
Katherine White
Brigham Young University

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White: The Men Who Could Speak Japanese

Students at the Navy Japanese Language School at Boulder, Colorado.

Katherine White

On their last day of class at the US Navy Japanese Language School (USNJLS or JLS), Captain Roger Pineau and his fellow classmates waited in a room on the second floor of the University of Colorado library. They had spent the last eleven months immersed in a rigorous study of the Japanese language, and today their teachers had promised a sample of what they would experience as Japanese-language officers in the Pacific War. The six students sat intently as their conversation sensei (teacher) entered the classroom, removed a Japanese newspaper from his briefcase, placed his pocket watch on the table, and began a fifty-five minute reading, without pause.

Sweat began seeping “from every pore” as Pineau realized he understood only about a quarter of the words. When the sensei finished, he folded the paper into his briefcase, pocketed his watch, wished the students go-kigen’yo (good luck), and departed. “We sat there in a state of communal shock,” Pineau explained, “We rose, moving out of the room and down the stairs, in a sort of zombie-like trance. I suppose we were all conjuring up the horror of being confronted with a combat situation.”

2 Ibid.
3 Ibid.
When the students reached the open air, a fellow classmate turned to Pineau. "Rog, if I were on a flagship and was summoned by the admiral to listen to a Japanese radio broadcast like that, I know just what I'd do," he declared. "I'd sit down in front of the radio speaker, and listen intently for about half a minute. If what I heard was coming out like Sensei's reading, I'd stand up, look the admiral square in the eye and say, 'Sir, the dirty bastards have switched to Korean.'"

Roger Pineau was one of over 1,600 Navy, Marine, and WAVES (Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service) officers trained in written and spoken Japanese at the Navy's language school in Boulder, Colorado. The Boulder school was but one of fourteen similar wartime military language programs, but in many ways it was unique. Unlike the Army, who chose to employ Japanese-American officers, the Navy program was restricted to Caucasian applicants. This meant that the majority of JLS students had to learn the language mostly, if not all, from scratch, which they somehow did more quickly and in greater numbers than Army Caucasian linguists—and with remarkable success. By its closing in late 1946, the JLS had produced over 1600 graduates, ninety percent of whom left as commissioned officers. These graduates would go on to intercept, decrypt, translate, and interpret Japanese radio traffic; translate captured Japanese documents; and interrogate Japanese POWs. Their roles in the Pacific, however, went beyond life-taking to life-saving. When the fighting stopped, they became instruments of surrender and agents of occupation in a country and empire whose defeat had seemed inevitable, but at a cost no one could have imagined in 1941. Boulderites—as USNJLS graduates were known amongst their military peers—were instrumental in creating clinics for wounded Japanese prisoners, negotiating the surrender of Japanese units, and arranging the repatriation of prisoners. As one scholar explains, "The behavior of Navy and Marine Japanese-language officers toward Japanese prisoners and civilians has been described as sympathetic, sensitive, and through their knowledge of the culture and society, extremely effective. Former Japanese POWs kept up long friendships or spent lifetimes seeking out their former captors in order to offer thanks." Their stories show us that the Pacific was not pure savagery but was also an arena for great humanity.

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4 Ibid.
5 Dingman, 233.
7 Carole E. and Irwin L. Sleznick, Kanji and Codes: Learning Japanese for World War II (Self Published).

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For many years, the details of the interrogation, translation, and cryptanalysis performed by Japanese-language intelligence officers were largely unknown. Because the JLS was conducted with the regulations and conditions of a war-time project, certain events were not recorded or publicized when they occurred; other data were withheld from public knowledge by the Navy Department. Even when the State Department declassified WWII military documents in 1972, researchers found that many U.S. Marine Corps, Navy, and Army units had destroyed records of Japanese-language military intelligence service in their outfits.

In an effort to remedy these deficiencies, in the mid-nineties several JLS graduates began collecting documents related to the school, feeling strongly that their stories were important to WWII history. The University of Colorado soon joined in, initiating a broad effort to document the program and the careers and contributions of its participants, instructors, and administrators.

Since then only a few major projects have dealt with the collection, many the work of JLS graduates for memoirs and autobiographies—like Roger Dingham’s Deciphering the Rising Sun: Navy and Marine Corps Codebreakers, Translators, and Interpreters in the Pacific War and Irwin L. Sleznick’s Kanji and Codes: Learning Japanese for World War II—that largely focus on the linguists’ experiences in active duty. Their stories, Dingham argues, are telling evidences to the importance of the armed services maintaining effective foreign language training programs in peace and war. Donald Irish’s sociological study “Reactions of Residents of Boulder, Colorado to the Introduction of Japanese into the Community” also drew heavily from the collection. Irish focuses mainly on the Boulder community and their perspective of the school’s Japanese and Japanese American instructors. Drawing from local newspaper articles, Irish chronicles an extensive PR campaign designed by the military to ensure the sensei’s safe reception in Boulder. The campaign, he argues,

9 Irish, 9.
12 In 2002, Jessica Arntson contributed an in-depth study of the sensei’s experiences, not only as instructors but also as victims of the American government’s incarceration of all ethnic Japanese living on the West coast. As Arntson explains, “The experiences of the JLS instructors and their families present a compelling perspective on both the internment and Japanese American participation in the war. Their struggles in Boulder offer a glimpse of the hardships and racism ethnic Japanese endured from neighbors and media who labeled them the ‘enemy’ even as they helped the
was ultimately successful. Despite early tensions, he concludes, residents eventually put aside prejudice for patriotism as welcoming the sensei became Boulder’s “war work.”

