



Pacific 1942: When sticking out one's tongue became a weapon...

military-Earth thinking notebook

le Chef de bataillon François DICKES

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Histoire & stratégie

What is the connection between Enigma, the Battle of Midway, a military school in the middle of California, the recent campaigns in Iraq and Afghanistan, Libya, Syria, Mali? Perhaps none... Or perhaps there are lessons, even inspirations, that can be very useful when the risk of strategic surprise looms. A small intrusion into the secrets of the past and the teaching of languages in the digital age.

Did Roosevelt know, and did he hide it voluntarily to justify his country's entry into the war? Dissertation and conspiracy theories regularly resurface to evoke the degree of knowledge that the Allies had of the imminence of a Japanese offensive in the Pacific at the end of 1941. Some are easy clichés... others highlight early warning signs of a potential confrontation, detected relatively early by Allied military officials. In the mid-1930s, the Director of Intelligence of the British Navy, Admiral Dickens, acknowledged the increasing presence of Japanese military intelligence officers in Crown territory, including London [1]. 1) The activism of spies working under the cover of the Mikado diplomatic delegations, fears about the evolution of relations with the Empire of the Rising Sun, and fears about the development of relations with the Empire of the Rising Sun made it clear that Japan was not going to be a party to the conflict. The need to break the multiple encryption codes used by the Japanese to protect the secrecy of their communications became increasingly apparent. These codes, logically constructed in Japanese, required a minimal knowledge of this language for those who wanted to penetrate its secrets. One of the first difficulties for British and American code-breakers was therefore to train Japanese quickly and in sufficient numbers, a difficulty they faced throughout the war. This ordeal and its lessons partly shaped the way in which the linguistic factor was taken into account in Anglo-Saxon defence tools, to the point of explaining pragmatic patterns inherited from the past and still perceptible today.

Much has been written on the history of Enigma and the deciphering of Nazi codes by British experts at Bletchley Park. The mythical place is now a museum that reveals to the

curious its incredible secrets about the code war that pitted Germany against the Allies. What is often ignored, however, is that the organization had a Japanese section whose importance, at first minor, did not stop growing from June 1942. Confronted with a lack of linguists fluent in Japanese, one of Bletchley Park's managers, Colonel John Tiltman, began to look for skills. He contacted the renowned School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) in London to train the staff he was lacking in Japanese. SOAS conscientiously estimated the duration of such training to be five years. The war was raging and Tiltman did not have that time frame. At his insistence, the SOAS agreed, despite its reservations and because of the urgency of the situation, to begin two years of training at Bletchley Park. Unhappy with this solution, which did not meet his immediate needs, Tiltman decided to set up an ad-hoc training course from scratch and with limited resources. With the help of a former Admiralty officer who had taught himself Japanese, Oswald Tuck, he set up a language course in Bedford Township, an hour's train ride from London, which was supposed to train Japanese speakers in six months. The first trainees thus trained immediately gave impressive results, and the success of the program confirmed Tiltman's choice. Captain Tuck eventually trained eleven successive classes who played an important, but little-known, part in the victory in the Pacific. The success of this operation was such that even the very reserved SOAS was forced to recognize it.

Confronted with this same problem, the United States found a different but equally original response. Paradoxically, the very country that did not hesitate to massively intern Japanese Americans in camps to avoid the emergence of a fifth column was also the one that enlisted citizens of the same origin for intelligence purposes. Thus, shortly before the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, the U.S. Army assembled a team of Japanese American conscripts in complete secrecy on a military field in Monterey, California. For the duration of the war, these soldiers participated in operations against the Japanese Imperial Army with a weapon of unsuspected potential: their native language. Serving in a centre whose sole purpose was to train the military intelligence community in the working language of the enemy, they wrote a unique piece of war history. Known to posterity as nisei (de ni: two, second and sei: era or generation), they served as cultural bridges to the enemy's thinking, understanding and countering his plans.

