

100 Percent Americans:

A Hard Proven Fact

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In April 1945, on a ridge overlooking the Italian town of San Terenzo, Army Lieutenant Daniel K. Inouye crawled up a hill alone. The platoon that he was leading was pinned down by enemy fire coming from three machine guns located directly above their position. As he pulled out a hand grenade near one of the machine guns he was hit in the stomach. He managed to get up and throw the grenade. As the enemy moved from their machine gun hole, he shot them down with his tommy gun. Then he continued, while bleeding from the stomach, to take out the second machine gun with two more grenades. As he neared the third enemy gun he pulled out another grenade, but before he could throw it his right elbow was smashed by enemy fire. Without hesitation Inouye bent down and picked the grenade back up with his good hand and threw it, dismantling the third machine gun. He would not let medics take him away until he was sure that his men had secured a defensive position on the hill.¹

This is one of the many great acts of courage and valor shown by Japanese-American soldiers who fought in Europe during World War II. Their unit, the 100th Infantry Battalion (100th) and later the 442nd Regimental Combat Team (442nd), came out of the war as the most highly decorated unit in the Army, with respect to the time that they spent in combat and the size of their team. Their service was all the more heroic due to the fact that while they fought in Europe for their country and freedom, their own liberties were being questioned and taken away at home. The Americans of this unit came mainly from two different backgrounds. Over half came from the freedom of Hawaii and the others from the West Coast where they and their families faced

¹ Hiroaki Morita, The Nation's Most Decorated Military Unit: 100th/442nd Regimental Combat Team, (Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania: US Army War College, 1992), 9.

internment under Executive Order 9066. They had disputes and different feelings about many things, but they also shared a common ancestry and desire to prove their loyalty.

The story of the 100th/442nd Regimental Combat Team is a story that was not told in full detail for many years. The first books that focused on the Japanese American war experience came out in the mid 1950's. This may have been due to the renewed interest surrounding Japanese American citizenship. In 1952, the McCarran-Walter Act passed nullifying the 1790 naturalization law and finally making it possible for Asian immigrants to become citizens of the United States.² However, the early stories that did come out were tainted by the still very present racism, even in their tribute to the great deeds of these Americans.

In his book, Ambassadors in Arms³, Thomas D. Murphy expresses his belief that the Japanese Americans who served in the 100th/442nd Regimental Combat Team accomplished the mission that they set out to accomplish. They proved their “own devotion to the nation and its ideals, and that of their folk.”⁴ Their battle however did not end with the fall of the Axis powers. After the war ended these fearless warriors continued their struggle against the prejudice and discrimination that they faced at home. Their record in battle was a powerful weapon in their home front fight for recognition and justice. Many of the troops who fought beside the Nisei⁵ soldiers “grew to resent the treatment accorded to the parents and relatives of these little, brown fighters. They

² Ronald Takaki, Strangers from a Different Shore: A History of Asian Americans, (New York: Penguin Books, 1989), 413.

³ Thomas D Murphy, Ambassadors in Arms, (University of Hawaii Press, 1954).

⁴ Murphy, 273.

⁵ Second generation Japanese Americans.

resented the confiscation of their property and the herding of their families into concentration camps at home... They determined then to raise their voices in protest and demand justice and recompense for the wrongs inflicted upon these people.”⁶ Murphy explains how the record of the 100th/442nd Regimental Combat Team did much to help Hawaii become a state. Before the war, the question of loyalty was the main obstacle in affording Hawaii statehood. “At the congressional hearings on statehood held in Hawaii in 1946 and 1948” few people “publicly expressed their doubts as to the matter of loyalty.”⁷ Murphy’s book, written in 1954, deals mostly with the Japanese Americans from Hawaii and only briefly details the experiences of mainland Japanese Americans after the war. Although Ambassadors in Arms is one of the first books to follow the Nisei’s story from the beginning, it is obvious that Murphy is still writing in a time of prejudice: A time when people of Japanese ancestry were referred to using racial descriptors such as “little” and “brown.” Even in his praise, Murphy is unable to fully abandon the discriminatory practices held within society.

The second wave of books concerning Japanese Americans wartime experience came after the declassification of military information. There was a silence surrounding the Nisei story that “they were forbidden by law to break until nearly three decades later.”⁸ This second wave was led by a book called Buriera no kaihosatachi. This book was written by Masayo Duus in 1983 and translated into an English version in 1987 by

⁶ Murphy, 278.

⁷ Murphy, 283.

⁸ Lyn Crost, Honor by Fire: Japanese Americans at War in Europe and the Pacific, (Novato, California: Presidio Press, 1994), 295.

her husband Peter Duus. The English version is titled Unlikely Liberators.⁹ Like Murphy, Duus focuses primarily on the accomplishments of the soldiers from Hawaii. However, Duus is able to give a much more in-depth look at the events that had transpired due to the fact that two months prior to the beginning of her research many of the wartime documents of the military had been declassified. Also in the thirty-year interval between this book and most of its predecessors, the intense level of anti-Japanese sentiment and racism had to a certain extent subsided, thus allowing Duus more leniency in describing the wartime racism and prejudices that had been present. Unlikely Liberators offers a much more balanced picture of the events surrounding Japanese Americans during World War II.

The third wave of books in this area of study began after 1988. In that year interest in Japanese Americans, was once again sparked. This time, by the long overdue repeal of Executive Order 9066 by President Ronald Reagan. Lyn Crost's book, Honor by Fire, is an example of this third wave. It was written in 1994 after both the declassification and the end of Executive Order 9066. Like Duus, Crost is able to tell the story of the Nisei soldiers in much greater detail than Murphy. With the repeal of Executive Order 9066, President Reagan also "signed into law a congressional act acknowledging 'the fundamental injustice of the evacuation, relocation and internment'"¹⁰ of Japanese Americans during the war. This gave Crost something neither Murphy nor Duus had had to work with: An official acknowledgement of the nation's mistake concerning internment. With this acknowledgement Crost is able to add a

⁹ Masayo Umezawa Duus, Unlikely Liberators: The Men of the 100th and 442nd, (University of Hawaii Press, 1987).

