

A SOLDIER'S REPORT

By Private Yori Wada, U.S.A.

Dear Rob,

The author of "A Soldier's Report", Yori Wada is a young Hanford-born, University of California-educated, Japanese-American (Nisei): he is in Uncle Sam's Army, training to be a Surgical Technician and comes from a family that, despite the handicap of race, has grown to be highly respected in this typical, if slightly smug, San Joaquin Valley Community.

Personally, I think Yori's piece presents a thoughtful slant on a delicate subject.

-Walter Christie, Jr., Junior Editor
Hanford Journal

DECEMBER 7, 1941, will go down in history as the day of the infamous and treacherous attack upon the United States by the Empire of the Rising Sun. And though it will never be recorded by historians, the falling bombs and flying bullets at Pearl Harbor heralded a revolutionary change in the daily lives of the *Nisei* of the Pacific coast. Up in smoke and into nothingness went days of complacency in Ivory-Tower living and racial provincialism and passivism. The new year of 1942 brought events which the Americans of Japanese descent had long feared and yet dared to hope wouldn't come true—the war between the United States and Japan.

Thrown into the maelstrom of the war, they gave vent to vocal declarations of loyalty to the Stars and Stripes. But to their dismay and confusion, they found a growing wave of suspicion directed against them and their parents. Truly, they were men without a country, shunning allegiance to Japan, their love for America unbelievable. Inside they felt empty; they knew not which way to turn.

But from afar today, I can say without qualifications that the great majority of *Nisei* are good Americans in the best sense of the word. True, among the *Kibei* (American-born Japanese educated in Japan) there are those whose feeling toward Japan is greater than their devotion to America. For them I have only a straightforward remark, "You are traitors to America and the Achilles heel for the *Nisei*. You are not fit to live here!"

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Yes, the *Nisei* have failed to play their role in a living and progressive America. They have failed to interest themselves in the social, human problems of their America; they have failed to attach themselves solidly in their communities. But in all this, they have done no less than their counterpart in the world of American youth. They were only a part of the whole of America's young manhood; they lived and reveled in parties, sports, and light living. They worked hard to earn money and didn't take time out to look at the clear American sky and beyond the horizon.

The *Nisei* have been Americans in their ways; that they have been restricted in their endeavor for full Americanism cannot be denied. Though passive, though clannish, deep down in their hearts is a devotion to their America which is staunch and courageous. They are a part of America and America is part of them; in all sincerity I say this, in my heart I know that I have only one allegiance and that for the land of Old Glory.

For the genuine fifth columnists from Japan and their sympathizers, I have hatred, contempt, and animosity. They should be thrown into concentration camps and into jails. But trust the *Nisei*; they will not fail you. They will even weed out the undesirable Americans of Japanese ancestry if given the chance. And that is their job in their *Nisei* communities; that is the responsibility of American citizenship.

Our *Nisei* history in America is obscure and misunderstood. But I hope that it is not too late. For the most part, we have not tasted the intangible goodness of our country. This is partly our fault and partly that of an American community which spoke of American fairness, equality, justice, but failed to live it. Ours was a life of negative and passive living; we worked hard to make money and to build homes but kept minds and energy away from the fight to become accepted Americans. Tolerance for the conglomerate nationalities is not enough for America; for vital unity and honest cooperation, acceptance and understanding are prerequisites. The *Nisei* in general have failed to join fellow Americans to reach that goal.

The *Nisei* have trod the twilight zone for years. The great majority of us have lived in the poorer sections of the cities. Many lived in rooms located in the rear of fish markets, grocery stores, candy shops, pool halls. My life has always been thus—a home like other Americans has been a hope and an aspiration. A bed-room, an annex bath room, and a kitchen with a candy store in front—no comforts, no privacy, but it was my home for years. And in such an environment I grew up—an American.

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My Mother is a great woman. Though she loves Japan, the choice for her children was America. Not once did she talk to us of loyalty for Japan, not once did she mention our duty to her country—rather, as an alien, she encouraged Americanism, good, clean Americanism. She prided herself on cleanliness and thrift—she was proud to send us to American schools, to alone. The majority of *Nisei* didn't care or were afraid of the gigantic task ahead. The vanguard of the energetic went ahead alone, pitied and envied, razed and admired. And in this work they were bolstered and fortified by the University Y.M.C.A.—that great "citadel of democracy in action."

My induction into the United States Army in July, 1941. From the Monterey Presidio, California, to Camp Grant, Illinois—there to become a part of the "Fighting 2nd" of Company "C". We got along swell—nationality just wasn't considered. We lived and drilled together; we played and sweated together; we got wet together and we stuck together. From such experiences was moulded a homogeneous, fighting American group! Mere words can't express this human living.

Then came the time for parting—it was hard saying goodbye to hard-won friends, but we had come to the crossroads. And I traveled south to Camp Robinson, Arkansas, while the others went with the four winds. It was time to make friends all over again—new friends among the fellow Yanks. No one is lonely long in the American army; it's easy to get into the groove if you're a regular fellow.

Then came the treachery at Pearl Harbor and in the Philippines. So overwhelmed was I with the rapid trend of events that I didn't know what to do. I felt ashamed that my parents' country had dared attack America in such a dastardly fashion. Listening to the radio reports that Sunday night, I was heart-heavy, cognizant of the tragedy, worried about the predicament of my family in Hanford in far-off California.

But here again, Americans to the rescue—Jack Sweet came and reassured me of his friendship—Dick Schultz' words were good to hear—letters from Camp Grant buddies arrived full of words of courage and friendship; it made me glow inside to hear from Lefty Richmond, Bob Hyslop, Art Grabianowski. With them, I was a fellow Yank!

The Stiles friends came through as usual—letters from Harry Kingman, Bob Stone, Charles Fender, Jim Fowle, Wes Hill . . . they picked me up and chased away the clouds of uncertainty and confusion. When I feel low, I take out their letters to read. Or I take hikes into the hills "to think things over." And the very attitude of the fellas of the Station Hospital showed that they accepted me as one of them. What more can I ask for?

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All I ask is the chance to do my share in defeating the Axis . . . a real chance on the battlefield.



"Your heart will be all right if you just stop listening to the radio."