



VETERANS FOR PEACE
HUMBOLDT BAY
CHAPTER 56

THE FOGHORN

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“Cutting Through the Fog of War”

Marx Was Right

by
Chris Hedges

At the Left Forum in New York City, Chris Hedges joined professors Richard Wolff and Gail Dines to discuss why Karl Marx is essential at a time when global capitalism is collapsing. These are the remarks Hedges made to open the discussion.

Karl Marx exposed the peculiar dynamics of capitalism, or what he called “the bourgeois mode of production.” He foresaw that capitalism had built within it the seeds of its own destruction. He knew that reigning ideologies—think neoliberalism—were created to serve the interests of the elites and in particular the economic elites, since “the class which has the means of material production at its disposal, has control at the same time over the means of mental production” and “the ruling ideas are nothing more than the ideal expression of the dominant material relationships ... the relationships which make one class the ruling one.” He saw that there would come a day when capitalism would exhaust its potential and collapse. He did not know when that day would come. Marx, as Meghnad Desai wrote, was “an astronomer of history, not an astrologer.” Marx was keenly aware of capitalism’s ability to innovate and adapt. But he also knew that capitalist expansion was not eternally sustainable. And as we witness the denouement of capitalism and the disintegration of globalism, Karl Marx is vindicated as capitalism’s most prescient and important critic.

In a preface to “The Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy” Marx wrote:

No social order ever disappears before all the productive forces for which there is room in it have been developed; and new higher relations of production never appear before the material conditions of their existence have matured in the womb of the old society itself.

Therefore, mankind always sets itself only such tasks as it can solve; since looking at the matter more closely, we always find that the task itself arises only when the material conditions necessary for its solution already exist, or are at least in the process of formation.

Socialism, in other words, would not be possible until capitalism had exhausted its potential for further development. That the end is coming is hard now to dispute, although one would be foolish to predict when. We are called to study Marx to be ready.

The final stages of capitalism, Marx wrote, would be marked by developments that are intimately familiar to most of us. Unable to expand and generate profits at past levels, the capitalist system would begin to consume the structures that sustained it. It would prey upon, in the name of austerity, the working class and the poor, driving them ever deeper into debt and poverty and diminishing the capacity of the state to serve the needs of ordinary citizens. It would, as it has, increasingly relocate jobs, including both manufacturing and professional positions, to countries with cheap pools of laborers. Industries would mechanize their workplaces. This would trigger an economic assault on not only the working class but the middle class—the bulwark of a capitalist system—that would be disguised by the imposition of massive personal debt as incomes declined or remained stagnant. Politics would in the late stages of capitalism become subordinate to economics, leading to political parties hollowed out of any real political content and abjectly subservient to the dictates and money of global capitalism.

But as Marx warned, there is a limit to an economy built on scaffolding of debt expansion. There comes a moment, Marx knew, when there would be no new markets available and no new pools of people who could take on more debt. This is what happened with the subprime mortgage crisis. Once the banks cannot conjure up new subprime borrowers, the scheme falls apart and the system crashes.

Capitalist oligarchs, meanwhile, hoard huge sums of wealth—\$18 trillion stashed in overseas tax havens—exacted as tribute from those they dominate, indebted and impoverish. Capitalism would, in the end, Marx said, turn on the so-called free market, along with the values and traditions it claims to defend. It would in its final stages pillage the systems and structures that made capitalism possible. It would resort, as

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it caused widespread suffering, to harsher forms of repression. It would attempt in a frantic last stand to maintain its profits by looting and pillaging state institutions, contradicting its stated nature.

Marx warned that in the later stages of capitalism huge corporations would exercise a monopoly on global markets. “The need of a constantly expanding market for its products chases the bourgeoisie over the entire surface of the globe,” he wrote. “It must nestle everywhere, settle everywhere, establish connections everywhere.” These corporations, whether in the banking sector, the agricultural and food industries, the arms industries or the communications industries, would use their power, usually by seizing the mechanisms of state, to prevent anyone from challenging their monopoly. They would fix prices to maximize profit. They would, as they [have been doing], push through trade deals such as the TPP and CAFTA to further weaken the nation-state’s ability to impede exploitation by imposing environmental regulations or monitoring working conditions. And in the end these corporate monopolies would obliterate free market competition.

