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442nd COMBAT TEAM

WRA Library Washington

CHRONOLOGY

1943, Jan. 28: War Department called for 4,500 volunteers to form 442nd Combat Team.

1943, April -: Full complement achieved by enlistments from mainland and Hawaii. Unit went into training at Camp Shelby.

1944, first week in May: 2nd and 3rd Battalions embarked for overseas. 1st Battalion remained behind to form cadre for 171st Battalion Separate. ((This unit was inactivated and scattered in Feb., 1945. Most of men went as replacements for units overseas.))

1944, first week in June: 3rd Battalion arrived in Italy. For some unexplained reason, the 2nd Battalion went to Africa, but joined the 3rd in Italy in a short time.

1944, June 25 (Approx.) 442nd engaged in first action in Italy.

1944, middle of September: 442nd, which had been joined by the 100th in Italy, arrived in France. *Part of 36th Div.*

1944, Oct. 30: 442nd rescued the Lost Battalion at Biffontaine, France.

The rescuers were presented with a silver plaque by the survivors of the Lost Battalion:

"TO THE 442ND INFANTRY REGIMENT:

With Deep Sincerity and Utmost Appreciation  
for the gallant fight to effect our rescue after we  
had been isolated for seven days.

1st Battalion, 141st Infantry  
Regiment

Biffontaine, France

From the 24th to the 30th of October, 1944.

*TOZ: Please save this  
for future reference  
needs. J.C.*



Library

## JAPANESE-AMERICAN SOLDIERS DECORATED

from

ARMY AND NAVY REGISTER, August 12, 1944

The Japanese-American 100th Infantry Battalion, which recently recently received a citation from Lieut. Gen. Mark W. Clark, U. S. Army, commanding general of the Fifth Army, has participated in fighting on virtually every front established in the drive through Italy, reports from Fifth Army Headquarters indicate.

Going into action first in the Naples area, the battalion fought its way across the Volturno River and the Rapido River and was in the front line for 40 days at Cassino. Later it was transferred to the beachhead at Anzio and took part in the breakthrough to Rome.

The 100th Battalion and the 442nd Regimental Combat Team, of which it is a part, are composed of Americans of Japanese descent, all of whom volunteered for service. The majority of the soldiers in the 100th are from the Hawaiian Islands.

The mission for which the battalion was cited was accomplished June 26 and 27 in the vicinity of Belvedere and Sassetta, Italy. A strong German center of resistance dominated a vital highway and impeded the advance of an American infantry division. In the face of numerically superior forces of Nazi infantry and field artillery, the battalion fought its way to the defended positions and completely destroyed the enemy flank position, killing 178 Germans, wounding 20, and capturing 73 in the process.

In ten months of almost continuous fighting only two soldiers of the 100th Infantry have been captured by the Germans, while the battalion has taken hundreds of prisoners, killed hundreds more and destroyed vast quantities of enemy materiel.

More than 1,000 Purple Hearts, 44 Silver Bars, 31 Bronze Stars, 9 Distinguished Service Crosses and 3 legion of Merit medals have been awarded to members of the unit. Fifteen enlisted men have received battlefield commissions after displaying outstanding leadership in combat. Among them are two company commanders--Capt. Mitsuyoshi Fukuda, of 2333 Fern Street, Honolulu, Hawaii, and Capt. Sakee Takahashi of Makaweli, Kauai, Hawaii. Lieut. Col. Gordon Singles, of Denver, Colorado, a West Point graduate, is battalion commander.

One of the Japanese-American officers, Capt. Young O. Kim, has received three decorations. He was awarded the DSC for outstanding gallantry during the breakthrough to the Alban Hills and also holds the Silver Star and the Purple Heart. 2nd Lieut. Allan Ohata was awarded the DSC for heroism in killing 50 Germans during one day's fighting in an early battle in Italy.

There never has been a case of desertion or absence without leave in the 100th, although there were two reported cases of "reverse AWOL." Before their battle wounds were completely healed in a field hospital behind the lines, two soldiers left the hospital and hitch-hiked back to their companies on the battlefield.







HEADQUARTERS, CAMP BOWIE, TEXAS  
Public Relations Branch  
13 July 1945

DIST: Brownwood Bulletin  
Brownwood Banner  
Washington  
Dallas  
File

RELEASE No 10

Technically, Sgt James H Sakamoto is a Nisei, or member of the second generation. But don't mention it to him, because he's all-American. He's a member of the 1853d Svc Medical Detachment, assigned to the operating room, Regional Hospital, where he assists and prepares the patients for surgery.

Sgt Sakamoto goes quietly about his work and is held in high regard by his fellow servicemen, and this, any clear-thinking American would opine<sup>is</sup> as it should be. Sgt Sakamoto is an American citizen, whose home is at present in Clearfield, Utah. Before that, he lived in Santa Ana, Calif. He was born in Blackfoot, Idaho. His parents, both living, are natives of Japan, his father coming from an urban and his mother from a rural community. They are a family of agriculturalists and agriculture is Sgt Sakamoto's prime interest.

Sgt Sakamoto went through high school at Anaheim, Calif., near Santa Ana and took an agricultural course. He was active in athletics and played football all four years. Following graduation he went to work on his parents' truck farm.

He was inducted July 15, 1941, at Ft McArthur, Calif. He took his medical basic at Camp Grant, Ill., and came to Camp Bowie, Oct 21, 1941. He has since been stationed here, except for a couple of months when he attended surgical technicians' school at Ft Sam Houston. He became a Technician, Fourth Grade in June of 1943 and a Sergeant in March of this year.

Sgt Sakamoto said his parents have not heard from a grandparent on his mother's side, in Japan, for the past five or six years. He declared that he has never been embarrassed because of his ancestry and that everyone has been courteous and treated him as they would any other American. He wants to return to truck farming after the war and plans to take some college courses in agriculture and may utilize the GI Bill of Rights to help get this advanced education.

He has a brother who is a mechanic-farmer in Clearfield and a married sister in



HEADQUARTERS, CAMP BOWIE, TEXAS

222-S kamoto

Chicago, Ill. His brother-in-law is engaged in war work.

He admits there is a "feeling" toward members of the Nisei west of the Rockies but says there is practically none east of the mountains. He said he could not express an opinion when the war with Japan would be over--but soon, he hopes. He has felt that the Emperor has been a weak sort of figurehead for a great many years and despite modernization of several of the larger cities of Japan, they cannot long stand the incessant bombings they are taking.

His parents, he is sure, have never been caused any distress because of their Japanese birth and he is proud of the fact that they are doing their part, on their truck farm, in producing essential foodstuffs at this time.

When his interviewer pointed out "But for accident of birth, you or I might be of another color or race," the Sergeant smiled broadly and nodded his head knowingly. It's an infectious smile and it's no wonder the GI's like this Sergeant they call "Jimmy."



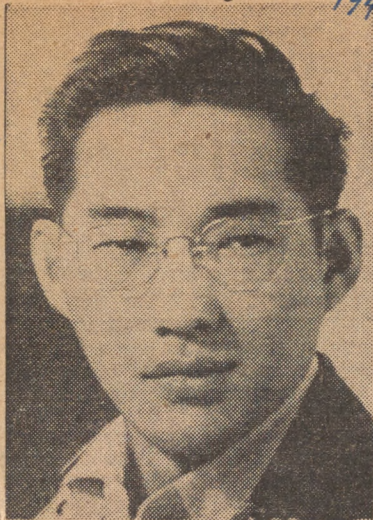






## **Alien Jap Joins Army**

*Wash. Times  
March 19,  
1943*



Kazuo Uno, 23, of Kelso, Wash., will be the first Japanese alien to join the U. S. Army. This is now possible under a new ruling permitting local draft boards to induct Jap aliens who volunteer and are found acceptable to the War Department.



Subsequent to the decision by the War Department to accept certain Japanese Nationals who volunteer for military service, National headquarters of Selective Service has sent a memorandum to all local boards describing procedures requested by the War Department for the forwarding for induction of such registrants as well as those of Japanese extraction or parentage who are United States citizens, National headquarters of Selective ~~Service~~ Service announced today.

Primary requirements for induction of Japanese aliens<sup>h</sup> are that they must be found to be acceptable after investigation by the War Department, and must ~~be~~ pass the physical examination at an armed forces induction station. The determination of acceptability will be made on the basis of loyalty and other kindred factors.

