

# ***NISEI* JAPANESE AMERICAN GI'S**

— Their Remarkable Achievements During and After WWII  
As Soldiers and Intelligence Language Specialists —

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## **A. Introduction:**

December 7, 1941 (U.S. time) drastically and tragically changed the lives of all U.S. citizens of Japanese ancestry and first-generation Japanese then inhabiting the United States. On this Sunday morning the Imperial Japanese Navy's task force attacked in strength and wreaked havoc upon the US Navy's Pacific Fleet being moored in Pearl Harbor, Oahu, Hawaii. This very day was to be long remembered as the "Day of Infamy" in American history, as Franklin D. Roosevelt indignantly designated in his presidential 'declaration of war' speech to the US Congress.

On February 19, President Roosevelt signed the infamous Executive Order 9066. General John L. DeWitt, the 4<sup>th</sup> Army Commander, supported by the local government officials and fanatic white mass media, forthwith began herding Americans of Japanese Ancestry (AJA's) on the West Coast into assembly centers for allocation purposes.

The Japanese American residents in the US were roughly divided into two groups geography-wise: Group 1 living in the Hawaiian Islands and Group 2 living in the Mainland United States. Group 2 was furthermore divided into two subgroups: Subgroup 2-a living on the West Coast and Subgroup 2-b living elsewhere.

Group 1 fortunately escaped imprisonment because of its population dominance in the Territory of Hawaii. Group 2-a, however, was unjustly and unconstitutionally deprived of their possessions, expelled from their homes on the West Coast by the federal and local governments and the military authorities under Executive Order 9066 which ordered Americans of Japanese Ancestry (AJA) to be evacuated from the Pacific coast. The AJA's were forcefully interned in the relocation/concentration camps at Minidoka Idaho, Topaz and Poston Arizona, Manzanal New Mexico, Manzanola Colorado Heart Mountain Wyoming, and a few other locations dotting the inland desert of the West.

The Subgroup 2-a AJA's thus suffered cruelly at the harsh hands of the US authorities both military and civilian, which understandably but oft-times unfairly harbored bitter hatred and enmity against them. The American public, specifically the white populace, persecuted the Japanese-American citizens. They not merely robbed AJA's of their constitutional human rights but also looted their residences and other valuable possessions, driving them out of their firmly built-up businesses and well-managed farms to the concentration camps in the far-flung bleak wilderness. The Japanese Americans were doomed to confinement there until the end of the war. But their young men nevertheless displayed their loyalty to America by volunteering to fight for freedom. This paper discusses how the *NISEI* GI's contributed to the U.S. war effort during and after World War Two specifically in its Pacific Theater.

## **B. Hawaiian *Niseis* in Military Combat Units**

### 1. 100<sup>th</sup> Infantry Battalion (Separate)

Excepting a few of its officers, the 100<sup>th</sup> Infantry Battalion (Separate)

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was the first combat unit in U.S. Army history to be comprised exclusively of *Niseis* (second-generation Japanese Americans) from Hawaii. The unit was made up of 1,432 men serving in the 298<sup>th</sup> and the 299<sup>th</sup> Regiment of the Hawaiian National Guard who had been drafted prior to Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor. In the ensuing weeks the soldiers guarded the Hawaiian beaches/coast lines from a possible Japanese invasion.

Japan's naval forces were approaching Midway on May 28, 1942, when all Japanese American soldiers in the 298<sup>th</sup> and the 299<sup>th</sup> were placed in a separate unit called the Hawaiian Provisional Infantry Battalion in anticipation of another Japanese attack on Hawaii. They were shipped out of the islands on a dark night of June 5, 1942 — their destination a secret.

Several days later they sailed through the Golden Gate and disembarked in Oakland, California. The unit — renamed the 100<sup>th</sup> Infantry Battalion (Separate) — was then transported by train to Camp McCoy, Wisconsin, and subsequently to Camp Shelby, Mississippi, for combat training.

Throughout their sixteen months of training, the army remained silent as to whether the 100<sup>th</sup> would be sent into combat, and if so, to where, when and with whom. Finally in September 1943, the 100<sup>th</sup> was dispatched to Oran, Africa, and attached to the 34<sup>th</sup> "Red Bull" Division. On September 22, 1943, the "One Puka Puka" hit the beaches of Salerno, Italy.

For the next nine months, the 100<sup>th</sup> fought from Salerno to Rome, battling against a tenacious enemy throughout a bitter winter. The unit faced its toughest test at Monte Cassino, a German-occupied mountaintop monastery, and suffered tremendous casualties. That battle earned the 100<sup>th</sup> its nickname "The Purple Heart Battalion".