A May 22 editorial in *The New York Times* gives us a window into what Marx said would characterize the late stages of capitalism:

As of this week, Citicorp, JPMorgan Chase, Barclays and Royal Bank of Scotland are felons, having pleaded guilty on Wednesday to criminal charges of conspiring to rig the value of the world’s currencies. According to the Justice Department, the lengthy and lucrative conspiracy enabled the banks to pad their profits without regard to fairness, the law or the public good.

The Times goes on:

The banks will pay fines totaling about \$9 billion, assessed by the Justice Department as well as state, federal and foreign regulators. That seems like a sweet deal for a scam that lasted for at least five years, from the end of 2007 to the beginning of 2013, during which the banks’ revenue from foreign exchange was some \$85 billion.

The final stages of what we call capitalism, as Marx grasped, is not capitalism at all. Corporations gobble down government expenditures, in essence taxpayer money, like pigs at a trough. The arms industry with its official \$612 billion defense authorization bill—which ignores numerous other military expenditures tucked away in other budgets, raising our real expenditure on national security expenses to over \$1 trillion a year—has gotten the government this year to commit to spending \$348 billion over the next decade to modernize our nuclear weapons and build 12 new Ohio-class nuclear submarines, estimated at \$8 billion each. Exactly how these two massive arms programs are supposed to address what we are told is the greatest threat of our time—the war on terror—is a mystery. After all, as far as I know, ISIS does not own a rowboat. We spend

some \$100 billion a year on intelligence—read surveillance—and 70 percent of that money goes to private contractors such as Booz Allen Hamilton, [which] gets 99 percent of its revenues from the U.S. government. And on top of this we are the largest exporters of arms in the world.

The fossil fuel industry swallows up \$5.3 trillion a year worldwide in hidden costs to keep burning fossil fuels, according to the International Monetary Fund (IMF). This money, the IMF noted, is in addition to the \$492 billion in direct subsidies offered by governments around the world through write-offs and write-downs and land-use loopholes. In a sane world these subsidies would be invested to free us from the deadly effects of carbon emissions caused by fossil fuels, but we do not live in a sane world.

Bloomberg News in the 2013 article “Why Should Taxpayers Give Big Banks \$83 Billion a Year?” reported that economists had determined that government subsidies lower the big banks’ borrowing costs by about 0.8 percent.

“Multiplied by the total liabilities of the 10 largest U.S. banks by assets,” the report said, “it amounts to a taxpayer subsidy of \$83 billion a year.”

“The top five banks—JPMorgan, Bank of America Corp., Citigroup Inc., Wells Fargo & Co. and Goldman Sachs Group Inc.—account,” the report went on, “for \$64 billion of the total subsidy, an amount roughly equal to their typical annual profits. In other words, the banks occupying the commanding heights of the U.S. financial industry—with almost \$9 trillion in assets, more than half the size of the U.S. economy—would just about break even in the absence of corporate welfare. In large part, the profits they report are essentially transfers from taxpayers to their shareholders.”

Government expenditure accounts for 41 percent of GDP. Corporate capitalists intend to seize this money, hence the privatization of whole parts of the military, the push to privatize Social Security, the contracting of corporations to collect 70 percent of intelligence for our 16 intelligence agencies, as well as the privatization of prisons, schools and our disastrous for-profit health care service. None of these seizures of basic services make them more efficient or reduce costs. That is not the point. It is about feeding off the carcass of the state. And it ensures the disintegration of the structures that sustain capitalism itself. All this Marx got.

Marx illuminated these contradictions within capitalism. He understood that the idea of capitalism—free trade, free markets, individualism, innovation, self-development—works only in the utopian mind of a true believer such as Alan Greenspan, never in reality. The hoarding of wealth by a tiny capitalist elite, Marx foresaw, along with the exploitation of the workers, meant that the masses could no longer buy the products that propelled capitalism forward. Wealth becomes concentrated in the hands of a tiny elite—the world’s richest 1 percent will own more than half of the world’s wealth by next year.

