细菌战。我只说我们没有足够的证据。

这事是我几十年的心病，没有别的，只觉得对不起中外科学家，让他们都签了名。也许我还是太天真，因为他们可能知道真相，但服从政治斗争需要。如是这样倒罢了，如不是这样，他们是受我们骗了。我曾不止一次向黄克诚说对不起他们。黄说你不用这么想，搞政治斗争嘛，而且一开始你就表示了你对细菌战的看法，是很不容易的事，你已尽到责任了。

我想这件事在历史上总有一天要说清，现在由我这不在职的知情的83岁的老人说出来比较合适：1952年的细菌战是一场虚惊。

1997年9月

(2005年2月2日追记。去年，2004年，军事医院科学院李义民教授转来一份比利时医科大学一位教授写的文章，专门讨论此事，说：俄国公布了前苏联的档案。苏共中央1952年秋，同一天给毛泽东主席和金日成主席发了电报，称美军并未进行细菌战，你们是一场虚惊，已给苏联专家茹科夫撤销院士的处分，因他带头搞了黑皮报告)

(作者[吴之理]为原中国人民志愿军卫生部部长)

(责任: 编辑黄钟)

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([Yanhuang chunqiu] Editor's Comment: This essay is the posthumous work of Comrade Wu Zhili, former director of the Chinese People's Volunteer Army Health Division. With the exception of a few sentences and obvious typographical errors, this journal did not permit alterations in order to not influence the understanding of its contents.)

It has already been 44 years (in 1997) since the armistice of the Korean War, but as for the worldwide sensation of 1952: how indisputable is the bacteriological war of the American imperialists?

The case is one of false alarm.

That year the Party Central Committee confirmed (at least at the beginning) that it believed that the U.S. Army was conducting bacteriological warfare. We mobilized the whole military and the whole nation, spending large amounts of manpower and materiel to carry out an anti-bacteriological warfare movement. At the same time, American imperialism was also notoriously reaching a low point. When the former commander of U.S. Forces in Korea, [Matthew Bunker] Ridgeway, was transferred to Allied Headquarters Europe at the end of 1952, crowds jeered him at his arrival to the airport, calling him "the god of pestilence"[\[1\]](#) and causing him embarrassment. Not until he swore by the name of God that the U.S. military did not undertake bacteriological warfare was he allowed to go.

The affair originated with the appearance of large numbers of flies[\[2\]](#) and fleas on the snowy winter ground. It was later learned that these were snow fleas (in Korean called 'oguli'), not human fleas,[\[3\]](#) and that they are a natural phenomenon on the snow in the winter. Snow fleas are of the order Springtail (Collembola), genus Dark springtail (Isotomopalustris[\[4\]](#)). I also had reports of snow fleas in Northeast China. At that time we thought flies and fleas could not be found on the snow, and given that foreign newspapers were reporting that Japanese bacteriological war criminal Ishii [Shiro] had come to the front lines in Korea to investigate suspicious deaths on the U.S. military side, the Central Committee determined that the U.S. military was conducting bacteriological warfare.

The principal course of the affair was as follows: On January 29, 1952, the [Chinese People's] Volunteer Army Health Division and Volunteer Army Headquarters received a telegram from the 42nd Army claiming that U.S. planes flew over Pyongyang county (where that army was encamped) on January 28, 1952, and on the snow-covered ground in the trenches many types of insects were discovered. Among them were fleas, flies,[\[5\]](#) and spider-like insects. The 42nd Army sent specimens of 23 fleas (snow fleas), 33 flies,[\[6\]](#) and spider-like insects. Our chemical testing lab conducted cultures and did not discover pathogenic bacteria. The head of the 42nd Army Health Division was Gao Liang, a very attentive and qualified health cadre who had been the head of education at the medical school when I was in the 3rd Division. He must have been somewhat on alert about bacteriological warfare in order to send this telegram. The 42nd Army's telegram was also sent to PVA Command, where it drew the a high degree of attention from Commander Peng Dehuai, was forwarded to the Party Central Committee, and was sent to every unit to alert them and require timely reports of any similar situations. At that time almost all units sent telegrams of similar discoveries (within two months there were close to a thousand reports), reporting that the enemy dropped all kinds of things, including dead rats, flies and large mosquitos, vessels with insects (which were U.S. Army iron 4-compartment ammunition cases and paper parachute tubes used for spreading propaganda material), tree leaves and snakes, and one or two units reported that some North Korean citizens had suddenly died. [There were also] reports that large amounts of dead fish floated up in the river, and ten or more specimens of small dead fish (crucian carp[\[7\]](#)) were sent in, which a bacteriological culture found to have pure salmonella. People's Daily again reported that U.S. planes were dropping bacteria, dead rats and other things.