¹⁰ Crost, 300.

dimension of official governmental criticism that was lacking in earlier works. On top of that, Honor by Fire gives a well-rounded account of both Hawaiian and mainland Japanese American participation in the war. It also focuses in much more detail on the injustices occurred both during the war and to the present. No matter when the book was written, however, they all begin at the same point: Pearl Harbor and the important years leading up to that event.

The selective service draft system began in October, 1940. In November of the same year, the first number to be chosen in Hawaii “belonged to a Japanese American.”¹¹ By the time the attack on Pearl Harbor had occurred one year later, around half of the three thousand Hawaiians drafted were of Japanese ancestry. “Seeing one’s son drafted is usually no cause for celebration,” but Issei¹² parents “accepted the fact that their sons had a duty to serve the country.”¹³ It was a contract of citizenship. At the time, they believed that it was “certain proof that they were American citizens.”¹⁴ Large celebrations and farewell gatherings were held to honor these draftees. Even other Americans applauded this loyalty. The *Honolulu Advertiser* commented: “We rejoice with you in the honor upon your home. Your son, no matter the eventuality of this world, will always honor your family name.”¹⁵ Soon this rejoicing and praising of loyalty stopped.

¹¹ Duus, 18.

¹² First generation Japanese immigrants.

¹³ Ibid., 12.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

Even before the bombing of Pearl Harbor, the Government of the United States “believed that Hawaii’s security might be endangered from within.”¹⁶ In fact, as early as 1936 President Roosevelt gave serious thought to this concern. On August 10th of that year, he wrote a memorandum to the chief of naval operations stating “that every Japanese citizen or non-citizen on the island of Oahu who meets these Japanese ships or has any connection with their officers or men should be the first to be placed in a concentration camp in the event of trouble.”¹⁷ Conrad Tsukayama reflects on his experience as a youth meeting Japanese naval ships. He explains that “when the Japanese naval training ships docked at our ports, it was a big treat to visit the ships. It was always exciting to watch the wrestling and kendo competitions between the Japanese cadets and the locals.”¹⁸ He remembers how people would ask him if he truly believed himself to be American why not visit his own battleships? The answer to this question, however, was easy. “Pearl Harbor was off-limits to anyone of Japanese ancestry. Thus visiting American warships was out of the question.”¹⁹ Tsukayama’s reflections of his childhood shed a different light on the subject of visiting Japanese naval ships than the one shed by the President of the United States. Furthermore, at the time, Japan and the United States were at peace. Therefore the only conclusion that seems to hold water is that the comments made by President Roosevelt were no more than racial prejudice

¹⁶ Murphy, 4.

¹⁷ Ronald Takaki, Double Victory: A Multicultural History of America in World War II, (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 2000), 148.

¹⁸ Conrad Tsukayama, “I Saw His Face!” in Japanese Eyes American Hearts: Personal Reflections of Hawaii’s World War II Nisei Soldiers, (Hawaii Nikkei History Editorial Board: University of Hawaii Press, 1998), 14.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 15.

showing its face within the highest levels of our government. They also make it clear that the President of the United States had few qualms about interning Japanese Americans even before the bombing of Pearl Harbor.

Looking at the congressional report on the statehood hearings of 1937 gives us a look into other facets of the government's stance on Japanese Americans in Hawaii prior to the bombing of Pearl Harbor. During these hearings a legislator observed that Hawaii's Japanese-Americans showed the same attitude toward America as had the first generation Americans of European ancestry: "an appreciation of the material benefits received; a high conception of the freedom enjoyed; and an earnest endeavor to comply with the standards of the new culture. The Americanization of the Japanese of Hawaii has perhaps made greater progress than it has with many immigrant groups of longer residence in America living in mainland communities."²⁰ This particular congressman also spoke of the Nisei as an orderly, law-abiding group that was more than willing to cooperate with other groups. He commented on the great number of community activities that the Nisei participated in. Still much was made about the dual citizenship of many of the Nisei of Hawaii.

Until 1924 the government of Japan followed a practice that at the time was almost universal among the industrialized nations of the world: that of recognizing the children of its nationals as citizens of Japan. The United States followed the same principle by conferring its citizenship upon children of Americans living abroad. Due to the ratification of the Fourteenth Amendment in 1868, it was established that "all persons born or naturalized in the United States... are citizens of the United States and of the

²⁰ Murphy, 16.

State wherein they reside.”²¹ This meant that from 1868 forward the Nisei born in the United States were granted American citizenship. The problem was that unlike their European counterparts, the first generation Japanese immigrants were not allowed to become citizens. Prior to the Civil War naturalization was only granted to “free white persons.” After the abolition of slavery it was decided that the wording of the naturalization statute would need to be revised. This revision occurred in 1870. However, although it enabled African Americans to become naturalized it still excluded immigrants from Asia. The new wording was, “white persons and persons of African descent.”²² At this time, however, Asians were considered “yellow persons” and therefore still excluded. This meant that although second generation Japanese Americans were granted United States citizenship, because their parents were not citizens of the United States, Japan still recognized them as citizens of Japan. Furthermore, the majority of Japanese Americans “born before 1924 did not know they were dual citizens.”²³ As far as they were concerned, “they were Americans, living in America, and Japan had no control over them.”²⁴ Their beliefs, unfortunately, meant little in the eyes of the popular opinion massed against them. Their loyalty and patriotism was questioned by many people, including the President of the United States.

