

The Interpreter

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Our Mission

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, letters, photographs, and records of graduates of the US Navy Japanese/Oriental Language School, University of Colorado at Boulder, 1942-1946. We assemble these papers in recognition of the contributions made by JLS/OLS instructors and graduates to the War effort in the Pacific and the Cold War, to the creation of East Asian language programs across the country, and to the development of Japanese-American cultural reconciliation programs after World War II.

You're in the Army Now !

After the debacle with the interview with Lt. Commander Hindmarsh, I talked with my math teacher who knew me rather well and asked if I should volunteer for service. He said there were many boys who could fight for our country and that I should get as good an education as possible before enlisting. I took his advice and enrolled in my second semester of college. Three months later I got "Greetings from the President of the United States." I was drafted.

I had a very sour feeling about the Navy, so when asked which service I wanted to enter, I chose the Army. I wrote down what I could do, including reading and speaking Japanese. Before getting my uniform I was called to an office that was about 8x8 feet in size. The guy there said something and I answered, huh? He said something louder and I said, "I don't understand you." He shot back at me, "I thought you could speak Japanese." I looked at the book

he was reading from and saw that it was a tourist guide book, Japanese English, English Japanese. I then said, "Give me the sentence in English and I'll give it to you in Japanese." He did, it was something simple like, where is the bathroom. He then closed the book and certified that I could speak Japanese. God! What an interview.

After getting my uniform and gear, I was immediately sent to Camp Ritchie, near Hagerstown, PA., as an acting corporal. With this designation, I could travel alone. When I reported in, I saw German tanks, men in Italian and German uniforms. The Sgt. at the desk said, "What language do you speak." I replied, "Japanese." He said, "We don't have Japanese here," and assigned me to a German unit, maybe because my name was Eckel. At the barracks I met a guy of Norwegian ancestry, the first person who spoke English without an accent. The next morning I reported to the office, the only person there was a Captain. I told him I had no military training, didn't know how to salute properly, and knew nothing about military procedures. He got a broom out of the closet, taught me the manual of arms, how to march, salute and present myself as an enlisted man. What other buck private had a Capt. as a drill Sgt. in the army? Yup! I graduated with honors.

Classes started the following week. Only one problem, I couldn't speak a word of German. I teamed up with an old Austrian (36 years old, twice my age) who spoke good German, not so good English and wasn't the smartest guy around. Most of the classes were taught in English by British, French and American officers. We had a rich curriculum, ranging from photo interpretation to field work. We were instructed on how to unload from a truck going 10 to 15 miles/hour. We held our rifle across our waist, stepped off backward hitting the

ground on our feet and then rolling into a ball letting the helmet take the brunt of the roll.

After rolling head over heels for 20 to 30 feet one comes to a stop none the worse for wear.

Unfortunately, my Austrian partner didn't master the technique, his rifle flew from his hands, his face and clothes were filthy with dust and dirt, he just sprawled. We were on night maneuvers and had to find our way back. I dusted him off as quickly as possible, he read the German maps issued us, and we started for our destination. I kept pushing him, because the first to fill the waiting trucks didn't have to pull KP (kitchen police, peeling potatoes and washing huge pots and pans). Of the five weeks we were there, the Austrian and I were assigned KP only once.

When it came to interrogation, I asked the questions. The Austrian would put them into German. The Austrian would give me the answers in English and we would write them down.

Nobody complained, so we graduated with superlative ratings as interrogators after five weeks of study, still not knowing enough German to be of any use. After graduation I was interviewed by a Capt. who wanted me on his team. When I told him I spoke Japanese, not German, he faced me with a very quizzical look and said, "You graduated as one of the best interrogators in the class, dealing with very 'difficult prisoners.' "(These "prisoners" were part of the cadre to evaluate our skill in interrogation.) I said, "Yes, but..." Before I could finish my sentence he said, "I'm referring you to the psychiatric ward."

