

Alamedans serving in World War II

ALAMEDA  
**Japanese**  
**American**  
HISTORY PROJECT

**Joe Iwataki**

a photographic

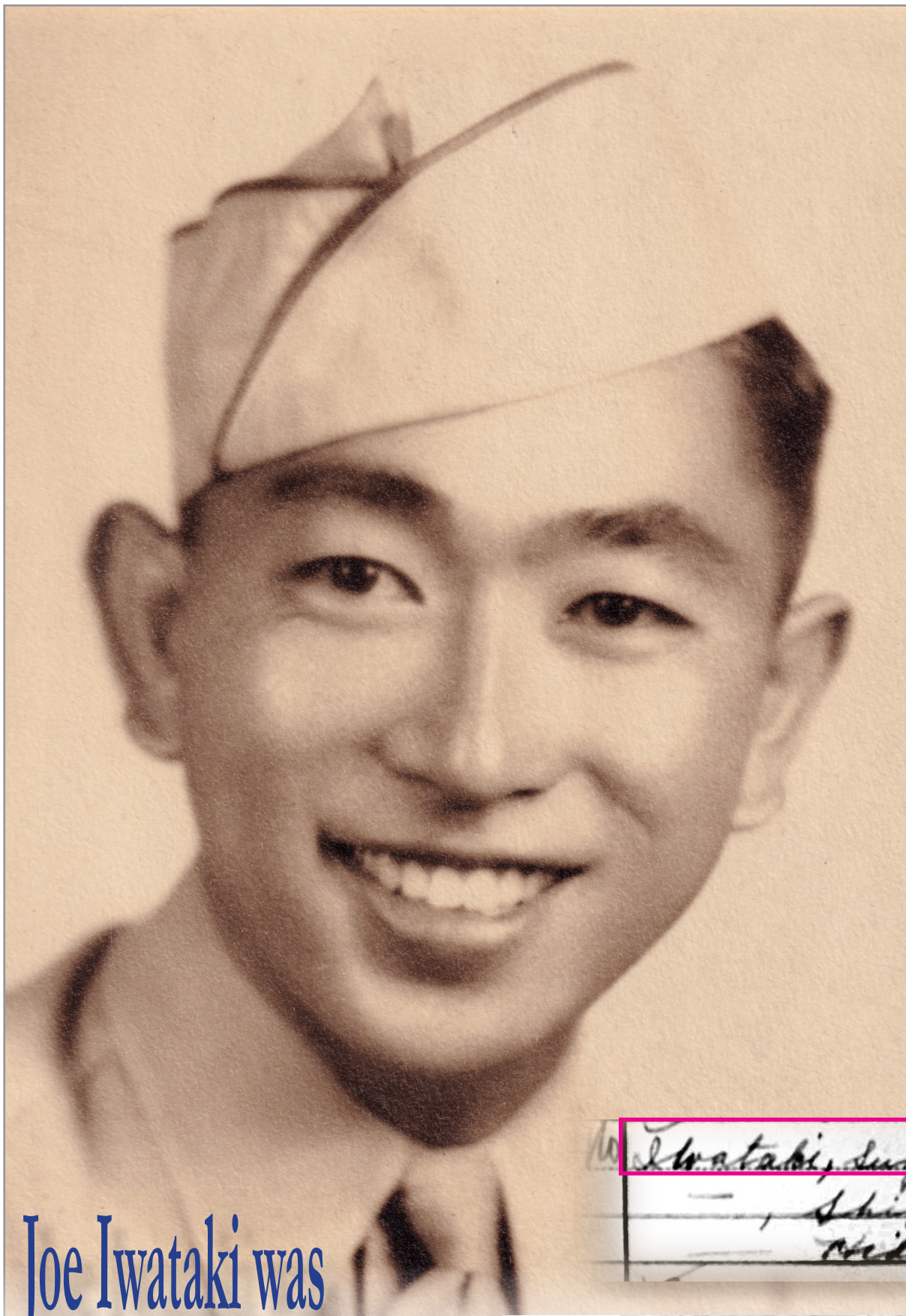
**JOURNEY**

**from**

**Fort Ord to Australia**

*just another soldier*

*Joe Iwataki  
1/14/45*



town of Alameda, CA. A member of the Buddhist Temple, he was the secretary of the YMBA in 1937 and before that, participated in events sponsored by the local JACL.

He enjoyed playing badminton and basketball. In June 1938, he won the contest that gave the *Alameda Acorns* basketball team their name. By October of that year, 25 young Japanese American men were practicing for games you could call Joe to schedule against the new team he had named.

