

AN EXPERIMENT IN EDUCATION:

THE ARMY SPECIALIZED TRAINING PROGRAM
FAR EASTERN PROGRAM¹

UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON

By F. H. MICHAEL

Associate Professor of Far Eastern History, University of Washington

In the larger symposium to which the colleges and universities of the Northwest are contributing, the question that is being asked of all institutions is *What were the Lessons in your Military Training Program/s for Science Education; for Education in General.*

The Army Specialized Training Program of Far Eastern Language and Area Studies at the University of Washington started in July 1943 and lasted for nine months until April 1944. The program formed a part of the great scheme of language and area programs distributed over many universities in this country, of which a smaller number consisted of Far Eastern programs. The unit on the campus consisted of 125 army students who were to be trained in Japanese, Chinese, and Korean language and areas respectively. For the last three months we had an additional number of fifteen army students who were to receive short brush-up courses in Far Eastern languages (mostly Mandarin, Chinese and Cantonese) and area courses.

An excellent detailed outline of the general objectives and the methodology of the program was provided for us by the army. This was followed as closely as possible. It required that the student should receive in language training a "complete command of colloquial spoken form of the language" meaning "the ability to speak the language fluently, accurately, and with an acceptable approximation to a native pronunciation" as well as "a practically perfect auditory comprehension of the language as spoken by natives." In the area study, the student was to get acquainted with the geography, history, and contemporary institutions and culture of the region. Special emphasis was to be given to the

¹ This is the fourth article in this series. Any one wishing copies of this article or the other articles in this series should write to Dr. J. W. Hungate, Eastern Washington College of Education, Cheney, Washington.

tences through translation, the students were directly trained in whole phrases through connected conversation material. The students were at first introduced to the new material and then trained in small groups through teachers who either were natives of the respective country or spoke the language like a native. The intensive language training gave each student from two to three hours language drill per day. As supplementary teaching material gramophone records were used. Such records were not only made by the teachers but also by the students themselves, to be used for the correction of pronunciation. The results of this new approach to language teaching were excellent. The students who had never had any Far Eastern language before were, after four or five months, able to carry on a limited conversation in the new language.

We had examples of students who conversed at this stage for half an hour with a Chinese lady in her own languages but had also been given enough between a Chinese painter and a member of the faculty who did not know each other's language. After nine months the students were not only able to understand and speak their respective language but had also been given enough introduction into the reading and writing to enable them to continue on their own. As a proof of this accomplishment, may be mentioned that during the last months several of the area lectures were given in the foreign language. To cover this, field courses on geography, peoples (social institutions), modern history, government and politics, economic structure, and arts and religion were arranged for each respective country. A general course on peoples dealing with race issues preceded the other courses as an introduction. In the area teaching the new emphasis on practical problems of the day in government, especially local government, economics, customs and the like, gave not only the student but also the teacher a new outlook with regard to the material and to the problems of the country in ques-

tion. The organization of the program in such a short time did not always permit an integration of the various materials at the time when they were taught, but we believe that the subject material discussed covered the whole field of practical present-day problems of the countries and their backgrounds, and that the students received a good understanding of the conditions which they would encounter.

The experience gained in the language training has been since applied to our civilian classes. Our material will soon be brought out in book form.

The program demanded the organization of a large staff, which was provided by the Far Eastern department in cooperation with the geography department, sociology department, political science department, anthropology department and the College of Economics and Business. Additional teachers, especially in language had to be employed. One of the difficulties encountered in the organization of the program was the uncertainty up to the last moment as to what language and areas were to be taught. Until two days before the start, the University did not know whether to teach the students in European or Far Eastern programs, not to speak of the distribution of students in specific language groups. From this uncertainty resulted a discontent on the side of the students who at the outset would, in the large majority, have preferred a European program. However, this feeling was soon overcome and the interest aroused provided a good stimulus for the work.

The majority of our students has been used by the army for work in which they especially applied their training. We hope that the remainder will eventually be used likewise. Aside from this war contribution the program was of greatest importance for the University as it introduced new methods, new courses, and a practical form of cooperation between departments on a regional basis.