



Episode 902, Story 1 – WWII Leaflets

Wes Cowan: This case takes us from a tiny slip of paper to the titanic struggle for hearts and minds in the Pacific theatre. March 1945. The United States is fighting an unprecedented world war, on two fronts. While the campaign in Europe is entering its final bloody weeks, US bombers are dropping thousands of tons of high explosives on Japanese cities, killing nearly 100,000 in Tokyo in one night alone. But the United States also has a different kind of ammunition in its arsenal, a secret weapon which kills no one. Now, two women from Frisco, Texas think that they've discovered a World War Two treasure, which has been hidden in a box for sixty years.

Donna Stevens: I found this among my late husband Lloyd's possessions. I'd love to know what it is.

Hi Wes, I'm Donna Stevens.

Wes: Hi Donna, how are you?

Wes: So, ladies, what do you have for me?

Donna: I have this box that I found among my husband's belongings, there's a notation on here that tells a little more about it.

Wes: "This box contains an original propaganda leaflet which the Americans dropped on Japan. I know the woman who did most of the artwork and printing for the U.S. propaganda leaflets. She gave these to me."



Donna: And it has a leaflet in it.”

Wes: Let’s take a look. These are great graphics and it’s full of Japanese characters. So, how did this get to the United States?

Donna: The box belonged to my husband, Lloyd. My husband was in the navy in Honolulu, and this was given to him by some friends of ours, Wayne and Duncan who lived in Honolulu.

Wes: So I want to get this sort of straightened out here. You are....?

Marjorie Lehman: Lloyd Steven’s my brother

Wes: Okay, brother. and you are....?

Donna: His wife.

Wes: Okay. Did Lloyd ever talk about this leaflet? Did you know anything about it?

Donna: Not at all. It was in a box that probably hadn’t been opened in about 60 years, and I knew nothing about it. I found it and called Margie and said, “You gotta see this,” and we were both very intrigued.

Wes: What is it that you guys want me to find out?



Donna: We'd like to know if it is an authentic propaganda leaflet or anything else that you can tell us about it.

Marjorie: Who designed it? Who the lady was he referred to on the note?

Wes: Now, I don't know much about World War Two propaganda leaflets, so this is going to be an interesting investigation for me. And I'll be back when I have some answers for you.

Donna & Marjorie: Thank you very much.

Wes: Okay, let's take a look at this leaflet a little bit more carefully. This leaflet has these amazing graphics. There's this clenched fist, crushing, women, children and men. In the lower right corner, it looks like a Japanese soldier with a bayonet or a knife and he's getting ready to stab an older man. On the back, there's a graphic here where people are putting ballots into a ballot box. And then finally in the lower left-hand corner there are planes dropping bombs. Looks like on ships. I wonder if that's Pearl Harbor. Here's another clue. Number 2057 is in the upper right. 2057. That's got to be some sort of an inventory number. There's no indication of who did this. No artist's signature. But we do know that this came from Honolulu during World War Two, and was made by a female artist.

Origins of US war propaganda date back to colonial days, but the First World War was the real launching pad for government efforts to sway public opinion. It looks like that during World War I, the United States began producing posters that were used domestically to explain the War and to get Americans behind the



war effort. It was in 1942 during the Second World War that the United States began widely distributing propaganda overseas. The US attempted to demoralize enemy soldiers and civilians through radio broadcasts and all sorts of aerial bombardments: newspapers, pamphlets and leaflets. They even distributed packets of seeds with the American flag and matchbooks inscribed with FDR's four freedoms. Let's see, propaganda leaflets. This is like searching for a needle in a haystack. I've got to find somebody that can read Japanese.

I'm at Texas Christian University to meet 94-year-old, Paul Boller. Professor Boller was a Japanese translator during World War Two – he also was in charge of making propaganda leaflets.

Wes: Paul, have you seen this leaflet before?

Paul Boller: No. It's entirely new for me. Never seen one quite like it. It's what we call "nihongo" Japanese. There are five illustrations here. They all center on the same theme that the Japanese military, or "gumbatsu," has taken over control of the government in an illegal way, usurping the power of the emperor and thrusting the country into an unnecessary war. The giant hand you see crushing the people is the Japanese invasion of Manchuria back in 1931. The second step is illustrated with this picture of the menacing dagger. It represents a series of assassinations carried out by the military.

Wes: The other images - from ballot box corruption to a 1936 invasion of China, all the way to the bombing of Pearl Harbor in 1941 - assert that the Japanese military, or "gumbatsu," have illegally seized power and recklessly plunged Japan into war. But Paul says *his* office didn't produce it.



Paul: It's quite different.

Wes: How so?

Paul: Well in its approach. I was stationed in Guam at Commander Nimitz's Advanced Headquarters.

Wes: The leaflets that Professor Boller and his team created for Admiral Nimitz had a very stark message for their Japanese recipients.

Paul: Every week they'd mention cities and said, "Next week we're going to bomb some of those and you should get your civilians out of the way."

Wes: So your leaflets were basically, "You need to leave now"?

Paul: Right. Absolutely.

Wes: Those directives weren't idle threats. Toward the end of the war, the U.S. firebombed more than 60 Japanese cities, killing over one million people, some with a new incendiary material, a petroleum jelly known as napalm.

Paul: When I was in Occupied Japan, I happened to run into a mayor of one of the cities near Tokyo, and he told me that that city had received our leaflets and that he had given permission of all the citizens to leave town for the week. And they did and we hit them, and all these civilian lives were saved, and I felt pretty good about that.