The lesson of the nisei was not forgotten once Japan surrendered. After the defeat of the Axis, other threats were looming against the backdrop of the Cold War, and the existence of an organization teaching the language of the potential enemy remained of interest. Sixty years later, this organization still exists. Located at the prestigious Praesidio de Monterey, what is now called the Defense Language Institute - Foreign Language Center (DLI-FLC) trains American soldiers of all armies in the use of languages. With approximately 35,000 trainees per year, the DLI-FLC contributes to the operational engagement of the U.S. Armed Forces around the world. This action relies on a teaching staff speaking languages as varied as Arabic, Russian or Chinese for the most common, but also Pashto[3], Tamashek[4] or Tausug[5] for the rarest. In addition to the headquarters in Monterey, the courses can be taught in a decentralized manner both on American soil and on other continents - as in Germany or Korea - thanks to mobile teaching. In the latter case, trainees remain close to their place of work.

In addition to the teaching provided, DLI is distinguished by a willingness to integrate the latest technologies into its teaching methods, and is also highly responsive to the sometimes unexpected demands of the defence apparatus. As an example, the Headstart program gave, as early as the 1970s, the American military the opportunity to initiate itself to a language on its own thanks to an all-in-one method comprising an instruction booklet and cassettes [6]. Other times, other means, Headstart evolved into an interactive digitized version on CD-Rom, then online, Headstart2 [7], available on the American NIPR

(Non-Secure Internet Protocol Router) unprotected network. Exploiting the resources of the digital tool, a programme of the same type, called Rapport [8], enables troops to be prepared before being projected into theatres of operation, following awareness of the difficulties encountered in Iraq and Afghanistan. These are just two particularly successful examples of the many DLI products.

The Institute also aims to be able to respond quickly to specific needs that may be expressed. One of the most recent examples is a set of English-Japanese conversation kits developed during the tsunami and nuclear disaster that struck Japan in March 2011. These tools - which fit in a pocket - were quickly provided to helicopter crews or rescue troops, saving lives through the use of extremely urgent conversation elements. Similar conversation kits are available for almost every language spoken on the planet's surface[9]. They are part of a wide range of language products and have become one of the institute's trademarks, covering the areas of initiation, training or practical confrontation of the language barrier.

Finally, as part of a longer-term approach, the DLI offers online teaching aids in the form of courses, audio samples, but also complete text study exercises, visual or audio documents which enable the soldier who has been initiated into a language to maintain or even improve his level. In particular, let us mention the GLOSS(Global Language Online Support System)[10] which contains nearly 6,000 lessons and exercises in no less than 37 languages and the Advanced NorthKorean Dialect Materials which presents resources of the same order for the particular case of North Korea.

The DLI-FLC has its origins in the shortcomings detected by the Americans on the eve of a world war, and is the heir to a pragmatic turn of mind that contrasts with the clichés of uncultured cowboys often conveyed about our allies across the Atlantic. This approach recognizes language and cultural awareness as a tool in its own right that must be mastered to meet the imperative need to understand one's enemy but also one's ally. Much progress has been made since Pearl Harbour and the ensuing urgent need for solutions that go off the beaten track. The days when foreign languages were passed down to the Anglo-Saxons for a domain of wacky code breakers seem to be over. The invasion of Iraq and the operations in Afghanistan have accelerated the integration of the cultural and linguistic factor into operations to the lowest level. The field no longer concerns a few specialists, but tends to become a matter for everyone. The current trend, however, is not set in stone and, for its critics, there will be plenty of opportunities to make their voices heard. American military history has preserved traces of these struggles within the armed forces themselves. In 1942, at Midway, the U.S. Navy won a victory that is credited with changing the course of the war. The man behind the understanding of the enemy's plan was a Japanese man, Joe Rochefort, commander of the Hypo unit, who cracked the Japanese Imperial Navy 's JN-25b code and unveiled Admiral Yamamoto's plans [11]. Victim of a war of services in the aftermath of the battle, Rochefort was dismissed and transferred as the person in charge of a dry dock! His memory and the role of his unit of code-breaking linguists were not rehabilitated until 1986.