Coincidentally, at that time suspicious deaths were discovered on the U.S. military front lines, and the U.S. military sent Japanese bacteriological war criminal and former head of Unit 731 Ishii to North Korea to investigate this matter and publish this information. Based on the above information, the Party Central Committee determined that the U.S. military was conducting bacteriological warfare. After just a few days, on February 22, 1952, the front page of the People's Daily ran an eye-grabbing top headline, which, in the name of the Chinese People's Volunteer Army and the North Korean government, denounced the U.S. imperialists for carrying out large-scale bacteriological war in Korea and Northeast China. Photographs of the dropped objects and bacterial smears were attached. This drew jarring and successive condemnation from the whole world. Prior to this, we did not know People's Daily would publish so quickly. After publication, I said to Health Division Deputy Director Zhu Zhiguang (since passed): "From here on, we should be passive." Zhu said, "After today, we can only write an article."[\[8\]](#)

The Central Health Division[\[9\]](#) was under the charge of Deputy Director He Cheng. He had worked in Northeast China, and knew that Japan's Unit 731 had engaged in[\[10\]](#) bacteriological warfare. He knew Ishii's person and deeds, and that they were his mistaken decision- and the Party Central Committee agreed. He sent entomologist Professor He Qi and bacteriologist Professor Wei Xi (both of them since passed) to Korea to investigate. Before they came, we had already dispatched men (including myself) to the reporting units many times to ascertain the situation, an investigation which concluded that there were insects and other objects dropped on the snow, but which did not discover people who had died suddenly or suspiciously fallen ill. Units that had previously reported deaths said that the reports had been hearsay. As for flies, almost every house has them in front of and behind the stove-they could fly out the door onto the snow at any time.

My personal analysis was: (1) Imperialism is capable of carrying out all manner of evils, and bacteriological war is not an exception. (2) Severe winter, however, is not a good season for conducting bacteriological war. When the weather is cold the mobility of insects is weakened, and is not conducive to bacteria reproduction. (3) Dropping [objects] on the front line trenches, where there are few people and sickness does not spread easily, and where the U.S. military's trenches are not more than ten meters away, allows for the possibility of ricocheting. (4) Korea already had an epidemic of lice-borne contagious diseases. All the houses in the cities and towns had been burned down, and the common people all lived in air-raid shelters. Their lives are already difficult, but the Korean people are extremely tenacious and bacteriological warfare cannot be the greater disaster that forces them to surrender. (5) Our preliminary investigation still could not prove that the U.S. military carried out bacteriological warfare.

I reported my viewpoint to Deputy Commander Hong, and he agreed that I should send a report of my opinion to Commander Peng and the Central Committee. I suggested that it would be wise to not publicize this as a major matter, in order to avoid being passive and wasting manpower and resources (this was before Professors He and Wei had arrived). Just then, a telegram arrived from the Central Committee, criticizing my lack of vigilance and saying that the enemy had not carried out bacteriological warfare, but that we could still take advantage of this to reinforce health work. Afterward Professors He and Wei carried on with their investigations and observed insect specimens and bacterial smears. He discovered that the so-called fleas were snow fleas, while Wei discovered that although the stained snow flea smears seemed to have bubonic plague[\[11\]](#) bacteria, they showed to be gram-positive (bubonic plague is gram-negative). They could not culture plague. I asked their opinion. He Qi said (verbatim), "I think it's a false alarm."[\[12\]](#)

After Commander Peng saw my telegram, he requested that I give an in-person report. Deputy Commander Hong asked me to give Commander Peng a realistic account of my viewpoint. Coincidentally, Chief Kim of the Korean People's Army