Decision to accept, under prescribed conditions, certain Japanese aliens now residing in this country who are found qualified for military service was made by the War Department in order to make it possible for those who desire to do so to serve in the American armed forces. In no case will a Japanese alien be inducted into the Army unless he volunteers for service and his desire to volunteer must be evidenced by a request in writing signed by him. This request, together with a personal history of the alien, will be sent to the War ~~Dept~~ Department for a determination of his acceptability.

When a Japanese alien has been found acceptable for service by the War Department and the local board is so notified it may proceed with the classification and forwarding for induction of such alien in a manner substantially the same as that prescribed for other aliens, whose acceptability also must be determined by the War Department.



## GIs in the Pacific Say: This Is An Anti-Fascist War

*(This is an editorial from the Midpacifican, the armed forces' newspaper in the Central Pacific area, published at Honolulu. The Midpacifican is written and edited by servicemen.)*

Jan, 1945

Three dispatches just came in from Army News Service.

Two will make you proud.

One will make you angry.

The first, datelined Washington, reveals that a single AJA (Americans of Japanese ancestry) division in Italy was awarded 1,000 Purple Hearts. The second, datelined France, reports how the "lost battalion" in the Saint Dies area was rescued by American soldiers of Japanese ancestry who fought their way through to the trapped men.

The third, datelined Poston, Ariz., tells how a crippled AJA was ejected from a barbershop because the proprietor didn't like his ancestry. The GI was Pvt. Raymond Matsuda, 29, from Hawaii. He had served two years with the 442nd Combat Team in Italy. He wears seven campaign ribbons and decorations, including the Purple Heart.

The action of one ignorant American brings shame to all of us.

His ignorance is dangerous. It stabs at the heart of the things for which we fight.

GIs who kill Japanese on Pacific battlefronts can tell you why they feel friendship for the AJAs fighting in Italy. They're brother Americans.

GIs who kill Nazis know they continue to like and respect German Americans now fighting at their side in Europe.

We don't make war on people because of the color of their skin, or hair, or the shape of their faces of the nationality of their fathers and mothers.

We fight for an idea.

We kill fascists because it's our idea that people from every race and of every tongue should keep on living in our country as good neighbors.

We kill fascists because they think their race or blood makes them better than other people.

We fight for our idea because it is the cement that holds democracy together. We fight against the fascist idea because it is the poison that holds our enemies together.

GIs know that the only difference between our enemies and our friends is what goes on in their minds.

The ignorant American from Arizona is one of a few rotten apples in the big barrel of America. His thinking does not reflect the way America thinks.

He probably doesn't even realize he thinks like our enemies.

But he does.

Misguided people, such as he, parrot the racial ideas of the Nazis and the Japs.

As long as they do, they constitute a menace to our country.

It would be foolish for any GI to feel that fascism will be wiped out with the defeat of Germany and Japan.

The job will not be done until all Americans are educated to think and act like Americans.

That's our job, too.



**JAPANESE-AMERICAN JOINS LEGION**—Harley M. Oka (left), 28, a Japanese-American who received a medical discharge from the Army, is congratulated by Commander William F. Schneider after joining Hollywood, Cal., Post No. 591 of the American Legion, composed entirely of World War II veterans. Kingsley Morgan (center), second vice-commander, said the post was the first in the Nation to admit a Japanese-American member. (A. P. Wire Photo.)

## Mother of Air Corps Hero Hits Gardena Discrimination

LOS ANGELES—A mother of an American airman, killed last fall in combat over Germany, asked her son's friends at a memorial service on Dec. 29 to honor all who fell for democracy, regardless of race.

The Air Corps officer was Lieut. Maurice Levine, and his friends of Lodge 141 of the International Workers' Order had gathered to honor his memory at services held at Odd Fellows hall.

Rising to speak of her son, Mrs. Sophie Levine, declared:

"Since my son died, we are gathered here to honor him. But in the city of Gardena, another American boy gave his life fighting the Germans, and his home town will not even allow his name to be put on the roll of honor. His mother is denied the privilege of meeting with her boy's friends, like this. That boy, Kiyoshi Muranaga, was an American of Japanese ancestry, decorated for bravery after he died. I want that mother to know that other Americans feel toward her boy just as they do toward mine."





# AMERICAN LEGION

HOLLYWOOD WORLD WAR II  
POST 591

ADDRESS YOUR REPLY TO:

WILLIAM F. SCHNEIDER, Commander  
1164 North St. Andrews Place  
Hollywood 38, California  
Telephone GRanite 7561

2035 NORTH HIGHLAND AVENUE  
HOLLYWOOD 28, CALIF.

Post 591, American Legion, Hollywood World War II, on January 9th, 1945, unanimously adopted the following

## RESOLUTION

Whereas, we as members of the American Legion, are pledged to support the Constitution of our country and

Whereas, we consider the guaranty effected by Article 14 of the Constitution to be of great importance to us in the maintenance of our democratic ideals and

Whereas, recently there has been much controversy and agitation in the Western States and particularly in California attacking the rights of American citizens of Japanese descent and

Whereas, affected by these unjust attacks are many American citizens who have served in our Armed Forces not only in World War I but are still serving in World War II, many of them having received citations and commendations for valor beyond the call of duty and

Whereas, among this falsely attacked group are loyal American veterans who have served and are serving actively and patriotically as American Legionnaires and

Whereas, the order of evacuation issued by the U. S. Army has now been vacated and

Whereas, we are aware of the fact that disloyal Japanese and such Americans of Japanese descent who are suspect will be kept in custody of the government with a view toward deportation and de-naturalization after the war and

Whereas, the American Legion has full confidence in the judgment of our military authorities and

Whereas, there have been grave assaults upon the inherent rights of fellow Americans and

Whereas, there is now being waged a persistent campaign of intolerance, prejudice and hatred against them and

Whereas, there is cause for grave suspicion that certain elements are waging this campaign behind the cloak of false patriotism although their only true consideration concerns their selfish economic advantage:

NOW, THEREFORE, we, the members of Post 591, American Legion, Hollywood, World War II, Department of California, do hereby declare:

1. We, the members of this Post, condemn any discrimination of whatsoever type against any American citizen based on the stand that he or she is of Japanese or any other racial descent.
2. We, as veterans of World War II, have been fighting for the ideals of and principals guaranteed by the U. S. Constitution and are much concerned over the actions of certain groups and individuals who are attacking these very ideals for which we have been fighting.
3. We strongly condemn any efforts to establish a false distinction among American citizens based on race, color or religious creed, such distinction being a complete violation of the constitutional provision that there be no such distinction established among American citizens.
4. We therefore condemn the action of the Hood River Post of the American Legion in effacing the names of American soldiers fighting overseas from their honor roster, as a shameful act which discredits and humiliates the name of the American Legion.
5. We urge all comrades of our Post and all other American Legion Posts and all citizens who have the welfare of the nation at heart to safeguard the constitutional rights of all Americans regardless of race, color and creed.



Office Memorandum UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT

DATE:

WRA Library Washington

TO:

Capt Cahill UD BPR

FROM:

LT Tukey

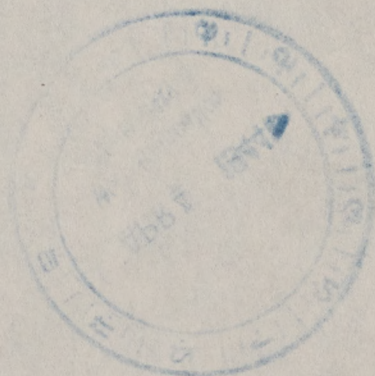
RICHARD E. TUKEY,  
1st Lieut. - Inf.,  
Public Relations  
Officer

SUBJECT:

attached story & pix as  
requested

RICHARD E. TUKEY,  
1st Lieut. - Inf.,  
Public Relations  
Officer

Fort Benning Ga











PFC. THOMAS TSUYUKI

## Japanese American Wins Chute Wings

Having recently successfully completed his jump training The Parachute School, Private First Class Thomas "Bud" Tsuyuki holds the distinction of being one of the first Americans of Japanese descent to earn the right to wear the silver "Wings," of a qualified paratrooper.