## 2. 442<sup>nd</sup> Regimental Combat Team

On June 11, 1944 the casualty-depleted 100<sup>th</sup> was bolstered by replace-

ment from the 442<sup>nd</sup>. The 100<sup>th</sup> was subsequently attached to the newly arrived 442<sup>nd</sup> Regimental Combat Team (RCT), a unit which had been organized in March 1943 at Camp Shelby, Mississippi. It was made up of 2,686 volunteers from Hawaii and another 1,500 from concentration camps in the mainland United States. The 442<sup>nd</sup> RCT was comprised of the 442<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Regiment, 522<sup>nd</sup> Field Artillery Battalion, 232<sup>nd</sup> Combat Engineers Company, Anti-tank Company, Cannon Company, Medical Company, and the 206<sup>th</sup> Army Ground Forces Band. The 100<sup>th</sup> was designated the First Battalion of the 442<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Regiment, although it was allowed to retain its original name, the 100<sup>th</sup> Infantry Battalion.

Thereafter, as a part of the 442<sup>nd</sup> RCT, the 100<sup>th</sup> contributed significantly to driving the German Army to the Arno River in September 1944. From October through November 1944 the 100<sup>th</sup> /the 442<sup>nd</sup> joined the 36<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division in northeastern France for the Vosges Mountain Campaign. The 100<sup>th</sup> rescued the Texas "Lost Battalion", an effort that earned it a Presidential Unit Citation.

In April 1945, the 100<sup>th</sup> /442<sup>nd</sup> was attached to General Clark's Fifth Army in Italy, where it pierced the long-held Gothic Line and drove the Germans back into the Po Valley, forcing and accelerating Germany's surrender on May 2, 1945.

There were two conspicuous groups of Japanese Americans in the 100<sup>th</sup> and the 442<sup>nd</sup>: those from Hawaii and those from Mainland. At first they were in discord with each other, but they quickly learned to overcome this early disparity by fighting side by side, as John Tsukano remarks: "By now we (from Hawaii) have come to know our mainland *Kotonks* very well. We have identified with each other. We are united in common cause. True at Camp Shelby we had some serious misunderstandings. But living together, working together and training together, sharing hardships and

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plain common sense unified us. The word *Kotonks* was ostensibly how their heads sounded when the Hawaiian boys knocked them together. The *Kotonks* in turn dubbed the Hawaii boys *Buddaheads*, a corruption of the word *Buta* (pig) heads... The names *Kotonks* and *Buddaheads* gradually became the badges of honor for both groups, names to be proud of, names to look up to, names we'd be proud to pass on to the next generation, and the next — as long as the 100<sup>th</sup> and the 442<sup>nd</sup> are remembered.”

During its eighteen months in combat, the men of the 100<sup>th</sup> buried 337 of their comrades. For its service to the United States, the 100<sup>th</sup> Infantry Battalion and its soldiers were honored with 3 Presidential Unit Citations, 1,703 Purple Hearts, 1 Congressional Medal of Honor, 24 Distinguished Service Crosses, 147 Silver Stars, 2,143 Bronze Stars, and 30 Division Commendations.

From unwarranted distrust in the wake of Pearl Harbor attack, the 100<sup>th</sup> Infantry Battalion earned the distinction of being the most decorated battalion for its size and length of time in combat. With its battle-proven motto “Go for Broke!” the 100<sup>th</sup>/442<sup>nd</sup> doubtlessly paved the way for other Japanese American soldiers to prove their loyalty to the United States as they gallantly fought in the European campaigns of World War II.

### **C. Military Intelligence Service — America's Secret Weapon in WWII**

#### 1. Military Intelligence Specialist Language School (MISLS)

During World War II, another thousands of *Niseis* served the Allied Forces, performing secret military intelligence work against the Japanese military in the Pacific theater of WWII as valiantly as their brothers of the 100<sup>th</sup> and 442<sup>nd</sup> did in combat in Europe. Their work dispelled any doubt

that as Americans the *Niseis* were willing to fight an enemy with whom they shared a similar ancestral lineage.

Until now, less than half of the Japanese-American story has been told. A grudging Pentagon kept details of the rest in secret for 30 years. Across the world from Europe, nearly 5,000 *Niseis* served their country as translators, interpreters, interrogators, and, if the occasion arose, combat infantrymen. These military intelligence language specialists were sworn to secrecy and silence, whereas their brothers were lauded. The Pacific was practically crawling with Japanese Americans in uniform, although very few civilians knew they were there. Had they known, they would not have believed it.

On November 1, 1941, the U.S. Army secretly opened a Military Intelligence Service (MIS) language school at the Presidio in San Francisco to teach and give training in military intelligence in the event of war with Japan. Following the outbreak of World War II, Japanese Americans with the required language skill were recruited from the 100<sup>th</sup> Infantry Battalion and 442<sup>nd</sup> Regimental Combat Team, as well as from Hawaii and the concentration camps in the Mainland. In excess of 5,000 *Niseis* graduated from military language schools at the Presidio, Camp Savage and Fort Snelling, Minnesota.