The events of December 7, 1941, only helped to emphasize these fears. On that day Pearl Harbor was bombed. After inspecting the ruins of the destroyed fleet,

²¹ Roger Daniels, Coming to America: A History of Immigration and Ethnicity in American Life, (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1990), 270.

²² Ibid., 271.

²³ Murphy, 19.

²⁴ Ibid.

Secretary of the Navy Frank Knox issued a statement to the press. In it he stated: “I think the most effective fifth column work of the entire war was done in Hawaii, with the possible exception of Norway.”²⁵ It is interesting to note in hindsight that no Japanese American was ever convicted of espionage. Ironically the only people to have been convicted of spying for the Japanese were Caucasian, of which at least 10 were convicted.²⁶ Twelve days after the attack Secretary of the Navy Knox recommended the internment on an outer island of all Japanese aliens living on Oahu. General Delos Emmons, the military governor of Hawaii, was not of the same opinion and saw the shortcomings of interning a large percentage of the population of Hawaii. Emmons was aware of the fact that Japanese Americans represented over 90 percent of the carpenters, nearly all of the transportation workers, and a large percentage of the agricultural laborers. He therefore concluded that “Japanese labor was absolutely essential for the rebuilding of Pearl Harbor.”²⁷ The 1940 census showed that 37 per cent of the population of Hawaii was of Japanese ancestry.²⁸ This was a higher percentage than that of Caucasians, who comprised a little under a fourth of the population. On December 21, Emmons issued his own statement assuring the Japanese Americans that “there is no intention or desire on the part of the federal authorities to operate mass concentration

²⁵ Takaki, *Double Victory*, 138.

²⁶ Thelma Chang, *I Can Never Forget: Men of the 100th/442nd*, (Honolulu, Hawaii: SIGI Productions, Inc., 1991), 85.

²⁷ Takaki, *Double Victory*, 138.

²⁸ Murphy, 1.

camps.”²⁹ This was the beginning of a schism in policy between Washington and Honolulu.

On February 9, the War Department ordered Emmons to suspend all Japanese workers employed by the army. Emmons resisted the order and it was eventually rescinded. He did, however, discharge all Japanese-Americans from the 298th and 299th regiments of the National Guard of Hawaii.³⁰ Emmons may have been able to see the negative affect that interning Japanese Americans would have economically but his decisions and actions to disband American soldiers of Japanese ancestry does betray a certain lack of trust even on his part. President Roosevelt, on the other hand, was irritated with Emmons. He did not believe the economic interests of the islands to be as important as its safety, and he believed its safety was threatened by Japanese Americans. On March 13, Roosevelt approved a recommendation for the evacuation of 20,000 Japanese Americans from Hawaii to the mainland. Again Emmons resisted, drastically reducing the number to 1,550. In a letter to the Secretary of War, President Roosevelt wrote “I think that General Emmons should be told that the only consideration is that of the safety of the islands and that the labor situation is not only a secondary matter but should not be given any consideration whatsoever.”³¹ This was in October, showing just how deep the schism had become. In the end General Emmons ordered only 1,444 Japanese Americans to be interned. Most of the business leaders in Hawaii backed

²⁹ Takaki, *Double Victory*, 138.

³⁰ Edwin M Nakasone, *The Nisei Soldier: Historical Essays on World War II and the Korean War*, (White Bear Lake, Minnesota: J-Press, 1999), 35.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 139.

Emmons' position: They knew that the economy and their businesses could not handle the decimation of their labor force that mass internment would create.³²

Unfortunately the Japanese Americans who lived on the mainland did not have the support of a high-ranking General or the majority of the business leaders pulling for them. The man in charge of the Western Defense Command was Lieutenant General John L. DeWitt. In direct contrast to General Emmons' views on Japanese Americans, General DeWitt was one of the most influential advocates for internment. Therefore, on the mainland there was nothing between the Japanese Americans and President Roosevelt's authority. President Roosevelt had for years seen the internment of Japanese Americans as a possibility. Even before the bombing of Pearl Harbor the President had secretly arranged to have Curtis Munson gather intelligence on the Japanese in the United States in order to assess whether they constituted a threat. That report was delivered on November 7, exactly one month before Pearl Harbor was bombed. In it Munson "informed the President that there was no need to worry about the Japanese population."³³ At this same time the FBI was conducting its own study of the situation. In early February, Director J. Edgar Hoover "concluded that the proposed mass evacuation of the Japanese could not be justified for security reasons."³⁴ Still on February 19, 1942, Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066, which made it possible for the creation of internment camps. It also reclassified Japanese Americans as 4C (enemy

³² Ibid., 137-140.

³³ Ibid., 144.

³⁴ Takaki, *Strangers*, 386.

aliens) and therefore made them ineligible for the draft. The camps were used for the purpose of the forceful relocation of Japanese-Americans on the West Coast.

With the majority of the evidence supporting the claim that Japanese Americans were not a threat, the question arises: why did Roosevelt continue with his plan of internment? J. Edgar Hoover believed that the claim for military necessity for mass evacuation was based “primarily upon public and political pressure rather than on factual data.”³⁵ Unlike what happened in the islands, the mainland press immediately embraced the story of “Fifth Column Treachery” and quickly expanded on its principle theme: that Japanese Americans were a threat to the security of the United States. Ronald Takaki explains in his book, Strangers from a Different Shore, how the press coverage quickly escalated and how patriotic organizations such as the American Legion and the Native Sons and Daughters of the Golden West began intense lobbying for the removal of the Japanese Americans on the West Coast. Local and state politicians quickly fell in line, and pressure on the government to order removal expanded rapidly. Unlike the situation in Hawaii, “economic interests in California did not need Japanese labor, and many white farmers viewed Japanese farmers as competitors.”³⁶ Therefore, there was little resistance and much support for such a law, and on February 19, it was finally issued. It is interesting to note that the order did not specify Japanese Americans as a group. It is, however, obvious that they were the intended target. A few months after the order was issued President Roosevelt learned about discussions in the War department to apply the order to Germans and Italians on the East Coast. He immediately wrote a letter to inform

³⁵ Ibid., 387.