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The assault on the working class has been going on now for several decades. Salaries have remained stagnant or declined since the 1970s. Manufacturing has been shipped overseas, where workers in countries such as China or Bangladesh are paid as little as 22 cents an hour. The working poor, forced to compete with the labor of those who are little better than serfs in the global marketplace, proliferate across the American landscape, struggling to live at a subsistence level. Industries such as construction, which once provided well-paying unionized jobs, are the domain of nonunionized, often undocumented workers. Corporations import foreign engineers and software specialists that do professional work at one-third of the normal salary on H-1B, L-1 and other work visas. All these workers are bereft of the rights of citizens.

The capitalists respond to the collapse of their domestic economies, which they engineered, by becoming global loan sharks and speculators. They lend money at exorbitant interest rates to the working class and the poor, even if they know the money could never be repaid, and then sell these bundled debts, credit default swaps, bonds and stocks to pension funds, cities, investment firms and institutions. This late form of capitalism is built on what Marx called "fictitious capital." And it leads, as Marx knew, to the vaporization of money.

Once subprime borrowers began to default, as these big banks and investment firms knew was inevitable, the global crash of 2008 took place. The government bailed out the banks, largely by printing money, but left the poor and the working class—not to mention students recently out of college—with crippling personal debt. Austerity became policy. The victims of financial fraud would be made to pay for that fraud. And what saved us from a full-blown depression was, in a tactic Marx would have found ironic, massive state intervention in the economy, including the nationalization of huge corporations such as AIG and General Motors.

What we saw in 2008 was the enactment of a welfare state for the rich, a kind of state socialism for the financial elites that Marx predicted. But with this comes an increased and volatile cycle of boom and bust, bringing the system closer to disintegration and collapse. We have undergone two major stock market crashes and the implosion of real estate prices in just the first decade of the 21st century.

The corporations that own the media have worked overtime to sell to a bewildered public the fiction that we are enjoying a recovery. Employment figures, through a variety of gimmicks, including erasing those who are unemployed for over a year from unemployment rolls, are a lie, as is nearly every other financial indicator pumped out for public consumption. We live, rather, in the twilight stages of global capitalism, which may be surprisingly more resilient than we expect, but which is ultimately terminal. Marx knew that once the market mechanism became

the sole determining factor for the fate of the nation-state, as well as the natural world, both would be demolished. No one knows when this will happen. But that it will happen, perhaps within our lifetime, seems certain.

"The old is dying, the new struggles to be born, and in the interregnum there are many morbid symptoms," Antonio Gramsci wrote.

What comes next is up to us.

Potluck and Peace Pilgrimage Program

Friday, July 31 at 6:00 pm at Humboldt Unitarian Universalist Fellowship, Bayside, Arcata there will be a potluck followed by a seminar-conversation with peace advocate, Roy Tamashiro, My God, What Have We Done: The Nuclear Age & the Rise of Peace Consciousness. Roy will recall his first Peace Pilgrimage to Hiroshima, and link this experience to other Peace Pilgrimages, including the recently launched Veterans for Peace - Golden Rule Project in Humboldt Bay. Roy is passionate about reawakening the call to abolish nuclear weapons and to inspire the cultivation of global "peace consciousness." An evening with Roy is not to be missed. Vets for Peace, Quakers, SERVAS members and the general public are all invited.

Next VFP56 meeting will be held
on Thursday, July 2nd at
7:00 PM.
Meeting will be held at 24 Uni-
tarian Fellowship Way, Bayside,
Jacoby Creek Road. Veterans and
non-veterans are more than wel-
come to come and help us dialogue
about what we together can do to
bring about peace in this complex
world.



Restored Anti-Nuke Sailboat Launches Again on a Peace Mission

The Golden Rule drew attention to U.S. atmospheric nuclear tests in the Pacific in 1958 and helped start a movement that led to a ban.