Together these theses, articles, and books constitute an extensive new chapter in WWII intelligence historiography, but they have by no means exhausted the possibilities for meaningful inquiry into the contributions of the JLS. Archival texts documenting the development, organization, and curriculum of the Boulder school illustrate a far deeper legacy than mere wartime utility. As 1940s American propaganda trumpeted anti-Japanese rhetoric and flashed racist stereotypes of subhuman fanatics, the Boulder school became a focal point for cross-cultural exchange between white American students and Japanese-American sensei that resulted in a unique atmosphere of acceptance and understanding. JLS students read Japanese poetry, history, and literature, participated in Japanese festivals, and engaged in weekly screenings and discussions of Japanese cinematic masterpieces. In true historical irony, the school built to “weaponize” the Japanese language engendered a humanized image of Japan that changed the way naval language officers saw the war and their role in it.

When fighting ended, academics across the country took advantage of the program’s success by adopting the pedagogical methods developed by naval and academic administrators in Boulder. Leading this movement were JLS graduates whose experiences in the context of war begat a lifelong interest in and appreciation for Japan. Many returned to civilian life and went on to illustrious careers in Asian languages, humanities, and the social sciences. The resumes of other graduates reveal that their war experiences opened doors outside of academia. They became international lawyers, businessmen, art dealers, authors, and ambassadors. For these graduates, Boulder gave their lives new purpose, inspiring them to play an active and ongoing role in building a global community through education.

**History and Development of the Navy’s Japanese Language Schools**

United States win the war.” Arntson’s work thus provides a unique example of the contradictions and complexities of race on the American home front.


14 Pineau, “Words at War.”
Japanese-language training in American military branches began in 1905. After Japan’s unexpected victory over the powerful Russian Empire that same year, U.S. officials quickly noticed significant deficiencies in American intelligence capabilities concerning the island nation. In early spring of 1906, the US State Department began educating a small number of Foreign Service, Army, and Navy officers in a Japanese-language course in Tokyo. Selection of these early students was often haphazard and the instruction casual, often left to the initiative of the student. Needless to say, their progress was sluggish. By early 1940, concerns about America’s preparedness for war with Japan grew as amiable relations gave way to diplomatic tensions. A 1941 review of naval forces reported that sixty-five percent of the few dozen trained by the military had lost their language competence. Final tallies determined that only twelve officers in the U.S. Navy were adequately proficient in spoken and written Japanese.

Seeking to remedy the situation, the Army and Navy began scrambling to design courses for training officers in writing, reading, and speaking Japanese. In February of 1941 the Navy called upon A. E. Hindmarsh, assistant professor of international law at Harvard and previous attaché in Japan. Hindmarsh’s first step was to develop a curriculum capable of meeting the Navy’s formidable demands for language specialists of both quality and quantity. He naturally looked to the philosophies of Naoe Naganuma, an aging teacher he had met while an attaché. In the early 1920s, Naganuma had become popular among many U.S. Army, Navy, and State Department students for his scientific approach to the teaching of Japanese. As a fellow teacher remarked in 1931, Naganuma’s ultimate goal was for his students to “frame [their] thoughts and actions through, in, and with that foreign language, not merely to learn about that foreign language.” In application, this philosophy meant that the study of Japanese grammar was minimized, if taught at all. Speaking skills were taught primarily through context, and students were encouraged to look to situational cues for appropriate speech patterns. When one student asked “Why is the language constructed this way?” Naganuma tellingly responded, “Because that the way we say it!” It was not enough for students to talk like the Japanese, he argued; they had to think like the Japanese. In 1929, Navy funding allowed Naganuma to compile the first three volumes

16 Pineau. Words at War, 8.
18 Harold E. Palmer, Forward to Hyojun Nihongo Tokuhon (June 1931), xi.
19 Ibid.
of a meticulously planned course. His *Hyojun Nihongo Tokuhon*, or "Standard Japanese Reader," relied on a combination of traditional Japanese folktales and histories, as well as practical conversation exercises that placed students in the middle of a Japanese store, train station, or classroom. This was exactly the type of practicality Hindmarsh wanted for the Navy’s program.

The Naganuma course, however, normally required three years for students immersed in Tokyo, where they had ample opportunity to hear and practice the language. The pressures of encroaching war, however, deprived Hindmarsh of such luxuries. In July of 1941, Hindmarsh proposed to his superiors a plan that would shorten the Tokyo course by 24 months. Students at the JLS were thus required to learn in one year what had taken pre-war language officers to learn in three. This adaptation was possible, he believed, under ruthlessly specific conditions. All “easy-roads,” gadgets, shortcuts, and extraneous academic theory—the "tommy-rot which had characterized the teaching of language in the US for generations"—were rejected. The standards for admission to the program were also intensified. Hindmarsh turned to top universities and academic institutions; there, he believed, genius awaited. Between March and June of 1941, Hindmarsh located fifty-six Caucasian persons with a knowledge of Japanese sufficient enough to form the nucleus of the new naval Japanese-language course. On August 1, 1941, he submitted his Naganuma-based curriculum to his superiors and recommended establishing two training centers, one at Harvard University and the other at the University of California, Berkeley. A few months later the Director of Naval Intelligence and the Chief of the Bureau of Navigation approved Hindmarsh’s plan, and on October 1, 1941 the US Navy Japanese Language Schools at Harvard and Berkeley opened their doors to the first class of scholars.

Initial experiments in Cambridge, however, did not go as smoothly as Commander Hindmarsh had hoped. Problems immediately surfaced when established professors refused to alter their teaching methods to fit the curriculum outlined in the Navy contract. Harvard had long used an abstract, theory-based approach to language learning. Professors focused on antiquated written characters and vocabulary, suitable in the world of academics but less than ideal when it came to producing graduates with a practical command of the spoken language. This was exactly the type of impracticality Hindmarsh had hoped to avoid. One of the first lessons in the Harvard text, for example, taught the proverb, “An ogress at

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21 Hindmarsh, 6.
22 Ibid.
23 Hindmarsh, 7.
eighteen—second-grade tea in its first infusion," meaning, "Even an ugly woman is beautiful at a tender age." An amusing anecdote, perhaps, but Hindmarsh knew lusty proverbs would be of little use on the battlefield. When several of these Harvard students failed their midterm evaluations in November of 1941, Hindmarsh decided not to renew the Harvard contract. In 1942, the Navy Japanese language school in Cambridge came to a close.

