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# Book Reviews

By Mr. Reid Kirby



*Lab 257: The Disturbing Story of the Government's Secret Plum Island Germ Laboratory*, Michael Carroll, William Morrow, 2004.

*Lab 257* is Michael Carroll's first book. The author spent more than seven years researching Plum Island's history and interviewing recent island employees and residents in the nearby community. By federal law, researchers are not allowed to investigate animal diseases of economic importance within the conterminous United States. After World War II, the US Department of Agricultural and the US Army Chemical Corps needed a location to investigate animal diseases with biological warfare (BW) potential. Plum Island, a couple of miles offshore of Long Island, New York, served as a location where such research could be conducted without presenting hazardous conditions for US livestock.

Mr. Carroll takes what could be an interesting history about a fascinating research establishment and turns it into a sensational exposé. The title, *Lab 257*, is undoubtedly intended to stir the imagination into a comparison with Japanese Unit 731 and offers an aborted attempt that the would-be founding father of the establishment was a German BW scientist. I was originally interested in this title with the hope that there would be something revealed about the little-understood BW program by Germany during World War II. The author tries to make the case that the German scientist is a war criminal, not through any involvement in human experiments, but rather through association with the Nazi Party and the specter of antianimal BW work. Additionally, Mr. Carroll tries to make a case that Lyme disease originated at Plum Island and conjectures several means by which animal diseases could have left the island. The position is as incredible as it is strange. The author changes the mood throughout the book, taking a harsh tone with past scientists, while warming to those still living that could be interviewed. There is even a short dramatization of a biological mishap. *Lab 257* would be cautiously valuable to someone writing a history of Plum Island, but is otherwise an example of fringe literature with a portrayal of almost every form of novelist style. The author has unfortunately wasted an opportunity to write a credible history.



*Greek Fire, Poison Arrows & Scorpion Bombs: Biological and Chemical Warfare in the Ancient World*, Adrienne Mayor, Overlook Press, 2003.

It is always a welcome sight to see a unique, professional perspective on the history of chemical-biological (CB) warfare. Adrienne Mayor is a folklorist by profession, and her writing demonstrates just how commonplace CB warfare was in the ancient world.

Contemporary scholars often ignore the significance of CB warfare in history. Works on World War I generally limit chemical warfare to a paragraph or so on the battles of Ypres or the use of mustard gas but fail to note how almost every artillery barrage involved the use of poisonous gas in some form. A general observation is that only the most notorious CB events remain in history, typifying what was more or less commonplace at the time.

Ms. Mayor's husband is noted as a historian on ancient military history, and throughout the book text there is an argument of *jus in bello* scratching under the surface. Bringing mythology, classical literature, and ancient history together creates a story replete with instances of enemies using CB warfare in its crudest and earliest forms. Peppered throughout the text are examples to draw parallels with the modern-day concept of CB warfare.

*Greek Fire, Poison Arrows & Scorpion Bombs* is an invaluable text for the chemical soldier to better understand CB warfare from its classical roots. It provides vivid stories that make presentations interesting and historical examples that can typify points true today. Throughout the stories is the moral that while CB warfare is a potent weapon, it brings tragedy to the user and the victim alike.

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