

**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.*

**Special Reunion Issue**

We at the Archives have decided to dedicate issues of *The Interpreter* to covering the 60<sup>th</sup> Reunion of the US Navy Japanese/Oriental Language School. Since we have completed issues all the way into September, we decided to add these issues as 1A and 2A.

**Sensei Testimonial**

The Rev. Hubert D. Kuyper, [whose] whole name is on your list of former US Navy Japanese language school instructors, retired to his home state of South Dakota and passed away in the mid 1960's. Before WW II, Rev. & Mrs Kuyper ministered in Karuizawa, Japan. From 2/42 to 10/42, they helped the Japanese in Stockton, Ca, both "outside" and in the Stockton Assembly Center. Yours sincerely,

Masako T Agari

**Language School Grads Reunite****Students learned Japanese for Navy at CU from 1942 to 1945**

Harry Muheim was about to flunk his vision test at the San Francisco induction center when the telegram arrived — he'd been admitted into the Navy, bad eyes and all. "The telegram actually came during the examination," Muheim recalled of that day in early 1943. "On my way out the door, the doctor said, 'I hope they don't ask you to aim the guns.' [en]" That wouldn't be a problem for Muheim — thanks to his Phi Beta Kappa membership, he was on his way to the University of Colorado, home to the Navy's classified Japanese Language School. "And let me tell you, I had never come across anything in my life as difficult as learning Japanese," said Muheim, who lives in Boulder. "It was a time of a certain amount of anguish." Muheim and about 100 of his fellow graduates will gather on the CU campus today for the language school's 60th reunion, a weekendlong event that will include the dedication of a plaque at the University Memorial Center.

CU archivist David Hays planned the reunion as a way to pay tribute to the graduates and their predominately Japanese-born instructors, who staffed the school from 1942 to 1945. "This is about honoring these students and teachers, and letting the next generation know what their parents had done," Hays said.

The Japanese Language School was founded in Tokyo in 1910, although Navy officials transferred the program to the University of California at Berkeley in 1941, as relations with Japan soured. The school

was moved to Boulder in 1942, after President Franklin D. Roosevelt ordered the internment of 120,000 men, women and children of Japanese descent — including the language school's Berkeley faculty. The Navy had two requirements for admission into the secret school: Students either had to have been born in Japan, or they had to be members of the Phi Beta Kappa honor society. At CU, the language students were housed in what is now known as Baker Hall, and, for a full year, spent 13-hour days studying in small groups with instructors known as "Sensei." Before the war, the course was taught over a three-year period.

"It broke with old academic tradition," said Frank Turner, a 1944 graduate who lives in Colorado Springs. "We went at it full time, with native Japanese speakers for instructors." Once students completed their studies, they were dispatched to Washington, D.C., or the Pacific, where they eavesdropped on Japanese radio transmissions, translated captured documents and interrogated prisoners. "The Japanese just didn't believe we could understand their language," Hays said. "It's amazing what a large role intercepts played in the war. These guys had a big role."

For Muheim, a retired screenwriter and playwright who no longer speaks Japanese, the reunion is another chance to catch up with his old classmates, and those he served with in Pearl Harbor and the Pacific. "You go to these things and look around at all these old guys and wonder who they are," he said. "Then you realize, 'Hey, I'm one of them.' It was just another world. Another time."

Matt Sebastian, Boulder Daily Camera, June 7 2002

**Reunion Reviews**

[Ed. Note: I include these reviews not so much for those who were here, for they know what transpired, but for those who were not present but wished to be. DMH]

Dear David:

Just a short note to say how much we enjoyed the reunion, and getting to meet you in person. You have obviously put in a lot of effort in both the JLS research and in the reunion, and we appreciate it immensely.

We were at the reunion for only one day (Saturday), but it [was] filled with such fun and interesting activities--the breakfast gathering, the round-table discussion, the Gamow Tower tour, the bus tour, the visit to the Archives, and the final dinner. I met Verner Chaffin who was a student of my father, Buddy Tsuneo Iwata. Another former student, Stuart Prestrud and several of the sensei relatives said they knew my father well.

Best of luck on your continuing work. And thanks again for such a wonderful event.

Sincerely,  
Kathleen Iwata Chung

Dear David,

I cannot express appropriately my thanks to you and your staff for all the wonderful things that you did at our 60th reunion. It seemed to me that everyone had a marvelous time, and I know I did.

One of the things that I have come to appreciate is how unique our experience was. It is for this reason that I am planning to make a presentation to a small, but influential, group here in Louisville, on October 3, 2002. Our "Conversation Club" was founded in the same year as the University of Colorado, viz. 1876. It has remained active ever since.

I will tell the members (c. 25 in number) about the organization and conduct of the school, what its graduates did

during World War II, and a bit of what we have done since. I would deeply appreciate it if you could send me anything that you think might be appropriate, especially copies of the videos that we saw at the reunion.

Again, congratulations for an outstanding reunion, and thanks again for the outstanding work that you did to make it such a success!.

With warmest regards, I am

*Sincerely,  
Hal Wren  
JLS, 1943*

## Sunday Brunch Closes Successful Reunion

Planned as a half "hail-fellow-well met" get-together and half honoring ceremony, the 60<sup>th</sup> Reunion of the US Navy Japanese Language School proved to be one part Errol Flynn military gabardine, buttons and braid and two parts "It's a Wonderful Life".

It must have been my Army brat childhood and tour of service, with the parades, the bugle calls, the drill & ceremony, the retreat gun, the "dining -in's" and the uniforms that led me to plan this type of reunion: Carlisle Barracks, Berlin Brigade, West Point, Fulda, Fort Bliss.

