

## The Presidio Army Museum



## GO FOR BROKE

An exhibit honoring the Japanese American 100th Infantry Battalion and the 442nd Regimental Combat Team—the 'most decorated unit of World War II...'

**1.** This is the story of Americans of Japanese ancestry who fought in World War II against the armies of the Third Reich. It is the story of the 100th Infantry Battalion and the 442nd Regimental Combat Team and their phoenix-like emergence from the ashes of suspicion and fear to an almost unparalleled position of honor and regard.

The opening chapter of this began with the formation of the 100th Infantry Battalion. Early in 1942, there were many Japanese Americans already in the army in Hawaii. A number of them were serving with the 298th and 299th Regiments of the Hawaiian National Guard stationed at Schofield Barracks, Honolulu. Soon after the attack on Pearl Harbor, their loyalty was in question. They were disarmed and assigned to menial labor. The Hawaiian community requested that a Japanese American unit be formed from these trained men. The Army responded by creating a battalion of Americans of Japanese ancestry—this was the beginning of the 100th Infantry Battalion.

In June 1942, this group of 1300 men arrived at Camp McCoy, Wisconsin, and was officially christened the 100th Infantry Battalion and attached to the Second Army. Shortly after their arrival, approximately 100 men were detached and assigned to the Military Intelligence School (MIS) at Camp Savage, Minnesota. In February 1943, the 100th Infantry Battalion was transferred to Camp Shelby, Mississippi, to participate in maneuvers in Mississippi and Louisiana and to undergo large-unit training before deployment for combat. Their training record was so superb that the 442nd Regimental Combat Team was activated on February 1, 1943. A call then went out for Americans of Japanese ancestry to volunteer for service as a demonstration of their loyalty. More than 3000 men from Hawaii and 1500 men from the mainland responded to this call. Many of the mainland volunteers who came forth to serve had families that were being unjustly held in internment centers, behind barbed wire fences.

During the summer of 1943, the 100th and their new "baby brother," the 442nd, met briefly at Camp Shelby. The Army was still seeking answers to the question: how would American soldiers of Japanese ancestry acquit themselves in combat?



*"They were superb! The men of the 442nd took terrific casualties. They showed rare courage and tremendous fighting spirit... everybody wanted them."*

—Gen. George C. Marshall

**2.** In an attempt to find some answers, the 100th Infantry Battalion was sent overseas on August 11, 1943. They arrived in Oran, North Africa, and were attached to the renowned "Red Bull" 34th Division. On September 19, 1943, the 100th landed on the beaches of Salerno, Italy. They engaged in their first firefight at Montemarano on the 28th. This was followed by fierce fighting at three separate crossings of the Rapido River. There was further action at Volturno and Cassino and at the final breakout from the Anzio beachhead. During these battles, the 100th met every military objective. They overcame enemy minefields, tanks, and railway artillery. They made bayonet charges, fought off countless counterattacks, and held the high ground. Their ferocity in action and their determination to win against all odds led to their having such high casualties that they earned the name of the "Purple Heart Battalion."

This fame was dearly won, and over 1000 Purple Hearts were awarded during this period. Major James Gillespie, the commander of the 100th stated: "They call themselves just plain Americans... they have earned the right... Anybody who calls these doughboys 'Jap' is the most narrow minded person I know of. They are just as American as I am." The men of the 100th had proved that the loyalty of the U.S. soldiers of Japanese American ancestry was beyond question.

The superb combat record of the 100th plus an excellent training record led to the decision to send the 442nd into action overseas. The first battalion was left in Camp Shelby to serve as a replacement unit. On June 10, north of Rome, the 100th

was attached to the 442nd. Thus the final 442nd Regimental Combat Team consisted of the 100th Infantry Battalion, the Second and Third Battalions, the 522nd Field Artillery Battalion, the 232nd Engineering Company, the 206th Army Band, an Anti-Tank Company, a Cannon Company, and a Service Company.

The 442nd first engaged the enemy on June 26, 1944. This was followed by one battle after another until the end of the war, leading to a total of five major campaigns. The 442nd's efficiency and fighting ability quickly approached that of its precursor, the famed 100th Infantry "Purple Heart" Battalion. In the early phases of fighting, the 442nd was instrumental in the capture of Livorno, Italy, and in pushing the German Army north of the Arno River. In August, 1944, the 442nd's Anti-Tank Company took part in Operation Anvil (campaign of Southern France). Meanwhile, back in Italy, the 442nd established positions just beyond the Arno River. They left these positions to rejoin their Anti-Tank Company in France.