Disease Prevention Bureau was ordered to come get to the bottom of things and discuss with me how to manage the situation, because they also could not come up with evidence. I took him with me to see Commander Peng, hoping that Kim could be a witness to the fact that evidence of bacteriological warfare could not be found. That evening, we arrived at the PVA Headquarters in Hoechang County (We were posted at Seongcheon County, about a two-hour drive from the Command). Commander Peng, Deputy Commanders Deng Hua and Song Shilun, and ten or more others were sitting. We reported the results of our investigation and our opinions as stated above. Commander Peng said sternly (this is the general idea): "Our Health Director is an America imperialist operative and speaks on behalf of the enemy. Can the health of the Volunteer Army be guaranteed?" Then he said, "There are others who report that you^[13] are neglecting the sick and wounded. If a thousand or ten thousand die on the battlefield that's fine, but if one dies afterwards I will come to you for a reckoning." I said, "I will no longer act as Health Director. I have no other request, except please let me stay in Korea and fight." Commander Peng declared the meeting temporarily in recess for the standing committee to deliberate. When the meeting resumed, Commander Peng said, "The standing committee still wants you as the Health Director. Do a proper job. Set up a general disease prevention office and be the deputy director. Deng Hua will be the director."

On the road later with Director Kim, he said that he was scared and trembling because he thought I'd be beheaded. He also said, "Your Commander Peng is great, he loves the troops! He both educates you and regards you highly. You have a good Party, and a good Commander. After returning to post, I reported everything to Deputy Commander Hong, including what Commander Peng said to me personally. Hong did not utter a word, except to say "Do a proper job!" After only a few days, the Director of the Northeast Military Region Health Division, Dai Zhenghua (since passed), was tasked by the Central Military Commission to investigate anti-bacteriological warfare work. I gave him a report of Commander Peng's instructions. Dai said, "Don't be afraid, just go do what Commander Peng said." That night at midnight, I received a phone call from the Soviet Chief of Staff at Headquarters who, through a translator, said, "Stalin has asked whether bacteriological warfare is really occurring." I answered, "Go ask Commander Peng," and hung up the phone. I thought to myself, this is really hard to figure out! If I don't do this right I'll be beheaded. I should prepare myself to be beheaded.

After only a few days, He Cheng and Gong Rengquan organized a disease prevention inspection unit with a 30-person strong line-up that included He Qi and Wei Xi and had it come to Korea to aid in countering bacteriological warfare. Among them were:

Entomologist He Qi

Flea expert Liao Zhiying

Parasite experts Wu Guang and Bao Dingcheng

Bacteriologists Wei Xi, Chen Wengui (a plague expert who proved that Japan used the plague during the War of Resistance), Fang Liang (Korean), Xie Zhimu, Guo Shiqin, and Cheng Zhiyi

Virologist Guo Chengzhou

Epidemiology experts He Guanqing and Yu Huanwen

Expert in Rickettsia corpuscles Liu Weitong (who is also an epidemiology expert)

Approximately 10 young scientists (Ren Minfeng, Wu Zilin, Hu Jietang, Li Yimin, Li Zhenqiong, Gao Yundiao, Liu Yujing, etc.)

10 or more photographers and technicians

I divided them into 4 teams, the largest of which I placed near the Health Division. I placed the other 3 teams in the health departments of the Eastern, Central, and Western fronts respectively. These 3 teams were to take charge of the preliminary examination of specimens sent up from the field, and were responsible for directing

disease prevention work on the ground. Specimens that had problems in the preliminary examination would be sent to the group headquarters at Seongcheon for a secondary examination. The number of specimens received was large (several hundred), and some had bacteria cultured from them. All of these were Salmonella-type, and neither plague^[14] nor cholera^[15] appeared. A few times anthrax^[16] was found on tree leaf specimens. There were all kinds of so-called "dropped objects," but it was difficult to link them to bacteriological warfare.

