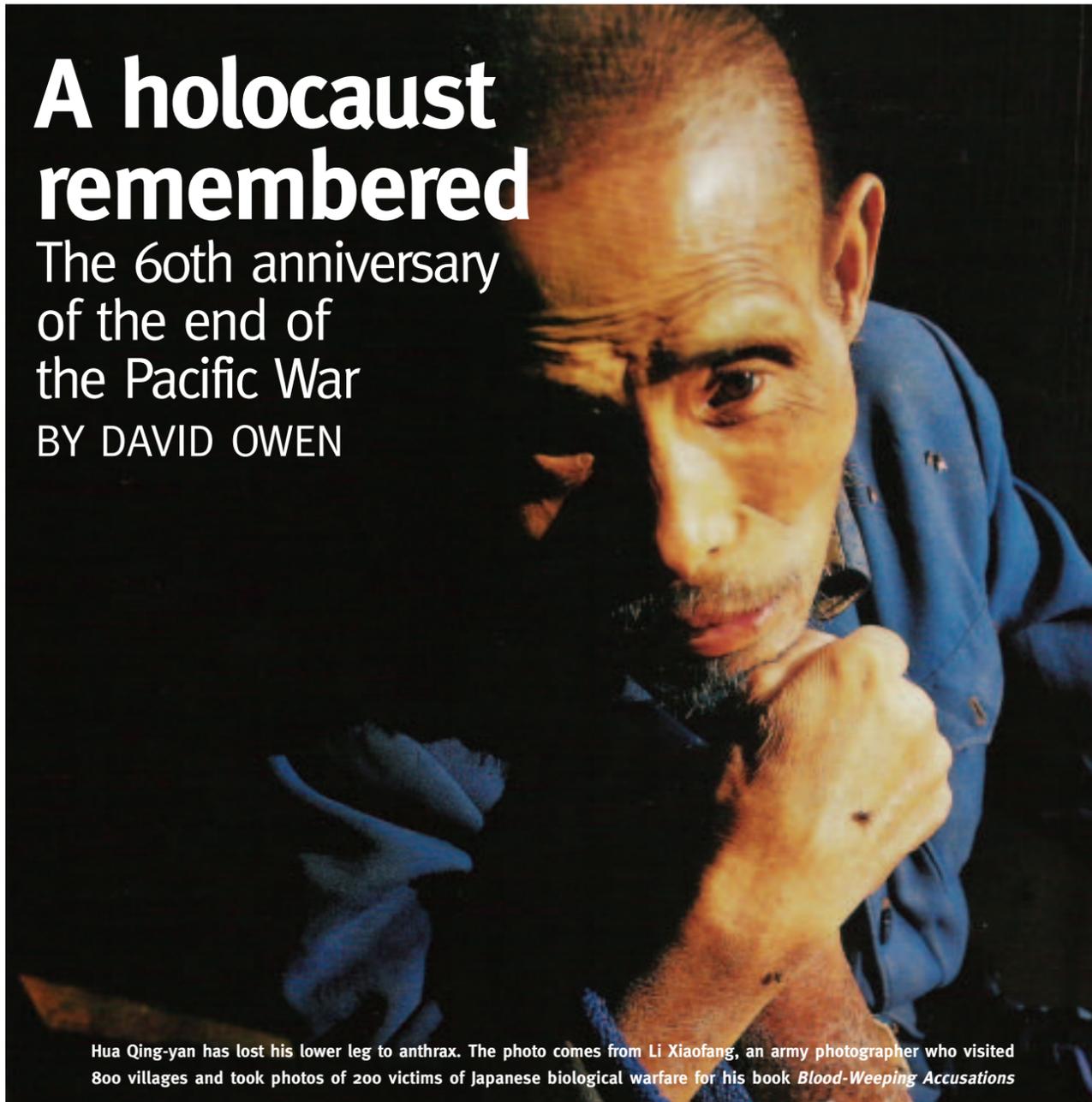


A holocaust remembered

The 60th anniversary of the end of the Pacific War

BY DAVID OWEN



Hua Qing-yan has lost his lower leg to anthrax. The photo comes from Li Xiaofang, an army photographer who visited 800 villages and took photos of 200 victims of Japanese biological warfare for his book *Blood-Weeping Accusations*

There was a palpable tension I hadn't felt listening to the other survivors. Perhaps it came from his articulateness, apparent even though he used a translator. I had asked one question after his hour-long speech and he had taken another half to answer it. Mr. Chang had much to tell. Madame Ni Cui-ping beside him had earlier born heart-rending testimony to the physical cruelty of the Nanking massacre. Her bayoneted shoulder was still deformed and was marked forever in the copper walk where a statue of her likeness stands in the memorial's grounds. Mr. Chang's wounds were ones of the heart, ones of the mind, which re-emerge to exact a toll with every retelling. Both he and the young translator gave the room cues to the words that followed. He would gently sob, the translator's head would jerk back in disbelief at the images, her eyes would tear and then the translation's diabolical sounds would

crash our senses as we struggled with the cruelty. He led us through numerous cycles of tears for the full length of his testimony to climax at the end with the horrific vision of his bayoneted baby brother, blood flowing from his diaper's fly, trying to feed at his dead mother's breast.

