

Sunday, December 12, 1943

Textbook Victory

Story of Navy's Speed, Skill In Setting Up Jap Language Courses to Plug Perilous Gap

By JOHN G. NORRIS

The Navy disclosed yesterday how a novel but dangerous weakness in the American war machine was remedied under a program launched very quietly three years ago this month.

The curious chink in our armor was discovered in the period of military and naval stock-taking which followed the fall of France and realization that a head-on clash with the Axis was only a matter of time.

Naval chiefs, preparing in the summer and fall of 1940 for what they considered an inevitable showdown with Japan, found themselves faced with this ominous situation:

Only a dozen men in the United States Navy could speak and read with any fluency the language of our most likely foe!

War with Japan, it was clear, would bring countless demands for persons trained in the Nipponese tongue. Naval Intelligence, officials realized with some dismay, could not operate without a staff able to understand Japanese.

2. For every American who had a working knowledge of Japanese, there were at least 100,000 Japs with a working knowledge of English.

Only five or six American universities taught Japanese and these courses did not turn out students capable of speaking, writing or understanding modern, everyday Nipponese.

Q The teaching and study of

three-year Japanese courses American naval officers had taken in Tokyo were brought to the United States, republished, and the courses got under way.

From this small beginning has come the rather extensive Japanese language training now operating in the United States. Hundreds of men have been trained in the Navy school and appointed reserve officers. Waves are now studying the enemy language and extensive Army schools are in operation.

Getting the Students

An interesting phase of the program is the way the Navy obtained its students. Because of the admitted difficulty of learning Japanese, it was believed that only first rate scholars could qualify. So Naval Intelligence circularized the membership of Phi Beta Kappa, honorary scholastic fraternity, for applicants.

At first, in order to be accepted for the training, applicants had to be college graduates and wear a Phi Beta key, or already have some knowledge of Oriental languages. Today, about 32 per cent of the students are Phi Beta Kappa, a like percentage hold graduate degrees, while about 22 per cent are not college graduates.

The Navy Japanese language school now is located at the University of Colorado. Early in the program, the Harvard course was