³⁶ Ibid., 389.

those in charge that he considered enemy alien control to be “primarily a civilian matter except in the case of the Japanese mass evacuation on the Pacific Coast.”³⁷ General DeWitt agreed completely with the President on this issue. In 1943, DeWitt told a congressional committee “you needn’t worry about the Italians at all except in certain cases. Also, the same for the Germans... But we must worry about the Japanese all the time until he is wiped off the map.”³⁸ The racially discriminatory way in which this order was carried out says much about the attitude toward Japanese Americans at the time. Japanese American evacuees were quickly rounded up in assembly centers and after a couple of months were transported by train to ten internment camps, located mostly in remote desert areas of the West and Midwest. These barb-wired camps became the home of 120,000 West Coast residents of Japanese descent “for the duration.”³⁹

In Hawaii, the Nisei men who served in the National Guard were dismayed by the lack of confidence in them and offered their services in whatever capacity the Army would like to use them. They were put to work, doing menial and sometimes unpleasant jobs, but they did each task without complaint and with a high degree of dedication. On top of this, the Japanese-American community did much to show their loyalty as a whole. Groups such as the Oahu Citizens Committee for Home Defense organized patriotic rallies and worked with the FBI and Army in determining any possible threats.⁴⁰ This devotion and dedication, along with pressures from the Japanese-American community, made the government rethink its decision to ban Japanese-Americans from service. On

³⁷ Ibid., 392.

³⁸ Takaki, *Strangers*, 148.

³⁹ Crost, 13.

⁴⁰ Murphy, 29.

May 26, 1942, orders were issued to establish the Hawaiian Provisional Infantry Battalion. This was the first real victory for Americans of Japanese ancestry in their battle against discrimination and unjust practices. Ten days later, 1,432 soldiers boarded the troopship S.S. *Maui* and headed for the mainland.

Discrimination continued even during their transport. It was widely believed that if the Japanese forces defeated the Americans at Midway they would immediately attack Hawaii once again.⁴¹ For this reason, many wives and children were being evacuated to the mainland. It was also the reason for the transport of the soldiers. In the case of a second attack on Pearl Harbor, Lieutenant General Emmons “was extremely worried that the Japanese might send ashore troops dressed in American military uniforms”⁴² and that American troops would not be able to tell the enemy from fellow soldiers. Subsequently, the Nisei soldiers of Hawaii were sent to the mainland for training. Aboard the ship the soldiers were not allowed to carry guns and were roped off from the other passengers and commanded to not associate with them. On June 12, a week after their departure, the S.S. *Maui* landed in San Francisco.

Once the soldiers landed, they were immediately sent by train to Camp McCoy, in Wisconsin, for basic training. It was at this time that the Battalion was given the designation of the 100th Infantry Battalion (separate). The “separate” meant that the 100th was not attached to any other military organization.⁴³ Usually a battalion is part of a regiment but the 100th had no such assignment or division. “The unit’s designation as the

⁴¹ Duus, 20.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Crost, 15.

100th showed that the army did not know quite what to do with it.”⁴⁴ The Hawaiians knew that there was something awkward about their designation and felt that they were being discriminated against. To show their dissatisfaction they began calling themselves the “One-Puka-Puka” (Puka meaning hole in Hawaii). In this way they poked fun at the army’s inability to fully understand them.⁴⁵

While on the train the soldiers were ordered to keep the shades down on the windows. This was “for their own safety.” The government was not sure how the people of the United States would act. Since the bombing of Pearl Harbor emotions had been extremely high on the West Coast concerning Japanese Americans. These emotions were helped along by the press and represented a tremendous force to deal with. Unlike the newspapers in Hawaii, which quickly dropped the story of Japanese American sabotage at Pearl Harbor, their mainland counterparts instead embellished the story, disregarding the factual data that was increasingly present. Far-fetched stories of “fifth-column” activity were popping up almost daily. On January 5, John B. Hughes of the Mutual Broadcasting Company reported that Japanese American’s “dominance in produce production and control of the food supply were part of a master war plan.”⁴⁶ Increasingly, these news reports called for internment of West coast Japanese Americans. The military was well aware of the strong prejudices and discriminatory practices that were present and wanted to avoid any confrontation.

⁴⁴ Duus, 25.

⁴⁵ Crost, 16.

⁴⁶ Takaki, Strangers, 388.

After a long ride, the train finally arrived at the camp. As it rolled up the soldiers saw barbed-wire fences and believed that they were, for some reason, being interned along with the Mainlanders. One soldier recalls someone yelling, “They’ve done it! They’ve tricked us!”⁴⁷ The truth was that Camp McCoy was located near an internment camp and that the barbed-wire was for that camp. The train rolled right on by and on to Camp McCoy without incident, but this story shows the lack of trust that was present even from the Japanese American side of the issue.

Most of the soldiers in the 100th Battalion had already gone through basic training and believed that doing so again was a waste of time. This did not stop them from doing their best, however. They did not want to give the Army any reason to send them back to Hawaii. They finished their basic training with very high marks in every category. Five of them even earned Soldier’s Medals for Heroism while not in combat by saving the lives of several residents of the area who had fallen through a frozen lake.⁴⁸

The high marks and great dedication of the 100th at camp did not relieve the doubts that the government had about Japanese-American soldiers. They called them the “guinea pigs from Pearl Harbor” and were watching them closely. “All of the officers of the 100th Battalion, and later the 442nd RTC, were haole (Hawaiian for white people) and most had some background in psychology or were picked to keep tabs on the army’s new recruits.”⁴⁹ The prejudices of the time, especially within the government, can be epitomized with one example: In the fall of 1942 the war department sent orders to

⁴⁷ Duus, 22.

