

THE JAPANESE AMERICAN SOLDIER IN WORLD WAR II

A Documentary Film  
by

Loni Ding  
Vox Productions, Inc.  
USA

The Japanese American Soldier in WW II is a feature length documentary of approximately one hour, on the insights to be gained from the complex and contradictory experiences of the Japanese American Nisei ( 2nd generation American -born) soldiers in WW II.

The film focuses on the experiences of men who served in two groups: the 100th Battalion/ 442nd Regimental Combat Team who fought as infantry in Europe ( hereafter referred to as 100/442nd); and the U.S. Army Military Intelligence Service (MIS). The entirely Japanese American 100/442 RCT by war's end became the "most decorated unit in U.S. military history". And those Nisei who served in military intelligence became famed as the "eyes and ears" of the Pacific war, the Army's "secret weapon", giving their commanders unprecedented advantage: "General Mac Arthur in New Guinea and the Phillipines was better informed about enemy dispositions than any other military leader in history." \* And yet many members of the 442nd and the MIS had volunteered out of America's wartime internment camps where Japanese Americans were imprisoned, and the Nisei MIS lived with the moral ambiguities of fighting against one's ancestral homeland, during this period of rampant domestic racism, while enduring also the double jeopardy of possibly being mistaken for "the enemy" and shot by one's own troops.

Under the circumstances, why did the Japanese American Nisei youth ( average age, 19) commit himself to serve, and how were the Nisei 442nd and Nisei MIS soldiers able to serve with such distinction?

This documentary looks at the Japanese American soldiers' experiences as combat soldiers in Europe; as interrogators, interpreters, translators, and documents decoders serving in every campaign of the Asia Pacific theaters; and as pivotal figures interpreting and facilitating Allied occupation policies and programs in postwar Japan.

Faced with the forced evacuation and internment of their families, how did the Nisei youth deal with the profound ambiguities and contradictions of their situation:

- whether to trust an American government that had just dispossessed them of all they owned, and imprisoned them;
- how to serve that country without stint, with unparalleled heroism, in the name of values - freedom and equality - which they themselves did not enjoy;
- how to fight an enemy, Japan, treasured ancestral land of their non-citizen Issei parents, and Meiji era wellspring of the Issei's deepest held values;
- how to deal with the possibility that they might yet face a brother or relative as "enemy" in some Asia Pacific battlefield. Will the Nisei soldier shoot his brother?

What values, what training allowed the Nisei - as discriminated racial minorities, as aspiring children of immigrants, and as filial sons of the traditional Issei - to act creditably under the circumstances?

\* John Costello, The Pacific War, p. 612

This film is a moral tale whose themes are personal honor, family loyalty, ethnic identity, and an abiding attachment to the land of one's birth. It dramatically and compellingly reveals the human aspect of the issues of race relations, civil rights, and cultural pluralism in the American experience, crystallized in the story of the Japanese American soldier. It tells us something about what it means to be American.

The film also allows us to glimpse something of what it means to be Japanese, as the Nisei and Japanese nationals meet in the crucible of war -- the encounter between US Army Nisei interrogator and Japanese prisoner of war, and between Nisei MIS and Japanese civilians in the battlefield and in postwar occupation. Here are encounters between Americans and Japanese, native sons of Japan and America, cast together in this historic contact between their two countries.



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### SCOPE OF FILM TREATMENT

Building upon the earlier film Nisei Soldier, Standard Bearer for an Exiled People, this feature length documentary will cover areas which will extend and deepen our understanding of the Japanese American soldier, his times, and his pivotal cultural position in the wartime meeting between Americans and Japanese, between America and Japan.

The following areas will be covered in the documentary, interweaving archival stills, footage, family album photos, news headlines, radio broadcasts, combat footage, contemporary interviews, dramatic re-creations, music, and cutting back and forth between past and present.

\* PRE-WAR NIKKEI, PRE-WAR AMERICA: THE DUAL CULTURAL LEGACY, CULTURAL ROOTS OF THE NISEI

*Who were the parents of the Japanese American Nisei soldier; what was his life like; what could he expect for his future?*

Issei immigration, worklife, and Issei family values; the Kibei experience; Nisei Americanization; anti-oriental racism; limited economic life chances of Nikkei in pre-war Hawaii and the Mainland.

EXCLUSION  
REMOVAL

\* PEARL HARBOR AFTERMATH: FORCED EVACUATION AND IMPRISONMENT; CITIZENSHIP AND JUSTICE DENIED

*What happened to the Nisei soldier and his family after Pearl Harbor, and what did he perceive was happening to himself, and with those around him?*

Reaction and response in Nikkei community; reaction of Caucasian neighbors, co-workers, business associates, classmates. The words and actions of Federal and local government officials, the military, and the press. Significance of the difference between Hawaii and Mainland reaction.