But life may not have been so rosy for the Iwataki. In the 1940 U.S. Census, it's his older sister, 30-year-old Suma "Doro-

Iwataki, Suma (X)	Lead	0	F	15	30
Shigeo	Leather	5	M	15	24
Medis	Leather	5	M	15	22

## Joe Iwataki was

“Just another soldier,” or so he claimed, on the front page picture of this document. A quiet man, he would probably say he was just another Japanese American Nisei who served in the United States Army after Imperial Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor.

He was also one heck of a photographer, documenting his military service from beginning to end. Some of Joe's best images, or photos given to him, are here for you to see.

As a young man, Joe was heavily involved with the Japanese community in his home-

### Joe Iwataki Wins Alameda Name Contest

ALAMEDA, June 11 — “Acorn” was selected by the Alameda Basketball club as the most appropriate name for its cage team at a meeting held Friday night at the local gakuen building. Min Iwashi, president, was chairman.

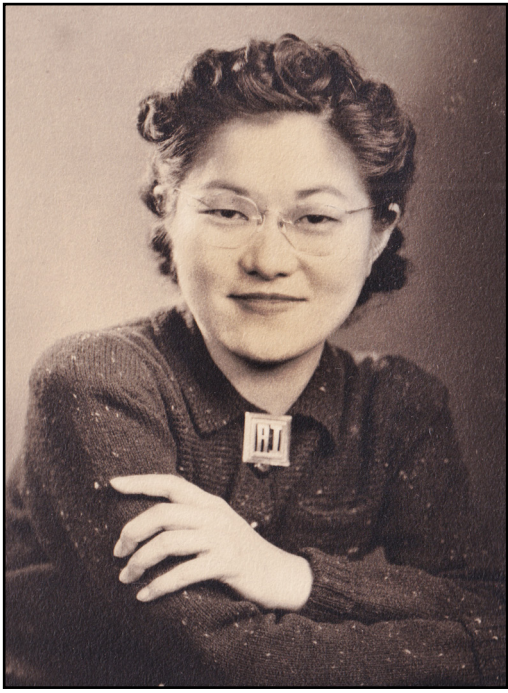
Joe Iwataki submitted the winning name and will receive one of the half a dozen prizes offered by the organization.

Close to 100 names were submitted in the contest.

thy,” who is listed as the head of their household on Pacific Avenue.

That's because Joe, just 22, had already lost both parents. His father, Gosaku, was hit by a car while riding his bicycle and died on Christmas Eve

1935, and his mother, Koyuki, had died of influenza on February 13, 1920. Born in 1918, Joe barely knew his mother. All smiles in his photos, perhaps he navigated his life by filling it with friends and activities.... and soon enough, the war.



## Alice Iwataki, Joe's older sister, recalls her mother and father

The Influenza epidemic of 1918-1920 that swept around the world came to our family: my mother, Koyuki, sister Dorothy, brothers Yo and Joe all were in a makeshift hospital in the Oakland church. My father, Gosaku,

John, and I, not being too ill, were at home. People everywhere were sick; we **all wore masks** when we had to go out to the stores or drug store.

It was on February 13, 1920, that my mother died at the hospital. My mother, Koyuki, was 37 years old when she died. My father was left with five young children, oldest was 9 years old and the youngest was 1-1/2 years old. It was an unhappy time for our father.

It was in those days that our father had thoughts of ending all our lives by walking into the bay that surrounds Alameda. Alameda is an island connected to Oakland by many bridges, so it was easy to walk into the water at the end of Park Street.

To ease my father's burden of caring for children and trying to run his laundry business, his former hometown friends decided that the three youngest children be sent to a foster home in Oakland. John, Joe, and I were taken there by these men. It was really an old people's home, there were no other children there.

I, Alice, was 6, John was 4, and Joe was only 1-1/2 years old, we were frightened, and we didn't know what was going on. I was old enough to go to school, so I walked for many blocks to go to Prescott School, leaving John and Joe at the home, it was on one of those school days that John and Joe got lost looking for me. They had gone about a block away from the foster home, but they were found by the time I returned from school.

Our father came every Sunday to see us, and bring clean clothes, and rice balls for us to eat, then he would get on his bicycle and return to Alameda.

While the three of us were in the foster home, my brother Yoshinori went to live with Mr. Kazutsura, his wife, Yoshiko "Ken" Sera and their son, George Tetsuro, who had returned from living in Japan with his grandparents.

