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"WORLD WAR II: THE ROLE OF THE NISEI SOLDIER"

I hope I will be able to provide you with a passing glimpse of the deep-reaching military experiences of Japanese Americans during World War II. Before I begin, however, I would like to submit a brief autobiographical sketch so that you may better understand how I fit into this setting.

I was born in Washington, D.C., and reared in New York City. In the spring of 1940, at age 20, I went west to California. On that fateful Sunday, December 7, 1941, I was in Oakland when Japan attacked Pearl Harbor, where their bombs sank and damaged 19 warships of the U.S. Pacific Fleet, and worse yet, killed 2,300 sailors, airmen and soldiers, and wounded 1,200 other military personnel.

A few days after the disaster I tried to enlist in the armed forces: first with the Army, then the Navy, and finally the Marine Corps. At each recruiting station I was turned away. "Japs" were "persona non grata." On January 5, 1942, the War Department classified Japanese American men of draft age as 4-C, "enemy alien."

In swift succession an 8pm-to-6am curfew and a 5-mile travel ban were imposed only on persons of Japanese descent. This was followed by Executive Order 9066, issued on February 19, 1942, which set in motion the mass incarceration of 110,000 people of Japanese ancestry, two-thirds of whom were American citizens. On May 6, 1942, four days before my 21st birthday, along with 8,000 Japanese Americans from the San Francisco Bay Area, I became an inmate of Tanforan Assembly Center, a racetrack converted into a temporary detention camp, where we lived in horse stalls.

Six months later, we were transported to Topaz, Utah, in the middle of an alkali desert. This mass internment camp was euphemistically called a "relocation camp." Of ghastly significance, the Nazis used the term "relocation" to move Jews to concentration/death camps. Ours were not "death camps," thank God, but they were certainly concentration camps.

On January 28, 1943, the War Department announced plans to form an

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all-Japanese American combat unit. In April, from within the barbed wires of Topaz, I volunteered to serve with the newly formed 442nd Regimental Combat Team. On June 16, I joined Company K, 442nd Infantry Regiment at Camp Shelby, Mississippi.

At the outbreak of the war, there were approximately 5,000 Japanese Americans in the armed forces. Immediately after hostilities began many of them were summarily discharged and reclassified as "enemy aliens" unfit for military service. Some suffered the humiliation of having their weapons stripped from them, and being herded into compounds like prisoners-of-war, and surrounded by machine guns. Others were handed brooms and mops and assigned to menial "shit details" or transferred to inland posts/interior commands less vulnerable to security.

When the first bombs fell on Pearl Harbor an immediate call went out to all University of Hawaii ROTC members to report for duty. Most of them were Americans of Japanese ancestry. Later that day 370 Nisei were sworn into the Hawaii Territorial Guard. At the same time Martial Law was declared, as well as a sunset-to-dawn curfew and blackout. Restrictions applied to everyone.

From thousands of miles away, however, the War Department in Washington, D.C., didn't like Japanese Americans serving in Hawaii's Territorial Guard. Consequently, less than two months after Pearl Harbor, the Nisei were discharged from the Guard without explanation. The Army no longer trusted them with guns. Although shattered and stunned by the Army's lack of confidence in them, the ex-territorial guardsmen returned to the campus of the University of Hawaii as students. As their anger gradually subsided, they petitioned the Commanding General of the Hawaiian Department asking to be allowed to make some contribution to the war effort. The offer was accepted. The General converted the Nisei students into a labor corps, and they called themselves the Varsity Victory Volunteers (VVV), who under Army discipline and orders, worked at

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quarries, built roads, and fulfilled many other pick-and-shovel assignments.

Similarly, the Japanese American soldiers in the 298th and 299th Infantry Regiments of the Hawaii National Guard had their weapons taken away, separated from their units, and were transferred to the Hawaiian Provisional Battalion. One June 5, 1942, its 1,277 enlisted men and 21 officers, under secret evacuation orders, sailed for the mainland U.S.A. Seven days later, upon docking at Oakland, California, they learned that the name of their unit was changed to the 100th Infantry Battalion (Separate). Its motto: "Remember Pearl Harbor." The newly designated all-Nisei combat unit was sent to Camp McCoy, Wisconsin, for training.