Berkeley, by contrast, was in Hindmarsh's eyes an unblemished success. There, Japanese-language professor Florence Walne developed a program true to the philosophies espoused by Naganuma, and thoroughly in line with the Navy's aims. An early draft of her course proposal emphasized precisely the kind of immersion the Navy wanted its students to experience. She suggested teaching the class in San Francisco's Japan town, where students' eyes and ears would be trained by interactions with Japanese on the streets. Arguing that "possession of a language" meant nothing unless accompanied by knowledge of the civilization it expressed, Walne wanted the students not only to "command the vocabulary" but to understand the social context in which words were used. This, Walne believed, would parallel what she herself had experienced as the daughter of a missionary in Japan.

These pedagogical theories applied to the Navy's search for instructors as well. As of December 1940, the Navy did not have an up-to-date list of American civilians who were competent in Japanese, and the prospects seemed bleak. The average American knew little of Japan outside of sensationalized images in popular culture and military propaganda, and maybe a few words—samurai, geisha, banzai—that had penetrated the English language. Initially, Hindmarsh sought the expertise of academics. After difficulties at Harvard, however, Hindmarsh dismissed the use of academics, preferring instead to recruit bilingual Japanese-American professionals for the Berkeley program. Only native speakers experienced in the practical application of the language, he came to believe, had the skills necessary for instruction in an immersion setting. Susumu Nakamura, a thirty-three-year-old Japanese-American teaching assistant, was Hindmarsh's first recruit. Another individual, an expert on Tibetan Buddhism, had only recently

25 Pineau, 15.
27 Pineau, 8.
28 Hays, "Enduring Communities."
come to Berkeley from Japan. Other sensei were pulled from Nakamura's acquaintances in the Bay Area and Walne's contacts at Berkeley's International House, a hub for international students.29 Kibei, second-generation immigrants with three or more years of study in Japan, were especially valuable. While their upbringing at times elicited questions of loyalty, at the JLS their experience made them valuable guides to the mysteries of Japan's society and culture.30 Few in the group had teaching experience, but pedagogy, they surmised, could be taught. The same could not be said of the insight a bicultural staff would provide.

Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor in December of 1941, however, cast a shadow over the victories of the Berkeley program. President Roosevelt wasted no time in signing Executive Order 9066, authorizing the removal of all people of Japanese descent living on the West Coast.31 Despite the pleas of JLS administrators, the government refused to grant an exception for the instructors at Berkeley. Hindmarsh and Walne were nonetheless resolved to salvage what they could of the program. They decided to relocate the school inland, where ethnic Japanese were considered less of a threat to national security. The University of Colorado, Boulder stood out as one of the few mid-western institutions willing to accept Japanese-American students during the war.32 By March of 1942, Hindmarsh had already begun negotiations with the university. On May 31, university president Robert L. Stearns signed a contract virtually identical to the one concluded in Berkeley, with an added proviso that protected the Japanese and Japanese-American sensei from further removal. Classes were slated to begin in July of that same year.33

**JLS in Boulder**

Conditions in Colorado when the JLS opened made the success of the Boulder school all the more remarkable. As Jessica Arnston explains, "Despite the breathtaking views of the Rocky Mountains and relatively good relations between Whites and Japanese in [Colorado], anti-Japanese sentiment experienced a resurgence during the West Coast evacuation."34 An exposé of conditions in Wyoming's Heart Mountain internment camp in the Denver Post claimed that the

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29 Dingman, 18
33 Hindmarsh, 8.
34 Arnston, 181.

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internees were living better than most Americans. It also charged that seventy percent of all internees were disloyal to the US. In reaction, a perturbed Colorado legislature tried to pass a constitutional amendment that prohibited Japanese aliens from being allowed to own land. The measure passed the Colorado House of Representatives by a landslide, but narrowly failed to gain a simple majority in the state Senate with a vote of twelve to fifteen. It was, Arnston explains, a time when little effort was made to distinguish between people of Japanese ancestry and subjects of an imperial regime.

Coloradoans, of course, were not alone in their mistrust of Japanese. Similar episodes could be seen throughout the country, and JLS recruits were not immune to this wartime prejudice, even when it came to their sensei. On the first day of class, Katsura Sensei began conversation class by saying, "'Ohayo' means 'Good Morning' . . . 'Ohayo' is same as name of state." Students snickered, and many found it easy to racially caricature his broken speech. In his journal, James Durbin wrote "Mr. Katsura: stereotypical nihonjin [Japanese person]. Terrible English." Another sensei was given the nickname "Tommy the Sandpiper," because he was so short that "every time he sneezed he blew sand in his Shoes." Also present was the more serious concern that they were being taught by the enemy race. After all, hadn’t these Japanese and Japanese Americans been interned for the very reason that their loyalty could not be determined? It is understandable that these contradictions puzzled the students of Boulder and complicated their initial reception of the ethnic Japanese men and women chosen to be their sensei. Soon, however, a remarkable synergy took place. Early preconceptions faded as students came to admire the dedication, concern, and professionalism with which the sensei approached their duties. Working in and outside of the classroom, Boulder sensei became singularly effective in imbuing students with both knowledge of and appreciation for the enemy’s culture. The result was a climate of understanding and cooperation that set Boulder, its teachers, and its students, apart from much of the country. It was, as sensei Kaya Kitagawa would later posit, as though the “community didn’t even know there was a war.”