Private Tsuyuki spent eight months in the Arizona internment camp following the military evacuation of all Japanese descendants on the West Coast. Understanding the necessity of the measure, Bud evidenced his loyalty by enlisting in the Army Language School in Minnesota. From there he entered the Parachute School.

Born and reared in the San Joaquin Valley, California, Tsuyuki graduated from high school in Watsonville, Calif., where he won his letter in basketball, track and football, and worked as a sports writer for two years on the two Watsonville daily newspapers. For a short time he conducted a sports radio program before enrolling as a pre-law student at Salinas Junior College.

Despite his Japanese ancestry, Private Tsuyuki received at the jump school the same respect shown any other American soldier in uniform. He states that he was never once made conscious of his extraction.

How'd he like the parachute jumping. Jumping out of a plane the first time up is the most unnatural thing he has experienced, Tsuyuki reports. "Training was rough all the way, but nothing that a little physical conditioning and determination can't take," he says.

Private Tsuyuki now works as a clerk in the Parachute School Headquarters. He has one brother, Sgt. Geary Tsuyuki, stationed in Arkansas and one or more of his other brothers will be in uniform soon.

Questioned about his future ambitions, Tsuyuki replied that he constantly dreams and hopes of seeing the Americans of Japanese ancestry in the Army being sent to take a major part in the war against the Jap "Sons of Hell." He believes that if more of the many thousands of American Japanese in the United States Army were used against Japan, the propaganda effect alone would contribute greatly to the shortening of the war.



THE PARACHUTE SCHOOL  
PUBLIC RELATIONS OFFICE

Fort Benning, Georgia.  
31 March 1944.

*Report*

Having recently successfully completed his Jump Training in The Parachute School, <sup>at Fort Benning</sup> Private First Class, Thomas "Bud" Tsuyuki holds the *distinction* recognition of being one of the first Americans of Japanese descent to earn the right to the silver "Wings" of a qualified parachutist.

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TPS - PRO  
Tsuyuki

Ft Benning Ga.  
31 Mar 44.

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COPY

WAR RELOCATION AUTHORITY  
COMMUNITY ANALYSIS SECTION

February 11, 1943

*hook file*

Mr. Paul McNutt  
Chairman  
War Manpower Commission  
Washington, D. C.

*Guarantee Letter  
to Mr. P. McNutt on Feb. 11, 1943*

Dear Sir:

The following consideration of some length is addressed to you at this time because of the exigent need demanding enlightenment on a problem which due to its intricacy has not been given as much attention as would be desirable. It might be marked as the height of imprudence when you men in public positions are ever confronted with pressing problems from all sides, to present the problem of the Japanese-Americans at this time. But I feel that the problem being one of a numerically small minority group is not one which can wait until a post-war era and its postponement will worsen rather than solve matters. And so it is with due apologies, the presentation is made.

On January 28, 1943, a statement was made public in which the policy of the United States Government would be one of accepting the Japanese-American persons now in the Relocation Centers into the armed services upon submission of evidence of loyalty. Such a change of policy whereby all persons regardless of racial background would be allowed to demonstrate actively loyalty to their country is highly commended. It has been the result of many interested groups concerned about equality of opportunity to be accorded all persons of American citizenry and without reservation. Among them the Japanese-American Citizens' League, sympathetic men in the War Department and in civilian government positions, the naturalized citizens of Japanese ancestry by reason of participation in the World War I such as the late Mr. Clarence Uno, former and present reserve officers in the Relocation Centers, and individuals, among them myself, who have time and again urged change of our draft status since the change of circumstances initiated by the



military evacuation. In your three-fold program (voluntary induction, selective service, and defense work programs) of registration, the Government has announced voluntary induction, and advisedly so, because of the train of events which have followed in the past few months. It is after considerable deliberation that I declare my intention for induction into the armed services of the United States after due consideration of in what way I might best serve my country in a time of shortage of manpower both on the home front and on the fighting fronts abroad. The choice involves considerable sacrifice; it involves the conflict between the basic religious principles of Christian brotherly love and the broad sociological world of the future, the conflict between the sanctioning of a double-standard Jim-Crowism and the mighty ideals of democracy for the common man, and the conflict between the rights of a democracy and the obligations inherent when our country is endangered by enemies from both within and without. The die is cast; there can and shall be no retroversion. The choice is made fully cognizant of the animosities aroused and many human relationships altered. However, as I offer my services and life to my country, I wish to make the following statements so that the democracy which we enlistees wish to see won will come to realization, that lives to be offered will not have been sacrificed in vain. I make these statements before being committed to military policy.

The exercise of freedom of expression for public enlightenment and for presentation of necessary facts, it seems to me, whenever pertinent and obviously indicated because of first-hand experience, is an inherent duty of an alive and informed citizenry in a democracy. It is wished that the operation of a democracy be inquired into and clarified. The test of a democracy it has been repeatedly said lies in the treatment accorded its minority



groups, in that they are the first of any to be affected in a democratic crisis. Members of a minority group must by duty keep others informed and vigilant of the insidious deteriorating attacks made upon a democracy, starting in the minority groups. Particularly, under duress of war Civil Rights undergo severe strain; and its future preservation depends in small measure upon the fate of the minority groups.

I wish to call attention to the social trends occurring during the interim of our confinement in the relocation centers. If trends continue at the present rate, I fear only an ominous portend for the future. I refer to the activities of various high-pressure groups ever trying to bar the gates we left behind us and ever attempting anew to lock the gates before us. I refer to such organizations and groups as the Native Sons of the Golden West, the California Joint Immigration Committee, the American Legion posts in the Coast states, and the Grand Jury of Los Angeles County, California. These groups have stirred public sentiment against the Japanese-Americans, forcing to head such measures as deprivation of citizenship from American-born individuals of Japanese ancestry, permanent banishment of all persons of Japanese ancestry forever from the now prohibited military zone on the Pacific Coast, deprivation of land ownership rights in our former home communities and in future communities eyed some as prospective homes for relocation, deportation of all Japanese ancestry persons back to Japan, and advocacy of more rigorous treatment of the parents, families, and friends to be left behind in the relocation centers.

In regards to deprivation of citizenship, it was noted that although the early attempts of the Native Sons of the Golden West in the lower courts failed, their more recent attempts have been more successful, hearing being



granted them in the United States District Court of Appeals in San Francisco, California. The American Legion has also urged its adoption in the posts all up and down the Pacific Coast.

The measures to provide for permanent banishment of all persons of Japanese ancestry now evacuated into the Relocation Centers shocks our sense of justice. The tacit understanding when Japanese ancestry persons volunteered to evacuate under army tutelage was that the move was of a temporary nature and that the change would be only for the duration of the national emergency. Many left property behind in the Coast States with the idea of returning home after the conclusion of the war. Now the American Legion is urging permanent exclusion of Japanese ancestry persons from West Coast in total disregard of official statements testifying as the loyalty of the now evacuated individuals and in total disregard of the basic principles of democracy. The recent Gallup Polls give at best an only uncertain assurance of public acceptability in these communities.

Along with these exclusion measures steps are being taken to deprive all Japanese ancestry persons, citizen and non-citizen alike, of land ownership rights in our former home communities and in those communities where some evacuees have planned as future homes into which to relocate. The majority report of the Los Angeles County Grand Jury set off the lead in this other counties of California have followed suit. It is not borne in mind that the early pioneer efforts of the Japanese made possible the opening up of hitherto waste lands and now these improved and cultivated lands are virtually confiscated. Nor does this apply alone to California. The State of Colorado has adopted resolutions to the same effect. The Utah State Legislature enacted laws forbidding the acquisition of land by any Japanese



ancestry persons. Similarly reads the adopted state laws of Arizona and Arkansas.

Cry has been made for deportation of all Japanese ancestry persons back to Japan, it being held by the American Legion group as a gesture of good will for the further spreading and ingraining the cause of democracy among the people of Japan across the seas. Were their declared intentions uttered in utmost sincerity, perhaps their lack of perspicuity could be somewhat excused. But that remains a moot question. Whatever the avowed or ulterior motive, it remains at best a futile idealistic proposal. If the people now evacuated were transported back to Japan, they would undergo most certain persecution with almost inevitable defeat. Similar facial features do not necessarily imply easy assimilation and effective work along this direction. The very factor of numbers of 100,000 against 80,000,000 would make the proposal unworkable at the very outset.