After reporting there, I was interviewed by a civilian psychiatrist who had the Captain's report in his hand. He asked me a few questions of no import, and then asked me to tell him about my childhood life. I told him I was a missionary's kid, grew up in Japan and spoke

Japanese like a native. When I was five, I attended a Japanese kindergarten, however, when it came time to go to first grade, the public school would not allow me to matriculate. The reason I gave the psychiatrist was that in 1924 Senator Cabot Lodge pushed through a law prohibiting Japanese from emigrating to the U.S., so in retaliation, they would not let me enter their school. I asked the Psychiatrist if he knew about the law. He didn't.

I asked if he wanted me to continue, he said, "Yes." I then told him how my kindergarten friends came to my house and taught me much of what they learned at school that day. My parents bought me the texts that they were using. This lasted for three years, real home study. Do you want me to continue? Yes, was his reply? I then told him how I went to the temples until age ten, talked with the priests and learned much about the many denominations in Buddhism.

I was told the difference between the Nishihonganji and Higashihonganji, born out of a civil war similar to the breakup of the Baptist Church forming the Southern Baptist during our Civil War. I asked, "Would you like me to tell you about the Nichirenshu, very militant, somewhat similar to the Christian Evangelical movement in the U.S. He looked at me and said, "That won't be necessary."

He assigned me to a bed in the psychiatric ward, maybe thinking I was delusional. After all, there were the test scores which demonstrated that I ably interrogated "prisoners" IN German!

I got worried and sent a letter to Capt. Rasmussen, the former U.S. military attaché to Japan, who I knew in Tokyo. (He was by then a full Col.) In less than a week Mr. Saito, a Japanese American civilian came to the ward where I was held and interviewed me in Japanese while I was sitting on the bed.

Mr. Saito was a Kibei (Japanese American whose parents wanted him to get a good Japanese education by sending him to Japan.) He spoke beautiful Japanese and his English was excellent. I felt really sorry for the Kibei because they were never really accepted by the Japanese in Japan, and when they returned to the U.S. the Japanese Americans tended to shun them. They got the worst of both worlds

In typical Japanese fashion, I apologized for being in this awkward position, and putting him to so much trouble. I explained why I was in the psychiatric ward, much to his amusement. He had me read some stuff and as we were drawing near the end of the interview, I spoke of the prejudice (*sabetsu no mondai*) the Kibei had to face in Japan as well as the United States. He answered by saying, *Kibei no mondai ni tsuite, yoku shiteru ne*. He abruptly switched to perfect English and said, "I will have orders cut immediately for you to go to Camp Savage, the Army Japanese Language School." It was there I learned *heigo*, military terminology and received my commission.

Such was the chaos of the Army in the first year of the war. Maybe I should have gone in the Navy, but yeoman 3rd class?

Baldwin T. Eckel
US Army JLS 1942

[Ed. Note: Ah, cross-training, know it well. Actually, everyone who was in the service in any branch, at any time, at any rank has SNAFU and FUBAR stories, but few can match this one. This may nose out the Navy assigning the best JLO linguist to mess officer. Thanks go to Mr. Eckel for this great story.]

An Army JLSer

Carole Slesnik informed me that you would be interested in hearing from former Army Japanese language school grads. I would like to have you add me to the mailing of *The Interpreter*. Please send it to 8991 Gills Pier Rd., Northport, MI 49670;

strausrick@coslink.net

You may be interested to know that I was one of the BIJs who got into the Army program at the University of Michigan, graduating in June 1945, and from Ft. Snelling in December that year. I spent two and a half years in the Occupation, all at GHQ. I was assigned briefly to ATIS, then 6 months on the Prosecution Staff at the Tokyo Trials supervising the translation of German documents into Japanese and English, then 18 months with G-2 Operations. On getting out of college, after a detour via recall to active service from the inactive reserves, again at G-2 Operations, GHQ, I joined the State Department, which included consul general on Okinawa, 15 years in all on the US-Japan relationship. A few years after retiring from State in 1987 I began my research on Japanese POWs of World War II. Actually it deals only with those in the hands of the western Allies. My sources were the National Archives, Japanese autobiographies and a Japanese few historical works on the subject, interviews with both Japanese American and Caucasian language officers and men, and finally, in 2003, a trip to Japan where I interviewed some 35 former vets, selected from a much larger number with whom I had gotten into contact through the Asahi.

