

The Army Language School— An Appraisal

THE need for Japanese linguists was foreseen by the Army months before Pearl Harbour and plans were made to meet this problem. Utilizing Americans of Japanese ancestry who were inducted into the Army from western states, a small language school was established on November 1, 1941. It was called the Fourth Army Intelligence School and was located at the Presidio of San Francisco. The School was organized for the purpose of teaching basic Japanese, military Japanese, the organization of the Japanese Army, the technique of interrogating prisoners of war and similar subjects. It was a language and a military intelligence school whose graduates were to act as translators, interpreters and interrogators for U. S. field forces.

In May 1942, the School was moved to Camp Savage, Minnesota and two years later to Fort Snelling, Minnesota. Its name was changed to Military Intelligence Service Language School. Finally, in June 1946, almost a year after V-J Day, the School was moved to its permanent location at the Presidio of Monterey, California. Its name was again changed, this time to Army Language School.

Soon after the School was established in Monterey, it embarked on a program of expansion. Classes in Russian were started in the fall of 1946. A year later, courses in Chinese, Korean, Spanish, French, Portuguese and the Middle Eastern languages were added to the curricula. In July 1948 instruction was begun in Roumanian, Albanian, Bulgarian, Czech, Hungarian, Polish, Serbo-Croatian, and the Scandinavian languages. Twenty-one languages are now being taught at the Army Language School. These are: Albanian, Arabic, Bulgarian, Chinese, Czech, Danish, French, Greek, Hungarian, Japanese, Korean, Norwegian, Persian, Polish, Portuguese, Roumanian, Russian, Serbo-Croatian, Spanish, Swedish, and Turkish.

It is obvious that the Army Language School has gone through a process of evolution, that it has adapted its program to meet changing world conditions. Not only have the curricula been changed from time to time but also the methods of instruction. From the very beginning the policy of the School has been to change methods of instruction and course content whenever the administration considers such revisions warranted.

For example, early in the war trainees at the School received a good deal of instruction in basic Japanese. All efforts were being directed toward turning out as rapidly as possible interpreters and translators of Japanese for service with our combat troops. Experience in the field soon indicated that

the scope of the language requirements there was limited to a narrow military field. Accordingly the basic Japanese language course was stripped to the bare essentials. Trainees concentrated on military Japanese. The course was usually of eighteen months' duration.

Since the war the course in Japanese has been reduced in length to twelve months and its content has been changed. The vocabulary which trainees are now required to learn is much broader and larger than it was during the war. Such changes can be made quickly since the School is not unnecessarily hampered by regulations and traditions. Because of this it is able to attain its goal efficiently.

The objective which the School is trying to achieve has never changed since the School was organized. The Army Language School is endeavoring to train men to *understand* and *speak* a foreign language. The ability to write in and translate a foreign idiom is of secondary importance. How the School operates to attain its goal is best seen by following the career of an average student from the time he is assigned to the School until his graduation.

All the students who are now attending the Army Language School are there at their own request. However, many who applied for assignment to the School were not accepted. Personnel files were used as a basis for screening applicants. Those who were accepted were given a language aptitude test on their arrival at the School. Failure to pass this test did not disqualify them from being enrolled in the language course to which they had been assigned.

The reason for giving the aptitude test was merely to determine its value as a predictor. The test consists of parts of those given at universities and a tone inflection test developed by the Army Language School. The tone inflection test is aural and is given by playing a recording of Chinese words. The words are inflected in one of four ways: level, rising, falling, rising and falling. The student checks the type of inflection to which he believes each word belongs.

Statistics on the correlation of this combination of tests were gathered from September 1948 until June 1949, in which month these tests were discontinued. The School decided that the correlation between the test results and grades received was not high enough. Actually the tests were too easy. In the tone inflection test a great number of students made perfect scores. Indeed this test revealed nothing more or less than whether or not a student was tone deaf.

In July 1949 the Army Language School began a study of the correlation between grades received in language courses and scores obtained in the following three tests:

- (1) The Army General Classification Test (AGCT). This test is given to all enlisted men when they enter the service. It has recently been discontinued in favor of the Army Classification Battery Test (ACBT). The ACBT consists

- of three parts: a. Reading and vocabulary; b. Arithmetic reasoning; c. Pattern analysis.
- (2) The language aptitude test given at West Point, WPQ-1, X-1.
 - (3) The following parts of the Seashore Measures of Musical Talents: a. Pitch; b. Timbre; c. Tonal memory.

If the correlation between the scores made on these tests and grades received in language courses proves to be sufficiently high, the School may use these as a predictor. Prospective students can then be tested prior to acceptance and those not qualified can be eliminated from consideration. At the present time, when passing a language aptitude test is not a requirement for admission to the School, it takes from four weeks to three months to determine accurately which students will not be able to complete their course successfully. The percentage of students thus disqualified varies from 8 to 13 per cent depending on the language being studied.