⁴⁸ Chester Tanaka, Go For Broke: A Pictorial History of the Japanese American 100th Infantry Battalion and the 442nd Regimental Combat Team, (Richmond, California: Go For Broke, Inc., 1982), 13.

⁴⁹ “442nd History: The 100th Battalion...” Online data-base, available at: <http://www.katonk.com/442nd/442/page2.html> , 1.

Camp McCoy that Japanese-American soldiers be detached for “special training.” On November 1, twenty-five men of the 100th were selected to leave Camp McCoy. Their destination was Ship Island in the Gulf of Mexico. Soon after arrival they were told that their mission was “dog-bait training.” Raymond R. Nosaka was surprised when he “learned that we would not be training the dogs, as we had assumed. Rather, we would be used as the bait—Japanese bait—so that the dogs could be trained to sniff out and kill Japanese soldiers.”⁵⁰ It was believed by some in Washington, D.C. that the body scent of Japanese could be recognized by dogs and that dogs could therefore be trained to hunt and attack based on these scents. A lot can be reasonably ascertained from this example about the discrimination and backward thinking that the Nisei soldiers had to put up with.

Life during basic training was difficult. It was much different than life in Hawaii. The Nisei at Camp McCoy were not “interested in Hollywood movie stars like Betty Grable or Jane Russell,”⁵¹ as were the rest of the soldiers at Camp. In Hawaii they watched Japanese movies and had actresses like Hara Setsuko and Ri Koran for pin-ups. They could not show this or many of their other cultural differences from back home without being associated with the enemy. They averaged a height of about 5’4” and a weight of around 125 pounds.⁵² This however did not stop them from standing up for themselves whenever the occasion called for it. They were often called names like “Japs” or “Oriental Creeps” and this inevitably led to fighting. Jesse M. Hirata recalls several fights with a Texan Unit in his essay, “The Life and Times of a Kolohe GI.” One

⁵⁰ Raymond R. Nosaka, “Japanese Dog Bait,” in Japanese Eyes American Hearts: Personal Reflections of Hawaii’s World War II Nisei Soldiers, (Hawaii Nikkei History Editorial Board: University of Hawaii Press, 1998), 155.

⁵¹ Duus, 34.

⁵² Tanaka, 2.

night, the Texans threw a couple of Nisei soldiers out of a local bowling alley. The soldiers returned with a few friends, opened the door, and a “Texan said, ‘I thought I told you--’ Before he could finish the sentence, he was punched out. Others were tossing six-footers in the air. In no time the alley was cleared of Texans.”⁵³ Hirata explains how many of the Nisei soldiers took boxing, judo, karate, and kendo back home. “In those days martial arts were not known stateside.”⁵⁴

In February of 1943, the 100th was moved from Camp McCoy to Camp Shelby, Mississippi for their advanced-unit training. Once again they earned top scores. By April they were in the final stages of their training. This was done with what was known as the Louisiana maneuvers. These consisted of a series of “war game” courses to test the combat readiness of many different units. These “war games” were comprised of mock battles with umpires who had flags telling each unit when to withdraw or advance. The umpires also made sure that captured troops remained prisoners throughout the exercise. Conrad Tsukayama remembers these games vividly. He recalls that “the 100th Battalion never withdrew because the withdraw-flag always disappeared... in one instance a high-ranking officer of the battalion was rumored to be the culprit. This was the kind of spirit and actions that were part of the Hawaii-bred 100th Infantry.”⁵⁵ Not only did they never withdraw, but soldiers who were flagged as casualties and prisoners were also constantly escaping and returning to their units. Later, once they were in battle in Europe, it is interesting to note that there was never an example of desertion or absence

⁵³ Jesse M. Hirata, “The Life and Times of a Kolohe GI,” in Japanese Eyes American Hearts: Personal Reflections of Hawaii’s World War II Nisei Soldiers, (Hawaii Nikkei History Editorial Board: University of Hawaii Press, 1998), 58.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Tsukayama, 25.

without leave in the 100th except for two cases. These two individuals left the field hospital and hitchhiked back to the front without permission before their battle wounds had completely healed.⁵⁶ These cases exemplify the same extreme intensity that the Nisei displayed during training. At the end of May, Major General Leslie J. McNair, chief of the army ground forces visited the training grounds in Louisiana where the 100th was practicing maneuvers. He was on a personal inspection tour. This gave the 100th the opportunity to be examined on the results of over a year of training. The 100th impressed the general quite thoroughly, and he left after giving them strong words of commendation.⁵⁷

Nine months after the creation of the 100th Infantry Battalion, Americans of Japanese ancestry won their second real victory against discrimination. Due in no small part to the excellent training record of the 100th, the decision was made to open the draft to all Japanese Americans. The example set by the 100th during training provided the necessary support that community leaders and government officials who were fighting for this opportunity needed in order to be heard. “The steady stream of petitions and interventions by prominent Americans, both civilian and military, prompted President Franklin D. Roosevelt and the War Department to re-open military service for Japanese American volunteers.”⁵⁸

On February 1, 1943, the President announced the formation of the 442nd Regimental Combat Team. It was to be a regiment entirely comprised of volunteers.

⁵⁶ Andrew W Lind, Hawaii's Japanese: An experiment in Democracy, (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1946), 158.

⁵⁷ Duus, 49.

⁵⁸ Tanaka, 16.