35 Ibid., 182.
36 Ibid.
37 Spiegel, 132.
38 Sleznick, 101.
39 Spiegel, 120.
41 Kitagawa, 2.
THE MAKEUP OF THE JLS

Standards for acceptance into the JLS were strict; according to a 1942 report written by Hindmarsh, applicants were to be between twenty and thirty years old, have had at least three years of college work, and preferably some training in Oriental languages.42 R.S. Hummel, for example, came to Boulder highly proficient in both written and spoken Chinese. Before joining the Boulderites, Hummel graduated from the University of California, Berkeley in political science and international relations with an emphasis in Chinese. Most valuable, however, were students with considerable exposure to the Japanese language. About one in five of the 1,200 total students to go through the JLS were those born in Japan to missionary or merchant parents—known colloquially as “born in Japans” (BJJs). Tad Vanbrunt, who was perhaps the most fluent of all, bragged that he had a degree from “Yoshiwara University,” referring to Tokyo’s red-light district.43 The group was, as one student remarked, the most “polyglot army ever assembled in one spot.”44

Others got into the program because they were “bright as hell.” Members of Phi Beta Kappa qualified without “oriental” language training.45 One student remarked that “Are you Phi Beta Kappa?” was the only question Hindmarsh asked before granting admission. Most recruits were from the top of their class at top-tier universities, Neal F. Jenson and William J. Hudson Jr. from Princeton, Hart H. Spiegal and Theodore Jackson from Yale.46 The number of these elite recruits was such that the JLS acquired the same stereotypes of wealth and arrogance associated with many ivy-league schools. In a play written by the students for a class party, one solo parodied the well-to-do backgrounds of many of the students. It went: “When I was a member of the idle rich / I spent my time in playing bridge / and soon I learned the art complex / of becoming an expert of shuffling decks. Oh I was such a shuffling fool / that I became a member of the Japanese school!”47 To be sure, brilliance did not always mean privilege, and not all JLS members fit this mold. Hindmarsh was surprised to find one student who had reportedly

42 Hindmarsh, 5.
45 “Our New Weapon—Japanese.”
learned Japanese while working as a taxi driver; another became interested in Japanese Buddhism and employed a tutor, whom he paid with the salary he made as the clerk of a liquor store. When the first class assembled in 1941, Hindmarsh had certainly gathered a batch of men more socially and intellectually diverse than he had originally envisioned.

Whatever their backgrounds, the men of Boulder were clearly not chosen for their physical prowess. Poor eyesight was a common problem. One student sardonically remarked that "the best features of the whole lot would not have sufficed to produce a single good pilot." Another student, who the examiner thought was blind, retorted that he "had one good eye." The medic replied, "I'm going to give you a waiver... but if a seagull shits in your good eye, don't come back and blame me." When several of the men were rejected after the military's physical examination, Hindmarsh pressured the Navy to ease its strict physical requirements. Unlike other naval programs, the JLS's success hinged upon brains, not brawn.

The school's demographic changed even more remarkably in 1943. That year, the Navy announced that WAVES "whose educational and intellectual qualifications were equal to the men" would also be accepted. From a pool of 600 applicants, Hindmarsh chose eighty-eight women whose backgrounds varied as widely as their male counterparts. A large percentage were recent college graduates; some came from secretarial or teaching positions. Betty Billet had been a chemist for the Food and Drug Administration. Three other women who had been working as military censors had been charged with opening, reading, and editing all mail sent to and from the battlefield to make sure military secrets were not being revealed. From these various backgrounds, the WAVES had no choice but to quickly assimilate into the JLS life. Some struggled with the rigorous demands of the program, but others did so well that the men became worried they were being surpassed. Overall the WAVES did remarkably well; an impressive sixty-eight of the eighty-eight women graduated in November of 1944. That same year, however, the military's official position changed. From 1944 on, women were no longer permitted to serve outside of the United States. The need for WAVE linguists

49 Spiegel, 9,11.
51 Ibid.
52 Dingham, 55.
subsequently dwindled, and, after only one graduating class, the WAVES' time at Boulder came to an end.  

**LIFE IN BOULDER**

Once in Boulder, JLS students faced something quite different from their past educational experiences. Under a rigorous schedule, Boulderites worked fourteen hours a day, six days a week, fifty weeks per year for two years. Students took stiff comprehensive examinations weekly to monitor their progress for an annual total of nearly 250 hours of examinations. This, according to Hindmarsh, "was far more than even a Harvard student would get in four years." The most extensive exams were given every Saturday morning and students referred to Friday's cramming sessions as "Friday Night Hell." A popular JLS song expressed their plight well. Sung to the tune of the University's fight song "On the Range of the Buffalo," it went:

With Kanji cards and *tokuhon* our troubles they began
With muttered curse and swear word, our fevers highly ran
Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, it doesn't pay to know
It's what you learn on Friday
On the range of the buffalo.

Judgment for those who could not keep up with Navy demands was swift and harsh. Hindmarsh requested that teachers be unrelenting in weeding out students who failed to meet the school's standards, "regardless of status, regardless of time, regardless of effort. Hard work without aptitude," he wrote, "is not enough, nor is good character, good education, or sincerity." In the beginning a student needed a score of seventy out of one hundred to pass. (Later, the threshold was raised to eighty). With two scores below seventy, a student knew to start packing his bags. Within the first semester, five of the ninety enrollees were dismissed for failure to meet minimum requirements, three from Harvard and two from Berkeley. The country was at war, after all, and Hindmarsh had neither the time nor the patience to coddle those who could not deliver.

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53 Betty Knetch, Quotations from letters from home, Roger Pineau Collection. Norlin Library, University of Colorado, Boulder, CO.
54 Hindmarsh, 6.
55 Sleznick, 103.
57 Hindmarsh, 6.
58 Dingham, 57.
Immersion demanded more than a cutthroat pace. After a brief grace period, Hindmarsh instructed the sensei to eliminate all classroom discussion in English. He curtly reminded the sensei that their task was to teach Japanese, not to "show off" their own English skills. "Any teacher who tries to parade his mastery of English is [to be] discharged," he warned. Communication difficulties thus became a daunting reality, even for students with prior study of Japanese. Those without exposure were left to decipher what they could from a whirlwind of odd sounds and shapes. For many, the first reading class was a "complete bust." Not knowing that the pages of a Japanese book turned from left to right, they opened to the index rather than to the first chapter. The Boulder students were, for all intents and purposes, strangers in a foreign land.