Back in the Islands another military group composed of soldiers of Japanese ancestry was "Hawaii's Forgotten Battalion." It was the 1399th Engineer Construction Battalion of nearly 1,000 men, who called themselves "the pineapple soldiers" because they served at home. One of them was the late Harold Sakata, who later gained fame as "Odd Job" in the James Bond movie "Goldfinger". The 1399th did all kinds of work -- stringing barbed wire, digging trenches, building a million-gallon water tank, developing an airstrip for Flying Fortresses, constructing roads and jungle training villages, and whatever the Army Corps of Engineers wanted done. These unheralded Nisei soldiers contributed greatly to the defense of Hawaii.

Returning to the 100th Infantry Battalion, the Army's distrust and suspicion followed the Japanese Americans to Camp McCoy. All during their training a constant flow of secret reports by observers -- probably intelligence officers, wended its way to the War Department in Washington, D.C. The men of the 100th knew they were "guinea pigs." They knew they would be watched and tested. The Army even kept individual dossiers on each and every one of them. They felt that the Army really didn't want them -- didn't really trust them. For instance: the War Department

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directed that no Japanese American be allowed to command a rifle company.

The men of the 100th had to prove themselves in training. They had to earn the right to fight. They had to demonstrate their loyalty. This they did with a vengeance. The Nisei received superior ratings for their performance on the field and on the drill grounds. They also scored the highest marks for behavior while off the post. In February 1943, the battalion was ordered to Camp Shelby, Mississippi, for advanced training.

A month earlier, because of the excellent training record of the 100th, the War Department announced plans to form another segregated Nisei combat unit. On February 1 the 442nd Regimental Combat Team was activated. From April to May approximately 1,500 volunteers from the ten concentration camps on the U.S. mainland, and about 3,000 from Hawaii assembled for training at Camp Shelby.

On August 11 the 100th embarked for overseas duty. On September 26 it secured a beachhead landing at Salerno, Italy. For the next nine months the 100th faced bitter combat and suffered over 900 casualties, which earned them the title "The Purple Heart Battalion." During that period the 100th distinguished itself in the fighting at Cassino and the breakthrough at the Anzio Beachhead.

Meanwhile in the States the 442nd Regimental Combat Team, composed of three infantry battalions, an Anti-Tank Company, Cannon Company, and Medical Detachment; the 522nd Field Artillery Battalion; and the 232nd Combat Engineer Company, underwent combat training at Camp Shelby. On March 6, 1944, the 442nd received orders to "prepare for overseas movement." On May 2 the Combat Team sailed from Newport News, Virginia, for Italy -- landing in Naples 28 days later. On June 15, forty miles northwest of Rome, the 442nd caught up with the 100th, which became the Combat Team's 1st Battalion. The 100th was allowed to retain its separate designation because of its outstanding battle record. Thus -- the 100/442 was born. Its motto: "Go for Broke."

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Although the fighting record of the 100/442 is well-known and documented, it bears repeating. This unique outfit, composed of men almost equally from Hawaii and the mainland, became and remains the most decorated unit in U.S. military history. In eight major campaigns in Italy and France, the Combat Team won over 18,000 individual decorations for valor, including the Congressional Medal of Honor; an unprecedented eight Presidential Distinguished Unit Citations, which is deemed the equivalent of the Distinguished Service Cross for the individual; and 9,500 Purple Hearts, which translates into a 308% casualty rate. The total American casualties per Americans in uniform in World War II was 5.8%. Casualties per number of Nisei in uniform was 28.5% -- almost five times greater than that of the overall American forces.


Two United States Senators from Hawaii served with the "Go for Broke" unit: Daniel K. Inouye, who lost his right arm in combat and who was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross for heroism under fire; and the late Spark M. Matsunaga, who won the Silver Star for bravery and who was wounded twice in action. Both rose to the rank of Captain.

The bloodiest battles of the war for the 100/442 took place in October 1944 in northeastern France. In this sector is the village of Bruyeres, an important road center; and the thickly forested Vosges Mountains, which no known army in history had been able to penetrate by force. The first objective of the Combat Team was the liberation of Bruyeres, which was accomplished with heavy casualties. And after only a single day's rest, the 100/442 was alerted for an emergency rescue operation.