The MIS graduates were dispatched to every combat theater and participated in every major battle and invasion against the Japanese military. They were assigned to the U.S. Army, Navy, Marines, and Air Force. They were also loaned to British, Australian, Canadian, New Zealand, Chinese, and Indian combat units in every phase of the Asia-Pacific war until Japan was defeated in 1945.

Beginning in May 1942, MIS *Nisei* linguists participated in many battles of the Pacific campaign. They translated enemy documents, includ-

ing military orders, battle plans, maps, official reports, personal diaries and letters; interrogated Japanese prisoners of war; intercepted and deciphered enemy communications; composed and broadcast surrender appeals and other psychological warfare tactics. They also gathered volumes of intelligence material and converted them into successful strategy and operations against the Japanese.

Until recently, very little was known about the invaluable service provided by the MIS *Niseis*, primarily because their work was strictly classified. The Military Intelligence Service was America's secret weapon of war against the Japanese Empire. General Charles Willoughby, G-2 chief in the Pacific, credited it with saving a million lives and shortening the war by two years.

## 2. U.S. Army Language Schools

In view of imminent war, the U.S. War Department ordered a language school to be established in the Presidio of San Francisco, unfortunately under the 4<sup>th</sup> Army, commanded by Lt. Gen. John L. DeWitt. General DeWitt was later to be well known for his hateful comment "A Jap is a Jap," as he expelled all Japanese from the U.S. coastal area in February 1942. He was so ordered by FDR's infamous Executive Order 9066 despite its questioned constitutionality, in conjunction with California Governor Culbert Wilson and U.S. Chief of Justice Earl Warren's joined demands.

Lt. Col. John Weckerling was appointed to take command of the language training operation, which he started in September 1941 in an abandoned airplane hanger at Crissey Field of the Presidio, San Francisco. Weckerling was fortunate to have Kai Rasmussen as his back-up person, who was the sole speaker of Japanese in the whole U.S. Army, although with a heavy Danish accent.

Rasmussen, in his turn, was also fortunate because he had a back-up figure in the person of John Fujio Aiso. Aiso was an American-born 31-year-old attorney, a cum laude Brown graduate, with a doctorate from Harvard. He had also attended Chuo University in Tokyo. Aiso became the chief instructor at the new school, with Akira Oshida and Shigeya Kihara from San Francisco working for him.

Rasmussen, to start with, tested the Japanese language abilities of approximately 4,000 *Niseis* in uniform using the *Naganuma Readers*. Out of these, only 60 candidates were selected for the first class of the Military Intelligence Specialist Language School (abbr. MISLS). No more than 15 of the selected 60 were considered true linguists proficient in both English and Japanese.

Thus 60 students sat down to studies at Crissley Field on November 1, 1941, at the MISLS. They as well as their successors called themselves "MIS'ers". Rasmussen and others got their project started on November 1. Five dozen men were five weeks into what was to be a rigorous one-year course when "Air raid! Pearl Harbor! This is no drill!" thundered at them.

In view of the many hardships and persecution which AJA's had to go through following the Pearl Harbor incident specifically on the West Coast, Rasmussen decided to move the site of the MISLS from California to Minnesota. The Gopher State was then the geographical area with the best record of racial amity. After consulting with Governor Harold E. Stassen, he obtained for army use of 132 acres near Fort Snelling, southwest of Minneapolis, called Camp Savage, after the tiny contiguous town there. Rasmussen's curriculum had been shortened from twelve to six months. Fourteen selected *Niseis* entered the first class at Camp Savage. They had only 90 days of cramming so that they might get into the Pacific as quickly



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as possible. Also with the class were 3 Caucasian commissioned officers, including John Anderton, a noteworthy person with photographic memory for Japanese ideographs. All told, 137 AJA's, 23 Caucasians, and 1 Chinese American named Won Loy "Charlie" Chang completed successfully the course that began at Camp Savage on May 28, 1942.

3. Some MIS'ers' Personal Involvement in the Pacific Campaigns

- a. The U.S. Pacific Theater of WWII was comprised of two major phases respectively conducted by General Douglas MacArthur and Admiral Chester W. Nimitz.

Operation *Cartwheel*, General MacArthur's offensive in the South-West Pacific toward the Japan proper by way of the Philippines, continued to put pressure on the Japanese in the Solomons and New Guinea during the final months of 1943. MacArthur then occupied the Green Islands and the Admiralty Islands and thus isolated Rabaul.

Operation *Galvanic*, Admiral Nimitz's first operation targeted the key islands and atolls in the Central Pacific, beginning with Tarawa and Makin, and then on to the Marshal Islands. He mobilized for these military objectives, the U.S. Marines accompanied by his mighty fleets and air bombardment. But the U.S. Navy, refusing to permit recruiting Japanese American Intelligence Specialists in the Marine Corps, had to pay dearly for its poor intelligence job unlike MacArthur's army. Ten days of bloody fighting on Peleliu, for instance, saw 4,000 Marines wasted — killed or wounded, who would otherwise have been saved.