While steps are being worked out for induction of Japanese-Americans into the United States armed services, the clamor is raised from various quarters of "coddling the evacuees". A Senate Investigation is now being conducted and our friends of the Relocation Program must be subjected to hearings. Present plans and activities and future appropriations threaten to be cut. The entire War Relocation program about which we were enthusiastically informed threatens to be revamped overnight. As we leave our parents and families in the Relocation Centers for the armed services, we have no assurance of fair treatment of those who see us off to the front and remain in the relocation centers. The War Relocation Authority at present has no definite policy, being governed by consensus of opinion and subject to change from day to day. My conscience wishes to rest assured of safe, fair treatment of the people who remain behind in our absence. As an enlistee, I would



not wish my parents to be subjected to the many personal indignities as formerly encountered in the WCCA during our absence; and further would not wish the jurisdiction of the Relocation Centers to be passed out from civilian into military hands.

I recapitulate the issues again: (1) citizenship status of American born persons because of racial background, (2) citizenship rights of these same people with regard to their property and franchise rights, and (3) the WRA program.

The trends which have been mentioned cannot be lightly brushed aside. We cannot completely ignore them on the basis of saying that the agitators are in the minority and that the majority of persons are understanding, fair, and of good will. And for this reason: the drums for mass evacuation were first beaten by these groups at the time of the Senate Tolan Committee investigation. While mention of the past is not necessarily meant to be a criticism of the subsequent steps taken by the Government, it is brought out with the intent to show what has happened in the past and thereby we can profit from this experience -- although costly -- in anything occurring in the future. It must always be remembered, further, that the pressure groups are achieving a certain measure of success in their campaigns. At the present time the pressure groups are allowed to rant at large unrestricted while we are unable to defend our position.

In examining ideologies, we find that our nation has avowedly declared itself to be fighting for democracy, the statements being made notably by President Roosevelt and by Vice-President Wallace. But needless to say, the concept of democracy has not been applied on all arenas of American life. Perhaps then the concept of democracy is a dynamic one furnishing hope of progressive change toward better things. The concept permits growth in keeping with



the needs of its people. For instance, upon recognition of the existence of a negro problem, Fair Employment Practice Boards have been set up in various communities of the country to iron out difficulties of fair treatment toward negroes in the defense industries. It is simply a step in the direction toward good. America has been a loving adopted mother for hundreds of thousands of refugees fleeing from war-torn Europe for a place of solace; and American democracy has been equal in meeting the task newly created. And so it goes. In the same light I believe all Japanese-American enlistees wish to have as much of democracy applied to its loyal citizenry whoever they are. True, Civil Rights of all might have to be necessarily curtailed in wartime and commensurate with the peculiar military necessity of the situation. But if curtailment it must be, then let the Civil Rights of all be curtailed equally. We wish to see America be truly the Open Door for all persons of genuine worth, even going so far as to open naturalization avenues for known loyal Chinese and Japanese first generation persons showing every reasonable promise of becoming well-assimilated into American life. We wish to have a fair hearing and a fair chance of defending ourselves in courts and in other legal citadels when prosecutions are instituted. I believe in the Constitution as the foundation of this country and her institutions. I do pledge to do everything in my power to protect it, from enemies both foreign and domestic.

The personal sacrifice involved when I take this step to enlist in the United States armed services will be mentioned, not for personal aggrandizement but for an illustration of the kind of sacrifices other families similarly placed are making toward the strengthening of the war effort. At the time of military evacuation eight months ago, I was forced to evacuate without finishing medical school by 1½ years, and at that time was doing creditable



work. I could have served when the time came as a graduated physician and perhaps more effectively in the armed services. But the past is past; I offer my services in whatever way possible that I can. Continuation and completion of medical studies through the National Student Relocation Council was prohibited by the fact that all medical schools in the country were doing military research. But I feel that although as great as the sacrifice may be, my country's welfare stands before my personal career whatever the fate of the latter may be. Another complicating circumstance is the health of both of my parents, my father at present virtually on the death bed in the hospital with health progressively ruined since the onset of evacuation and my mother suffering from chronic heart disease occasioned by the high altitude of the Relocation Center area. But whatever the family condition, as difficult as the condition may be, nevertheless the country in distress perhaps deserves first consideration in rendering service. It is a difficult choice to make, but a choice made with firm resolve.

In my stand as a nisei-American enlistee my attitude is one of let the past be past. Whatever has happened in the past can and must be interpreted as a wartime expedient whether in the ultimate analysis, it was justified or not, while when arriving at this conclusion being fully aware of the many personal sacrifices involved financially, socially, and spiritually. I will take your statements made in the past through either the WCCA or the WRA on face-value. For instance, I shall interpret the barbed-wire fence as a good-hearted effort to protect us from ill-meaning persons on the outside and let it go at that.

So much for the past. As I make this decision to enlist, I wish to have this important point stressed. I strongly urge and wish to have assurance for our future. As difficult as the past was, it could be uncomplainingly



borne were there definite reassurance of our place in the future. I should like to see the fruits of our efforts definitely written in the plans of the future. It would indeed be an ironic situation, if upon returning from the battlefield, we should be shipped back to Japan. I do not say that this will happen but it does not entirely lie outside the realm of impossibility; I say it so that it will not happen. Of course, primarily I along with the rest of the evacuee enlistees wish to be returned with our families to the Pacific Coast to our home towns before or at the completion of the war. However, if relocation is to be the course to be followed, then we wish to see a relocation program assured of permanency, stability, and genuine readjustment, involving the minimum of hardships and the least of risk. We should like to see a public education program carried out, and if at present such a program is already instituted, we should like to see it expanded. Probably such a public education program could best be carried out through an official government declaration in the form of a definite policy. By no small means, the human element factor looms as the largest contending factor.

As an enlistee, I fully recognize that the treatment accorded minority groups is the test of a democracy. I should like our democracy to meet this crucial test, to tackle its problem while in the initial barometer stage before the storm of chaos and inconsistency sweeps through all of society.

As an enlistee waging the battle abroad against aggression from enemies without, I appeal for fair play toward the people to be left behind. I feel a considerable degree of faith in a nation that is large enough in its social vision and capacity for tolerance to accord a splendid attitude toward the Italian and German aliens in this country known to be loyal to American institutions. I wish to see an official proclamation forbidding further infringement of our civil rights, referring especially to the action being taken by



the American Legion on the Pacific Coast. (Admittedly the American Legion in some mid-west states have been admirably fair and understanding of our problem.) I do not think it a violation of the Tenth Amendment of the Constitution if the federal government rides over the recent acts of the state legislatures involving discriminatory measures.

There is at present a coincidental situation in which on one hand the Japanese are the only remaining enemy alien group who have no lift on bans and restrictions for all intents and purposes on the continental United States (group includes American citizens as they are accorded the same treatment as their alien parents) and on the other hand at the same time the Japanese are the only significantly large group in confinement of a different race. The situation could be one of pure coincidence, or it could be one instigated from discriminatory reasons. Whichever is true, at least for the enemy it furnishes good propaganda. Now is the opportune time, it seems, to clarify definitely the stand the United States takes on this matter so that there can be no misunderstanding --- so that the entire world including even Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan itself, can see for itself that basically the democracy we have is a living vibrant thing that undergoes no alteration despite circumstances. It seems evident that the strength of a war effort depends greatly upon the force of its ideology. It is toward maintaining this strength that I should like to see the present situation remedied. I wish to see equal treatment accorded the Japanese evacuees as is being accorded to others of the citizenry and loyal individuals in being enabled to enjoy the rights of a democracy as well as to be afforded the opportunity of fulfilling its obligations equally with others of his citizenry. I urge the removal of restrictions and bans even if only on the basis of eliminating any possible ammunition for enemy propaganda; but really, of course, in keeping



with the broad fundamentals of a democracy "of malice toward none, with charity toward all" -- "regardless of race, color, or previous condition of servitude".

If due consideration be given to the foregoing, and if the potential will for fair play be actually realized either now or assured of fulfillment in a definite future, then I know that our lives will not have been sacrificed in vain.

