

# We Know All About Caesar, But Nothing of Jap Lingo

By HENRY McLEMORE

**N**EW YORK—I wonder how many officers or men in the American Army speak fluent Japanese without an accent.

Stories have been coming in from Australia, telling how the Japanese are confusing our aviators by giving them false commands over the radio in perfect English. Pilots have been lured to the wrong landing fields, told to stay in the air when their place was on the ground, and generally mixed up and bewildered.

The obvious way to combat such trickery is by similar trickery, with Americans cutting in on Japanese radio communications and giving their pilots a few false orders. But this is easier said than done.

How many of our men could cut in on a Japanese conversation and say in bona fide Japanese, "Pal, you'd better not come back to home base for a while. The Yanks are cutting up around here," or "Honorable Togo, this miserable person advises that you bring your ship into Sydney. Everything is under control."

**M**Y guess is that there aren't 15 men in our Army who can speak Japanese without a Vermont, Brooklyn, Mississippi, or some other sort of accent. The Japanese language isn't something you pick up overnight. In fact, you don't pick it up at all.

To learn it, you must study it for years, until your eyes get as bad as those of the average Japanese. The proper high school graduation present in Japan is a diploma and a pair of bifocal lenses. I have studied the language off and on for 35 years and I have mastered but two words. And, I have to say "banzai" twice to keep from only knowing one word.

I'm afraid that our officers and men are not going to fool the Japanese when they start impersonating Japanese authorities over the radio. The boys from the south of Japan, for example, are not going to be fooled by a Cracker American voice saying, "You all out yonder sho' better not land right now. There are so many searchlights playing around here it looks like a big 'possum hunt."

Just how this would sound in Japanese I don't know, but I do know it wouldn't sound much like Japanese. Imagine trying to say "'possum" in Japanese.

The same goes for the boys from the east side of Tokyo. You know good and well that they would become suspicious of a voice that told them to land at such and such a place as soon as their "erl" ran low.

**I**F the Japanese have a secret weapon, that secret weapon undoubtedly is the knowledge they have of us and the lack of knowledge we have of them. For years they have studied us, copied us, learned every blessed thing about us. They know our language, our slang, our psychology. They know our ways and our habits.

We know nothing of them. I can name on no fingers at all my intimates who studied Japanese in high school. Yet, the Japanese get English right along with rice-cooking and losing-face as one of the required subjects in first grade.

As you may or may not know, one of Hitler's prime axioms of warfare is "Begin by learning your enemy's language." Now is it not obvious why he chose Japan as one of the Axis members? Hitler hates to go back on an axiom.

So, when he took his first gander at the Japanese language, he undoubtedly said, "Let's make them part of the Axis so we can live up to our axiom."

**W**E Americans know nothing about Japan. Outside of a few women's garden club members, who have studied Japanese flower arrangement, we have been completely disinterested in the mind and manners of the Japanese.

Oh, a few of us had heard an ugly rumor that the Japanese slept on wooden pillows, and jumped down a volcanic crater when frustrated in love, but it was all so completely foreign to us that we didn't bother.

We spent our time learning all about the French, English, Germans, Italians, and, so help me, the ancient Romans. Even the ancient Romans are better understood by the average American than the Japanese.

One thing this war has done, though. It has made a hero of Lieutenant Pinkerton at last. He used to get hisses for roughing up Madame Butterfly, and going off and leaving her. But now—

"Banzai, banzai" for Lieutenant Pinkerton.