- b. On September 7, 1942 the special class of 12 men finished their course at Camp Savage. Graduation was held next day in front of the mess hall. Two of the graduates were held back to be instructors. Some others were sent to Australia to work under General MacArthur. One of them

was Arthur Komori, the first *Nisei* to earn a well-deserved commendation and a Purple Heart.

Besides the 1943 special class of 123 linguists from Camp Savage, another 6 were snatched out in mid-course and sent to New Caledonia commanded by Frederick P. Munson. Other linguists continued to flow into the Pacific. Some put their skills to work. Shigeo Ito went to Alaska with three others. They worked with Bill Nishikawa there, translating a captured batch of mail from Japan. Others also went to the Aleutians, an area that worried both Tokyo and Washington. It was the shortest route between the two antagonists, but almost impossible to defend, as was later mortally illustrated by an annihilated Japanese regiment in Attu.

- c. On May 11, 1943 the U.S. Army Seventh Division landed on Attu in the first attempt to take back America's real estate from the enemy. More than 20 linguists from the Alaskan command were in on the operation. After the Japanese final and self-destroying "Banzai" charge some of them visited an enemy encampment where patients had been shot to death or killed themselves with imminent captivity approaching. A Japanese doctor had done the shooting of the patients who were too weak to kill themselves. Umetani, a *Kibei*, wept bitterly as he translated a letter the doctor left. The letter later appeared in the *American Weekly*.
- d. Before 1943, more than one hundred *Niseis* had been dispatched to the Pacific. These language-trained GI's of Japanese ancestry were to become MacArthur's second weapon. He already had one code-breaking crew. He, like Nimitz with his own Navy code-breakers, was, as it were, "reading Tojo's mail." He learned in advance of Japan's combat plans. MacArthur easily figured Japan's logical targets were

Port Moresby, New Caledonia, Buna, Samoa and the Fijis. His effective and timely tactical countermeasures saved them from the Japanese invasion.

Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto was shot down over Ballale Island on April 18, 1943, while he was on an inspection tour. He was a victim of American code interception. So many sources have claimed credit for this coup that it is very difficult to establish whether any *Niseis* were involved, although their involvement was highly probable.

Admiral Mineichi Koga, successor to Yamamoto as Commander-in-Chief of the Imperial Japanese Navy's Combined Fleet, was killed in an airplane accident. His Chief of Staff, Rear Admiral Shigeru Fukutome flying in a separate plane, crashed in the sea and was captured, but later released, by the Filipino guerillas. The classified documents he carried, including the Japanese Navy's Operational Plans "Z" — Combined Fleet Secret Operations Order No. 73 dated March 8, 1944 — for the defenses of the Marianas fell into the Allies' hands. The captured plans were then rushed via an American submarine to Australia. Two Japanese American specialists — Yoshikazu Yamada and George K. Yamashiro translated the plans there. The translators played a key role in putting the captured Japanese document to work for the Allies. The translations were dispatched to Admiral Nimitz, who in his turn provided copies to every flag officer associated with the Marianas invasion under his command.

In 1943 the two American striking pincers groped toward the northwest, Nimitz from Guadalcanal and MacArthur's from eastern New Guinea. MacArthur advanced from Nassau Bay on up to Salamoia, Lae, Finschhafen and New Guinea, whereas Nimitz struck Russel, Rendova, Vella Lavella, New Georgia, Bougainville and Rabaul.

Both would then join forces northward to the ultimate objective of the conquest of Japan.

- e. Richard M. Sakakida served, following the Japanese Army's invasion of the Philippines, with the U.S. forces which were relentlessly driven back to Bataan and Corregidor. General MacArthur utilized his Japanese language skills to perform military intelligence work against the Japanese. From the last siege of Corregidor until its capitulation on May 7, 1942, Sakakida served as General Jonathan Wainwright's intelligence man. He was the only *Nisei* in the U.S. military to be imprisoned as an American POW. He survived over three years of captivity, during which he miraculously performed outstanding intelligence/spy feats against his captors. Sakakida eventually retired as an abundantly decorated lieutenant colonel, honored with admission into the U.S. Military Intelligence Hall of Fame.
- f. Remarkable intelligence achievement was carried out after the Battle of Bismarck Sea February 1943, when an abandoned lifeboat from a sunken Japanese transport was found aground on an island north of New Guinea's eastern tip. In it was a document of immeasurable value — the Japanese Army's Battle of Order or Officers' list. With an effective date of October 15, 1942, it was the complete roster of 40,000 Imperial Army officers, from General Hideki Tojo down to the most obscure company commander. Thanks to the *Niseis* and other linguists in Australia, it was thereafter possible to identify with increasing accuracy where which Japanese units were and in what strength. Proper use of the captured Japanese Order of Battle Book saved thousands of American lives and cost the Japanese dearly. The captured Japanese documents were revealing, as more of them were translated behind New Guinea front lines in 1943. A group headed by Jim Matsuyama was

hard at work in Washington, D.C. on the captured Japanese Order of Battle file, a task of monstrous challenge. The Japanese Army Officers List, when translated, filled fourteen file drawers. Keeping this up to date in Washington was a difficult job, because this devoutly-to-be-wished piece of information had arrived in the *kanji* form that baffled those concerned. This was exactly where the Japanese American language specialists came in to render their invaluable service of translation.

