

The Japanese Language School Archival Project

In the Spring of 2000, the Archives continued the original efforts of Captain Roger Pineau and William Hudson, and the Archives first attempts in 1992, to gather the papers, correspondence, photographs, and records of graduates of the US Navy Japanese Language School, University of Colorado at Boulder, 1942-1946. We assemble these papers in recognition of the contributions made by JLS graduates to the War effort in the Pacific, the successful occupation of Japan, the creation of Japanese language programs across the country, and the development of cultural reconciliation programs after World War II.

What's a BOGA?

Avid readers of *The Interpreter* know about the JLS at Boulder – and that matriculating males were known affectionately as the “Boulder Boys”, or BOBOs. Well, there were Boulder Gals too. And if BOGA is not part of the lexicon of JLSers everywhere, it's probably because there were so few BOGAs and so little known about them.

Here is some of what we do know. It was CDR Hindmarsh's idea to recruit women into the Boulder school beginning in 1943, ostensibly to free up more men for overseas duty (BOGAs were not permitted to serve outside the continental US). Hindmarsh handpicked the women himself. He knew what he wanted: Phi Beta Kappa College graduates with a demonstrated facility for languages. He tapped 88 women in short order – short, meaning he allocated roughly 2 minutes to each interview. Not all of them were PBKs and not all had language experience, but he did find some remarkable women.

They joined eagerly – each of them – searching for adventure and a way to contribute to the war effort.

Officially, the BOGAs were to be subjected to the Navy's universal standards of decorum and physical fitness. But behind the scenes, the BOGAs physical training amounted to heavy-duty sunbathing, horseback riding, golf and hiking.

In class, however, standards remained high. Sixty-nine of the 88 women made it through the program without giving up, failing, getting pregnant, or losing their minds. Then they were off to Washington, DC, where they expected they would finally have a chance to make that all-important contribution.

Yet almost without exception, the women expressed disappointment in the work assigned to them. They translated Japanese navigational manuals, aircraft operating manuals, coastal sea charts, captured diaries – documents they perceived to be of “dubious utility.” Said one, “I doubt I ever translated anything that anyone would need or even bother to read, but I hope I am in error on that score.” Said another, “The work was incredibly dull . . . the messages were mostly about single aircraft taking off from (garble) and landing at (garble).” Still others were assigned mail duty, filing, or editing tasks not even remotely related to the training they had just completed.

What went wrong? Note that nearly one-third of these women worked as translators in Japan after the War. It looks as though there was real talent and motivation here. Did someone in Washington miss the boat?

Twila Slesnick

[Boat, tank, jeep, battleship, they never run on schedule. Sounds like standard Army/Navy behavior to me, never the oiled machines anyone expects them to be. Ed.]

Please send insights, comments, and, heretofore unknown, facts and dark secrets to Twila

Slesnick, 8240 Rhoda Ave., Dublin, CA 94568, or to twila@home.com. Twila is assisting her father with his research on the Japanese Language Schools.

Chicken Feces

I shall here recount an incident involving another JLS graduate, John A. Lacey, and me when we were both assigned to a Navy unit in the interior of China in 1944-45. As John sometimes remarked, we two were probably The best Navy Japanese language officers in all of China -- adding that, come to think of it, we also were the only two there.

As the war ended but before the formal surrender of Japanese forces in China, we were flown to Shanghai, then in the process of liberation. The Japanese warships that happened to be in port were forbidden to leave, but one Japanese destroyer chose to try to depart. It was intercepted and escorted back to Shanghai. John and I were ordered to accompany one of our ranking officers, a no-nonsense commander, to board the destroyer in order to interrogate her captain. During our conversation, the Japanese captain happened to remark, with an air of pride that he had served on one of the ships in the fleet that had launched the Pearl Harbor attack on December 7, 1941. But, he added, brushing that aside, “That was war; this is peace.” Our Navy commander got angry and snapped: “Tell him, that's chicken-shit!”

I should mention here that our Navy language training had never got very far beyond official and reasonably polite words of communication, and the 5-foot shelf of dictionaries with which we were armed did not venture into street language. So John and I were at a loss as to how best to convey the commander's pithy language. We looked blankly at each other, discarded as clearly inadequate

the first words that occurred to us, involving gentle reproof, and then hit upon the only other solution we could think of on the spur of the moment -- a literal translation. So we said, as forcefully as we could, the equivalent of: “Chicken Defecation!”

The Japanese captain looked startled and puzzled, evidently trying to figure out what the bodily functions of chickens had to do with the matter at hand. But he returned to the main subject, our commander was distracted, and we settled back down to business.

*Royal Wald
Berkeley/Boulder JLS 1942*

Correction

We made a mistake in a previous *Interpreter*, in characterizing the *Ross H. Ingersoll Papers*. We incorrectly James H. Durbin material as a diary. Ingersoll's collection consists of a series of bi-weekly letters written by James H. Durbin to his family during the time he was in Boulder and Japan and edited by Dr. Ingersoll. In addition to this series of letters, Ingersoll included an “Overview” of his own experience at the Language School and his later service during the war, together with an autobiographical sketch.

*Sarah A. Johnson
Student Assistant*

EAL&C Grad Student Joins JLS Project

Jessica Arntson, graduate student in the East Asian Language & Literatures Department has joined the JLS Project as an intern. She will get credit for the internship through departmental independent study. Her duties will consist of processing small collections and assisting with donor relations. We welcome Ms. Arntson as a further sign of interest and collaboration from her department.

The Facility and Hours

Archives is located in the basement of Norlin Library at the east end of the historic quadrangle on the Boulder campus of the University of Colorado.

The Archives is open MWF, 1100-1700, but is staffed from 0800-1700, M-F. Out of town researchers may arrange for early and every day entry. Photocopying and both photographic and audiovisual reproduction services are available.

To Donate

If you wish to donate your materials, please contact the Archives to insure the proper mailing address. For large shipments, the archives will reimburse expenses. Upon receipt of materials we will send the donator a deed of gift with instructions. The donator must return to the Archives signed deeds of gift. The Archives will then provide copies of preliminary inventories and guides to donors and donor families when available. Feel free to contact us at any time.

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frontpage.htm](http://www-libraies.colorado.edu/ps/arv/frontpage.htm)

New Collections

The following are further collections held or recently received by the Archives:

- Paul F. Boller, Jr.
- John R. Cromie
- Col. Thomas E. Williams, Sr.
- Glen Slaughter
- John D. Swanfeldt