During this announcement he stated that “Americanism is not, and never was, a matter of race or ancestry.”⁵⁹ Although this statement seems very inconsistent with the President’s other actions, for Japanese Americans it was the beginning of what the 100th had worked so hard for.

The quotas for the new regiment called for 1,500 volunteers from Hawaii and 3,000 volunteers from the mainland. From the islands, however, more than 10,000 men volunteered right away. The quota was therefore raised, and in the end the number of volunteers authorized was increased to 2,600.⁶⁰ The enthusiasm to volunteer was not nearly so high within the internment camps. As a matter of fact, many of the War Relocation Authority “administrators expressed serious doubts that the volunteer plan would succeed.”⁶¹ In the end twenty-two percent of the 21,000 Nisei males eligible to register for the draft negatively responded to the call for volunteers.⁶² Frank Inouye, spokesman for the dissidents of the Heart Mountain Relocation Center, concluded a speech on the subject by “demanding that the U.S. government acknowledge the Nisei’s rights as Americans before asking for their military service.”⁶³ Others, however believed that stepping up to the challenge proposed by the government was the only way to gain lasting changes for themselves, their family and their friends.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 17.

⁶⁰ Duus, 59.

⁶¹ Frank T Inouye, “Immediate Origins of the Heart Mountain Draft Resistance Movement,” Peace & Change, (Volume 23, Issue 2, April 1998), 3.

⁶² Takaki, *Strangers*, 397.

⁶³ Inouye, 4.

For those who volunteered, the idea of a contract citizenship was one of the important factors that made it necessary for them to fight: by offering all that they had, they would be creating a better future for their children and for other Japanese-Americans. This included the belief that if they proved themselves they would be stopping something as horrible as the internment of American citizens from ever happening again; and because they truly were American citizens it was their duty to serve their country. Dr. Robert Kinoshita speaks of these reasons in a statement issued prior to his reinstatement as a US Army officer. In it he says, "I am gratified that I have been given an opportunity to carry out that trust placed upon me at a time when my nation is in danger...Now we are given the chance to prove the loyalty that we have declared so often."⁶⁴ Hiro Kashino, who later received six purple hearts for his bravery in the war, also speaks of these ideas and concepts. He recalls his memories on the subject many years after the war, stating, "I felt at the time that we had to prove ourselves. I never believed that they would put us in the camps until they did...I felt I had to do something to get out of that. I didn't want my brothers and sister to live that life, and if we had to prove our loyalty, this was the way."⁶⁵ These two men along with the other mainland recruits were sent to Camp Shelby for their training.

The newly formed 442nd arrived at Camp Shelby on April 13, 1943. The formation of the regiment was a stride in the right direction in the fight against racism and discrimination, but it did not signal the end to the deep-rooted suspicion of Japanese

⁶⁴ Robert S Kinnoshita, "I Am Proud to Serve," Heart Mountain Sentinel, (Volume 11, No. 10, March 6, 1943).

⁶⁵ Ferdinand M. De Leon, "Quiet Heroes: Finding Words For the Past," Seattle Times, (August 11, 1995, Final Edition).

Americans held within the armed forces. On that same day, in front of the congressional subcommittee on Naval Affairs, General John L. DeWitt stated, “A Jap’s a Jap. They are a dangerous element. There is no way to determine their loyalty. It makes no difference whether he is an American Citizen; theoretically he is still a Japanese, and you can’t change him. You can’t change him by giving him a piece of paper.”⁶⁶ The extent of this suspicion can be seen in Robert N. Katayama’s postscript entry in his journal. Katayama was one of the original volunteers for the 442nd and was encouraged to keep a diary from the time of his enlistment. He recalls that, “on April 7, 1943, we were all ordered to surrender our diaries to our superiors. I subsequently learned that we had been encouraged to keep diaries so that they could later be reviewed by the federal agencies to ascertain the depth of our loyalty.”⁶⁷ Once again the lack of trust throughout the military establishment is apparent. No matter what President Roosevelt said it is apparent that race and ancestry had plenty to do with military service in the eyes of the intelligence committee.

The time at Camp Shelby proved to be quite interesting. Unlike the 100th Battalion, the 442nd RTC was made up of both mainland Nisei and Hawaiian Nisei, and initially they did not get along well at all. The mainland soldiers arrived at camp two months prior to the Hawaiians and had begun to establish themselves by the time the Hawaiians arrived. When they did arrive, the Mainlanders were shocked from the start. George Goto, a California born Mainlander, recalls that they were “Odd, very odd...the

⁶⁶ Duus, 62.

⁶⁷ Robert N. Katayama, “Now I Am a Man! Departure Diary,” in Japanese Eyes American Hearts: Personal Reflections of Hawaii’s World War II Nisei Soldiers, (Hawaii Nikkei History Editorial Board: University of Hawaii Press, 1998), 53.

Hawaiian boys came in with their bare feet, T-shirts and pidgin English.”⁶⁸ Joseph Hattori remembers thinking “What am I doing here?... I thought I was among a bunch of savages.”⁶⁹ They got off the trains with ukuleles, guitars, and of course barracks bags. Most of the Hawaiians were well educated and could speak proper English, but they preferred pidgin English. Pidgin was a mix of English, Hawaiian, and a little Japanese that the Mainlanders could not understand and disliked. They were much more laid back, out-going, and unified as a group. If one was in trouble he would be backed by his fellow Hawaiians.