Kazuo Yamane from Hawaii made a similar discovery, as he was examining captured Japanese documents at Camp Ritchie, which had been overlooked by U.S. Navy intelligence at Pearl Harbor. The documents included the Imperial Army's ordnance inventory of the amounts and types of every weapon in the Japanese home islands. The inventory also listed their condition, locations, and quantity plus available spare parts and other materials in the Japanese weapons network. Utilizing this newly acquired information, strategic planners added new targets to the B-29 bombing list. Yamane's find was used with stunning effect at the war's end.

- g. The MIS'ers' Intelligence missions involved an ever-present danger of mistaken identity as was shown by Sergeant Frank Hachiya's incident. Hachiya of Hood River, Oregon, an MISLS graduate, volunteered to be dropped behind the enemy lines on Leyte in the Philippines on an intelligence mission. After a month of reconnoitering and mapping strategic enemy emplacement, he happened to wander, on his way back to the American lines, onto invading GI's who mistook him for an enemy infiltrator and shot him. Hachiya, despite his mortal wound, managed to deliver the precious piece of intelligence to an American officer and saved the lives of hundreds of his comrades. Sgt. Hachiya's service was

honored with a Distinguished Service Cross, the highest decoration for valor ever awarded a *Nisei* in the Pacific.

- h. The Americans landed on Saipan on June 24, 1944. The 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Marine Divisions hit first. Tim Ohta and his team from Minnesota were immediately at their heels with the 27<sup>th</sup> Army Division. Ohta was awarded a Silver Star on Saipan for talking enemy soldiers and frightened civilians into surrender out of caves where they had holed up. He and other *Niseis* managed civilian and POW camps for the island's new military government, besides collecting tactically valuable information of the Japanese defenses.
- i. The Japanese American language specialists were also active in various parts of the Continental Asia — China, Burma and India as well as in Australia. Two *Nisei* crash teams were dispatched to China on an assignment to help Colonel Claire Chennault recover and examine shot-down Japanese aircraft. The linguists swiftly identified all parts and instruments, thus finally convincing the U.S. Army and Navy of Japan's famed "Zero" Fighters' supremacy in the air.
- j. Fusao Uchiyama and his 8 linguist comrades went to India on an intelligence mission. Some of the members were later awarded a British decoration. In Northern Burma, 3,000 Americans under Frank Merrill, a protégé of Stilwell, challenged the Japanese. This unit was tabbed by a newspaper "Merrill's Marauders." Tom Taketa, attached to the 1<sup>st</sup> Air Command, did the radio-intercepting of the Japanese military communication for the combination of gliders, transports, fighters and bombers that backed up Wingate's unit and the Merrill's Marauders. His job was highly successful. Amos Nakamura and two others language specialists joined the 14<sup>th</sup> British Army all the way to its taking of Rangoon, Burma.

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- k. On October 20, 1944, some *Niseis* with four U.S. divisions hit the beaches at Leyte. There were many others with two infantry divisions and one airborne division held in reserve, and Corps and Army headquarters, radio interception units, ready to go to work as soon as they could get set up. The *Nisei* intelligence language specialists had made it possible for General MacArthur to keep his word. He had returned!

Proof was everywhere of how valuable were *Nisei* linguists who quickly translated captured Japanese documents and diaries. They were in such demand that every general wanted to "own" a few. Kai Rasmussen's dream had come true.

- l. Despite USMC's historical division's failure to provide any details on *Niseis* who served with the Marines in the war, 10 *Niseis* were paired off and attached to the 323<sup>rd</sup> Regiment on Peleileu, and the 322<sup>nd</sup> Regiment on Angaur. Nearly 40 to 50 of them were in the Iwo Jima campaign. Nobuo Furuiye, who made important contribution to the island's occupation, was touched by a document he translated, a personal paper of Baron Takekazu Nishi, a colonel in the Imperial Japanese Army. The Baron had represented Japan in the Olympics at Los Angeles in 1932 as an equestrian, and enjoyed a wide circle of friends in America. Ironically Nishi died in an American tank the Japanese had captured and turned against the Americans. Furuiye later went to Saipan. He said he enjoyed working with the Marines, but hoped he would never have to endure another campaign like the one he had been through on Iwo Jima.