When the three younger children came back to Alameda to live with the family, we moved from Encinal Ave., my father had sold his laundry, we went to live in a basement apartment on Clement Ave. From there, my sister,

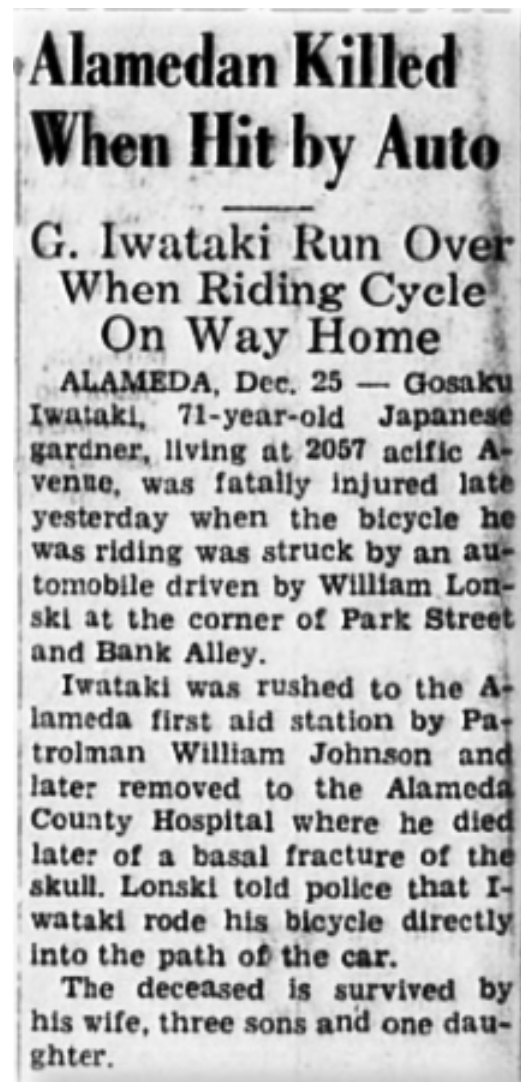
my two young brothers and I went to Haight School.

My father did garden work, riding his bicycle or pulling a wagon with his tools and mower. It was all strange to him, and my father was not a happy man, we couldn't communicate with him, our Japanese wasn't very good, and my father couldn't speak English.

By the time we three younger ones were going to two schools every day, we had moved from Clement Avenue basement apartment to a small house on Pacific Ave. It was not much of a house, but it had so much garden space in front and the back, my father planted vegetables, flowers and built fish ponds in the backyard.

There wasn't much to be said for the house, it had no electric lights, no hot water, just cold water, we had to heat water on the stove for whatever we needed.

Having no electricity, we used kerosene lamps, and had coal stove to warm us, and to cook on, we did have gas stove, too. The coal stove was good in the winter, it would keep us warm.



My father, on the day before Christmas 1935, around noon went to Park St. on his bicycle, and was hit by a car.

He was taken to the Highland Hospital in Oakland where he died around 2 p.m. without regaining consciousness, only my sister Dorothy was with him,

I got there too late, both John and Joe couldn't be reached at the time.

He was 71 years old.

My father died a month before my brother Joe, was to graduate from Alameda High School, the last of the children to graduate, and my father was looking forward to Joe's graduation.

After graduating from high school, Joe went to work for the Matsuura Nursery in Alameda, he delivered the garden products for them. December 1939, Joe was called in the first Selective Service System draft, and was to report to [Fort Ord, California, in January 1941.](#)