Respectfully,

/s/ Abe Oyamada

Abe Oyamada  
24 - 19 - C WRA  
Heart Mountain, Wyoming.

NOTE: The opinions expressed above are personal and of a few persons with whom I have spoken and do not necessarily commit the entire nisei-American group. Due to shortage of time and the machinery for registration and education of its operation for the Relocation Center residents, it has been impossible as yet to contact all of the prospective enlisted army personnel. In the near future, an open joint letter of this group from our Relocation Center will in all definite probability follow.

AO.



WAR RELOCATION AUTHORITY  
COMMUNITY ANALYSIS SECTION

Pvt. Henry E. Suzuki  
School and Student Detach  
Camp Savage, Minn.

*Dec 1942*

Dear Tom,

Thanks alot for your swell card. It's nice of you to remember me. Sorry I didn't write you before but I didn't have your address. I'd like to extend my Season's Greetings to you now before I forget to later. Well, it's really a white Christmas here. Snow. Lots of it. and plenty cold too. Imagine standing retreat and close order drill in weather 10° below. Boy your nose and ears and toe's just freeze on you. When I come home for my furlough I'll be at least a buck sergeant. We've been promised that. In 3 months I'll be corporal, also guaranteed. Here's one time I regret not having studied my nihongo before. Well, today we had a 10 mile march. It's part of our basic training. School has started now and it's a pretty hard grind from 8 in the morning till 9 at night and then some more volunteer cramming till midnight or so. We just don't get any spare time. Every minute we have to be on our toes. Only relaxation is on week ends when we go into town for a real good time. Your so busy you don't feel tired till you hit the bunk and the days just seem to fly by. Army life is swell compared to camp life. Everything is strict and to the point. No fooling around. Boy I'm learning a lot here. It's just like a college education. We get paid too! 50 bucks a month. I'll be getting a raise soon as I get my rating. Mas Imori was here. He graduated and is now enroute to parts unknown. He graduated as Staff Sergeant. 3 stripes and a rocker. He said to pass on his regards to all the boys. Minneapolis has a swell Cathedral on 6th and Hennepin. It's as big or bigger than Seattles. The people here are very friendly. Frequently we get invited for dinner, parties etc. There is no difference in treatment to Nisei or Caucasian Soldiers. Lots of swell articles about our graduates appear frequently in the "Yank" and also Minneapolis papers. I hope this good publicity becomes nation wide so that everyone will realize that we are in this war just as much as our Caucasian fellow Americans. It's a new experience to me to be treated equally. I hope soon that the Niseis get out of camp. W.R.A. is planning to get them all out. That's why I want to be an example of a perfect Nisei here, so people will judge the rest by our deeds here and overseas. Very encouraging reports are coming in here. The farther east you go to the more American the people are. They have never seen us or delt with us before so they didn't know what to think but now they are all for us. Nothing like out on the coast. Lots of fellows here are getting jobs for wives and friends here in Minneapolis through the officers here at camp. They realize our problem and want to help us. Well, be a good boy. I hope to hear from you soon. Pass my regards to all the church goers. To Father and Francis.

Sincerely

Henry Suzuki



An Address by Sergeant Ben Kuroki, U.S. Army Air Force  
Commonwealth Club, San Francisco, Cal.  
February 4, 1944

WRA Library Washington

I want to thank you gentlemen, especially Mr. Deutsch and Mr. Ward, for inviting me to speak to you today. This is a great honor, and I really appreciate it. I just hope that I won't disappoint you. People who are going to make speeches usually start out by saying that they don't know how to, but in my case it's really true. A soldier's job is to fight, not talk, but I'll do the best I can.

I've spent most of my life in Hershey, Nebraska, which isn't where they make Hershey candy bars. Hershey is so small that probably none of you has ever heard of it. Before the war the population was about 500; now I guess it's about 300.

I didn't even live in Hershey; my father had a farm a mile north of town. I remember the farmers used to go to town every Saturday night and stand in groups on the street corners talking about their cows and horses. We've lived on that farm since 1928, and after I finished high school I helped my father work it until the war came along.

The last two years are what really matter, though, and maybe I can tell you something about them, even if I don't know much about making speeches. That's one thing the Army didn't teach me, though it taught me a lot of other things, and the experience I went through as a result of being in the Army taught me even more.

I learned more about democracy, for one thing, than you'll find in all the books, because I saw it in action. When you live with men under combat conditions for 15 months, you begin to understand what brotherhood, equality, tolerance and unselfishness really mean. They're no longer just words.

Under fire, a man's ancestry, what he did before the war, or even his present rank, don't matter at all. You're fighting as a team--that's the only way a bomber crew can fight--you're fighting for each other's life and for your country, and whether you realize it at the time or not, you're living and proving democracy.

Something happened on my first mission that might give you an idea of what I mean. We were in a flak zone--the anti-aircraft was terribly accurate --and we had a flock of fighters attacking us.

A shell burst right above the tail, and flak poured down. Our tail gunner was a young kid named Dawley, from New Jersey. The piece that got him was so big it tore a four-inch hole through a quarter of an inch of aluminum and double-welded steel. It caught him just above the ear. It went through his fur helmet, and in so far we couldn't even see it when we got to him.

I was firing the right waist gun on our Liberator that day. All of a sudden I heard him yell over the interphone: "I'm hit in the head, let's get the hell out of here!"

We couldn't leave the guns until we'd shaken the Messerschmitts that were after us--it would have been suicide--but in a few minutes the tunnel gunner and I were able to get back to the tail.



We pulled Dawley back into the fuselage, so that we could work on him and at the same time watch out for more fighters. Then we took off our fur jackets and covered him up. It was about 10 below zero and we were about freezing to death.

He was in terrible shape; I can't even begin to describe the look of pain on his face. He was semi-conscious, but he couldn't open his mouth to speak. His lips seemed to be parched, as though he was dying of thirst. We couldn't understand how he was still alive.

I called the radio operator, because he's the one who is supposed to administer first aid on a Liberator, but instead the co-pilot, a first lieutenant, came back. He was going to give Dawley a morphine injection, but I stopped him. They'd taught us in gunnery school not to give morphine for head injuries; it might kill the man instantly. The co-pilot had either forgotten or was so excited he could think only of stopping the pain.

Anyway, I motioned to him--we couldn't hear each other above the roar of the motors--I pointed to my head and shook it. The co-pilot evidently understood, because he didn't give Dawley the morphine.

That tail gunner lived to fly and fight again, and the last I heard he had completed his tour of duty. Whether or not I was instrumental in saving his life by stopping that morphine injection isn't important--it was just that we had to work together regardless of rank or ancestry.

The tunnel gunner that helped me with him was Jewish, I'm a Japanese-American, the bombardier of our crew was a German, the left waist gunner was an Irishman. Later I flew with an American Indian pilot and a Polish tunnel gunner. What difference did it make? We had a job to do, and we did it with a kind of comradeship that was the finest thing in the world.

That first mission was over Bizerte; it was the 13th of December, 1942, and we'd just arrived in French North Africa from England two days before. When I say "we" I'm talking about the outfit I was serving with; it was Brig. Gen. Ted Timberlake's Liberator bomber group, which everybody over there called "Ted's Traveling Circus" because it got around so much back and forth between England and Africa. In fact, it got around so much it kept German military intelligence guessing, trying to figure out where it was from week to week.

It was a funny thing--I'd just been assigned to a crew the day before we left England, although the group had been based there for about four months. I'd finished gunnery school more than a month before, and ever since I'd been trying to get assigned to a crew. It wasn't easy; I'd talk to the pilot whenever I knew there was going to be an opening in a crew, and each pilot would assign me temporarily and then replace me when the time came for permanent assignment.

I understood well enough how they felt; and they knew I was as good as any man they did assign, but still they were uneasy. But I wanted to get into combat more than anything in the world, so I kept after it.

In fact, it had been one continual struggle from the beginning of my Army career, and I felt that I had done pretty well to get overseas and to



gunnery school.

Two days after Pearl Harbor, my brother Fred and I drove 150 miles to Grand Island, Nebraska, to enlist in the Army Air Forces. We were held up for nearly a month because of all the confusion and misunderstanding in Army camps at that time. For the first time in our lives we found out what prejudice was.

I began to realize right then that I had a couple of strikes on me to begin with, and that I was going to be fighting two battles instead of one-- against the Axis and against intolerance among my fellow-Americans.