\* THE CAMP EXPERIENCE: A QUESTION OF LOYALTY: PROVING THE UNPROVABLE

*What was happening in the camp, and what was on the minds of imprisoned Nisei youth trying to decide whether or not to serve a government that had just massively rejected and betrayed them? What happened between Issei parents and Nisei sons; between brothers and friends; between Nisei and Kibei?*

The divisiveness of the loyalty oath administered in the camps and the varieties of protest and resistance: disillusioned renunciants/expatriates; pro-Japan loyalists/nationalists; Supreme Court legal challengers; outraged radical democrats unwilling to cooperate unless their rights of citizenship were "restored first", etc.

The decision to volunteer, not volunteer, draft resist in response to the call for US military service.

Hawaii and Mainland compared.



\* JAPANESE AMERICANS IN UNIFORM

*How was the unity, morale and commitment of the Nisei soldier created and maintained in training and in combat?*

Recruitment and basic training of the 100th Bn (Hawaii Nisei) and the 442nd RCT in Hawaii and on Mainland. Conflict, tension and resolution between Hawaii Nisei and Mainland Nisei recruits.

The Japanese language training program of the US Army Military Intelligence Service (MIS) in Minnesota; the curriculum and perspective of the training.

The Japanese American soldier's experience of stratified race relations in American society and the racially segregated U.S. military of the times. The racial experiences of the Nisei MIS language training in mid West Minnesota, compared to experiences of the Nisei 442nd basic training in Jim Crow Mississippi of the 1940's.

The intelligence performance of the Nisei MIS as interrogators, interpreters, and documents decoders, in every campaign of the Asia Pacific theaters. Nisei MIS contribution to the humane treatment of Japanese POWs and rescue of civilians in Saipan and Okinawa. Nisei MIS role in interpreting, facilitating occupation policies and programs with Japanese civilians in postwar period.

\* THE LINK BETWEEN WARFRONT AND HOMEFRONT: LIBERATORS ABROAD, PRISONERS AT HOME

*What was the Nisei soldier's individual experience of the fundamental contradiction of their being liberators and rescuers abroad, while prisoners at home? What did he think he would do if faced with a brother, relative, or former schoolmate, as an enemy soldier on the battlefield, gun in hand?*

The relationship between warfront, 442nd, in Europe and homefront; between Nisei MIS in Asia Pacific, and the homefront families and friends in American internment camps. Letters and visits between Nisei soldiers and interned families; status of warfront Nisei and status of their relatives in U.S. and relatives in wartime Japan.

\* INTERNATIONAL AND CROSS CULTURAL PERSPECTIVES

*How did the Europeans view the "strange looking" American liberators? What did the Nisei MIS find surprising or familiar in their encounter with Japan, Japanese soldiers and civilians? What was made easier or more difficult in their communication and understanding of each other because of cultural commonalities and differences? How did the Nisei MIS react to the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki?*

The 442nd soldier as seen through European eyes; the encounter between Nisei liberators and French citizens they liberated, Bruyeres, France, 1944 and reunion meeting, 1984.

The Nisei MIS soldier as seen through Japanese eyes.  
Japan and the Japanese as seen thru Nisei MIS eyes.

The encounter between Nisei MIS and Japanese prisoners of war in the China, Burma, India and Pacific battlefields; Nisei translations of Japanese soldier diaries, surrender propaganda, rescue of Saipan and Okinawan civilians.

## International and Cross Cultural Perspective ( contin. )

The cultural and psychological meeting between Nisei MIS and Japanese relatives, and between Nisei interpreters and Japanese civilians in post-war Japan.

The pivotal role of the Nisei as bi-cultural embodiments of their Issei parents' Japanese values and yet also American ideology; as human bridges between two different societal and cultural worlds during the difficult transitions of the occupation and Japan rebuilding from the ashes.

## \* BEYOND VICTORY: THE WINNING OF THE PEACE

*What have been some lasting effects of the wartime involvement of the Japanese American soldier?*

The release of Nikkei families from American internment camps and rebuilding lives. Nisei silence about the evacuation/internment; the search by Sansei and Yonsei generations for knowledge and links to their past.

Hawaii Nisei in politics, Hawaii statehood and Nikkei mobility.

Overturning of discriminatory anti-oriental American laws and practices, and Nikkei assimilationism.

The legacy of the Nisei soldier for the Nikkei later generations, and for our understanding of American society. The effect on the Nisei of their experiences in Europe and in Asia Pacific.

The ongoing struggle for acceptance of racial equality and ethnic diversity; the unfinished struggle for justice in America. The Nikkei community speaks out. The ongoing development of meaningful cross cultural communication and understanding between Japanese and Americans, between Japan and the United States.