

MORE LANGUAGE TRAINING

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Parlez-vous Francais? Sprechen Sie Deutsch? Habla Espanol? Chances are, if you are a U.S. serviceman, you don't and you should. The need for qualified linguists at all levels has become increasingly apparent in the military today. The U.S. Military has relied too heavily, too long on foreigners to perform its large and complex language translation functions.

Why, one may ask, is this inadequate? The answer to this would be multifold. Not the least of these reasons is the tremendous loss of American prestige abroad and the fact that it leads to gross inefficiency at multiplied cost. One would think that no additional reason would be necessary to support a demand for improvements however there are many.

The United States Army is the largest and strongest military establishment in the world today. Unfortunately it is also accepted as uncommonly weak in the field of linguistics. Let us examine some of the reasons for this linguistic deficiency. To begin with, other nations have been forced, for economic reasons, to learn English, making it possible for effortless communication on our part. This is the underlying reason for our lack of effort in the field of languages. In addition our natural geographic isolation has contributed greatly to place us at the bottom of the language heap. This has reached the state to where the average foreigner automatically addresses an American in English and would be shocked to find this unnecessary due to the American's ability to communicate in the

other's language.

It is difficult to describe the pleasure one gets when observing the reaction caused by addressing a German in German instead of the expected English. The German feels that he has not only met a friend, but one who has taken the time and trouble to learn something of his country. This can be of great assistance in establishing a favorable relationship in military affairs. One doesn't necessarily need to be fluent but every little bit helps. A foreigner, even if he speaks English more fluently than we speak his language, appreciates the gesture of friendliness and courtesy implicit in our attempt to say a few words in his language instead of ours.

Although it is true that we suffer from a definite lack of qualified linguists there has been one encouraging development in the Army and that is an awareness of the problem. Much is being done today to train selected American soldiers in approximately thirty different languages. The focal point of our emphasis in language training has been the establishment of the language institute at Monterey, California. Here qualified soldiers are selected to attend courses varying in length from three to eighteen months. Upon completion of a course at Monterey the soldier is able to communicate on a basic level in his chosen language. Although he may not be fluent in the language he will have a good command of its basic, everyday use. In addition to the Monterey language program, the American University in the U.S. and Maryland University in Europe are offering many good off-duty language courses that not only prepare the student to make conversation in a given language but also

lead to college credits which may be applied to a university degree. These programs have caused marked improvements in the army language program but they have not been enough.

It is now time for the army to make an effort to give each soldier going abroad some training in the language of the country in which he will be stationed. Of course it would not be practical to make a linguist of every man in the army but it would certainly be possible to give each individual enough training to enable him to speak a few hundred words of a language. The increase in prestige alone would more than repay the costs involved, not to mention the closer ties caused through the communication on a person to person basis.

Such a program, as large as it would need to be, would actually cost the army very little to establish and maintain. Through a series of personal lectures, and more important, tape recorded lessons, we could bring languages right into the soldier's living quarters at very little expense. One of the most beneficial and least recognized aspects of language training is that the more people involved in the program, the easier it is for the individual to learn. By placing language training on such a basic level the soldier would actually be able to live his language and that alone would add interest.

This idea of teaching a language in the student's living environment is by no means new or even unique. This system has been employed for many years at the United States Institute of Foreign Trade, a commercial school located in Phoenix, Arizona. This is a one year, non-accredited school designed to prepare the student to

work and live abroad in the country of his choice.

Once enrolled here the student is required to live in a school dormitory where his chosen language is used exclusively. During the day the student receives formal training in the customs, economics and the language of his particular country of interest while at all other times he communicates, on a person to person basis, with his fellow students. All of this is carried on exclusively in the selected language and English is never allowed in use.

Perhaps this seems at first glance to be a little harsh however the results more than justify the effort involved. In a very short period of time (two to three weeks) the student is able to carry on a good conversation in his chosen language. There is no reason that a program such as this would not be appropriate for broad use through^{out} the army.

Of the countless number of americans who set out each year to learn a foreign language on their own very few succeed in their objective. This is due almost entirely to lack of perseverance. It takes many hours of language sessions to add up to the final attainment. By instituting a program as outlined here we would force the soldier to keep up with his language without taxing his abilities. We must keep in mind the fact that our purpose is to teach fundamentals only and not to qualify each soldier as a linguist. For more difficult translating tasks we will need to rely upon such facilities as Monterey and the current language training program to produce people who can qualify on this more specialized level. What is suggested here is that we train each soldier just enough to get

him interested and basically acquainted with the language and customs of the country in which he is stationed. The materials are presently available and there are many qualified instructors on active duty who have the ability to implement the program. Such a program would indeed give dollar results for the pennies invested.