Finally, after two more trips to Grand Island and three telephone calls, Fred and I were accepted at the recruiting station at North Platte, and sent to Sheppard Field, Texas, for basic training.

There was so much prejudice among the recruits there, that I wondered if it would always be like that; if I would ever be able to overcome it. Even now I would rather go through my bombing missions again than face that kind of prejudice.

My kid brother Fred could hardly stand it. He'd come back to the barracks at night and bury his head in his pillow and actually cry. We were not only away from home for the first time; but because of this discrimination, we were the loneliest two soldiers in the Army.

After basic I was sent to clerical school at Fort Logan, Colorado, and then to Barksdale Field near Shreveport, Louisiana, for permanent assignment. Of the 40 clerks sent to Barksdale, I was the last one assigned. I spent about a month at Barksdale, most of it on K.P. You've all heard the Air Forces motto, "Keep 'Em Flying." Well, my motto was "Keep 'Em Peeling"; they called me "Keep 'Em Peeling" Kuroki in those days.

The most discouraging thing about that was the fact that I had no assurance that I ever would be assigned. About the only thing that kept me going were the wonderful letters of encouragement I received from home. My sister would write me that I had to realize that Americans were shocked by Pearl Harbor, and that many of them were unable to distinguish between Japanese and Americans of Japanese descent. I still was without a friend in the Army, though, and that made it bad. There was only one boy who was kind to me at all--he used to get my mail for me when I was on K. P. and couldn't get away.

I was finally assigned to a squadron in General Timberlake's bomber group, which had been formed at Barksdale and was ready to move to Fort Myers, Florida, for final training. A few days before we were to leave, the commanding officer of my squadron called me in and told me I wasn't going; and that I was to be transferred to another outfit.

That was about the worst news I had ever heard. I asked him why, and he said that he had nothing to do with it. He started asking me questions then--how I liked the Army, and so forth. I told him pretty bluntly about the prejudice I was encountering, and that I didn't even go into town because I couldn't enjoy a minute of it when I did. He seemed sympathetic enough, but he said there was nothing he could do to stop my being transferred.



But, my words must have had some effect, because the day before the group left, he called me back and ~~told me to pack my bags~~ that I was going with them then.

At Fort Myers I did clerical work for about three months. I gradually began to win over some of the soldiers, and the boy who used to get my mail for me at Barksdale became a good friend of mine. We were in a truck accident one day, and I was able to help him. After that we were inseparable.

When the group had finished training and was ready to go overseas, I was given orders, as I had been at Barksdale, transferring me out of my squadron. This was even worse than the time at Barksdale, because I really wanted to go overseas and had been counting on it for three months.

General Timberlake--he was then a colonel--was already up north with the air echelon of the group, so I couldn't see him. I went to see the squadron adjutant and begged him, with tears streaming down my face, to take me along. He said there was nothing he could do about it, that it wasn't because I was of Japanese descent. But he did agree to talk it over with the group adjutant, and in about an hour he came back with the good news that I would remain with the outfit. I was about the happiest guy in the world just then.

We shipped north right after that and sailed from New York on the last day of August 1942. Ours was the first Liberator group sent to the European theater. As soon as we had our base set up in England, I applied for combat duty. I had to beg for that too, but at least I was sent to gunnery school.

It wasn't much schooling--about a week, I guess--a lot different from the way it is now, when every crew member goes to school for months in this country. I really learned to shoot the hard way, in combat.

As a result of the recommendations of the armament officer, I was accepted on Major J. B. Epting's crew as an auxiliary member; we were to go out on a raid the next day, but it was cancelled because of the weather. About a week later I was permanently assigned to his crew. The next day we flew to Africa and my tour of duty began. Once again I'd received a break just in the nick of time.

We were glad to get away from the cold, fog, rain and mud of England. Boy, Africa seemed like heaven for the first two days. It was dry and warm and the sun was shining. It was interesting, too, at first. I met my first live Arab. The Arabs used to come out to the base peddling tangerines and oranges and eggs, foods we hadn't seen for months in England. I remember in London they were asking 18 shillings--about \$3.50--for a pound of grapes; one of our boys even asked the vendor if they had golden seeds in them.

One of our gunners made a deal with an Arab--a filthy barefoot old man dressed in something that looked like grandma's nightgown. The gunner told him he would trade the plane for six eggs delivered every day for six months. So every day the Arab would bring him six eggs. Then he would go over to the plane and pat it and smile, thinking of the day when it would be his. We wondered what he thought when we took off one day and didn't come back.

After the second night in Africa we weren't so sure it was an improvement on England. It started to rain and kept on raining until we finally



couldn't operate at all. We had no tents or barracks or any place to sleep. Some of the boys slept under the plane until it got too muddy. I picked the flight deck inside for myself, but gave it up so that Major Epting could sleep there. I slept in the top turret.

If you have any idea of the size of a top turret on a Liberator, you can imagine how comfortable I was. I had to sit up, and all night I would bump into switches which would snap on and wake me up. One night of that was enough for me.

We'd left England in such a hurry that we didn't have mess kits. All the time we were in French North Africa we ate our canned hash and hardtack out of sardine cans.

And the mud--I've never seen such gooey mud. Our group flew about three or four missions from that base and then the planes couldn't even get off the ground. They'd start to take off and sink into the mud all the way up to the belly, and then we'd have to unload the bombs, dig the ship out, reload and try again. It was a mess. After about 18 days we gave up and moved out of there.

From French North Africa we went to the Libyan desert, near Tobruk, not long after the Germans had surrendered it. Tobruk was the most desolate place I have ever seen; it was full of abandoned tanks and guns and broken buildings. Only a church had escaped complete destruction, and no living person dwelt in that city.

But as far as we were concerned, we were glad to get out of our mud-hole in North Africa, but not for long. We were in Libya three months. In all that time, we were able to take a bath only once, and that was when we were given leave to fly to an Egyptian city for that specific purpose. That was the only time we shaved, too; we must have looked like a convention of Rip Van Winkles before we left.

There were no laundry facilities; we were allowed only a pint of water a day for everything. This water we drew from a well, which we had to abandon after a while when we found some dead Germans in it.

We were at least 300 miles from any town, excepting the dead city of Tobruk. We had no entertainment of any kind out there on the desert; when we weren't on raids we just lay around in our tents, or took walks in the desert.

The most dismal Christmas eve of my life I spent on the Libyan desert. It was cold, and we didn't even have tents to sleep under. We slept in our clothes and didn't even take off our shoes. Our morale was certainly low that night, as we thought of the fun we could be having in the States, and of our families and friends back there. But it's things like that, as well as actually fighting together, that bring men close to one another, as close as brothers.

Our group was going on raids about every other day while we were in the desert, and they were all pretty rough. We bombed Rommel's shipping lines over and over at Bizerte, Tunis, Sfax, Sousse and Tripoli in Africa. Then we started in on Sicily and Italy.



We had some boys of Italian parentage flying with us, and whenever we took off to bomb Naples or Rome I'd kid them about bombing their honorable ancestors. "We're really going to make the spaghetti fly today," I'd say, and they'd retort that they couldn't wait to knock the rice out of my dishonorable ancestors.

Naples was always a rough target. It was the "flak city" of the Italian theater. The flak burst so thick and black you couldn't even see the planes a hundred yards behind you. Yet our raids over there were called spectacular examples of precision bombing.

We participated in the first American raid on Rome last July. It was the biggest surprise I'd had so far; we thought we were going to run into heavy opposition, and we were almost disappointed when we found hardly any.

We bombed Sicily and Southern Italy at altitudes of about 25,000 feet, and it really gets cold at that height. One time over Palermo it was 42 below zero. I froze two oxygen masks; after that I had to suck on the hose to get any oxygen.

Even at that height we could see our bombs breaking exactly on their targets, and as much as an hour after we had left the targets we could see the smoke rising from the fires we had caused.

It gave you a funny feeling; you couldn't help but think of the people being hurt down there. I wasn't particularly religious before the war, but I always said a prayer, and I know for sure that my pal Kettering, the radio operator, did too, for the innocent people we were destroying on raids like that.