The Hawaiians also had much less trouble standing up to white people than the Mainlanders. This was due to the fact that in Hawaii, Japanese-Americans were not a minority. Hideo Nakamine later recalls, “in Hawaii virtually everyone was a minority... We were not afraid of standing up to the white man. But you can’t blame the mainland guys because they were abused and discriminated against... I felt sorry for them because their families were in the camps behind barbed –wire.”⁷⁰ They would often stand up to white bus drivers who would not allow African Americans on board the bus. A couple of times they even beat them up. Discrimination inside the camps also caused trouble. It was evident in all aspects of training. For example, the Nisei soldiers were often referred to as “Japs” by the other soldiers at the camps. The Texans seemed overly prejudiced toward the Japanese-Americans. “We had fights with a division from Texas because there was a lot of prejudice, no question,”⁷¹ recalled Ben Tamashiro of the 100th

⁶⁸ Chang, 113.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 116.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 118.

⁷¹ Ibid., 120.

Battalion. Another problem occurred when the haole officers had trouble pronouncing the Japanese names of the Nisei soldiers, often turning these mispronunciations into inside jokes. This discrimination and prejudice created friction that the soldiers had to deal with constantly. This increased the burden of training, but the Nisei soldiers took it in stride.

Between the two groups there were often arguments about the food and discrimination, but their common purpose ended up bonding them forever. The two groups had names for each other. The Mainlanders called the Hawaiians “buddhaheads” with the link to the word *buta* meaning pig. The Hawaiians called the Mainlanders “katonks” for the way their heads sounded “when Island boys knocked them together.”⁷² These names began as taunts but turned into friendly joking terms that are still used by the Nisei veterans today. The Hawaiians preferred a diet of fish, rice, and watermelons, and tried to get the mainlanders to pitch in for some of these supplies. This did not go over too well and caused much friction between the two groups. On top of that there was the extremely outgoing generous attitude of the Hawaiians in relation to the very restrained attitude of the Mainlanders. “When they visited a bar, for instance, the Buddhaheads dug into their pockets and bought rounds of drinks for one another.”⁷³ In contrast, “the Mainlanders never shared things.”⁷⁴ Today among reunions this is a joke, they say, “How come you can sit here now and drink beer with us, when you didn’t do

⁷² Murphy, 115.

⁷³ Chang., 116.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

that at camp?”⁷⁵ These differences caused many problems to begin with, but over time they were overcome and the unit became extremely unified.

In July of 1943, the 100th Battalion received its colors and was finally ready for combat. Their motto was “Remember Pearl Harbor.” On August 11, they left Camp Shelby for North Africa. On September 2, they landed at Oran. Once in Africa, they were attached to the 34th “Red Bull” Division and were soon transported to Italy for their first combat. This was the beginning of their distinguished service overseas.⁷⁶ It was their chance to prove themselves in battle. This they did, and in doing so became known as the “Purple Heart Battalion.” On June 2, 1944, they landed in Naples and pushed to the Anzio beaches. Thirteen days later, on June 15, after nine months of campaigning, they were reunited with their fellow Nisei and attached to the 442nd RCT as its first Battalion. The 100th, which had started with a strength of 1,300 soldiers, had by this time suffered over 900 casualties.

Finally together as a single unit, the Nisei soldiers proved themselves time after time, performing one spectacular show of honor after another. After fighting at Belvedere, Luciana, Livorno, and along the Arno River they were pulled back for rest and presented a Presidential Distinguished Unit Citation. Next, they began campaigning in the Vosages Mountains of France. There they liberated the French village of Bruyères on October 17, 1944.

Even in the midst of this extraordinary exhibition of courage, discrimination within the armed forces continued to follow the Nisei soldiers. Three days after the

⁷⁵ Ibid., 117.

⁷⁶ Tanaka, 24.

liberation of Bruyères the 442nd received a message from the 36th Division headquarters. It stated, “General wants you to know the 442nd is not getting publicity in *Beachhead News* due to censorship. Please tell men and S-6 [Colonel Pence] that the General appreciates their efforts and regrets censorship does not permit mention of the 442nd.”⁷⁷ On top of this blatant racism was the fact that up to that point all of the Combat Team’s recommendations for the Medal of Honor award had been downgraded to the lesser Distinguished Service Cross.

The next week they moved through the mountains of the area while encountering heavy resistance, a feat that earned them another Presidential Citation. At the end of this heroic week, on October 26, 1944, instead of resting, they were rewarded with orders to rescue the members of Headquarters Company and 1st Battalion of the 141st Regiment who had been pinned down for the two previous days. The two remaining battalions of the 141st had already unsuccessfully tried to rescue their comrades. The task was then put upon the 442nd. The “Lost Battalion” was comprised, ironically, of Texans. The battle to free this battalion is considered one of the ten most heroic battles of World War II. The 442nd succeeded in its mission, but in doing so sustained over three times the number killed and wounded than the regiment that was rescued.⁷⁸ Once again they were awarded a Distinguished Unit Citation. The story of the successful rescue of the “Lost Battalion” was an instant headline back in the United States; however, the 442nd was never mentioned due to censorship.

⁷⁷ Crost, 178.

⁷⁸ Frank Steidl, Lost Battalions: Going For Broke in the Vosges, Autumn 1944, (Novato, CA: Presidio Press, 1997), 166.

Although censorship was somewhat successful in keeping the news of the 442nd from circulating within the United States there was nothing that the Army could do to stop word from spreading throughout the armed forces in Europe. All over Europe GIs wrote letters to the *Stars and Stripes* expressing what they thought of the 100th/442nd Regimental Combat Team. One sergeant wrote, “We should like to read a substantial article on the Japanese-American soldiers. They have had more than a year of actual combat and it was they who recently displayed their ability by taking the pressure off the ‘lost battalion.’”⁷⁹ These same soldiers became strong allies in the fight against prejudice and discrimination once the war was over.