By Jane Braxton Little, National Geographic
PUBLISHED JUNE 19, 2015

EUREKA, California—Chuck DeWitt leaned one shoulder against a slender board, struggling to hold it in place while he screwed it into the top edge of the hull of the Golden Rule. “Nothing’s square,” he muttered. “That’s the nature of wooden boats.”

DeWitt, 70, was working against time on a project to reconstruct history. Five years after he and a crew of fellow Vietnam War veterans began restoring the 30-foot (9-meter) ketch, the launch of the Golden Rule was days away. With wind billowing his white hair, the creases in DeWitt’s sunburned brow seemed to deepen with each set of his shoulder as he strained to secure the board.

The project is more than a restoration for DeWitt, and the boat is no ordinary one. In 1958 a crew of pacifists tried to sail the Golden Rule to the Marshall Islands to protest atmospheric testing of nuclear bombs. The voyage was halted by the U.S. Coast Guard and the captain, Albert Bigelow, a Quaker and former U.S. Navy lieutenant commander, was thrown in jail.

The international publicity this confrontation attracted helped spur the growing opposition to nuclear tests and the arms race. It also initiated a tradition of protest boats carried on most notably by Greenpeace.

On Saturday, June 20th the Golden Rule was set to embark again. Christened by a Hiroshima survivor, it launched into the waters of California’s Humboldt Bay to resume its mission as a peace boat. For DeWitt, who calls the Golden Rule “a weapon of mass education,” it is a renewed commitment to raising public awareness of the dangers of radiation.

When he and other veterans first confronted the Golden Rule it had moldered in obscurity for years, some of them under water. A hole gaped in the hull, its ribs were broken and both masts were missing.

More resurrection than restoration, the boat now resembles the jaunty vessel that Bigelow sailed from Los Angeles to Honolulu and on toward the atomic test area. Outfitted with a new main mast

and mizzenmast, it also boasts sophisticated electronic navigation equipment that hadn’t been invented in 1958, said Steve Neinhaus, 64, who installed it. An experienced sailor and veteran peace activist who will skipper the crew, he was wrestling with a bilge pump and missing parts. That was the least of the challenges of sailing the Golden Rule, which Neinhaus called “a personal requirement for me.”

The Golden Rule project is an improbable accomplishment by unlikely volunteers. Members of Veterans For Peace, they are a motley bunch that might have appalled the original crew, all conscientious Quakers. They smoke, drink and swear like the sailors, though most of them are not. Aging and perpetually strapped for money, the mostly retired men sought to banish their war-related demons as they ripped out rotten wood and replaced it plank by purpleheart plank.

Among them are a school administrator, letter carrier, civil engineer, physician’s assistant and beekeeper. They share an opposition to war and nuclear weapons shaped by their military service. After years of post-war cynicism, restoring this historic vessel offered the promise of something positive, said DeWitt, the project coordinator. With a checkered youth that exposed him to the inside of a county jail, he embraced the restoration as an opportunity “to straighten out my karma before I kick the bucket.”

The Quakers who planned the Golden Rule’s 1958 voyage designed it as an act of civil disobedience to call attention to atmospheric nuclear weapons testing. In an open letter to President Eisenhower, Bigelow announced their intention to “sail, come what may.” And sail they did—right into the handcuffs of the Coast Guard.

Their arrests inspired Earle and Barbara Reynolds, who were en route in their own ketch Phoenix to Japan. Earle Reynolds, an anthropologist, had done extensive research for the U.S. government on the dangerous effects of radiation on Hiroshima’s children. The couple sailed into the test zone, and Earle was arrested.

The public demonstrations these direct actions provoked around the country caused a reluctant Eisenhower to suspend atomic tests in August 1958. Greenpeace’s Rainbow Warrior and a fleet of other protest boats continued to rouse public outcry worldwide, contributing to the 1996 Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty.

At about the same time, the Golden Rule fell into the hands of Laurence Badgley, a doctor who traveled with the Rolling Stones in the early 1970s and is known to a generation of fans as Dr. Feelgood. How the boat ended up moored in Humboldt Bay is a mystery to Leroy Zerlang, a fifth-generation Eureka boatyard owner. But when it sank and Badgley asked him to raise it, he did.