I knew I'd need Color Guards, Marines, and the plaque. Because, I was not just planning a reunion, I was really creating a medal ceremony. So the Colors were either posted, presented, or retired by either Air Force or Marine ROTC personnel at four of the functions. Marine Sergeants and Staff Sergeants in their "charlies" or dress uniforms drove the graduates to and from their accommodations. A Navy Commander gave a speech at the Plaque dedication. It was from dress "dining-ins" in the 11<sup>th</sup> Cavalry that I culled the series of toasts at the dinner.

One of the wives, Ms. Weissberg, I think, mentioned that JLSers were highly unmilitary before their service. That is probably true. So was I. But if a certified civilian can be

turned into an officer and can be transformed from a soldier back into a civilian, still you can never take the "veteran" away from him. He/she will always remember the formations, the uniforms, the sleeplessness, the orders, the discomfort, the duty and the sacrifice.

In early May, I went to the dedication of Colorado Highway 94 as the 94<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division Memorial Highway (my Dad's WWII unit). Their handling of that dedication influenced my handling of the plaque ceremony. They had more military presence, but they had Fort Carson nearby. They also had too many "suits" on the program. But it was what they did right that really influenced me. I tried to carry forth the solemnity with which they carried out their program.

Of course, I could depend upon the beauty of the campus and the cloudless, blue skies to set off our activities. But who can ever truly expect such tireless, self-motivated and intelligent work by student employees, part-time staff, fellow coordinators and volunteers. Their collaboration and suggestions created the displays, resulted in the JLS picture-placemats, the sensei-testimonials, and the film festival. Their preparation created the cards, the bio books and the exhibits. But it was their invisible efforts during the reunion that lubricated the effort: providing timely transportation, answering questions, providing escort and guiding tours. I would like to provide a list of fellow organizers and workers. I feel privileged to have worked with them to provide you the reunion you deserved:

Luann Pesonen, CU Foundation:

Scheduled facilities,  
organized meals,  
arranged accommodations,  
"Rode Herd"

Cynthia Haas, CU Foundation:

Assisted Luann  
Jessica Arntson, Grad.Student  
Sensei Relations, Films,  
Round Table, EAL&C and  
History Dept. Liaison

EAL&C Dept. & Center for  
Asian Studies, Professors Laurel  
Rodd and Steve Snyder  
Round Table and Films

USN JLS Oral History Project

History Professor Marcia

Yonemoto & students

SSG Patrick Tracy, USMC:

Coordinated Navy ROTC

Transportation

Coordinated Marine Color

Guard

Coordinated Marine

Volunteers

CSU "Wingwalkers"

Volunteered for Color Guard

At Plaque Presentation and

At Dinner

CDR Ulrich, USN

Volunteered to give speech at

The Plaque dedication

USMC ROTC Volunteers

Transportation, tours, Color

Guard

Bill Croyle

Airport, Plaque & Dinner

Colors Coordination

Karen Gifford, Archives

Displays, Hostess,

Information and tireless

Driver, Preparation

Cynthia Ploucher, Archives

Displays, Hostess, Interviews,

Information

Jennifer Hampson, Archives

Displays, Hostess, Tours,

Information

Amanda Chilton, Archives

Bio Books, Displays

Scott Shaver, Archives

Preparation, Holding down

Fort

Alvie Sellmer, Filming

Megan Applegate, Tours,

Holding Down Fort

Megan H. Lillie, Holding Down

Fort

*David M. Hays*

*Archivist II*

*60<sup>th</sup> Reunion Coordinator*

## Sensei Testimonial

My original [email] may not have made it clear that the painting of irises was an original work of art by Professor Ashikaga himself. In the winter of '44, as our "Winter" group was about to get its orders, Prof. Ashikaga invited Val Nolan and myself to dinner at his apartment. Val had been in the Secret Service (including the Presidential bodyguard detail at times) and was to be our group's valedictorian (appropriately enough).

Before dining, the professor sat us down, put his favorite record (and one of mine) on the

record player -- Smetana's "Die Moldau", or "Vltava". He also put the glass bottom of a coffee percolator on the flame to make hot water for tea, and regaled us with his story of how he had supported himself on his boat trip to America by mastering the art of poker...

About this time, the glass pot exploded from the direct flame, about two feet from Val's head, scattering shards of glass and hot water around the room.

For a few tense moments, Ashikaga must have had visions of himself in Leavenworth for injuring Boulder's star scholar, but Val emerged a bit damp but otherwise unscathed and unfazed. We finished out the evening with a splendid meal and exchange of further reminiscences, and the professor presented each of us with one of his flower paintings. Mine has remained by my bed as a souvenir of the gallant breed that came from behind the barbed wire to sharpen our skills and contribute to our eventual victory.

I never heard from Val Nolan again, but I think Hudson told me he had worked on the special wording of the Japanese surrender document.

*Tom Flournoy*

*JLS 1944*

*ThomasF242@aol.com*

*[Ed. Note: Val Nolan, AB 1941, JD, Indiana University; Editor in Chief, Indiana Law Journal; Deputy US Marshall, Southern District of Indiana, 1941-42; Agent US Secret Service, White House Detail, 1942; Faculty University of Indiana at Bloomington since 1949; Guggenheim Fellow, 1957; Resident Scholar Zoology, 1956-1968; Professor of Zoology since 1968; acting Dean, Indiana School of Law, Bloomington, 1976, 1980; Member Order of the Coif. <vnolan@indiana.edu>]*

## Daily Camera Followup

The *Boulder Daily Camera* placed a photo of the JLS 60<sup>th</sup> Reunion, above the fold on page one, on June 8<sup>th</sup>. Oddly, the photo included no follow-on story. *[Strange]*