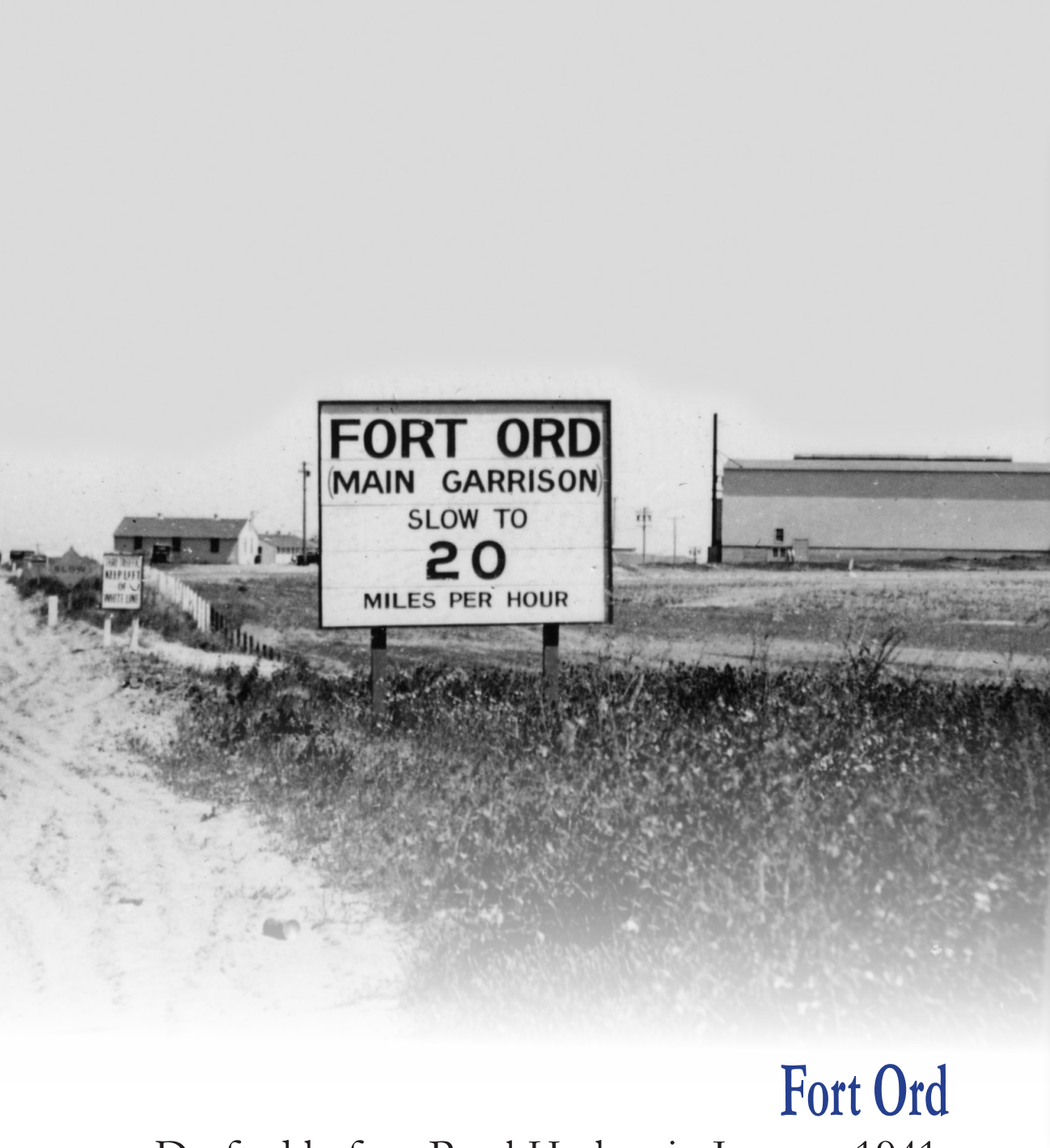
“On February 1, 1941, I was drafted into the U.S. Army for a year’s military training,” Joe wrote in a letter that amounted to his auto biography. “I was sent to Fort Ord, Monterey, California, where I was assigned to Company A, 53<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Regiment, 7<sup>th</sup> Division. On December 7, when the news of the Japanese attack on Pearl harbor was announced over the radio, I was at Fort Ord.”

“My heart sank upon hearing the dreadful news, and I wondered what would happen to me. Several of my Caucasian Army buddies came up to me and reassured me that they knew that I was a loyal American soldier. That made me feel good.”

“One incident later that same day had me worrying again. Our whole company was ordered to assemble in front of the supply room where we were to be issued new gear prior to moving out. As the Supply Sgt. read the names off alphabetically, he never called my name. After he had gone through the roster, I went up to him and asked why my name was not called. He again checked the list, and my name was on it. He had skipped over it by mistake. What a relief!”



