

# Maptalk

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## JAPANESE-AMERICANS

~ They, too, have fought and died

IN a field dressing station in Italy, the wounded American soldier moaned in delirium. Doctors bent low to catch his words. "Did we win?" he asked over and over. "Did I fight all right?"

The wounded soldier was a *Nisei* ("second generation"), an American of Japanese descent, from the 100th Infantry Battalion which spearheaded many spectacular advances of the 34th "Red Bull" Division.

"Our *Nisei* boys fought and died like real men," Brig. General J. C. Frye, commanding the 88th Infantry Division, told a correspondent. "They fought better than some other Americans did. I'm proud to be associated with them. They really scared the Germans."

### Nisei Decorations Break Records

The 100th Battalion, according to Army News Service, is "the most decorated, worst hit group in American uniform." Of the 100th's original combat officers only one survives, Major Mitsugusi Fekuda, of Honolulu. In less than a year of action the *Nisei* of the 100th Battalion and the 442nd RCT had 9,230 casualties, including replacements, in a group slightly more than 8,000 strong when it left Camp Shelby, Miss. In one company (normal strength 208 men) there were 380 casualties.

The *Nisei* altogether won 1,017 decorations in combat, an all-time record in U.S. Army history. These included 43 DSC's, 249 Silver Stars, 601 Bronze Stars, three Presidential Unit Citations, and Purple Hearts by the hundreds. In less than a year 15 *Nisei* won battlefield commissions.

The *Nisei* went into battle in September 1943. They were the first U.S. troops to make contact with the enemy in Italy. They participated in the landing at Salerno and in every major action in Italy after the landing. They made four drives across the Volturno River. They took an active part in the march on Rome and spearheaded the attack that captured Livorno.

In some of the European war's last fighting, the 36th Division was trapped by Germans in northern Italy. *Nisei* of the 442nd Regimental Combat Team, in which the 100th Battalion had been incorporated, stormed through German defenses and rescued the division.

Members of the original 100th Battalion came from Hawaii. Most of them had served in the Hawaiian National Guard, and two of them had captured the operator of a Jap one-man submarine which grounded on a reef off Oahu on 7 December 1941—the first Japanese prisoner to be taken by American troops in this war.

By 1943 *Nisei* had clearly demonstrated that they had the spirit and the ability to make good soldiers. The



War Department announced formation of the 442nd RCT, and a program of enlistments was begun under Army supervision at all relocation centers to which West Coast Japanese had been moved at the start of the war.

That *Nisei* knew the importance of their job and were determined to do their share against the enemy was amply illustrated in Italy, where the Statue of Liberty shoulder patch of the 442nd was found wherever the fighting was hottest. "Our boys came over here knowing that upon our showing depended the whole future of

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## Japanese-Americans

Japanese-Americans in the United States," said Sgt. Mike Masaoka, of Salt Lake City. Mike and his five brothers all volunteered for Army duty. Two are now dead, one badly injured. "Our motto was 'Shoot the works,' and I think we did. The only thing that burns us up is to be called Japanese. We're Americans and proud of it."

The War Department recently revealed that *Nisei* have an equally gallant combat record in the Pacific Theatre. In one of the war's "top secret" operations, *Nisei* translators and interpreters, well aware of what they might expect if captured, played a key role as translators and interpreters in the intelligence work that helped destroy the Japanese. Army intelligence is considered one of the most important factors in our Pacific victory; and *Nisei* were among its least-known but most vital components.

## Home Front Decorations Slightly Different

And when the war ended in Europe, the *Nisei* were just as anxious to get home as the rest of the Americans. They, too, had enough of the perils, discomforts, and grinding monotony of war. But to their ears had come news that made their minds uneasy. They had heard of signs in West Coast shop windows: "We Do Not Solicit Japanese Business," or even more bluntly: "No Japs Allowed." They had heard that *Nisei* names had been erased from the Hood River, Ore., American Legion Post honor roll. They had heard of the American Legion advertisement in the Hood River *Sun*, containing two lists of names: One list of Hood River residents who were "one hundred per cent behind Hood River Post No. 22, American Legion, in ALL their efforts to keep Japs from returning to this country"; the other list of "Japs who either owned or controlled land in Hood River County prior to Pearl Harbor."