A *Kibei* (returnee) loner named Terry Takeshi Doi landed at Iwo Jima with the 3<sup>rd</sup> Marine Division. He had been drafted while in Japan and served in the prewar Imperial Army. When cave-flushing began on Iwo Jima, Doi showed incredible courage. He would strip naked except for his helmet, to show the enemy he had no weapons, then enter a cave,

calling out to tell hidden Japanese soldiers to come out and surrender. Doi was shot at many times, but he survived. He was awarded a Silver Star.

The *Niseis'* contribution on Okinawa was a key one, especially when it came to communicating with, and sorting out from Japanese military, the Okinawan civilians. Warren Sakuma one day stopped an elderly Okinawan, to ask where he came from. An accompanying *Nisei* asked that question. No answer came. Sakuma then recalled special expressions he had learned a few days before and asked, "Makara chaga?" The old man's face lit up in recognition as he answered, "Koja son." Sakuma said he then increased his effort to master more of the Okinawan dialect.

m. A good number of *Niseis* served with, but refused to talk about, the Office of Strategic Services (OSS). George Goda led an air technical intelligence team of 8 *Niseis* to Australia. Another such team of 5 members was sent to New Caledonia to conduct interrogation and translation there. A number of *Niseis* also worked in counter-intelligence in the Pacific. Much of their clandestine operations did not become public, involving a number of Japanese Americans who worked in intelligence for the U.S. some in uniform and some otherwise, right through Vietnamese War.

#### **D. Some MIS'ers' Individual Involvement in Japan's Surrender and Occupation**

1. Small islands, as well as major cities, had to surrender. *Niseis* worked on this also. Don Okubo, touring the Marshalls in 1945, enticing isolated Japanese to surrender, went ashore to Airik Island from a destroyer escort.



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The Japanese there said they could not surrender without their commanding officer's permission on Taroa. Don sailed to Taroa and talked a Japanese rear admiral into giving up. This was before Emperor Hirohito officially announced surrender on August 15, 1945 (Japan time).

2. After a few months of preparation, some *Nisei* units were sent to Japan on temporary duty. They arrived in Tokyo in November 1945. Their job was to select and translate any document relating to the Japanese war effort. They were billeted with the Allied Translator and Interpreter Section in the Nippon Yusen Building. Their office was the Tokyo First Arsenal in Otsu Ward.

- a. Larry Mihara, along with Bill Wada, interpreted for and worked with Admiral Frank Fletcher, when the North Pacific naval commander accepted the surrender of Japanese forces at Ominato, in northern Japan. Mihara saved a lot of American lives by giving detailed instructions on how Japanese authorities were to care for the Allied POWs in nearby camps.
- b. Robert K. Sakai was sent to Aomori with a unit commanded by General Mueller. Sakai was in charge of a small group of language personnel. The military police needed to talk to the local police, investigate criminal activities, and issue orders to various Japanese organizations. Visits had to be made to all the schools to inspect how they carried out SCAP (Supreme Commander, Allied Powers) directives for eliminating militaristic material from textbooks. Disarmament and demobilization of Japanese forces, destruction of airfields, confiscation of weapons, elimination of coastal defense facilities, conversion of military industries — all required the language personnel's help.
- c. Ben Yamamoto was sent to Sasebo on an assignment to assist in

inventorying the torpedoes in various storage locations. He had to work with two Japanese navy officers and other Japanese people. Ben was at first so uncertain about how he would be received by his former enemy and felt so ill at ease that he kept his .38 revolver at the ready. Then hostility gradually vanished and friendliness prevailed. He says, "I relate these stories to describe the friendly relations that flourished spontaneously with the Japanese. I'm glad I was able to come to Japan at this early stage of the occupation, before ending my military service. As Americans, we were there not as arrogant conquerors but as people with hands extended in friendship and humanity."

2. Much of the wrap-up work to end the war was done by *Niseis*.
  - a. Kiyoshi Hirano double-checked preliminary drafts of the surrender arrangements in order to make sure they conformed to Japanese law so no later jingoist would have an "out".
  - b. Tom Sakamoto went over the final draft of the actual surrender document used on board *USS Missouri*, and was one of the few *Niseis* allowed on board the battleship for the ceremony. Nimitz did not have great affection for them.
  - c. Hoichi Kubo may have come away from the war more satisfied than any other Japanese American. "I was in on the start, and the finish," he remarked. "I saw planes coming through Kole Kole Pass on December 7, 1941, and on Okinawa I saw more Japanese planes, those special planes with the green crosses on them that were taking the Japanese surrender delegation to Manila, to give up."
  - d. Harry Okubo was embarrassed, in his filthy fatigues, to accept for the 32<sup>nd</sup> Division the surrender of a spotless General Yamashita. Kei Sakamoto cleaned up a bit before escorting the general to Manila.