Rochefort's experience reminds us that efficiency sometimes carries little weight in the face of career challenges and that it is not always appropriate to innovate when we upset firmly established certainties. Perhaps we on this side of the Atlantic need to ask ourselves what we think of our relationship with languages, the importance we attach to them and the resources we give our soldiers. After more than ten years in Afghanistan, a review of the training provided in English and Dari (Afghan Persian) could be instructive. An assessment of the skills acquired and the use that has been made of them would enable us to place ourselves in an area where the names of French soldiers have left their

mark on history...., when in the 19th century, in languages such as Arabic, there was little else but the forces of Her Most Gracious Majesty to compete with the French army.

1| The Emperor's codes, Michael Smith, Bantam Press, 2000.

2 | Ibid.

3| Indo-European language, spoken mainly in Pakistan and Afghanistan.

4 | Afro-Asian language, spoken mainly in Mali and Burkina Faso.

5 | Austronesian language, spoken mainly in the Philippines but also in Malaysia and Indonesia.

6| In 1977, Headstart was distributed to the units to promote the introduction of German. The method was progressively produced for several rare languages such as Japanese, Korean, but also as an initiation to dialects: Spanish was available in European, Latin-American or Puerto Rican dialects, French in its Belgian version... Belgian. The method consisted of instruction booklets, cassettes and even mnemonic cards in some cases. In addition to language, Headstart took into account the cultural, historical and geographical factor in the form of short monographs.

7| Headstart2 is available in 16 languages (several dialects of Arabic and Portuguese, Chinese, Korean, but also rarer ones such as Kurmanji (Kurdish dialect), Swahili or Hausa). The programme begins with literacy, an introduction to basic grammar and vocabulary. In a second stage, a purely military approach is used to deal with conversation and specific expressions. All this is part of an 80 to 100 hour training course, the pace of which is at the beneficiary's own discretion. The "cultural orientation" applications and country monographs - now interactive - are still part of the Headstart recipe. The programme is regularly enriched: Somali, Baluchi and Turkmen are expected to swell the ranks of the new languages available. Accessible and downloadable at <http://hs2.lingnet.org/>.

8| Rapport provides six to eight hours of online training in French, Portuguese, Iraqi Arabic, Dari, Pashto or Swahili. At the end of the training, if the trained member successfully completes the assessments, he or she has the option of printing a certificate that may be required for certain postings. Information available at <http://rapport.lingnet.org/>

9| Available in the form of conversation logs with audio files, these kits cover several areas: basic language, civil-military affairs, naval operations, air operations, medical language - which are accessible without special authorisation -, military police operations, raids, force protection - which require authorisation via secure access. An iPod version is available for most kits. Accessible online or downloadable at <http://famdliflc.lingnet.org/index.aspx> using the country and language tabs at the top right of the page. The page also provides access to national legends (<http://famdliflc.lingnet.org/folkTales/index.html>) and cultural awareness material in the form of interactive websites (<http://famdliflc.lingnet.org/?v=cip> & <http://famdliflc.lingnet.org/?v=co>) or films (<http://famdliflc.lingnet.org/products/cipcvideo/default.html>).

10| Free access at <http://gloss.dliflc.edu/Default.aspx>.

11| For a more precise vision of Joe Rochefort's role, a recent book has been devoted to him: "[11] The role of Joe Rochefort in the development of the Canadian economy has been described in the following terms Joe Rochefort's War, the odyssey of the codebreaker who outwitted Yamamoto at Midway" Elliot Carlson, Naval Institute Press, 2012.

An officer from EMIA, Battalion Commander DICKES is a graduate of the École de Guerre (EdG). Selected for post-EdG schooling, since September 2011, he is following a three-year training in Arabic language at the National Institute of Oriental Languages and Civilizations (INALCO).

Title : le Chef de bataillon François DICKES

Author (s) : le Chef de bataillon François DICKES

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