I quickly formulated anti-bacteriological warfare measures (strengthening individual health measures, giving more types of vaccinations, requiring everyone to pin their trouser leg and sleeve openings tight and wear scarves around the neck, setting sentries to watch the sky, developing methods for collecting and submitting specimens for examination, on-the-spot swatting of insects dropped from the air, sprinkling sanitizer, discovering suspiciously ill personnel first isolate them and then report, etc.) and promulgated them throughout the whole army. I also got Commander Peng's approval (which the PAV Headquarters and allied governments circulated to the whole army) to perform autopsies on the dead, giving a green light to researching the cause of their injury and death.

For the entire year, no sick patient or deceased person was found to have anything to do with bacteriological warfare. Because of our particular focus on health, the number of sick personnel was greatly reduced. Later, in 1987, a few army leader cadres ran into me and said, "The American imperialists engaged in such massive germ warfare but our side didn't even have one death!" By then, I thought this was unimaginable.

That year [1952] we were busy with receiving investigatory delegations: Li Dequan [Otto Braun, Comintern advisor to the Chinese Communist Party] and Liao Chengzhi led the Chinese team, the International Association of Democratic Lawyers, and the International Scientific Commission. The head of the latter delegation was Royal Society fellow Joseph Needham, who wrote *Science and Civilisation in China*.^[17] The deputy head of the delegation was U.S.S.R. Academy of Sciences fellow Zhukov-Verezhnikov, who was experienced in this area and was a medical expert at the trial of Japanese bacteriological war criminals in Khabarovsk. He brought a young English translator named Mr. Kowalski.^[18] Members of the delegation included Brazilian biologist and bat expert Dr. [Samuel B.] Pessoa, French veterinary expert Professor [Jean] Malterre, Swedish clinical laboratory scientist Dr. Andrea Andreen (female), and Italian biologist Dr. [Oliviero] Olivo. Our own Dr. Qian Sanqiang was the point-of-contact, Doctor Chen Shu was the Russian translator, tropical disease expert Dr. Zhong Huilan and (gynecology) professor Yan Renying (female) were English translators. Of the former two investigation teams, one was entirely Chinese and of course fully cooperated.

The International Association of Democratic Lawyers, not being natural scientists, diligently noted down everything we said, all the while cursing American imperialism. It was not the same with the International Scientific Commission: although they believed that the American imperialists conducted bacteriological warfare, we could not produce proof of the issue. Soviet Academician Zhukov was entrusted [with the task] by Stalin. He was an all-right fellow. When they came to Korea, which was right after the U.S. military conducted a huge bombing raid on Pyongyang, Pyongyang was a field of rubble. The investigation teams first inspected the bacterial evidence dropped by American planes in the Northeast [of China] (July 12 to July 25). Before entering Korea, Zhukov had said to them, "Korea is a battlefield and very dangerous, we might as well make a conclusion about the results of the Northeast investigation and sign it in order to avoid working hard and accomplishing nothing [if we get killed]." The other delegates thought this made sense, and wrote the initial conclusion that the U.S. military had conducted bacteriological warfare in Northeast China. In Korea (July 28 to August 1), they were set up in a hotel deep underground, but were still harassed by American planes at night.

On the day the hearing began, the Korean side reported two cases. One was of cholera deaths: American planes dropped straw baskets on Daedong in Pyongyang, which contained mussels carrying cholera. Patients ate the mussels, got cholera, and died. Korea had not had cholera in many years. The other case was of plague deaths: one day a family discovered fleas on the surface of their water jar, which was very strange. After a few days, members of the family fell ill and died. The autopsy revealed plague. Korea had never before had plague. (This case was prepared under the guidance of Professor Chen Wengui at the request of the Korean side, it was similar to what he observed in water jars in the 1940s when Japan dropped disease-carrying fleas at Changde).

The Volunteer Army brought forward the case of two first lieutenants at the 20th Group encampment who discovered a dense group of fleas while chopping wood. They collected quite a few and sent them in. Plague was cultured from the fleas. Because we required everyone to tighten their trouser leg and sleeve openings and immediately sanitize areas upon which objects had been dropped from the sky while we were countering anti-bacteriological warfare, the army did not have any sick or dead. The scientists easily accepted this, and they adopted the testimony. The truth of this matter is that the fleas were discovered in small thatched cottages in the forest. These cottages have firewood and other assorted items in them that are suitable for flea colonies. It is difficult to say that the American imperialists dropped these in. When they were giving the above report, they did not mention the thatched cottages. This time when they were asked to go out and testify at the scene, one of them said that Chairman Mao taught him not to lie. He was unable to move. What to do? Only to persuade him to submit to the current needs of the struggle against the enemy and say that the place where fleas were discovered was out in the open. All the flea specimens were human fleas (*Pulex irritans*[\[19\]](#)). As for the plague, that was easy, we [could] cause it to appear.