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Sojiro Takamura acted gentlemanly by giving General Torashiro Kawabe a box of Almond Rocca to take with him to Japan, after helping assure protective custody for the surrender delegation that came to Manila.

- e. Eddie Yamada and Harry Akune flew to Atsugi Naval Air Base before MacArthur did, so that the 11<sup>th</sup> Airborne could establish a perimeter around the air base to protect the Supreme Commander. Paul and George Aurell of the first Camp Savage class, along with Faubian Bowers, stepped onto Japanese soil at the side of Douglas MacArthur. George Ichikawa was the enlisted team leader for these officers. He and Kazuo Kazaki lead a large team of “*Kibei*” (returnee) *Nisei* language specialists whose first-hand knowledge of Japan proved vital to the successful occupation of Japan.
- f. Kazuo Yamane’s discovery in Washington, D.C. of the Japanese Ordnance Inventory the Navy at Pearl Harbor overlooked, saved a great many human life. It also helped speedily establish peace later. With a copy of Yamane’s discovery in hand, the occupation forces were able to proceed right to arms caches and seize them.
- g. Some *Niseis* worked on the war crime trials in Japan, Manila, and China including the trials of Generals Masaharu Homma and Tomoyuki Yamashita. Their function must have been a fascinating experience. They worked on the investigation, the defense, and the prosecution.
- h. Kan Tagami relates his story: “The highlight of my twenty-year military career was the five years I served as General Douglas MacArthur’s personal interpreter in Japan. The job resulted in my most memorable assignment ever: a one-on-one meeting with Emperor Hirohito following Japan’s surrender... The General received many leading Japanese visitors, including Prime Ministers Hitoshi Ashida and Shigeru Yoshida.

Prime Minister Yoshida was very appreciative of my cooperation... I interpreted for Yoshida several times.”

- i. Many *Niseis* did important work of lasting economic value to Japan. Yoshikazu Yamada and three others were part of a mission ordered to make a survey of Japanese scientific development. Meeting with leading Japanese scientists laid the groundwork for later exchanges that helped Japan rebuild her economy. Without the thousands of *Nisei* interpreters who served in the Occupation the recovery of Japan could not have been as swift, or as strong as it really proved to be. They were the channels of communication; Japanese nationals always came to them first, because they were the bridges to the English-speaking authorities. *Niseis* helped track down war criminals, and eliminate the military influence in Japan. They helped restructure Japan's economic system, so that workers received a greater share of production benefits. Their presence helped Japanese come out of their shells and grow.

### **E. Conclusions — *Nisei* Servicemen ultimately proved themselves as loyal Americans**

1. *Niseis* had to face and overcome their dual-frontal predicament in military service. As Jan Kurahara of Hood River, Oregon personally confided to the author: “The Japanese American soldiers had two enemies to fight: the Japanese/German military and the white Americans.” Kurahara's remark well recapitulates the lamentable and unreasonable wartime hardships the AJA's were undeservedly forced to suffer, beginning with the mass evacuation and the concentration camps at the outbreak of the Pacific War. The *Nisei* soldiers overcame all these difficulties by proving their loyalty to the United States of America.

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A typical intra-racial experience as Senator Daniel Inouye relates it:

“When we first went to Camp Shelby, Mississippi, we didn’t have a PX, so we went to the *haole* (a Hawaiian expression for a “white person”) outfit’s PX. When the *haoles* saw us, they called us ‘Japs’ and kicked us out of the PX. The boys that were kicked out went back to camp to report the incident to the others. A gang of them went back to the PX and beat the hell out of all the 69<sup>th</sup> Division there.

“We fought whenever we were called ‘Japs’... Even when we went overseas we fought the ‘*haoles*’ at first. They weren’t the only ones derogatory, though. We called them ‘beanies’. There was a mean fight in Bagnoli, just outside of Naples, where we were waiting for transportation to the front. But one day into combat all the chips fell off. We focused on the real enemy instead. Plus, we knew we had to help each other to survive. The publicity of the 100<sup>th</sup> and 442<sup>nd</sup> received from the *Stars and Stripes* for our deeds helped also.”

Inouye continues:

“It is my sincerest hope that America shall not burden any other ethnic group with the terrible dilemma forced on many Japanese Americans a scant four decades ago: whether to remain with their loved ones or leave them to uncertain fate to help defend the nation responsible for their incarceration. So many paid with their blood to demonstrate their loyalty, yet died with uncertainty that their children might be considered less American than other citizens.”

2. The Japanese Americans’ loyalty was not so much proved to the American public by the MIS’ers who served in the Pacific theater of WWII, as by the *Niseis* of the 100<sup>th</sup> Infantry Battalion and the 442<sup>nd</sup> Regimental

Combat Team who fought in Europe. The reason is simple: military intelligence had been classified as top secret until recently and the MIS'ers were under oath to keep their wartime intelligence service from public knowledge. The comments given below in section 3, therefore, exclusively concern the Japanese American soldiers who fought in Europe.