I can report that my book, entitled: "The Anguish of Surrender: Japanese POWs of World War II" will be published by the University of Washington Press in late February or early March of 2004. It includes a chapter on the graduates of the Army and Navy language schools, as well as one on the interrogations. I am attaching the blurb on my book that is now on a website as well as in a catalogue of forthcoming publications of the UWP. I feel confident that the book will find an interested readership among the many who served in the Pacific in the Japanese language-related capacity. For further information, you can also call me at (231) 386-7642.

As of possible interest, also, I have an article in the March 2003 issue of *World War Two Magazine* (obscure, but good) in which I relate my story, a by-

product of my book research. It involves my accompanying a group of Japanese vets of the China war who were returning, for the last time, to the city they had occupied. All such visits were at the invitation of the Chinese authorities (sic).

[Ed. Note: In February, he published a book on Japanese POWs, now available through the University of Washington Press. The cost is \$27.50 for a cloth volume.]

Ulrich (Rick) Straus
US Army JLS 1945

Army JLS to CIA

I am advised by Mrs. Slesnick that you are interested in the Army JL program of WWII. I was one. I had enrolled, on advice from my father, in the Oriental Languages Department of the University of California at Berkeley, when along came an Army recruiter and scooped up most of us for the new program at the University of Michigan. That was in March 1943. After a full year at Michigan, off we went to OCS at Fort Snelling, Minn., for additional training, not only in the language, but in the techniques and requirements for administering enlisted men. Our enlisted men were to be *Nisei*.

In 1945, I found myself assigned with an eight-man unit of *Nisei*, to the 86th Infantry Division. The War was still on, and the task was locating and rounding up the residue of the Japanese military. Then it was on to further linguistic challenges in Occupied Japan. After a brief interval once again at the Allied Translator and Interpreter Section, I was assigned to a substantial language unit at the 5250th Technical Intelligence Company, the task of which was the collection and analysis of the whole spectrum of Japanese ordnance. Later the task related to the translation of various Japanese field commanders from the South Pacific, giving their perspectives of the situations experienced by Douglas MacArthur and in which he had specified his interest. The General was involved, at the time, in writing a history of the War, and wanted the outlook of the foe as well.

I eventually returned to Berkeley and resumed my study of oriental languages, with the object of gaining a Ph.D. and becoming an instructor. I secured my BA and MA, and was working toward the Ph.D. when a recruiter from the Central Intelligence Agency came through, suggesting that, perhaps, with my family, it would be more of a life if I had a steady paycheck rather than the GI Bill augmented by a variety of part-time jobs to support my family.

When retirement arrived in 1974, I reverted to old instincts and turned to translation. This was highly augmented by Word Perfect, and I was able to produce a private publication of various works, which a dozen or so universities have acquired *in toto*, but a wide variety have acquired selectively.

It also occurred to me at that juncture to ask my classmates for accounts of their experiences after training. Given their lucidity and coherence, it bid fair to assume the dimensions of the New York City telephone directory. Almost dead silence ensued. About six contributed this and that, but the majority failed to contribute. The ultimate result was a work entitled, *Random Recollections*. I mention all of that because you expressed interest in contacting Army trainees. They are either no longer of this world, or have fallen irretrievably silent. I cannot, therefore, give you the names of anyone other than a chap in Chicago [Allen Meyer, on our mailing list] and of a later class who managed to contribute information he had secured from the records kept by Joseph Yamagiwa as to those who had been trained at Michigan.

Donald M. Richardson
US Army JLS 1944

[Ed. Note: I thought I would cluster these Army JLS stories together as a salute to the Army JLS and enlisted linguists from Forts Savage and Snelling and the University of Michigan. Their experiences read similarly to those of the readership, but they do seem to have produced a Captain Pineau type officer to organize reunions and start the collections of their papers.]