But we were in no position to be sentimental about it. The people knew they were in danger, and they could have gotten out. Besides, we weren't fighting against individual people, but against ideas. It was Hitlerism or democracy, and we couldn't afford to let it be Hitlerism. And so, unfortunately, it was German and Italian lives or ours. That was the only way you could look at it.

It was a happy day when after three months of Libya, we received orders to return to England. We took off from Tobruk at midnight. There was no formation; the planes left at two-minute intervals, and each was on its own.

The next morning, instead of seeing daylight, we looked out over a blanket of clouds without any opening. We had had to go up to about 10,000 feet to get over the clouds, and now we couldn't go under them, for fear of crashing into mountains.

We were lost. The navigator could do nothing, and the radio operator, though he was working like mad, couldn't get his messages through because of the weather. Finally he got a message, but by that time we didn't have enough gas to get to the air field that had answered us. We'd already been up 11 hours and 20 minutes with a 10-hours' supply of gas. We expected to go down any minute.

The pilot called back that anyone who wanted to bail out could do so. Nobody did; I know I had so much faith in Major Epting's flying ability that I wouldn't leave until he did. All of a sudden, and it seemed like a miracle



to us who were tensely waiting for the crash, there was a tiny rift in the clouds. Epting didn't wait one second; he just dove right into it, and made a perfect landing in a valley that wasn't big enough to land a cub in safely.

We had just gotten out of the plane when a swarm of Arabs surrounded us. There must have been a hundred of them, and they were armed with rifles, spears, and some with clubs. When we saw them coming we debated whether we should shoot at them or try to talk to them. We decided to talk to them, but we couldn't understand them and they couldn't understand us.

They didn't hurt us, but they certainly weren't friendly. They took everything away from us--guns, wallets and everything we had in our pockets--and they wouldn't let us near the plane.

We had no idea where we were, but in a few minutes a Spanish officer came up and arrested us, and we found out that we had landed in Spanish Morocco. The officer marched all of us, our crew and the Arabs, into a native village about two miles away. The procession we made caused more excitement, I guess, than that village had had in its entire history.

The natives all thought I was Chinese, but Kettering, our radio operator, explained to the Spanish soldiers that I was Japanese American. That created quite a stir when it got around. Most of the people, both Spanish and Arabs, flatly refused to believe it, and later it took the American embassy to prove it to them.

In a few days we were flown to Spain in a German plane and interned in a mountain village. We thought we'd be there for the duration, but within two months, through methods I can't reveal, we were in England.

From England we bombed targets in Germany and began preparations for the raid on the Romanian oil fields at Ploesti, preparations that were to last three months and take us back to the Libyan desert. In England our group practiced low-level bombing. We practice-bombed our own airfields, each plane having its own specific target. That way our bombardiers got accustomed to finding targets at low altitude.

After nearly a month in England we returned to Africa. This time our base was set up near the city of Bengasi in Libya. Here we had a complete dummy target of what we later learned were the Ploesti refineries.

Up to this time I had been a tail gunner, but now I was assigned to the top turret, the position I held throughout the rest of my missions. To celebrate the event, Kettering painted in big red letters across the glass dome of the turret these words: "Top Turret Gunner Most Honorable Son Sgt. Ben Kuroki." "Most Honorable Son" was what they usually called me--that or "Hara-kiri." They were a great bunch over there.

Every day that we weren't on missions, 175 Liberators loaded with practice bombs would take off in groups at regular intervals and bomb duplicates of the real target. On these practice raids, each group rather than each plane had its specific target, so that it was really a dress rehearsal of the actual raid. Some of the planes flew so low that they came back with their bomb-bay doors torn off. And we sure scared the daylights out of the natives; we had to dodge groups of Arabs and their camels all over that desert.



Despite the heat we had to do double work, because we had only a skeleton ground crew--our real base was still in England. We'd go up into 10 to 20-below-zero temperatures and then come back into 110-above heat. It was no wonder that a lot of the boys came down with colds.

We had fewer sandstorms and they didn't last as long as when we had been stationed near Tobruk. What really worried us were the poisonous sand-viper snakes and scorpions. The scorpions especially--big two-inch long devils with curving tails were thick as flies. We'd find them in our blankets and everywhere else. If you got stung by one of them, you really knew it; you'd be sick as a dog for at least a day.

The month preceding the Ploesti raid we were taking part in the invasion of Sicily, bombing Messina, Palermo and various airfields. It's unusual for heavy bombers to bomb airfields, but we were assigned that job so that it would be impossible for enemy fighter planes to take off from those fields and strafe our ground troops as they landed.

During all our practice for Ploesti we were intensely curious as to what our target was going to be. Rumors of all kinds were floating around, but no one thought it would be Ploesti because no one could imagine how we could carry enough gas to get there and back.

Our base was guarded by British anti-aircraft gunners, and we used to ask them what they thought about our flying so low. They said it was an advantage from the point of view of escaping the heavy anti-aircraft fire, but that we would be dead ducks for anything smaller than 40 millimeter cannon. Right then we began to think of the approaching raid as a "suicide" mission.

The last week in July every crew member in every group was restricted to the base until after the mission, but it was not until the day before we left that we were told the target was the Roumanian oil fields. That was news all right. You hardly ever hear of an oil field being bombed--the only other one I know of was in Burma. We were really surprised. There had been a couple of rumors that our target was to be Ploesti, but nobody had put any stock in them--it seemed too improbable.

We were briefed all that day and into the night. The American engineer who had constructed the Ploesti refineries talked to us; he knew the exact location of every refinery and every cracking and distilling plant. The information he gave us proved invaluable the next day. They showed us motion pictures which gave details of the individual targets of each group.

In the afternoon Major General Brereton, commanding general of the Ninth Air Force, came around in a staff car and talked to us for almost an hour. He said we were going on the most important and one of the most dangerous missions in the history of heavy bombardment, that it had been planned in Washington months before. He told us that Ploesti supplied one-third of all Germany's oil and nearly all of Italy's, that it was timed, furthermore, to cut Hitler's fuel supply as his divisions rushed to defend it against the coming Allied invasion.

When he finished, our group commander--not General Timberlake, who had just been promoted from colonel and was now a wing commander, but the new group commander--briefed us again, and went into minute details of the takeoff



the next morning. He tried to encourage us as much as possible.

"I'll get my damn ship over the target if it falls apart," he said.

He got his ship over the target all right--we were close behind him. And we saw it when it fell apart, flaming to the earth.

That afternoon before the raid he emphasized that nobody had to go who didn't want to; it was really a volunteer mission. No one declined, but we were all very tense. Someone had mentioned that even if all planes were lost it would be worth the price, and that started more talk about its being a suicide mission.

We didn't sleep very much that night, and there was none of the joking that usually went on among our crew. We tried hard to sleep, because we knew it would be a long trip and we had to be at our best, but you can imagine how easy it was.

The first sergeant blew the whistle at four in the morning. While we ate breakfast the ground crews, who had been working on the planes for the last two days, gave them a final checking over. Those planes were beautiful, parked wing to wing in a long line on the runway.

We took off at the crack of dawn. It was a perfect summer day, warm and balmy. The lead plane of the group started out, and the others followed at precise intervals until finally the whole group was in the sky in perfect formation. Our group joined other groups from nearby fields at pre-arranged places. It was all split-second timing.

We were keyed up. We knew it was going to be the biggest thing we had ever done, and we were determined it would be the best. It was the same with the ground crews; they had always taken great pride in the ships, but this time they had gone overboard to get them in perfect condition. They shared our excitement and anxiety, too.

From Bengasi we flew straight over the Mediterranean. It was very calm and blue that day. We were going along at about 5,000 feet when suddenly we saw one of the planes ahead take a straight nose-dive. It went down like a bullet, crashed in the water and exploded. For half an hour we could see the smoke from it. It gave us a haunting feeling, as of approaching disaster--we could see that not a man on that plane had a chance to escape.

A couple of hours after we left Bengasi, we were crossing the mountains of Italy, going up sometimes as high as 10,000 feet to get over them. Then the Adriatic and into Yugoslavia, through Bulgaria and across the Danube into Roumania.

Over the Danube valley, in Roumania, we went down to about 300 feet, so low that we could easily see people in the streets of Roumanian towns waving at us as we went over. They must have thought we were friendly bombers because we were flying so low. Or maybe they recognized the white star on our wings and were glad that we were coming.