Wes: Paul, you see this number here? Number 2057? Does that have any meaning to you at all?

Paul: Not really. We didn't number our leaflets, but it looks like it would be the two-thousandths of this kind.

Wes: It's some sort of inventory number.

Paul: That's right.

Wes: Look, Paul, if your office didn't make this leaflet, who did?

Paul: Well, I think was probably the Office of War Information in Honolulu. And I think they were doing things quite different from ours.

Wes: I need to dig into this Office of War Information. In the meantime, I'm putting a call into the *History Detectives* office to see if they can help me track this number 2057 in government records... Professor Allison Gilmore has written extensively about the Office of War Information. She's asked me to meet her in the cockpit of a World War Two bomber owned by Seattle's Museum of Flight.

Allison Gilmore: Wes, come on in. Have a seat.

Wes: Wow, this is amazing.

Allison: Isn't it cool?



Wes: Oh, it's so cool!

Allison: Wes, I brought you here because this is a B-29 bomber and they dropped lots and lots of propaganda leaflets.

Wes: Allison explains how the bombers flew over Japanese cities and towns, dropping containers, stuffed full of propaganda leaflets, instead of bombs.

How many of these leaflets were dropped?

Allison: Perhaps as many as 600 million. Perhaps even more than that.

Wes: Wow, Allison, have you seen this leaflet before?

Allison: No, I've not seen this precise leaflet. But I have seen dozens, even perhaps hundreds, very like it.

Wes: So, does this look like the kind of leaflet that would have been produced in the Honolulu Office of the OWI?

Allison: Yes, it does look like an OWI product. Primarily because of the numbering designation, which is how the Office of War Information numbered its leaflets, but also because it's very political in nature. The Office of War Information's official job was to be the spokesperson, essentially of the federal government, and it was very much involved in all kinds of propaganda activities what was referred to as "white operations." That is, they dropped information,



leaflets, and it was clear that this was stuff coming from the Americans, and the objective was to demoralize the Japanese.

Wes: So, I mean, it sounds to me like we would call this today PSYOPS?

Allison: Exactly, that's what this is, psychological warfare operations. They had various themes that they employed, all designed to convince them that their own leaders essentially had led them astray.

Wes: Now, my leaflet was accompanied by this note that says it was produced by a woman artist. Do you know of any women who were actually working in the art department at the OWI in Honolulu?

Allison: I do have a pamphlet here, and I think you'll be very interested in what you find there in the section on leafleting.

Wes: Wow. OWI Central Pacific Operations. I guess this is something that was produced by the office there. Leaflets. Look at that. "Artist Frances Baker makes preliminary sketches for a leaflet." Frances Baker.

I can't find anything about this woman. But I do get a lead on a similar name. Frances Baker Blakemore... during the war the artist lived in Honolulu where she produced illustrations. Bingo! That's got to be her. Looks like there's a whole book about her life. Unfortunately, Frances Baker Blakemore died over ten years ago. But the art historian who wrote her biography is alive and well in Seattle. Michiyo Morioka agrees to meet me at the Henry Art Gallery at the University of Washington.



Wes: Michiyo? Wes Cowan.

Michiyo Morioka: Hi, how are you, Wes?

Wes: Great! So you actually knew Frances Blakemore?

Michiyo: Yes, I did.

Wes: Well, tell me about her.

Michiyo: Frances was an artist. She was born and raised in eastern Washington. And in 1935 she went to Japan on honeymoon and stayed there for 5 years. And then, right before the war broke out, she escaped to Honolulu, Hawaii, and became involved in the war propaganda leaflet. Pretty soon, Frances was recruited as chief illustrator.

Wes: I have to ask you – have you ever seen this leaflet?

Michiyo: Wes, I think I have something that you'll be really interested in.

Wes: You know guys, when you gave me this leaflet; I really never had seen a World War Two aerial leaflet. So the first thing I had to do was to find someone who could help me translate Japanese. I explained the leaflet's propaganda theme. It was how the Japanese military or "gumbatsu" underhandedly seized control of the government. So, I found then a biography of Frances Blakemore and I located the author. What she showed me was pretty amazing.



Michiyo: This is a collection of leaflets that Frances kept until she died.

Wes: Look at that, it's the same leaflet!

Michiyo: Yes, exactly the same.

Wes: That is amazing! That's the same leaflet!

Michiyo: It is. The fact that it's in her collection means that she produced it, but also I can tell from the style that this is by Frances.

Donna: That is amazing. An absolute verification that she did it. Isn't that something?

Marjorie: I just assumed she was Japanese because of the beautiful writing that she did.

Wes: Remember the little number in the corner, 2057? Well, I contacted the Air Force because those were the guys that were dropping the leaflets and asked them. Take a look at this. Confidential memo here, read for me from the list.
#2057.

Donna: "How the gumbatsu got control." 196,500.



Wes: So, that's your leaflet, "how the gumbatsu got control." The information from that document indicates that 196,000 of those leaflets were dropped in one month alone.

Donna: That is amazing!

Wes: And over 400,000 were dropped in total. Your leaflet is absolutely 100% genuine.

Donna: Thank you so much.

Marjorie: You'll never know how much it means to us.

Wes: Would you guys like to see some pictures of Frances Blakemore?

Marjorie: Surely!

Donna: Oh, I'd love to.

Wes: After the war, Frances moved back to Tokyo and opened what became a prestigious art gallery. She continued her own prolific painting career. Late in their lives, Frances and her husband returned to Seattle and founded the Blakemore foundation, to promote American understanding of Asian arts and language.