When it sank a second time in March 2010, a disgusted Zerlang hauled the dilapidated ruins onto the beach of his boatyard. “I

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planned to get drunk and burn the SOB,” he said. A bear of a man whose falsetto bellows can out-compete the roar of his forklift, he admits a weakness for wooden boats. Even wrecked, the graceful lines and rakish charm of the Golden Rule beguiled him.

Zerlang became more intrigued as he researched its history. Any 30-foot craft that plies Pacific waters is impressive to begin with and the Golden Rule’s message about nuclear weapons resonated with Zerlang. “I’m not a pacifist but anyone in their right mind is anti-nuke. This boat—she’s a sweetheart,” he said.

Word of Zerlang’s research spread to local members of Veterans For Peace, a global organization dedicated to promoting awareness of the true costs of war. Jim Sorter, a 1960s veteran, showed up when the boat was “still wet from the bay.” He was as smitten as Zerlang and envisioned what the ketch might accomplish.

Fredy Champagne from VFP22 contacted Sorter who brought in DeWitt. After working with nuclear-armed torpedoes in the 1960s, DeWitt became a pacifist “not Gandhian” but committed enough to stand in a street-corner vigil every Friday night. By October 2010 the vets had hatched their plan for a restoration of the ketch and its anti-nuke mission.

Zerlang offered his boatyard and electricity for a year, which stretched to five. Most of the work was done in a slow-paced percussion of hammers and power drills resonating through the coastal fog, accompanied by the screech of gulls and bleats of Zerlang’s pet goats.

Progress came in pulses stimulated by donations, which eventually totaled \$200,000. When a check for \$1,500 arrived (“And you could count those on one hand,” said Nate Lomba, a former treasurer.), DeWitt would buy supplies. When money ran out, he’d take a break in Baja California to volunteer on a Olive Ridley turtle project.

A disagreement over money and ownership stopped work for several months, threatening to scuttle the entire enterprise. Nine of ten boat restorations fail, Zerlang noted. “This little boat’s spirit pulled it through,” he said.

Despite five years to plan, just what the crew will do remains vague. The possibilities range from educating children about the dangers of nuclear weapons and nuclear energy to sailing uninvited in Fleet Week and other shows of military prowess. Another option is monitoring radionuclides in ocean water.

The Golden Rule is scheduled to set sail on its first voyage on July 16, the 70th anniversary of the first detonation of a nuclear weapon. Its destination is San Diego, where it will be part of the national convention of Veterans For Peace in August. Zerlang will be watching with a father’s anxiety about his daughter. “I take care of boats. That’s what I do, so yes, the worry is there,” he said.

DeWitt will also be watching, charting the course of the Golden Rule’s “positive propaganda.” “This boat changed the world in 1958. It can be done again,” he said.

Follow Jane Braxton Little on Twitter.

Secret World War II Chemical Experiments Tested Troops By Race

*JUNE 22, 2015 4:59 AM ET
Caitlin Dickerson - 2015*

Historical photographs depict the forearms of human test subjects after being exposed to nitrogen mustard and lewisite agents in World War II experiments conducted at the Naval Research Laboratory in Washington, D.C.

Photographs depict the forearms of human test subjects after being exposed to nitrogen mustard and lewisite agents in World War II experiments conducted at the Naval Research Laboratory in Washington, D.C.

As a young U.S. Army soldier during World War II, Rollins Edwards knew better than to refuse an assignment.

When officers led him and a dozen others into a wooden gas chamber and locked the door, he didn’t complain. None of them did. Then, a mixture of mustard gas and a similar agent called lewisite was piped inside.

“It felt like you were on fire,” recalls Edwards, now 93 years old. “Guys started screaming and hollering and trying to break out. And then some of the guys fainted. And finally they opened the door and let us out, and the guys were just, they were in bad shape.”

About This Investigation

This is Part 1 of a two-part investigation on mustard gas testing conducted by the U.S. military during World War II. The second story in this report examines failures by the Department of Veterans Affairs to provide benefits to those injured by military mustard gas experiments.