Two hundred seventy-five members of the 1st Battalion, 141st Infantry Regiment of the 36th (Texas) Division were trapped and surrounded by Germans in the Vosges Mountains three miles from the nearest friendly unit. On October 30, after five days of fierce and

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savage fighting, the 100/442 made contact with the besieged Texans. From Bruyeres to the "Lost Battalion" the 100/442 lost about two-thirds of its men. Casualties were estimated at 2,200, including 161 dead and 1,800 in hospitals. For the "Lost Battalion" ordeal, the casualties suffered by the Japanese American soldiers were more than five times greater than the number of men they rescued. (My company suffered greatly. Out of 200 men, only 17 riflemen remained. I was one of them.)

It was only recently that we learned that the artillery arm of the 100/442 was among the first American troops to liberate a Nazi concentration camp in the Dachau area. In early March 1945 the 522nd Field Artillery was detached from the 100/442 and reassigned to the Western Front, where the unit participated in the Siegfried Line and Rhine River crossings in Germany. During that action the men of the 522nd stumbled upon a subsidiary concentration camp at Dachau. There was a standing high command order not to liberate any Nazi camp. The men of the 522nd disobeyed. They shot off the lock that held one of the prison gates, and shared their food, clothing and medical supplies with the inmates. INSERT 

This is only half the story of the Japanese American soldier in World War II. Classified by the War Department for almost three decades is the little known account of the exploits of the 6,000 Japanese Americans who served with the United States Military Intelligence Service in the Pacific Theater of Operations. These Nisei linguists were the "eyes" and "ears" of every American combat command in the Pacific and elsewhere. The "Commands" were: Alaskan Defense, South Pacific, Southwest Pacific, Central Pacific, Southeast Asia, European, Continental U.S., and Canadian. They also served in the Office of Strategic Services (OSS) to conduct psychological warfare against the Japanese.

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Next month -- beginning April 27 through May 8, the veterans of the 522nd and members of their families will participate in an Israel/Dachau Commemorative Tour. A highlight of their stay in Israel will be the Holocaust Memorial Day ceremonies in Jerusalem with Israeli Dachau survivors and their Nisei liberators. A similar observance will be held in Germany by members of the Jewish community in Munich to honor the visiting Japanese American veterans of the 522nd Field Artillery Battalion of the 100/442 Regimental Combat Team.

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They translated captured Japanese documents, interpreted enemy communications, interrogated prisoners-of-war, deciphered enemy codes, and secured intelligence behind enemy lines. They participated in every major invasion, including going in with the first wave of assault troops at such places as: Attu in Alaska, Guadalcanal, New Guinea, Leyte, Solomon Islands, Saipan, Iwo Jima, New Caledonia, Bougainville, the Philippines and Okinawa.

They served individually or in small groups and were attached to every branch of the U.S. armed forces -- the Army, Navy and Marines. In addition, they served on foreign assignment with Allied forces from Australia, Canada, China, Great Britain, India and New Zealand.

On the downside -- when U.S. military intelligence documents were declassified in 1972, the Nisei veterans were surprised to learn that the Navy, the Marines, and many Army units did not keep records of the Japanese Americans attached to their outfits. The Nisei linguists, it seemed, were mostly treated as non-functional and non-existent.

When recruited for Japanese language school, all enlistees were promised commission upon completion of the course. There were no commission, however, for the Nisei upon graduation. Caucasians who graduated were commissioned as 2nd Lieutenants. Most Nisei were promoted just one or two grade levels in enlisted ranks. The Nisei instructors themselves, who taught the caucasians, were never more than Sergeants. The Nisei linguists began receiving commissions only toward the very end of the war, and often because Japanese officers, who were prisoners-of-war, refused to deal with enlisted men. In belated recognition hundreds were commissioned, and the U.S. Army's dependence on the Nisei linguists continued throughout the Occupation of Japan.

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During the early days of the war the Nisei were at times distrusted by their enlisted counterparts, as well as by field commanders who were still suspicious of their loyalty to America and relegated some of them to menial non-intelligence assignments. Officers were instructed to keep a sharp eye on the Nisei.