Hindmarsh's language restrictions extended beyond the classroom. All student newspapers, school songs, radio broadcasts, notices, and bulletins had to be in Japanese. Signs reading Nihongo dake ("Japanese Only") covered the hallways, reminding students that conversation at meals and in public corridors was restricted to Japanese. Many JLS instructors took up walking to afternoon meals with their students, exchanging simple comments in Japanese about the weather or food. For some students these conversations were painfully intimidating. WAVE Betty Knecht wrote to her family, "At each [lunch] table are three Japanese teachers, and conversation is supposed to be entirely in Japanese. One of the teachers at our table chatters all the time at a great rate of speed. Usually I don't know what he is talking about. One day three of us had quite an intelligent conversation about books. Mostly there are strained silences." Some took to the challenge well. Partway through Book II, James Durbin became aware of his improving Japanese. He realized he understood more and more of the Japanese movies he watched each week and he consistently scored well when translating radio news broadcasts from Japanese to English. One "classy looking," attractive Japanese-American girl working in the cafeteria showed students that speaking Japanese could actually be fun.

Outside of class, teachers and students worked to embrace Hindmarsh's immersion mandate. The first step was to develop extracurricular programs that mirrored "in-country" study as closely as possible. The student newspaper, Sono hi no uwasa, ("The Day's Gossip") included weekly book reviews of great Japanese

59 Hindmarsh, 8.
60 Spiegel, "War Years and Better Days," 122.
61 Hindmarsh.
62 Knecht.
63 Sleznick, 104.
64 Dingham, 33.
classics, like The Tale of Genji. Noting the book’s cultural significance, the reviewer praised Genji as being of “paramount importance to anyone wishing to become acquainted with the classical background of Japan.”65 The review continues with an admiring commentary on the cultural elements of Japan’s Heian period, calling it “a time when court etiquette had become so detailed and exquisite that the daily life of courtiers approximates a series of dances, whose every movement and responses are rigidly prescribed, yet always harmonious.”66 All reviewed texts were made available in the campus faculty club. By the end of the first term it was said the Navy JSL library looked more like a “Japanese lit class” than a military collection.67

The newsletter also included more light-hearted content. One section provided functional translations for classic English expressions, like, “Hi no nai tokoro ni kemuri wa tataru,” “Where there’s smoke there’s fire,” and “Go ni itte wa, go ni shitagae,” or “When in Rome, do as the Romans do.” Japanese jokes, puns, and cartoons became popular additions to Uwasa. One of the most used puns among the men was the homonymic “Naiyo wa naiyo!”—“There’s no meaning!”68 These phrases, while of no use on the battlefield, were meant to maximize Boulderites’ ability to creatively use Japanese in everyday conversation. An early Uwasa publication also included the text of what would become the school’s “Fight Song,” written by fellow student J. B. Kremer, III.66 It was not uncommon to hear a rousing chorus (in Japanese, of course) echo throughout the halls, “March on, march on, our stalwart men/Endeavor to your utmost for your country’s sake/Until its glory extends to the world!” sung irreverently to the tune of “Onward Christian Soldiers.” More and more, the students’ lives—even sense of humor—were becoming closely tied to the Japanese language.

A few weeks into the semester, administrators began broadcasting short-wave radio readings to the dorms, as per Hindmarsh’s recommendations. Every Tuesday and Thursday evening students could listen to readings of Japanese folktales and “Far East” news updates, entirely in Japanese. One of the most popular broadcasts was the “47 Ronin,” a feudal-era tale centered on a band of samurai who set out to avenge the unjust death of their master. At its heart, “Ronin” is a glorification of the samurai class and bushido (warrior code) values of loyalty, honor, and

65 Ibid.
66 Uwasa, 4.
67 Hummel, 53.
68 Uwasa, 2.
sacrifice. Goketsu ichidai otoko (Episode of a Swashbuckler) is set in the midst of civil-war Japan and recounts the exploits of Tokugawa Ieyasu, one of Japan’s three great unifiers. The story ends with a scene of the Battle of Sekigahara, the site of Tokugawa’s historic victory that brought 200 years of peaceful, hegemonic rule to Japan. More sentimental was Chichi Kaeru (“Father Returns”), the tale of a man who left his family for another woman. The film’s bittersweet portrayal of the trials of modern family life was enough to convince Durbin, a self-proclaimed culture snob, of the merits of Japanese cinematography. He quickly developed “a new respect for Japanese film and culture.”

Students carried out a more formal study of Japanese history, politics, and geography in class. The emperor was a frequent topic of study. One test question asked students to translate sentences like “In the center of the city of Tokyo is the Imperial Palace. The imperial palace is the place where His Majesty the Emperor and Her Majesty the Empress reside.” Embedded in this language instruction was an emphasis on the emperor as a symbol of Japan’s divinity and a powerful source of unity, pride, and identity for the Japanese people. Fittingly, the Constitution of the Empire of Japan (also known as the Meiji Constitution) was required reading. As the governing document of Japan’s government, administrators believed the constitution was the key to decrypting the Japanese mind and its motives. Later classes even had to memorize its tenets.