About 10 miles from the target, we dropped to 50 feet, following the contours of the land, up over hills and down into valleys. Our pilot would



head straight for those hills, and every time I thought sure we'd crash right into them, but he would pull us up just in time, and just enough to get over the ridge, and then down into the next valley. Coming back we were flying part of the way at five and 10 feet off the ground, and some of the planes returned to base with tree tops and even cornstalks in their bomb-bays.

We had a very good pilot. He was our squadron leader, Lt. Col. K. O. Dessert, and his copilot was our regular pilot, Major Epting.

This was the 24th mission I had flown with Major Epting and the same crew, except for Dawley, the tail gunner who was hurt during our first raid. Our ship was named in Major Epting's honor; his home town is Tupelo, Mississippi, and so we called the plane "Tupelo Lass."

The major, who is 23 years old, is one of the best pilots I've ever seen. He pulled us out of a lot of tough spots when we thought we were gone.

And between Major Epting and Col. Dessert they got us through Ploesti without a scratch, but it was a miracle that they did.

We came into the oil fields at about 50 feet and went up to about 75 to bomb. The plane I was on was leading the last squadron of the second group over. Five miles from the target, heavy anti-aircraft started pounding us. When we saw the red flash of those guns we thought we'd never make it. We really started praying then. We figured that if they started shooting at us with the big guns at that distance, they would surely get us with smaller and more maneuverable batteries. We remembered the British anti-aircraft men who had said we'd be dead ducks for anything under a 40 millimeter cannon. At our height you could have brought a Liberator down with a shotgun.

Ploesti was wrapped in a smoke screen which made it very difficult to find the targets. When we got over, the refineries were already blazing from the bombs and guns of the planes ahead of us.

Red tracers from the small ground guns had been zig-zagging all around us for half a mile or more, and the guns themselves were sending up terrific barrages. Just as we hit the target, gas tanks started exploding. One 10,000 gallon tank blew up right in front of us, shooting pillars of flaming gas 500 feet in the air. It was like a nightmare. We couldn't believe our eyes when we saw that blazing tank high above us. The pilot had to swerve sharply to the right to avoid what was really a cloud of fire. It was so hot it felt as though we were flying through a furnace.

The worst I saw, though, was the plane to the right of us. Light flak must have hit the gas, because all of a sudden it was burning from one end to the other. It sank right down, as though no power on earth could hold it in the air for even a second. When it hit the ground it exploded.

Every man on that ship was a friend of mine, and I knew the position each was flying. I'd seen planes go down before, but always from a high altitude, and then you don't see the crash. This way it seemed I could reach out and touch those men.

The most pitiful thing was that ship's co-pilot. He was an 18-year-old kid who'd lied about his age to get into aviation cadet training. We always



called him Junior. When our regular co-pilot, who was firing the right waist gun that day, saw Junior's ship go down, he let loose with his gun like a crazy man. Junior was his best friend.

Then we saw flak hit our group commander's plane. In a second it was burning from the bomb-bays back. He pulled it up as high as he could get it; it was fantastic to see that blazing Liberator climbing straight up. As soon as he started climbing, one man jumped out, and when he could get it no higher, two more came out. Every one of us knew he had pulled it up in order to give those men a chance. Then, knowing he was done for, he deliberately dove it into the highest building in Ploesti. The instant he hit, his ship exploded.

We left Ploesti a ruin. Huge clouds of smoke and fire billowed from the ground as we pulled away from the target. It was like a war movie, seeing those masses of flames rolling toward you, and white flashes of 20-millimeter cannon-fire bursting alongside of you.

We got back to camp 13 hours after we had taken off. It was the longest bombing mission ever flown, and that explains why it was necessary to do it at low altitude. If we had bombed at the usual level, we would never have had enough gas to get back.

It was also the most dangerous mission in the history of heavy bombardment, ranking as a battle in itself. It is officially regarded not as the Ploesti raid but as "the battle of Ploesti."

There was no line at the mess hall that night. Even though we were starved, we couldn't eat when we thought of the men that should have been standing in line and weren't.

And even though we were dead tired, we couldn't sleep. I know I didn't sleep for several nights after that. The ground crews kept the runway lights on all night, and many of them stayed up until morning, though they knew the planes they had worked so hard on and their friends, the men who flew them, weren't coming back.

The next morning was rough, too. We always got up at six o'clock, and there was always a lot of yelling back and forth between the tents--sometimes we'd throw rocks at each other's tents. The only yelling we heard that morning was our co-pilot calling for his friend Junior, although he had seen him go down in flames the day before.

Ploesti was my 24th mission. For most of the crew it was the 25th; in other words, it completed their tour of duty for them. I was assigned to another crew for my last mission.

For a long time I had been thinking about volunteering for an extra five missions. I wanted to do that for my kid brother; he wasn't overseas then. The day after my 25th, I asked my commanding officer if I could go on five more. He said I should go home; in fact, there were orders out already for me to do so, and a plane ticket to the States waiting for me. But he finally gave me permission, and I stayed with the crew I had flown with on what was supposed to be my last raid.



It took me three months to get those five missions in, the weather was so bad. And then when I came home it was by banana boat and not airplane. I was sure burned up about that.

It was at this time that I flew with the only full-blooded American Indian pilot in the European theater; everybody called him "Chief", but his name was Homer Moran, and he was from South Dakota. Four of those extra five missions I flew from England over Germany.

I nearly got it on the 30th mission, my last one. We were over Munster, in Germany, and a shell exploded right above the glass dome of my top turret. It smashed the dome, ripped my helmet off, smashed my goggles and interphone. The concussion threw me back against the seat, but I didn't get a scratch. I thought the ship had blown apart, the noise of that explosion was so loud. I passed out, because my oxygen mask had been torn off, but the radio operator and the engineer pulled me out of the turret and fixed me up with an emergency mask.

Things like that aren't explained just by luck. I must have had a guardian angel flying with me that time and on the other missions, too. They say there are no atheists in foxholes; I can tell you for sure there are none in heavy bombers either.

I left England the first of December. They wanted me to stay over there, with my outfit, as chief clerk in operations; but from the beginning I have felt my combat career would not be over until I had fought in the South Pacific, and so I asked to come home for a brief rest and then be assigned to a Liberator group in the South Pacific.

It was December 7, two years to the day after Pearl Harbor, when our ship reached New York. I thought I was a pretty tough sergeant, but when I saw the Statue of Liberty and the sunlight catching those tall buildings, I damn near cried. I knew I had come home, and I felt so lucky to have gotten through all these bombing missions without a scratch that I said a prayer of thankfulness as I leaned against the rail. I only wished that all my buddies could have come home too.

I spoke earlier of having two battles to fight--against the Axis and against intolerance. They are really the same battle, I think, for we will have lost the war if our military victory is not followed by a better understanding among peoples.

I certainly don't propose to defend Japan. When I visit Tokyo it will be in a Liberator bomber. But I do believe that loyal Americans of Japanese descent are entitled to the democratic rights which Jefferson propounded, Washington fought for and Lincoln died for.

In my own case, I have almost won the battle against intolerance; I have many close friends, in the Army now--my best friends, as I am theirs--where two years ago I had none. But I have by no means completely won that battle. Especially now, after the widespread publicity given the recent atrocity stories, I find prejudice once again directed against me, and neither my uniform nor the medals which are visible proof of what I have been through, have been able to stop it. I don't know for sure that it is safe for me to walk



the streets of my own country.

All this is disappointing, not so much to me personally any more, but rather with reference to my fight against intolerance. I had thought that after Ploesti and 29 other missions so rough it was just short of a miracle I got through them, I wouldn't have to fight for acceptance among my own people all over again.

In most cases, I don't, and to those few who help breed fascism in America by spreading such prejudice, I can only reply in the words of the Japanese American creed; "Although some individuals may discriminate against me, I shall never become bitter or lose faith, for I know that such persons are not representative of the majority of the American people."

The people who wrote that creed are the thousands of Japanese Americans whom certain groups want deported immediately. These Japanese Americans have spent their lives proving their loyalty to the United States, as their sons and brothers are proving it now on the bloody battlefield of Italy. It is for them, in the solemn hope that they will be treated justly rather than with hysterical passion, that I speak today.