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THE ICC IS NEEDED TO HOLD SOLDIERS ACCOUNTABLE

According to your recent Associated Press dispatch, "More than 100 nations hailed the birth of the International Criminal Court as a landmark for global justice, vowing that its mission to prosecute and deter future war criminals will not be sabotaged by U.S. opposition" (July 2).

In November 1945, I helped commit what I believe were atrocities against an unarmed village in north China, together with the Japanese Imperial Army. My story was the topic of Kate Gurnett's article, "A call for war-crime justice," almost two years ago (Times Union, Sept. 15, 2000). The point is that I was never prosecuted (or even questioned) about what I had done and, of course, there was no ICC to take jurisdiction if, and only if, the nation involved refused to prosecute.

Yes, had there been proceedings, I would have invoked mitigating circumstances, particularly the fact that I was following verbal orders, implicit in the United States secret involvement in the Chinese Civil War (an international conspiracy in which the Soviet Union was also complicit).

But I should have been prosecuted and convicted -- then or now -- and I should have been sentenced because blaming higher authorities must never be allowed to completely exonerate the perpetrator. That is one reason why the ICC is so important; if the act committed comes in the service of a secret national policy, there is no court of justice available to take jurisdiction.

Our country is the only one I know of that refuses jurisdiction to the International Criminal Court to prosecute those responsible for genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes. I have lived with all this on my conscience for 57 years.

EDWARD J. BLOCH

Latham