Early chapters in the Naganuma readers relied heavily on Japanese folklore, like the famous story of Momotaro, or “Peach Boy.” The story begins as a child, Momotaro, emerges from a giant egg found by an aged couple near the river bank. As Momotaro grows, he exhibits superhuman strength and stamina. When his village is terrorized by a group of marauding demons, Momotaro assembles a band of creatures and victoriously subdues the threat. Momotaro was significant, as one student explained, not only because it was easy to read, but “because [it] offered insight into the Japanese character.” According to historian John Dower, Momotaro exemplifies traditional Japanese values. During the war, the “Peach Boy” became a powerful symbol of Japanese national identity. The story, he argues, reinforces the belief that Japan is of divine origin but that it is suscepti-

70 Uwasa, 3.
72 Sleznick, 104.
74 Uwasa.
75 Sleznick, xiii.
76 Ibid.
ble to outside threats, and upholds Japan’s cultural mandate that its people unite as a single force to achieve its national objectives, and, if necessary, surrender their very lives.77 This “Peach Boy” lesson would later serve JLS graduates as they struggled to understand some Japanese soldiers’ fanatical loyalty to their nation and emperor. Like Momotaro, they found Japanese often willing to sacrifice all for the sake of their homeland.

**EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES**

Despite the incredible demands of their education, the JLS students still managed to have fun. The sensei played a key role in organizing extracurricular activities that synthesized work and play. Japanese games like majong became a popular pastime, and both student and sensei would play it “every chance they could get.”78 As friendships formed, teachers invited students to their houses for tea, parties, and traditional Japanese celebrations.79 One photo in the Boulder archives shows a sensei and his wife standing with two WAVE officers, all dressed in traditional Japanese kimono.80 When another group of students arrived at a sensei’s house for a thanksgiving celebration, they were disappointed to learn there was no Japanese food. The students, in turn, developed a passion for the culture their sensei represented, so much so that JLS staff frequently had to remind the students they were “not there to love the Japanese, but to study them.”81 War, after all, was close at hand.

**JLS AT WAR**

Within a year of completing the JLS course, the Boulderites were scattered to fight and work, die and triumph in places they had never imagined they would see. Little more than a month after Pearl Harbor, Elmer Stone sweated in American Samoa; Hart Spiegel scavenged Japanese corpses in search of maps and diaries on the Pacific island of Bougainville. In Okinawa, Donald Keene was tasked with

77 Ibid.
79 Interview with Seito Hirabayashi. Jessica Arntson Collection. Norlin Library, University of Colorado, Boulder, CO.
81 Sleznick, 109.
clearing enemy soldiers and civilians out of caves and tombs. These young JLS graduates, the nation for which they fought, and the empire that attacked it were forever changed by the war. But what began as a life-and-death struggle between America and Japan eventually set the two countries on a course toward permanent peace and friendship. The graduates of the Navy Japanese Language School were integral in bringing about these changes.

JLS graduates' assignments during the war had much to do with their specialty at Boulder and the posts that the Office of Navy Intelligence deemed most needy. Several hundred were sent to radio intercept stations for signal intelligence. Most JLS officers cycled through the Joint Intelligence Center Pacific Ocean Area (JICPOA), a large facility overlooking Pearl Harbor, at one time or another. Although desk work had its rewards, the tasks were often boring and the work load ebbed and flowed. Many intelligence officers, longing for adventure, asked to be transferred into active Navy and Marine units. In combat, more than ever, JLS grads employed what they learned in Boulder. Their training gave them the ability to look beyond the immediate horrors of war to see the common humanity they shared with the enemy.

Irwin L. Sleznick was assigned to the 2nd Battalion of the 22nd Marine Regiment as a Japanese-language interpreter. On April 1, 1945, Sleznick arrived on the Island of Okinawa carrying, in addition to his backpack of food, clothing, and tools, four dictionaries weighing fourteen pounds. His memoir, published in 2006, recounts his fears as he faced the daunting tasks ahead. "I didn't just wonder if I'd be capable of doing the work assigned to me," he wrote, "I also wondered if I would have the opportunity."

Since the war began, Japanese-language interpreters and their overeager comrades argued over the importance of taking Japanese prisoners for interrogation. Man after man informed Sleznick that he would be wasting his time on Okinawa because there would be no prisoners to interrogate. "They did not plan to take any," he explained. "Moral arguments do not sway men inflamed with hatred and hungry for blood."

From the beginning, Sleznick's commanders kept him busy with thousands of terrorized civilians. "Whenever they found a native of interest or a babbling child, they would call for me," he wrote. These natives often provided vital information about the whereabouts and size of Japanese units hiding on the island. Moreover, Sleznick's ability to discern between combatant and civilian in the dark
of night proved indispensable. Because American troops could not tell the difference between civilians and combatants in the dark, noncombatants were sometimes shot as they tried to move to safety. As a result, Marines often faced the horror of waking up to dead bodies of women, children, and the aged. Sleznick’s language skills provided a much needed solution.87

Sleznick’s value in distinguishing between soldier and civilian became apparent on the fifth night of his deployment in Okinawa. When the men heard shuffling feet, Sleznick yelled to his fellow soldiers, “Don’t shoot! I will tell these people in Japanese to stop, be silent, and sit down... if they appear to be civilian refugees, I will move them outside of our perimeter and stay with them until morning.” To his relief, the scheme worked remarkably well. With the refugees facing him in a semi-circle, Sleznick blurted out a few traditional Japanese greetings, expressed hope for their health and safety, and warned them not to leave the nest for any reason. Unsure what to say next, Sleznick thought of Momotaro, the Japanese folktale every student at the JLS had been required to memorize. Starting at the beginning, he recited the story word for word: “Mukashi mukashi...” Once upon a time... 88

That was the first time Sleznick told the story, but it would not be the last. “I would tell it many more times before the campaign was over—always with excellent results,” he explained.89 Most Japanese had heard the story of Momotaro and his exploits since childhood; its characters, plot, and themes were familiar and comforting to the refugees. Hearing the tale in their own language, they could participate and ask questions, all the while taking comfort in the fact that this enemy of the Japanese nation could understand them, their language, and their culture. As he told the story for the first time that night on Okinawa, “the families around [him] set aside their own miseries and fears.... As the story unfolded, he recalled, a calm spread throughout the group.”90