About the middle of May, Chen Wengui phoned me from our inspection team's bacteria lab to tell me that Fang Liang had lost the plague cultures dropped by the enemy (the bacteria lab was originally Fang Liang's responsibility, in reality the lab had never had plague cultures). Chen Wengui had studied plague with an Indian professor,[\[20\]](#) and discovered it at once. I realized that this was a big problem and immediately notified Director He Cheng in Beijing and Director Wang Bin in Northeast China to promptly send Comrade Men Xin to get the plague cultures or else this would all be [too] difficult to manage. Men Xin (who later served as the director of Military Hospital 203 in Liaoyang, since retired) went to Shenyang, and came back in 5 days with two tubes of plague cultures (packed in sealed iron pipes). I gave one tube to Chen Wengui, and gave the other to the North Korean deputy prime minister of health protection Ro Jin-han[\[21\]](#) in the presence of the deputy captain of our disease prevention unit Li Zhefan. He had asked for the bacteria cultures before, and at this moment he knew exactly why I gave him the cultures. After this, I told Li Zhefan, "In case it will be difficult when the time comes to prove bacteriological warfare, inject me with plague and let me die. This way, the director of the Health Division will have caught the plague dropped by the U.S. military even if it is not iron-clad evidence." He said, "That won't do. We can always think of another way." It was apparent how large the pressure was at this time. Li was of Korean ethnicity.[\[22\]](#) Before Liberation he had done plague prevention work with Soviet experts in Northeast China and was already a remarkable expert. A few years ago I asked him if he remembered this affair, and he said he did not remember it too clearly.

Within this one year I went to Beijing three times to report on issues related to anti-bacteriological warfare. I saw Premier Zhou [Enlai] every time. Even though Premier Zhou had many matters to attend to, he asked a lot of very detailed questions about this issue. One time, the Korean Deputy Prime Minister for Health Protection went with me to Beijing and gave the Premier a report of the preparatory work of the International Scientific Investigation Team. The Premier asked the Korean side what difficulties there were, and I interjected, after which the Premier immediately asked Deputy Prime Minister Ro what he thought of my opinion. It

moved me that the Premier had the noble character to respect the opinions of others, and at the same time made me feel like I should not so wantonly interrupt. One evening, at a little past 8 o'clock, the Premier was eating while discussing issues with me. He only had a small bowl of rice, two small plates of vegetables and a small bowl of soup. Quite a thrifty life.

Before the investigation teams returned to Northeast China, they went to Pyoktong prisoner of war camp on the northern border of Korea and met with several U.S. airmen. They had earlier published in People's Daily that they had dropped bacteriological bombs. With the investigation teams, they freely discussed the classes they took on bacteriological weapons and their experience with "bombs that don't explode." After the ceasefire, they were exchanged back to their country. I heard that they were all disciplined for this. I really admire the persuasion work of our personnel in the prisoner-of-war camps.

When the investigation teams returned to Beijing, they signed and published a 500-page-thick black book, Report of the International Scientific Commission for the Investigation of the Facts Concerning Bacterial Warfare in Korea and China. They were received by Chairman Mao.