Three test subjects enter a gas chamber, which will fill with mustard gas, as part of the military’s secret chemical warfare testing in March 1945.

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The VA's Broken Promise To Thousands Of Vets Exposed To Mustard Gas

Edwards was one of 60,000 enlisted men enrolled in a once-secret government program — formally declassified in 1993 — to test mustard gas and other chemical agents on American troops. But there was a specific reason he was chosen: Edwards is African-American.

“They said we were being tested to see what effect these gases would have on black skins,” Edwards says.

An NPR investigation has found evidence that Edwards’ experience was not unique. While the Pentagon admitted decades ago that it used American troops as test subjects in experiments with mustard gas, until now, officials have never spoken about the tests that grouped subjects by race.

For the first time, NPR tracked down some of the men used in the race-based experiments. And it wasn’t just African-Americans. Japanese-Americans were used as test subjects, serving as proxies for the enemy so scientists could explore how mustard gas and other chemicals might affect Japanese troops. Puerto Rican soldiers were also singled out.

White enlisted men were used as scientific control groups. Their reactions were used to establish what was “normal,” and then compared to the minority troops.

All of the World War II experiments with mustard gas were done in secret and weren’t recorded on the subjects’ official military records. Most do not have proof of what they went through. They received no follow-up health care or monitoring of any kind. And they were sworn to secrecy about the tests under threat of dishonorable discharge and military prison time, leaving some unable to receive adequate medical treatment for their injuries, because they couldn’t tell doctors what happened to them.

Army Col. Steve Warren, director of press operations at the Pentagon, acknowledged NPR’s findings and was quick to put distance between today’s military and the World War II experiments.

“The first thing to be very clear about is that the Department of Defense does not conduct chemical weapons testing any longer,” he says. “And I think we have probably come as far as any institution in America on race. ... So I think particularly for us in uniform, to hear and see something like this, it’s stark. It’s even a little bit jarring.”

NPR shared the findings of this investigation with Rep. Barbara Lee, D-Calif., a member of the Congressional Black Caucus who sits on a House subcommittee for veterans affairs. She points to

similarities between these tests and the Tuskegee syphilis experiments, where U.S. government scientists withheld treatment from black sharecroppers in Alabama to observe the disease’s progression.

“I’m angry. I’m very sad,” Lee says. “I guess I shouldn’t be shocked when you look at the syphilis studies and all the other very terrible experiments that have taken place as it relates to African-Americans and people of color. But I guess I’m still shocked that, here we go again.”

Lee says the U.S. government needs to recognize the men who were used as test subjects while it can still reach some, who are now in their 80s and 90s.

“We owe them a huge debt, first of all. And I’m not sure how you repay such a debt,” she says.

Mustard gas damages DNA within seconds of making contact. It causes painful skin blisters and burns, and it can lead to serious, and sometimes life-threatening illnesses including leukemia, skin cancer, emphysema and asthma.

In 1991, federal officials for the first time admitted that the military conducted mustard gas experiments on enlisted men during World War II.

According to declassified records and reports published soon after, three types of experiments were done: Patch tests, where liquid mustard gas was applied directly onto test subjects’ skin; field tests, where subjects were exposed to gas outdoors in simulated combat settings; and chamber tests, where men were locked inside gas chambers while mustard gas was piped inside.

Even once the program was declassified, however, the race-based experiments remained largely a secret until a researcher in Canada disclosed some of the details in 2008. Susan Smith, a medical historian at the University of Alberta in Canada, published an article in *The Journal of Law, Medicine & Ethics*.

In it, she suggested that black and Puerto Rican troops were tested in search of an “ideal chemical soldier.” If they were more resistant, they could be used on the front lines while white soldiers stayed back, protected from the gas.

The article received little media attention at the time, and the Department of Defense didn’t respond.

Despite months of federal records requests, NPR still hasn’t been given access to hundreds of pages of documents related to the experiments, which could provide confirmation of the motivations behind them. Much of what we know about the experiments has been provided by the remaining living test subjects.

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Juan Lopez Negron, who's Puerto Rican, says he was involved in experiments known as the San Jose Project.