With the adoption of a language aptitude test which is reasonably reliable as a predictor, it is hoped that the percentage of failures will be substantially reduced. The Army Language School is not taking the attitude that the test which it started using in July 1949 will necessarily turn out to be such a predictor. If it proves to be unsatisfactory, further study and experimentation will be undertaken. The Army Language School is a progressive institution and it will not be content until a reasonably reliable language aptitude test has been found. Even then experiments will continue in an effort to improve the test.

The importance of an aptitude test for pre-selection is very apparent when one considers the types of trainee who form the student body at the Army Language School. The students are above average intelligence for Army personnel. The Army wide figure for the General Classification Test (AGCT) is 100; for the students at Army Language School it is 128.7. All military ranks from private to full colonel are represented. The trainees are of all ages from 17 to 50. Some have had only a ninth grade education; others hold advanced degrees. Previous language training varies from none at all to several years study in high school and college. It must be noted that a student may be trained in a language other than the one he studied in high school and/or college. In view of this diversity in the previous training of students and of the aim of the School to teach trainees to understand and speak a foreign language it is evident that careful consideration had to be given to the selection of a faculty.

First of all it was decided that instructors must be natives of the country whose language they teach. However it was ruled that native born Americans who were raised in or who received most of their education in a foreign country would be acceptable. It would seem that the first place in which the Army Language School would seek instructors would be in the universities, for they have trained teachers who instruct in such languages as Arabic and Persian and who are natives of those countries. But the Army Language

School does not try to proselyte professors from civilian schools. Moreover, it is quite doubtful if such professors could be lured away from American universities with their research facilities, to teach at the Army Language School. Besides, the School prefers to secure for its teaching staff persons who were only recently using the language they teach, *in their daily life*, and therefore engages native speakers to accomplish the aims of the School, namely, to teach men to speak a foreign language in a brief period of time.

The best qualified instructor in the opinion of the School is one who was a teacher in his native land and who is, in addition, familiar with American customs. But such people are not easy to find. As a result there is great diversity in the former occupations of the faculty members. For example, in the Japanese section there is a chemical engineer, a salesman, a newspaper man, a businessman and representatives of several other occupations. At the same time there are a number of instructors on the School staff who are professional teachers with many years' experience in some of the world's foremost institutions of learning.

In the past, the Army Language School did not give a course in teaching methods to new instructors who had had no previous experience. Such courses are currently being organized with some already in operation. Four civilian members of the faculty are currently attending a foreign language teacher training course at Cornell University in order that they may supervise instruction in classes for the new instructors as well as the instruction in each of their language divisions. In those cases where courses for new instructors have not yet been established, the equivalent of such a course is provided by supervised training on the job, and by section and departmental discussion. In the past two years three professors made visits of inspection to the School. A committee of four educators also made such a visit and rendered a favorable report.

The courses vary in length. The course in a Romance language lasts four months, in Roumanian and the Scandinavian languages six months, and in any other language twelve months. Regardless of the total time required for the course in a particular language, the number of hours per week is the same for all languages.

	<i>Hours</i>
(1) Contact hours of instruction	30
(2) Study in class (<i>optional</i>)	5
(3) Examinations (written and oral) are given alternate Friday afternoons from 1 to 4. On the alternate Friday, reviews are conducted from 1 to 4.	3
(4) Estimated <i>minimum</i> night study necessary to meet assignments is 15 hours per week, i.e., at least 3 hours study per night	15
(a) Total classroom work per week	33-38
(b) Total estimated minimum outside study required	15
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GRAND TOTAL	48-53

(The above schedule is taken from Information Bulletin No. 1, Army Language School.)

The hours of instruction are spent in the following manner. Twenty-five percent of the teaching is by the grammar and translation method and seventy-five percent by the direct method. Grammar as such is taught in all courses. Since some of the students have no knowledge of English grammar or even grammatical terms when they arrive, they are issued an English grammar and are told to study it for two weeks. At the end of two weeks they are required to turn it in. This passing acquaintance with English grammar enables the student to understand the grammar and structure of the language he is studying.

However, the principal teaching technique employed is the direct method. Since the objective to be attained is a speaking knowledge of a language most of the class work is oral. As soon as possible the class is conducted in the language being studied. In the Japanese course for example students are required at the end of the first month to recite in Japanese a story which they have memorized. During the second month they give reports orally once a week on a story or article they have read. Thereafter the entire class either puts on a skit in Japanese or attends a Japanese movie once a week. It is easy for all members of the class to take part in the skit since classes are limited, except under unusual circumstances, to five students. In these skits, indeed when speaking the language at any time, students are encouraged to use the gestures peculiar to the language. Instruction in the other languages follows more or less the methods used in teaching Japanese.