Until the passage of the Freedom of Information Act, the wartime episodes of the Nisei soldiers in the Pacific Theatre was considered "secret" -- restricted information, then downgraded to "confidential," and ultimately cleared. Very little is known by the general public. For instance: would you believe that in early 1944 two top Nisei linguists were placed on temporary duty with the highly secret Manhattan Project, which was established to develop the atom bomb. Their very "hush hush" assignment was to translate special Japanese technical manuals and file papers regarding the progress of Japanese nuclear research. Other Nisei linguists were involved with intelligence work in Europe -- to intercept and decode messages from the Japanese Ambassador in Berlin to Tokyo. They were assigned to Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force (SHAEF) in Versailles, France.

The Nisei soldiers in the Pacific distinguished themselves on and off the battle fields. Many were killed and wounded while performing extraordinary acts of bravery (too numerous to describe here), and others outstanding intelligence work. The decorations they won were far out of proportion to their numbers. After V-J Day, from 1945 to 1952, more than 5,000 Nisei linguists played an important role in the Occupation of Japan, where they took part in all the major assignments covering military government, disarmament, civil affairs, counter intelligence, civil censorship, the War Crimes Trial, and repatriation program.

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Listen to what four top commanding officers have had to say about the Americans of Japanese ancestry in Military Intelligence Service.

Colonel Sidney Forrester Mashbir, Commandant, Allied Translator and Interpreter Section (ATIS): "The United States of America owes a debt to these men (Nisei linguists) and to their families which it can never fully repay."

Major General Frank D. Merrill, Commander of the Merrill's Marauders in Burma: "As for the value of the Nisei, I couldn't have gotten along without them."

Major General Charles Willoughby, G-2 Intelligence Chief of MacArthur's Command: "The Nisei saved countless Allied lives and shortened the war by two years."

And finally --

General Joseph (Vinegar Joe) Stillwell, Commander of U.S. Troops in China-Burma-India Theatre: "The Nisei bought an awful big hunk of America with their blood."

A concluding note: the Nisei soldiers paid their dues. Over 33,000 of them served in the United States military during World War II and its immediate aftermath, including some 300 in the Women's Army Corps (WAC's) and Army Nurse Corps. Their wartime record and sacrifices proved once and for all that they were loyal Americans. They earned the right to walk tall. This is the proud legacy they have bequeathed to their children and grandchildren, and community.

When President Harry S. Truman presented the 8th Presidential Unit Citation to the 100/442 on the White House lawn on July 15, 1946, he said: "You fought for the free nations of the world ... You fought against prejudice -- and you won. Keep up that fight ... continue to win -- make this great Republic stand for what the Constitution says it stands for ... the welfare for all the people, all the time."

Thank you for listening.

MARCH 28, 1992

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WILLIAM (BILL) KOCHIYAMA
CONFERENCE AT YALE UNIVERSITY
SPONSORED BY YALE COLLEGE NIKKEI

FIGHTERS AGAINST INJUSTICE

In America there were many unsung heroes who were severely tested during World War II. ^{Among} ^{American} /them were the Japanese resisters and protesters who took the words of the Constitution seriously and demanded that those precepts apply to all citizens alike. They paid a heavy price for their acts -- with long prison terms, solitary confinement, beatings in stockades, forced labor units, and less-than-honorable discharges.

On January 20, 1944, the War Department reinstated the draft of Nisei, including those in U.S. concentration camps. On June 26, 63 young men of the Fair Play Committee at the Heart Mountain, Wyoming, detention camp refused to report for induction until their constitutional rights were restored. Eventually 267 Japanese Americans from all ten concentration camps were convicted of draft resistance. On December 12, 1947, all were granted full pardon by President Harry Truman.

On March 21, 1944, over 100 Japanese Americans (all pre-war draftees) at Fort McClellan, Alabama, refused to undergo combat training, while their families were still incarcerated in U.S. concentration camps. Twenty one were court martialed and sentenced to prison. Others were assigned to the 1800th General Service Battalion, a labor unit without weapons. Thirty years later, in 1982, less-than-honorable discharges of the Fort McClellan protesters and members of the 1800th General Service Battalion were changed to Honorable Discharges, and their prison records erased -- thanks to the notable efforts of New York City attorney Hyman Bravin.

valiant
These fighters against injustice deserve our salute.

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