Not all interactions between language officers and Japanese were so successful. An interpreter assigned to the 1st Marine Division on the Pacific island of Peleliu remembers an order he was given to “shout commands” to a group of Japanese soldiers firing on the unit from nearby hills. “I was given a loudspeaker run by batteries and I shouted up to the hills telling the Japanese men up there that they were surrounded and that they should come down and surrender and that

87 Ibid.
88 Sleznick, xi.
89 Ibid.
90 Sleznick, xii.
they would not be harmed if they did." 91 No one moved; the Japanese just continued firing as he shouted. A week or so later, the same officer was sent to a series of caves to coax civilians and soldiers out of hiding. This second attempt yielded similar results, and put him at great risk. He believed these high-danger, low-reward missions were a misuse of his skills. "It seems to me," he later explained, "that our Marine Corps leaders should have had a talk with the Japanese Language Officers so that we could know what to expect from each other. . . . It was my feeling that shouting from a loud speaker at men who were firing at you is a waste of time." 92

Away from the front line, some language officers found a more practical use of their language skills. After transferring to Okinawa from JIPCOA, in June of 1945 Robert Thorton persuaded the Army to let him establish a small hospital to treat the Japanese. He was unable to bring in any American physicians or medics, but because of his language ability he was allowed to recruit a Japanese POW medic to assist him in surgery. 93 This concern for the well-being of Japanese soldiers complicated language officers' already strained relationships with their fellow Marines. Another JLS soldier in Okinawa spent some time with American doctors who were working on casualties. "They left the Jap casualties to the last, so I offered to try to treat some of them," he explained. "I sprinkled sulfa powder and put on bandages and tried to talk to them. This enraged the Marines, to see an officer being helpful to a Jap, so I had to stop." 94

At times, language officers felt the need to intervene on behalf of the Japanese. One of the oldest language officers, Sherwood "Pappy" Moran, was a sixty-five-year-old missionary who had first gone to Japan in 1916. On Guadalcanal, where hardened Marines were loath to take prisoners, Moran was able to persuade a general to offer front-line Marines a three-day break if they could bring in live prisoners. 95 Moran also revamped Marine interrogation procedures. "Tough guy" tactics would not work, he argued; instead, humane treatment, or even "wooing a captive by evoking memories of home" would lead to greater cooperation. The interpreter, he explained, "should be a man of culture, insight, and resourcefulness, and with real conversation ability." 96 Drawing on his knowledge of Japanese

91 Edward Van Der Rhoer, Deadly Magic: A Personal Account of Communications Intelligence in World War II in the Pacific (New York: Scribner, 1978), 44.
92 Ibid.
93 Slezwick, 131.
94 Van Der Rhoer, 45.
96 Ibid.
history, culture, and society, Moran himself would often sit for hours with a captive, talking about sports, religion, and philosophy. 97

Moran also tried to help other Marines understand the character of the Japanese troops. In the first of several papers he wrote for the Marine Corps, Moran stressed that Japanese and Americans were genetically and physiologically alike. He encouraged soldiers not to buy into stereotypical generalization about Japanese temperament and behavior. "There is great danger," he warned, "in thinking that all Japanese are alike in thought and behavior." Instead, he encouraged soldiers to learn about each individual's social status, political affiliation, and home life. This, he believed, was the key to understanding their character and intentions. Moran's motives were of course not completely altruistic. Once he had the prisoners' trust, Moran would begin questioning them about their ship movements, the size of their forces, and other items of military significance. Using these tactics, he reported, "Prisoners told [him] what he wanted to know." 98

As the war came to a close, the role of JLS graduates turned even more toward lifesaving and bridge building. The contributions they made during the occupation have been told elsewhere; Japanese-language officers played a unique role in smoothing the way for American presence in Japan. As Roger Dingman explains, "The language officers in Japan turned out to be point men for peace. . . . They traveled throughout the country and occupied its capital region, laying the foundation for the establishment of a permanent American naval presence and the restoration of good relations with its elites and ordinary citizens alike." 99 For many, Japan became a strong and constant theme in their post-military careers as well. Their journey toward knowing the enemy may have been over, but their journey toward knowing Japan had only begun.

**POST-WAR LEGACY**

When the fighting stopped in 1945, the US and Japan struggled to build a peace-time relationship. Slowly, corporations and law firms with offices in both countries began to flourish. Industrial trade increased; student, teacher, and scientist exchanges flowered like never before. Men like JLS graduate Reed Irvine built personal bridges between themselves and their former enemies. After leaving Boulder in March 1944, Irvine was assigned to the 2nd Marine Division in

97 Ibid., 97.
99 Dingman, 219.
time to participate in the invasion of Saipan and Tinian. During the occupation, Irvine was sent with his division to work on the southern island of Kyushu. He was discharged soon thereafter, but, wanting more time in Japan, he returned in the spring of 1946 as a War Department civilian employee. There he met and married his Japanese wife, Kay, a survivor of the Nagasaki bombing of 1945. When he returned from Japan in 1946, Irvine joined the Federal Reserve Board’s Division of International Finance where he eventually served as the head of the Board’s Asia section. Glenn Nelson of the 2nd Marine Division similarly decided to return to Japan once his service was over. In late 1947, Glenn took a position in Tokyo with the US State Department. He and his wife ended up staying for twenty years, raising five of his children in Nihon [Japan]. After the war, Orville Lefko began working as a CPA. While his career had little to do with Japan, he raised his children on stories of his wartime service. In the early 1990s his daughter Tami received a degree in Japanese Language and Culture at the University of Michigan, continuing the legacy her father had begun fifty years prior.