Military documents show more than 100 experiments took place on the Panamanian island, chosen for its climate, which is similar to islands in the Pacific. Its main function, according to military documents obtained by NPR, was to gather data on "the behavior of lethal chemical agents."

Document

One of the studies uncovered by NPR through the Freedom of Information Act was conducted in the Spring 1944. It describes how researchers exposed 39 Japanese American soldiers and 40 white soldiers to mustard and lewisite agents over the course of 20 days.

Lopez Negron, now 95 years old, says he and other test subjects were sent out to the jungle and bombarded with mustard gas sprayed from U.S. military planes flying overhead.

"We had uniforms on to protect ourselves, but the animals didn't," he says. "There were rabbits. They all died."

Lopez Negron says he and the other soldiers were burned and felt sick almost immediately.

"I spent three weeks in the hospital with a bad fever. Almost all of us got sick," he says.

Edwards says that crawling through fields saturated with mustard gas day after day as a young soldier took a toll on his body.

Rollins Edwards, who lives in Summerville, has many scars from exposure to mustard gas in World War II military experiments. More than 70 years after the exposure, his skin still falls off in flakes. For years, he carried around a jar full of the flakes to try to convince people of what happened to him. "It took all the skin off your hands. Your hands just rotted," he says. He never refused or questioned the experiments as they were occurring. Defiance was unthinkable, he says, especially for black soldiers.

"You do what they tell you to do and you ask no questions," he says.

Edwards constantly scratches at the skin on his arms and legs, which still break out in rashes in the places he was burned by chemical weapons more than 70 years ago.

During outbreaks, his skin falls off in flakes that pile up on the floor. For years, he carried around a jar full of the flakes to try to convince people of what he went through.

But while Edwards wanted people to know what happened to him, others — like Louis Bessho — didn't like to talk about it.

His son, David Bessho, first learned about his father's participation as a teenager. One evening, sitting in the living room, David Bessho asked his dad about an Army commendation hanging on the wall. David Bessho, who's now retired from the Army, says the award stood out from several others displayed beside it.

"Generally, they're just kind of generic about doing a good job," he says. "But this one was a bit unusual."

The commendation, presented by the Office of the Army's Chief of the Chemical Warfare Service, says: "These men participated beyond the call of duty by subjecting themselves to pain, discomfort, and possible permanent injury for the advancement of research in protection of our armed forces."

Attached was a long list of names. Where Louis Bessho's name appears on Page 10, the list begins to take on a curious similarity. Names like Tanamachi, Kawasaki, Higashi, Sasaki. More than three dozen Japanese-American names in a row.

"They were interested in seeing if chemical weapons would have the same effect on Japanese as they did on white people," Bessho says his father told him that evening. "I guess they were contemplating having to use them on the Japanese."

Documents that were released by the Department of Defense in the 1990s show the military developed at least one secret plan to use mustard gas offensively against the Japanese. The plan, which was approved by the Army's highest chemical warfare officer, could have "easily kill[ed] 5 million people."

Japanese-American, African-American and Puerto Rican troops were confined to segregated units during World War II. They were considered less capable than their white counterparts, and most were assigned jobs accordingly, such as cooking and driving dump trucks.

Susan Matsumoto says her husband, Tom, who died in 2004 of pneumonia, told his wife that he was OK with the testing because he felt it would help "prove he was a good United States citizen."

Matsumoto remembers FBI agents coming to her family's home during the war, forcing them to burn their Japanese books and music to prove their loyalty to the U.S. Later, they were sent to live at an internment camp in Arkansas.

Matsumoto says her husband faced similar scrutiny in the military, but despite that, he was a proud American.

"He always loved his country," Matsumoto says. "He said, 'Where else can you find this kind of place where you have all this freedom?'"





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If you would like to submit an article, opinion, comment or response to anything you have read which might interest the members of VFP-56, please e-mail it to turtldnccer@aol.com, in word format, or mail to Jim Sorter at 1762 Buttermilk Lane, Arcata, CA 95521. Submissions will be included on a first come basis until the newsletter is full. Late arriving submissions will be archived for future issues.



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