Upon their return home, President Harry S. Truman honored Japanese Americans by saying, “You fought not only the enemy, you fought prejudice, and you have won. Keep up that fight, and continue to win, to make this great Republic stand for just what the Constitution says it stands for: the welfare of all the people, all the time.”⁸⁰ Although the Commander and Chief of the United States honored them in this way, it did not mean that they were honored by the rest of the United States upon their arrival home. For the Hawaiian born it was not as big a deal. They had homes to return to. But the mainlanders were forced to return to their stolen lives. Furthermore, much prejudice and discrimination continued to exist on the mainland. “Often... former internees were met with hostile signs: No Japs Allowed, No Japs Welcome. When they finally saw their homes again, many found their houses damaged and their fields ruined.”⁸¹

⁷⁹ Crost, 198.

⁸⁰ Nakasone, 47.

⁸¹ Takaki, *Strangers*, 405.

It is conservatively estimated that the losses occurred, due to relocation, in terms of “1942 dollars totaled \$400 million.”⁸² After the war, in an attempt to settle the claims of former internees, Congress decided to return an average of 10 cents on the dollar. The low figure may be the result of the War Department tampering with evidence submitted to the U.S. Supreme Court in cases regarding the constitutionality of internment. In 1943, the Court ruled against a number of Japanese internees in their civil fight against internment. Their decision was in a large part based on a doctored copy of General DeWitt’s original report on the evacuation of Japanese Americans from the West Coast. After reading DeWitt’s report, Assistant Secretary of War John McCloy came to the conclusion that certain points within the document would jeopardize the government’s cases. To solve the problem McCloy instructed DeWitt to submit a revised version to the Court and destroy the original. This information was not discovered for nearly forty years, at which time a copy of the original was found by a Japanese American woman while conducting research of the newly declassified war files.⁸³

Even with the deep-rooted discrimination within the upper ranks of the United States government and military establishment, the members of the 100th/442nd Regimental Combat Team were able to distinguish themselves as the most highly decorated unit in the Army, with respect to the time that they spent in combat and the size of their team. By the end of the war, as a combined entity, the 442nd and the 100th received 7 Presidential Distinguished Unit Citations, 36 Army commendations, 87 Division Commendations, and 18 decorations from Allied nations. As far as individual

⁸² Crost, 300.

⁸³ Ibid., 297-298.

awards went 9,486 Purple Hearts, 1 Congressional Medal of Honor, 52 Distinguished Service Crosses, 1 Distinguished Service Medal, 560 Silver Stars, with 28 Oak Leaf Clusters, and 22 Legion of Merit Medals were awarded to members of this unit.⁸⁴

Although this record is quite impressive, in the eyes of many who were involved the fact that only one Congressional Medal of Honor was awarded stood out as a sign of continued prejudice. The Medal of Honor is the Army's highest award for bravery and valor. Many of the officers who commanded this unit and many of the soldiers who fought beside this unit questioned for many years the Army's inability to honor it to the degree that it deserved. However, on June 21, 2000, this injustice was finally recognized by the United States. On that date 20 members of the 100th/442nd Regimental Combat Team were finally recognized for the heroic part that they played in World War II. They were awarded the Medal of Honor by President Clinton. At the ceremony he stated, "It's long past time to break the silence about their courage... Rarely has a nation been so well served by a people it has so ill-treated."⁸⁵ The time that passed before the 100th/442nd Regimental Combat Team was completely recognized for its actions shows the deep prejudice that was present even after the war.

The story of the 100th/442nd Regimental Combat Team is one of courage and honor and also is one that was not told in detail for many years. One factor that led to the exemplary behavior and actions of these men was the close-knit communities that they came from. When most soldiers were released from service after the war, they went home to their different states and were for the most part never again held accountable for

⁸⁴ Nakasone, 44.

⁸⁵ David Stout, "Top Honors Come Belatedly For Asian-American Soldiers: Recognizing those who served in World War II Despite Injustices at Home," The New York Times, (June 22, 2000), A18.

their actions during the war. They were able to tell their stories however they wished. This was not the case in regard to the Nisei soldiers: When they returned home, they returned with their fellow soldiers to the same, few, tightly knit communities. The stories of their actions and whatever they did during the war came home with them.

Although Japanese heritage is the main thing that negatively separated these men from the rest of society, it was also one of the factors that led to their success on the battlefield. The concept of bringing honor to one's family was deeply rooted in each of these soldier's minds. The importance of this concept meant giving everything in your power to act courageous and honorably in fulfilling your duty in battle, even if that meant giving your life. This was a concept deeply instilled upon them from a very early age. Their parents understood that the country of their children was different from that of their own. The mother of Seiso Kamishita told her son that this fact "makes us your enemy. If you feel that it is your duty as an American soldier to shoot us, we will be proud of you."⁸⁶ They volunteered not for themselves but for their family and their community and to prove that they are part of America. In the end the Nisei soldiers accomplished their mission. Their children have seen the benefits of their actions. The daughter of Shiro Kashino stated, "I look at the opportunities that I've had and I don't think I would have had those if it hadn't been for what they did."⁸⁷ Due to their fighting record, the soldiers of the 100th/442nd Regimental Combat Team found that upon their return to the United States, they had gained a strong support group that had not been available prior to

⁸⁶ Seiso Kamishita, "Honor Thy Country," in Japanese Eyes American Hearts: Personal Reflections of Hawaii's World War II Nisei Soldiers, (Hawaii Nikkei History Editorial Board: University of Hawaii Press, 1998), 47.

⁸⁷ Leon.

the war. Many former soldiers, politicians, and community leaders recognized the sacrifice that Japanese Americans had made during the war. Although their lives were less than ideal, the building blocks of a new future were created by the men of the 100th/442nd Regimental Combat Team. Those building blocks have since changed the world in a positive manner. The Japanese American soldiers of World War II are a perfect example of the diverse culture that America was built upon. They are also, the perfect example of “100 Percent Americans.”

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