At this time, the opportunities for Japanese-language specialists also began to grow, and the JLS graduates in particular found their language training secured them certain advantages over other veterans. As language officers, JLS grads were eligible for sixteen semester hours of college level credit in Japanese that could be combined with credits earned in basic training and special schooling. This meant language officers could reduce their time in college to one year and still graduate with a major in Japanese. Building off what they learned in Boulder, many graduates of the JLS left higher education primed to be pioneers in the field of Japanese cultural and linguistic studies. James Morley admitted that before 1941 he could not have found Japan on a map. When he arrived in Japan during the occupation, however, the devastation he saw convinced him to “devote his life to trying to build a better relationship between Japan and America.” When he returned home, Morley began studying modern Japanese history under the famed Tsunoda Ryusaku of the University of Columbia. Morley went on to become one of the foremost post-war scholars of Japan, writing prolifically on the subject of Japan’s modern military exploits. Several other JLS graduates also found their calling in academia. After his 1976 retirement, D. Norton Williams spent thirteen years as an economics teacher at Choate Rosemary Hall School in Wallingford. There he and his wife Marylou (also a JLS graduate) provided a study course in Japanese for

100 Ibid., 62.
101 Ibid.
103 Ibid.
interested students. With the help of several Japanese attendees who were eager to teach, the Williamses developed accredited courses for three years of study.\textsuperscript{104} He and his wife taught successfully for many years, imbuing future generations with the lessons they themselves had learned both in and outside the classrooms of the Boulder JLS.\textsuperscript{105}

Perhaps no one better exemplifies the impact of the JLS on the lives of its graduates than Donald Keene, today one of the world’s most acclaimed Japanologists. Before the war, Keene had only a vague image of the exotic island nation. “The thought of eating raw fish” he recalls, “terrified him.”\textsuperscript{106} When he stumbled on a box of blood-stained diaries of deceased Japanese soldiers in Okinawa, Keene felt he had been given an authentic glimpse into the heart and mind of the Japanese. This changed his perspective of the country and its people and shifted his post-war career path towards Japanese literature. When he returned from war, Keene returned to Columbia University to complete his graduate studies under Ryusaku Tsunoda, a scholar of Japanese classics. As Keene became increasingly proficient in the Japanese language, he began writing books and articles in English and Japanese, and to give lectures and seminars to Japanese audiences. Reflecting this path from student to soldier to scholar, the path of many JLS graduates, Keene writes “There is now something within me that craves expression in Japanese and makes me respond eagerly to opportunities to use the Japanese language. It is hard to define what that something is, and perhaps, as experts have stated, a person can think only in his native language. But whatever the level may be at which my Japanese exists within me, I feel sure that it is permanently installed and that it will remain with me as the source of much that has made my life worthwhile.”\textsuperscript{107}

\textbf{CONCLUSION}

On March 2, 1946, the staff of the now peacetime Navy Japanese Language School met in the “Old Gym” for the annual Spring Festival, a celebration of the art, literature, and music of Japan. During the festival, sensei recited \textit{wa} (traditional Japanese poetry), sang popular Japanese songs, and performed ritual dances based on the country’s most ancient legends. One dance, \textit{Ume ni mo haru},

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{104} “Japanese Language School: 50-Year Reunion, August 7-9, 1992.” 34, 35.
  \item \textsuperscript{105} Ibid.
  \item \textsuperscript{107} Ibid.
\end{itemize}
was said to "symbolize the beauty of the first plum blossom in spring," a classic motif throughout Japanese culture.\textsuperscript{108} Another, which told the story of an aged mother who made a pilgrimage to visit the temple where her only son is buried, was accompanied by a sakuhachi, a Japanese flute virtually unknown to American audiences at the time.\textsuperscript{109} The program fittingly ended with Matsu no midori, a classical ceremonial dance traditionally performed at the opening of happy occasions.\textsuperscript{110} The Spring Festival marked the completion of the students' studies, and the closing of the JLS at Boulder. With American military presences in the Pacific receding, the Navy's need for Japanese linguists dwindled. Hindmarsh and his administrator determined that the Boulder school should be absorbed into the University of Colorado's civilian language program. In June of 1946, the JLS at Boulder closed the doors of its military operations.

The legacies of the program and its graduates, however, continued. These men and women were not only skilled in the Japanese language, but they also left Boulder with an understanding of and respect for Japanese culture and history that transcended the classroom. In the field, Japanese-language officers encouraged their fellow soldiers to see beyond wartime hate to the common humanity they shared with the Japanese. After the war, they applied this same principle to their careers. As diplomats, translators, and academics, the Boulder graduates devoted their lives to rebuilding the damaged ties between Japan and the US. Whatever their contributions, the story of JLS graduates evidences the importance of shared understanding and cross-cultural exchange in war and peace.


\textsuperscript{109} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{110} Ibid.
Katherine White grew up hearing stories of her grandfathers’ experiences in WWII from her parents. These anecdotes would be the inspiration of her love of history and her eventual decision to become a history major. It was at BYU that she decided to expand her understanding and perspective of the war by studying the experiences of the Japanese people, those whom her grandfathers had seen as their enemy. She has been able to pursue this specific interest with the aid of numerous extracurricular opportunities, scholarship awards, and faculty mentors. She received two Foreign Language and Area Studies fellowships that she first used to participate in the eight week Middlebury Japanese Language Intensive program in Oakland, California, and later to study abroad in Japan. That same year Katherine worked as a research assistant for Dr. Aaron Skabelund in the preparation for his book, Empire of Dogs: Canines, Japan, and the Making of the Modern Imperial World. Katherine graduated from BYU with a degree in History and Asian Studies in Winter of 2012 and is currently planning on returning to Japan with the Japan Exchange Program to teach English in a Japanese school, after which she plans on returning to her study of Japanese history in a graduate school program. This essay was written for the History Capstone taught by Dr. Rebecca de Schweinitz.