

Japanese Words of Military Value

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The Military Intelligence Service Language School (MISLS) of the U.S. Army was established in Minnesota in 1942. The school was set up to train Japanese language experts who would assist the U.S. forces in the war against Japan. The majority of students in this school were the second-generation Japanese Americans (*Nisei*). After graduating from the school, they were assigned to various commanding offices of the U.S. forces on the front line in different regions to fight against Japan. This document is a dictionary of Japanese words of military value, created by the MISLS at Camp Savage in Minnesota, U.S. in August 1943. It is a compilation of new terms or abbreviations used by the Japanese military and a revised edition from the first volume that was issued in the same year. The staff revised the first edition based on latest Japanese periodicals and captured enemy documents. Former students who were deployed in the field operations helped update the new edition.

This document is an important document showing how the U.S. forces translated and utilized Japanese military terms. In the dictionary, each entry is comprised of the following: Romaji (the method of writing Japanese words using the Roman alphabet), Kanji (Chinese characters), and English. On page 15, the words “I-AN FU” and “I-AN JŌ” are included in Romaji; the former, “I-AN FU,” also called “I-AN KŌSHŌ,” is written in Chinese characters (“慰安婦” or “慰安公娼”) and translated as “Licensed prostitute (of the Japanese army).” Meanwhile, the word “I-AN JŌ” is likewise written in Chinese characters (“慰安場” or “慰安所”) and then translated as “Army brothel.” Understanding the limits of translations is useful for a more accurate interpretation of American official documents regarding the “comfort women” system. While these terms such as “prostitute” and “brothel” used in the US official documents generally meant sex workers and where sex work takes place respectively, it should be noted that the dictionary adopted literal translations of the “comfort women” and “comfort stations” without considering their historical context. Also, this document shows that the U.S. forces were aware of the “comfort station” system as early as August 1943, when the war was still in full swing.

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