They had also heard of what had happened to Mr. and Mrs. Kay Sakamoto after they had returned to their California home from a relocation center. The Sakamotos found their home burned to the ground two days before. The Sakamotos had lost one son in the Army, killed in action. They were expecting two other sons, both decorated for bravery, to return home shortly.

The Spokane, Wash., Post of the Veterans of Foreign Wars had refused membership to *Nisei* Richard Naito because of his Japanese ancestry. In Sacramento a jury had freed two brothers accused of dynamiting the fruit packing shed of a Japanese-American with sons in service, after their lawyer argued it was a "white man's country."

## At First They Were Wanted

Japanese immigrants did not begin to arrive in America in appreciable numbers until after the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, when Japanese farm laborers were urged to come to the United States to replace Chinese as low-paid, seasonal workers. "The Japanese were regarded as very valuable immigrants," says a 1920 official state publication, *California and the Oriental*, "and every effort was made to induce them to come."

Once arrived, the Japanese proved efficient and industrious. Thanks to their skill and industry, Japanese farmers wrought astonishing changes in California agriculture. One K. Ikuta first demonstrated that rice could be grown successfully in California. Soon Japanese were growing rice on 25,000 acres of "hardpan," previously regarded as useless for cultivation. The delta section of the Sacramento River was reclaimed largely by Japanese workers. In this area a Japanese, George Shima, became famous as the "Potato



"Can't ya read signs?"



## Japanese-Americans

King" of the world. The towns of Florin and Livingstone, Japanese settlements, were waste lands until Japanese farmers reclaimed them.

By 1907 there was no longer enough migrant Japanese farm labor to supply demand, and as a result the Japanese became the highest-paid farm labor group in California. It seemed that plans had backfired. "Japanese labor is not cheap labor," the Los Angeles *Times* editorialized in 1920. "The little brown traders know how to get as much for their labor as the traffic will bear."

Three years earlier, statistics showed that value of crops produced on Japanese farms was three and a half times the state average. Japanese farmers were able to bid higher for leases and purchases of farm land, and real estate values rose sharply where they had settled. This did not endear the Japanese either to large-scale agriculturists, hungry for cheap labor, or to small farmers, hard-pressed to compete with thrifty Japanese.

## Now They Are Not

But resentment of West Coast farmers against the Japanese ability to compete favorably for a living is only a single factor among the many forces that make race relations a tricky problem along the Pacific shore. Distrust of Orientals goes back more than a century in California. After the Pearl Harbor attack, some incidents of sabotage or attempted sabotage and the frank desire of some Japanese to return to their homeland led to the assumption that all Japanese were fifth columnists.



442 Regimental Combat Team  
Shoulder Patch

But there are many Japanese who, like the *Nisei*, look upon America as their home, consider themselves Americans, and ask nothing more than to be allowed to make a living there. There were also many Japanese who expressed a desire for repatriation only because they were victims of a systematic campaign of terror and intimidation carried on by violently anti-American countrymen. According to Dillon E. Meyer, Director of the War Relocation Authority, about 60,000 such Japanese-Americans will leave relocation centers by 15 December.

## The Homeless Japanese

The problem of Japanese-Americans is not confined, however, to release from detention. Due to West Coast persecution, many of them prefer not to return to their former homes. To assist displaced persons, organizations like the Greater New York Citizens' Committee for Japanese-Americans are being formed "from Boston to San Francisco," Meyer has stated.

Few Americans are optimistic enough to believe in an overnight solution for Japanese-American difficulties. Like racial and religious prejudice everywhere, West Coast racial violence is emotional rather than logical. Like all intolerance it is deeply-rooted in old fears, old hatreds, and old distrusts. It can not be educated out of people in a single year or even in a few years. Arriving at a civilized solution is a postwar project that may well engage the best efforts of Americans for years to come.

Meanwhile few Americans, seemingly, would openly dispute General Joseph W. Stilwell's contention that the "Statue of Liberty Boys" have earned with their blood the right to full participation in American life. They would be hard put to deny "Vinegar Joe's" fighting statement: "You're damn right those *Nisei* boys have a place in the American heart, now and forever. And I say soldiers ought to form a pickaxe club to protect the Japanese-Americans who fought the war with us. Any time we see a barfly commando picking on those kids or discriminating against them, we ought to bang them over the head with a pickaxe. I'm willing to be a charter member."