Mr. Chang was a boy of eight in late 1937 when the Japanese Imperial Army, fresh from a hard-fought victory in Shanghai, engulfed the undefended city in an unparalleled five-week orgy of violence which claimed, with Chang's whole family among them, 350,000 victims.

I was one of 20 Canadian teachers on the second peace and reconciliation tour organized by the Association for Learning and Preserving the History of the Second World War in Asia (ALPHA). The tour followed the stories of survivors and their advocates of the Japanese trail of destruction during the 1931-45

war. The participants will use the material in Canadian classes to shed more light, at least for North American purposes, on this hidden chapter of history.

The young Chang ultimately escaped into the Nanking International Safety Zone, an area within the city centre set up by some two dozen foreigners, mostly American, but also German, Danish, Russian and Chinese to protect Chinese refugees from the Japanese army. One of the Americans, Minnie Vautrin, a dean at Ginling Women's College, refused, as the other foreigners had, to leave the city but instead led the efforts to maintain the college's grounds as part of the Safety Zone as a haven for women and children. At Nanjing Normal University, formerly the Ginling Women's College, in a building adjacent to a bust of Minnie Vautrin, we met Professors Zhang Lian Hong and Jing Sheng-hong. They lauded the courageous efforts of the woman who came to be known as "The Goddess of Nanking." Vautrin literally worked around the clock caring for the refugees who came to the campus, confronting Japanese soldiers entering the zone to spirit off women, beseeching their officers not to do evil things to the women and children and enduring, according to one Chinese survivor, being slapped several times by Japanese soldiers. Iris Chang, in her classic *The Rape of Nanking*, gives a startling statistic that the whole zone eventually accommodated 200,000 to 300,000 refugees, almost half the population left in the city, while the other half—some 350,000—were killed. Ms. Vautrin suffered physical and severe mental privation caught up as she was in the maelstrom of the massacre. After a nervous collapse, Minnie Vautrin, on May 14, 1941, a year to the day she left Nanking, became another casualty of the Nanking horror when she took her own life.

At the tour's beginning, in Shanghai, we met with Professor Su Zhu Liang, the Director of the Centre for the Study of Chinese "comfort women"—a Japanese military euphemism for sex slaves. He told how Japanese authorities, during their intervention in Russia's Civil War in 1920, had used 5,000 Japanese prostitutes but found the soldiers had contracted high rates of syphilis so, unique in military history, the imperial militarists organized a system of sex slave stations throughout China to house unsuspecting "clean" local women snatched from conquered territories to service Japanese soldiers. With the emperor's sanction the militarists entrapped 400,000 women in total. Professor Su has identified 146 sex slave houses in Shanghai alone.

On our last day in the city we met a small, wispy, cruelly misshapen Madame Xian Bing Shu. Her experience as a sex slave has permanently traumatized her. She testified in quiet subdued tones while her daughter and son-in-law sat to the side of the boardroom, fearful for the effect the proceedings would have on their mother. Through the gentle encouraging transla-

tion of Ms. Sophia Yao, a graduate student working with Professor Su, Madame Xian told her story of being tricked with the promise of work, to come from her native Korea, only to find in China the grim reality the Japanese had organized for her and thousands of other women. During the interview her spirits briefly lifted when she described fighting back against the soldiers but they retaliated and hit her with rifle butts, breaking her back. Without any medical attention her back remains with a pronounced curve, shortening her stature by a foot.

We learned that Professor Su is on a lonely watch in his fight for compensation for the women from the Japanese government. The Chinese government, arguing that its support would be interpreted as unfriendly by the Japanese, has refused assistance. Foundations have withheld aid as well. Nevertheless,



Minnie Vautrin was a key member of the Safety Committee that helped protect more than 200,000 refugees in Nanking

Mr. Su and some of his students have given publicity to the issue with the publication of numerous books on the sex slave system and through their efforts have had one of the sex slave stations in downtown Shanghai preserved as an historical site. In addition, a number of the women have carried the fight for compensation into the Japanese courts.