**3.** Reconstituted, the 442nd Regimental Combat Team moved up the Rhone valley in "40 and 8's" to Epinal where they were attached to the 36th Division. Almost immediately thereafter they were pressed into action. After three days of bitter fighting, the 442nd liberated the French town of Bruyeres on October 18, 1944. After the fall of Bruyeres, the 442nd fought on to secure the high ground beyond the town. They were relieved on October 23 for a rest—but not for long. On October 27, 1944, they received orders to break the German ring that surrounded the "Lost Battalion" of the 141st Regiment, 36th Division. The "Lost Battalion" had been isolated for almost a week and was low on food and ammunition—the 442nd was ordered to reach them at any cost. They moved into action, and during the next four days, they engaged in the bloodiest and fiercest fighting ever undertaken by the 442nd. The men fought from tree-to-tree, against hidden machine-gun nests and tank-supported infantry. They drove through schrapnel-filled barrages of mortar and artillery fire and



crossed minefields and booby traps. They never stopped in their determined drive to reach the entrapped battalion. At the end of this action, more than 200 men of the 442nd were dead. In addition, 600 men were wounded, the total number of casualties exceeded the number of men saved, but the 442nd had fought through and rescued the "Lost Battalion."

After this battle, General Dahlquist of the 36th asked the men of the 442nd Regiment to be assembled so that he could thank them personally. When he saw only several hundred men (out of the usual regimental complement of 4500), he asked the 442nd Commander, Colonel Charles W. Pence, "Where are the rest of the men?" Pence tearfully replied, "You're looking at the entire regiment... that's all that's left."

At the beginning of this action, Company K had started with some 200 riflemen, but had 17 men left when the "Lost Battalion" was reached. I Company had only 8 men left. Both companies lost all their officers and noncoms ran the companies for the last few days of action. All the other companies had suffered similar losses.



"These are some of the best goddamn fighters in the U.S. Army. If you have more, send them over!"

—Gen. Mark W. Clark

4. This mission was successful but personnel and materiel had been severely depleted. The 442nd was relieved on November 8th and sent to southern France to guard the French-Italian border. This was officially labelled the North Apennines Campaign, the men of the 442nd called it the "Champagne Campaign." During this assignment, the 442nd was brought back to life with replacements of men and a fresh supply of materiel.

5. At General Mark Clark's personal request to General Dwight Eisenhower, the 442nd was returned to Italy in March, 1945. Their new assignment was to create a diversionary action on the western anchor of the Gothic Line. This sector had defied Allied assault for over five months. The enemy had had ample time to fortify their position, and the line appeared to be impregnable. Frontal assault was impossible—the enemy's guns were in complete control. The only solution was to conduct a surprise attack by going up over a nearly vertical mountainside. On April 5, the 442nd started their approach. During the dark hours before dawn, the men of the 442nd and the 100th climbed for hours in tense silence. They finally reached the top of the ridge and moved into position for the attack. In the next 32 fantastic minutes, the men took two key mountain-top enemy outposts. With this break in their line, the other enemy positions fell one by one. What started out as a diversionary attack by the 442nd and the 100th soon developed into a major rout that destroyed the enemy's western section. The Gothic Line that had withstood assault for six months was finally broken!

By April 30, 1945, the men of the 442nd had breached practically every position held by the enemy and they were the first Allied troops to reach Turin. They were in complete control of the western sector and the enemy was surrendering in greater and greater numbers. Finally on May 2 the Third Reich surrendered and the war was over.

As reported in the Congressional Record by General Jacob L. Devers, Chief of the Army Ground Forces "... the 100th and the 442nd suffered 9,486 casualties, including 650 soldiers who were killed in action. The total number of casualties was more than twice the assigned complement of men in the unit." In spite of this, during its intense military missions, the Beachhead News reported, "The 442nd... never gave ground, never took a backward step."

6. In less than two years, the 100th Infantry Battalion and the 442nd Combat Team had successfully fought in seven major military campaigns: Naples-Foggia Campaign; the Rome-Arno; Southern France (Operation Anvil); the Rhineland; the North Apennines; Central Europe Campaign; and the Po Valley. The Congressional Record reported that they had received, among other awards and citations, "... a Congressional Medal of Honor; 52 Distinguished Service Crosses; 1 Distinguished Service Medal; 560 Silver Stars plus 28 Oak Leaf Clusters; 22 Legions of Merit; 15 Soldiers Medals; 4000 Bronze Stars with

1200 Oak Leaf Clusters; 9486 Purple Hearts; 7 Presidential Distinguished Unit Citations; 2 Meritorious Unit Service Plaques; 36 Army Commendations; 87 Division Commendations; 18 decorations from allied nations; and a special plaque of appreciation from the men of the "Lost Battalion." Several years after the war, Governor John Connolly of Texas issued a proclamation officially making all former members of the 442nd, "honorary Texans." Altogether there were 18,143 individual decorations for valor, thus making the 100th and the 442nd Regimental Combat Team "the most decorated unit for its size and length of service in the history of the United States."



6 "Thank you for telling and showing the real story of the accomplishments and sacrifices of the 100/442 Regimental Combat Team. I am proud of what these Americans have done in spite of the prejudices and obstacles confronting them. They were truly the noblest of us all"

Mike Mansfield  
U.S. Ambassador to Japan

As President Harry S. Truman pinned the final Presidential Unit Citation to the 442nd colors, he said "... I can't tell you how much I appreciate the privilege of being able to show you just how much the United States thinks of what you have done... You fought not only the enemy but you fought prejudice—and you won."

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