



Reply



To the Editor

The letter from Professor Viroj Wiwanitkit¹ regarding the recent publication in the Journal of the Chinese Medical Association of “No evidence of 1918 influenza pandemic origin in Chinese laborers/soldiers in France” makes two points²: (1) epidemiological studies are limited by the completeness of reporting; and (2) slow transportation by sea in 1918 makes it unlikely that the influenza pandemic of 1918 first occurred in Europe.

Mortality reporting was very important to the military at that time, and likely to be as complete as any public record. However, it would not have detected the nonlethal disease described in the spring of 1918 by Hans Zinsser.³

Despite the lack of rapid transcontinental transportation in 1918, the late 1918 influenza pandemic peaked on separate continents nearly simultaneously. The most likely explanation of this finding is that a precursor of the pandemic virus had been circulating unnoticed for some years until conditions favored its rapid emergence.

Since 1918 predated the discovery of influenza viruses, historical epidemiological studies are one of the few means to understand the continuing enigma of the highly lethal 1918 influenza pandemic.

Conflicts of interest: The author declares that he has no conflicts of interest related to the subject matter or materials discussed in this article.

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