At our next stop in Yi Wu, a vibrant expanding city, we met the charismatic Madame Wang Xuan, a human dynamo who has been working for 10 years as the chief plaintiff representative for the Unit 731 (a chemical and biological warfare team established by the emperor's orders in Harbin) lawsuit.

A teacher by training, Madame Wang is part of the 36th generation of Chong Shan village, one of many Chinese sites hit by the unit's poisons. With Madame Wang translating we heard the remarkable story of a 34th generation villager. Mr. Wang Bing

Hong survived the bubonic plague because during his affliction his mother, hearing that a drunk was the only survivor in the local hospital, allowed him only alcohol during his fierce craving for water. In the nearby Lin Shan Temple, Madame Wang recounted how, after the attacks, Japanese versions of the Nazi Dr. Mengele, clad in their doctor's white coats, performed vivisection on live Chinese victims to determine the efficiency of their hideous germ warfare. In fitting juxtaposition to these ghoulish activities and adjacent to the temple stands a cenotaph in commemoration of Yi Wu's biological warfare victims. There are plans for an expansive park to be laid with this memorial as its focal point.

In Xia Yi village we heard testimony from survivors of anthrax and glanders, animal diseases which can be caught by humans.

They were spread by the Japanese and their trained POW agents in widespread areas throughout China producing many of what are called "rotten leg" villages. They were so named because the victims developed oozing sores that infected the bone and caused a rotting of the whole limb. An anthrax victim had



A hopeful sign: white doves on a Nanking memorial wall

her open sores for more than 50 years and a victim of glanders, (a disease that afflicts horses causing their jaws and mucous glands to swell) had her face horribly distorted.

The last survivors we visited on the tour were two work slaves who mined ore for years for Japanese corporations during the war and each had their own stories of abuse suffered. One of them had his leg broken by a guard who hit him with an axe. Were it not for his fellow workmates he would have died like 40 percent of the work slaves who never returned to their homes after liberation.

A common thread throughout all the victims' stories was the proven and admitted culpability of the fascists, but unlike the perpetrators of the European Holocaust, Japan has been allowed to avoid paying any compensation, principally through American manipulation of the 1951 San Francisco Peace Treaty. Germany, Japan's Axis ally, has paid over \$60 billion in reparations while Japan has paid nothing, quite literally getting away with mass murder.

Were my story to stop here I would have, in a small way, given voice to an event, the Asian holocaust, which is common knowledge in China, Korea and other Far Eastern countries, but barely hits the radar screen in North America. Still all I would have done was to recount one long vale of tears.

For part of an ending I'll return to the survivor Mr. Chang. In the quiet after his presentation, Jing, the young translator, asked me if I had any questions for Mr. Chang. I said I did and asked, "What gives you the strength to tell your story after

all the torment you've suffered?"

"The many Japanese who come to the Nanking memorial and ask me for my forgiveness," he gently replied.

An apologetic Japanese government is one of the three principal demands Chinese and Koreans assert is needed to finally settle the holocaust issue. The second is compensation. Because of the fruitlessness of using international courts as a channel of redress, compensation is being fought for in Japanese civil courts, in part by Madame Wang Xuan on behalf of biological warfare plaintiffs and Chinese attorney Kang Jian, the leading lawyer in support of comfort women and slave labour victims. We found the third demand, education of Japanese youth regarding the excesses of the Asia Pacific war, was being dealt with in a groundbreaking way.

As a lifelong teacher I realize the fullest form of peace and reconciliation comes through the reformative and generative force of education. During our final stop on the tour in Beijing, we met with Professors Rong Wei Mu and Bu Ping of the Institute of Modern History of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. They

were both part of a team of 50 Chinese professors who together with 50 Korean and 50 Japanese professors produced, each in their own language and with the same text, a high school history textbook called *A Modern History of the Asian Pacific*. Its widespread use in Japanese schools would help considerably to meet the third demand. An English version will be published this coming year in Hawaii.

For their part, the two Canadian ALPHA chapters—British Columbia and Ontario—have each produced detailed curriculum guides on the Asia Pacific war, 1931–45, for use in high school history, law and social science classes. Each guide culminates with a mock international tribunal exercise, complete with the appropriate Hague and Geneva Conventions and protocols quoted in their pages, to try the Japanese offenders. ALPHA will be distributing a complimentary copy of the curriculum guide to each of the 600-plus secondary schools in Ontario.

For further information visit the websites: www.asia-wwii.org and www.alpha-toronto.org. 

David Owen is a 28-year veteran of the classroom with the Toronto District School Board and a union activist. He is releasing an autobiography this fall entitled *My Confession: The Making of a Militant*. His book details some of his work as an OSSTF branch president and executive officer during the struggles of the Mike Harris years. He can be contacted at d_owen@rogers.com.