3. Their former commanding officers bear unanimous testimonies to the *Niseis'* loyalty and bravery.

a. President Harry S. Truman

Commander in Chief, U.S. Armed Forces:

“You (*Niseis*) fought for the free nations of the world... you fought not only the enemy, you fought prejudice — and you won.

“Keep that fight... Continue to win — make this great Republic stand for what the Constitution says it stands for: ‘the welfare of all the people, all the time.’”

b. General George C. Marshall

Chief of Staff, U.S. Army:

“Eisenhower’s staff declined them (the 100<sup>th</sup>)... General Clark took them... They were superb! They took terrible casualties. They showed rare courage and tremendous fighting spirit... everybody wanted them... in the operations, and we used them quite dramatically in the great advance in Italy which led up to the termination of the fighting there.”

c. General Mark W. Clark

Commander, the Fifth Army:

“...They (Japanese American Soldiers) performed magnificently on the field of battle. I’ve never had such fine soldiers. Send me all you got.”

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d. General Joseph W. Stilwell

Commander, Chinese Army:

“The *Niseis* bought an awful big hunk of America with their blood. We can not let a single injury be done them without defeating the purposes for which they fought.”

e. Major General Jacob L. Devers

Chief of the Army Field Forces:

“There is one supreme, final test of loyalty for one’s native land — readiness and willingness to fight and, if need be, to die for it. These (Japanese) Americans pass that test with flying colors. They proved their loyalty and devotion beyond all questions.

“They volunteered for army combat service and they made a record second to none. In Europe, theirs was the Combat Team most feared by the enemy. In the Pacific, they placed themselves in double jeopardy, chancing the bullets of friend as well as of foe. Everywhere they were the soldiers most decorated for valor, most devoted to duty. Their only absences without leave were from hospitals which they quit before they recovered from their wounds, in order to get back into the fight for what they knew to be right. These men more than earned the right to be called Americans not merely Japanese Americans. Their Americanism may be described only by degree, and that the highest.”

f. Brigadier General Robert F. Young

Chief of Staff, Sixth U.S. Army:

“The Japanese American soldiers, though repressed in this country at a period in history less enlightened than our own, valiantly fought to preserve the ideals of freedom proclaimed by that country. No man or no group could have done more. In retrospect, we clearly see that many of our past deeds have been colored by emotion, prejudice or unfounded

fear toward our fellow men or our countrymen. I would like to believe that those actions exhibited the attitude of the times and were attitudes which we, as a nation, have long since overgrown. And that now we are forever wiser... I am nonetheless very proud of our nation and our people because we possess that rare and unique humility and compassion to admit past faults, seek corrections, and make amends... this quality is rare on this earth. And even today, it is one of the privileges and blessings worth fighting for to preserve. Thank you for your unparalleled heroism which shall always remain an inspiration for all Americans.”

g. Colonel James Lovell

100<sup>th</sup> Infantry Battalion:

“...This was mentioned on many occasions that they (the Japanese American GI's) did not win the war, that they fought as well as any soldier perhaps, not any better. But we knew of none that fought better.”

#### 4. AJA's Honor Restored

Senator Spark M. Matsunaga's observation recapitulates the AJA's determination to preserve forevermore the constitutional right they fought for and won by shedding blood:

“If we the living, the beneficiaries of their sacrifices are truly intent upon showing our gratitude, we must do more than gather together for speechmaking and perfunctory ceremonies. We must undertake to carry on the unfinished work, which they so nobly advanced. The fight against prejudice is not confined to the battlefield alone. It is still here and with us now. So long as a single member of our citizenry is denied the use of public facilities, or denied the right to earn a decent living because of the color of



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his skin, we who 'fought against prejudice and won ought not sit idly by and tolerate the perpetuation of injustices."

On January 1, 1942, Roosevelt publicly deplored the treatment aliens and other foreign-born were then receiving at the hands of Americans, but deplore was all he did about it.

The perpetuation of the injustices Matsunaga referred to, however, was not to be tolerated any longer after August 10, 1988 when President Ronald Reagan signed into law the "Civil Liberties Act of 1988". The Act called for the U.S. government to issue individual apologies for all violations of civil liberties and constitutional rights, backing up the words with \$20,000 tax-free payments to each internment survivor. The government, however, was still hedging its bets. "It is not for us to pass judgement upon those who may have made mistakes while engaged in World War II," Reagan told an audience who gathered to watch the signing, "Yet we must recognize that the internment of Japanese Americans was just that, a mistake." He went on to comment, "What is important in this bill has less to do with property than with honor, for here we admit wrong. Here, we reaffirm our commitment as a nation to equal justice under the law."

The *Nisei* Japanese American servicemen thus won reparations, frequently with their own blood and lives, and proved to themselves and to their offspring that they could stand up for their human rights as loyal Americans.

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