The Army Language School has sometimes had difficulty in securing suitable textbooks. Commercially prepared texts are used whenever it is possible to do so. However such books are written for use in a high school or college classroom at a relatively slow pace and are frequently not suited to the intensive courses given at the Army Language School. The only solution of the textbook problem was for the faculty of the School to write their own texts. This was a matter of necessity and not of choice. Of the twenty-one language departments almost every one has now written its own texts. They contain all the essential grammatical principles, but are primarily designed for use of the direct method. These books meet the special needs of the students at the Army Language School.

Considerable use is made of training aids. In this respect the school has secured and continues to seek a wide variety of training aids. With the exception of the transmitter, the School has radio and recording equipment comparable to that of a Class A radio station. Recordings have been made of the first twenty lessons in each course. Copies of the recordings are then made. Small phonographs are issued for groups of two or three students. During their study time these groups can listen to that day's lesson just as it was presented by the instructor.

Recordings are also made of broadcasts from Japan, Russia and Europe. These are usually newscasts and are of particular interest to the advanced

students. They are played in class the day after they are recorded. Pravda makes a "dictated newscast" for the benefit of newspapers in small towns and villages in the Soviet Union which have no newswire service. Since these broadcasts are made slowly enough to be written down, they can be understood by the less advanced students. In view of the fact that they contain the latest news they awaken a lively interest in the students.

The School has equipment for making new sound tracks for movies. New sound tracks are made by the instructors in a given language. This makes it possible to change the sound track on any movie from one language to another, thus utilizing one film to the utmost. Strange as it may seem, a Japanese movie was recently shown in which all the actors spoke Turkish. Ordinarily when a movie is shown, particularly to the less advanced students, they are given a synopsis of the story to read the day before they see the film.

The Soundscriber is used only for remedial work. Students who cannot be convinced that they are pronouncing badly make a Soundscriber recording. It is done in this manner: The instructor reads a phrase or sentence into the microphone. Then the student reads the same words. This process is repeated a number of times. The recording is then played back. Even the most stubborn student sees his errors and is forced to admit them.

Despite the great use made of training aids, the School feels that no training aid or combination of them is a satisfactory substitute for an instructor. Training aids are used merely to supplement the instruction given in the classroom. But the greatest training aid of all is the studying done by the students in preparation for their classes.

The estimated *minimum* time of fifteen hours per week spent by the student in night study is an accurate figure. The students actually spend that amount of time preparing their lessons. Clear proof of this is the fact that officer students are rarely found in the officer's club on school nights.

The total amount of instruction given per week is, as the schedule shows, 30 hours. The total hours for the whole course amounts to 510 for the shortest courses (Romance languages) and to 1380 for the longest courses (Russian, Japanese, etc.).

In this period the students acquire the following vocabularies. In French 2500 words active vocabulary plus an additional 1500 words passive vocabulary. In Russian these figures are 3000 and 2000 words respectively. In Japanese the students are exposed to 7000 or 8000 words. Of these they retain 3000 words as an active vocabulary plus an additional 1000 words as passive vocabulary. In the written language they are able to read from 1500 to 2000 characters. Are these vocabularies sufficient to enable graduates of the School to function efficiently abroad?

The best answer to this is obtained from graduates who have been sent abroad. They have written back to the School that they get along quite

well at understanding and speaking the language in which they were trained. This is after all the objective of the School and that objective is being attained. The School is not trying to turn out graduates who are *fluent* in a foreign language. Fluency comes after the graduate has been abroad for a while.

The Army Language School is therefore doing the job it set out to do. There are some things which could be improved however. The length of the courses in the Romance languages should be increased from 4 to 6 months. New instructors with no previous teaching experience should be given a short course in teaching methods before they begin instructing. This defect is rapidly being remedied. Lastly instructors should not be required to teach 25 hours per week. An instructor cannot do his best teaching with such a heavy load.

These are, however, minor points when one looks at the whole picture. The Army started under wartime conditions to produce military interpreters in Japanese only, in a very short time. It had had no previous experience in this field. The School is now producing interpreters in a score of languages. No one knows where the next war will be fought. But wherever it is, there will be trained interpreters available. It will not be possible to wait for interpreters to be trained in the next war. Time will run very, very short.

However there may not be another war. In that case the money expended on training interpreters now is being very well spent. Army personnel who go to a foreign country in peace time and who can speak the language of that country are certainly received with a great deal more friendliness than they would be if they did not speak the language. They are, in a sense, ambassadors of good-will who make for international understanding and amity. Recently a graduate of the Army Language School was sent to Saudi Arabia. Shortly after his arrival he made a speech in Arabic. His audience was amazed and extremely pleased. It was the first time that they had heard an American Army officer give a speech in their own language. It is such speeches as this which tend to prevent war.

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