After the international scientists gave their report to Chairman Mao, he said, "I see that the American imperialists are experimentally engaged in bacteriological warfare." They unanimously approved what he said.[\[23\]](#)

After Academician Zhukov returned to the Soviet Union and reported to Stalin, a telegram came from the Central Committee of the Soviet Communist Party saying that bacteriological warfare was a false alarm. Premier Zhou immediately sought out Chief of Staff Huang Kecheng and Deputy Commander Hong Xuezhong and asked, "Have you been up to tricks?" Hong answered, "Yes, otherwise we wouldn't have had anything to report." At that time, China had sent people to Europe to do anti-bacteriological warfare propaganda. Premier Zhou promptly ordered a retraction. Afterwards China did not raise the matter again, but following [generations] did not know. A few people who write books are always inserting that the American imperialists engaged in bacteriological warfare. I always recommend conveying that we were "threatened" by bacteriological warfare, thus taking a more defensible position. When he was sick, Huang Kecheng asked me to pass his opinion to the comrades at the Academy of Military Sciences who were editing an encyclopedia: "The American imperialists did not engage in bacteriological warfare in Korea. Right now the two countries' relationship is not bad, and it would be inappropriate to keep talking about this issue." When they heard this, they sent someone to ask if there had been bacteriological warfare after all. I only said that we do not have enough evidence.

This has been my silent regret for decades. There has been no other. I only feel sorry for the international scientists who signed their names. Perhaps I am too naïve, because it is possible they knew the truth but obeyed the requirements of the political struggle. If it was like this then fine, but if not then they were deceived by me. I had unceasingly expressed my apology for them to Huang Kecheng. Huang said, "You don't need to feel this way, this was political struggle! Furthermore you had expressed your views on bacteriological warfare from the beginning. It was not an easy situation, and you were given responsibility too late."

I think that there will be a day in history to speak clearly about this incident. Now that I am an 83-year-old man who knows the facts and is no longer on duty, it is fitting to speak out: the bacteriological war of 1952 was a false alarm.

September 1997

(Retrospective from February 2, 2005: Last year, in 2004, Professor Li Yimin at the Military Hospital Academy of Science forwarded an essay written by a professor at a Belgian medical college, discussing this affair in particular, which said: "Russia has published documents from the former Soviet Union. In the fall of 1952, the Soviet Central Party Committee sent telegrams to Chairman Mao Zedong and Chairman Kim Il Sung respectively, claiming that the U.S. military had certainly not conducted bacteriological warfare and that it was a false alarm. The Academy membership of Soviet expert Zhukov has been revoked because he took the lead on producing the black book.")

(The author [Wu Zhili] is the former Director of the Chinese People's Volunteer Army Health Division)

([Yanhuang chunqiu] Editor: Huang Zhong)

[1] The Chinese word used, wenshen [瘟神], is a deity traditionally believed in Korea and China to cause disease and pestilence. The fact that European crowds were using the name of a Chinese deity in this case may be embellishment by the author.

[2] More specifically, "houseflies."

[3] The Chinese term is generally used to refer to the *Pulex irritans*. The original article uses the common names for organisms, except in a few cases where the scientific name is given parenthetically after the common name in the text. In all other cases, the translator has provided the scientific nomenclature in the footnotes.

[4] Possibly intended to refer to *Isotomurus palustris*.

[5] Although the author used the term for "housefly" above, this instance uses only the more general categorical sense of "fly."

[6] Here the author uses the term "housefly" again.

[7] *Carassius carassius*.

[8] Zhu uses the word for an academic article [wenzhang, 文章] rather than the word for an official report [baogao, 报告].

[9] It is unclear whether this refers to the PLA Central Health Division or a national government central health division, but in either case it is superior to the PVA Health Division.

[10] The word in Chinese translated here as 'engaged in' often has a negative connotation, and can imply that the speaker/writer feels that the action carried out was nefarious.

[11] *Yersinia pestis*.

[12] In the original manuscript, the author has He Qi saying the term "false alarm" in English.

[13] The Chinese word used here is second person plural.

[14] *Yersinia pestis*.

[15] *Vibrio cholera*.

[16] *Bacillus anthracis*.

[17] The Chinese title for this book is The History of Chinese Science and Technology.

[18] This rendering in English is an approximation of the original Russian name filtered through Chinese pronunciation.

[19] That is, *Pulex irritans*.

[20] The name of the Indian professor is given in Chinese as suoke [苏可], but the English spelling could not be determined.

[21] In simplified Chinese pronounced Lu Zhenhan [卢震韩], which in Korean hanja is rendered 卢震韩 or in Hangeul 卢震韩.

[22] That is, ethnic Korean Chinese.

[23] Or, "They unanimously approved this way of putting it."