Joe at Fort Ord, July 1941

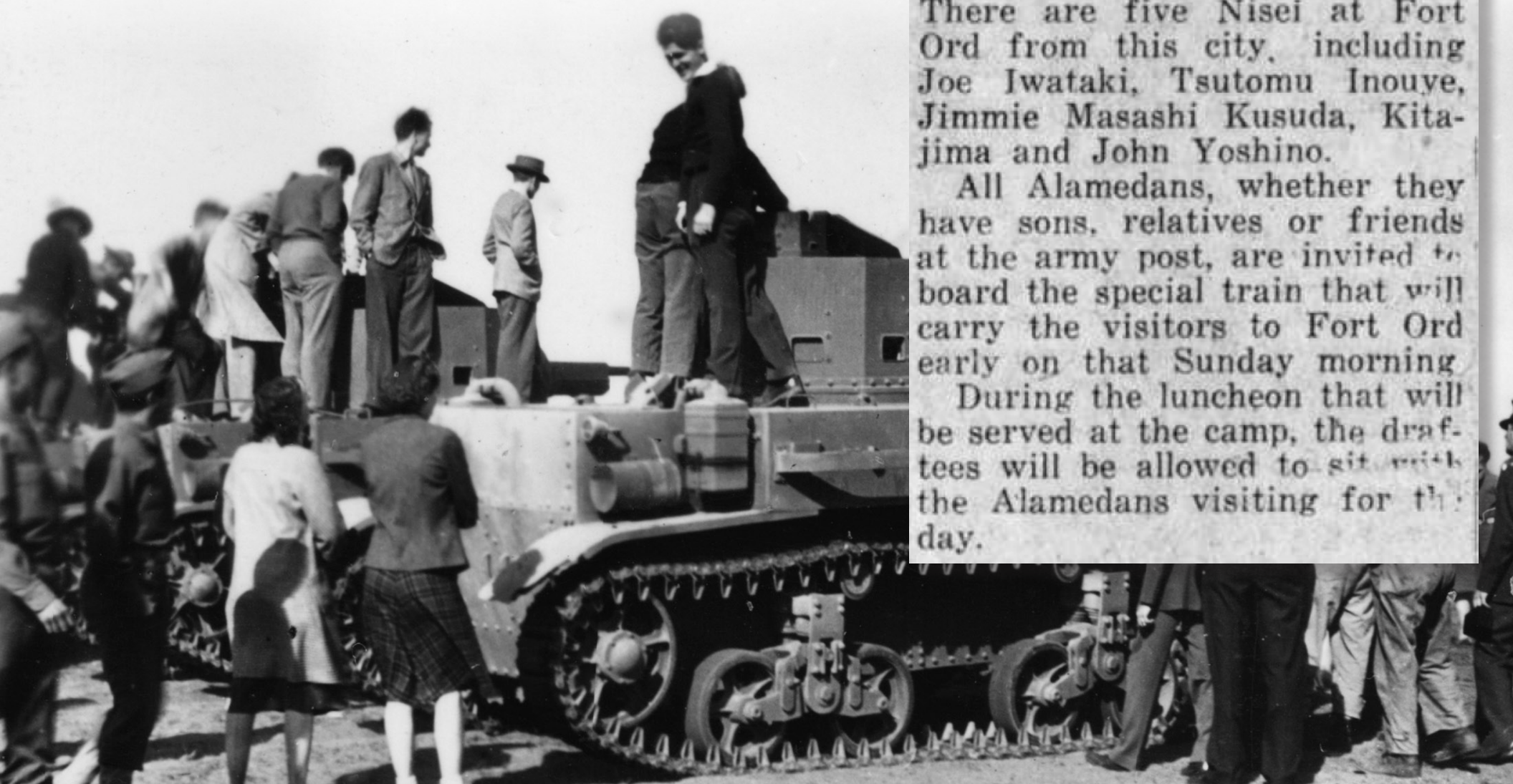


## Fort Ord

Drafted before Pearl Harbor in January 1941, Joe's friends in Alameda honored him (and fellow Alamedan Henry Yoshino) with a farewell party just before he left for Fort Ord, in Monterey, CA.

A few months later, the friends he left behind followed that with a visit in May, meeting him for lunch at the Fort.

*Photo below: Visitor's Day at Fort Ord, 1941.*



## ALAMEDA JACL TO GIVE PARTY FOR DRAFTEES

February 2, 1941 • Shin Sekai Asahi Shinbun

ALAMEDA, Feb. 1—In honor of the first draftees of Alameda, Joe Iwataki and Henry Yoshino, the Alameda JACL and the Japanese Association sponsored a joint farewell party on Wednesday at the local Japanese Association.

The chairman for the gathering was T. Miki. The speakers were: T. Nakata, president of the Japanese Association; Sakae Date, JACL president; Kadonaga, Shiota and Koike. Joe Iwataki and Henry Yoshino both responded.

The draftees will leave on February 1, at 7:00 a.m. from Park Street Station.

## Alameda Plans Special Day with Fort Ord Nisei

May 6, 1941 • Shin Sekai Asahi Shinbun

ALAMEDA, May 5—Alameda is going to have its own day at Fort Ord May 18, and Nisei will play an important part in it. There are five Nisei at Fort Ord from this city, including Joe Iwataki, Tsutomu Inouye, Jimmie Masashi Kusuda, Kitajima and John Yoshino.

All Alamedans, whether they have sons, relatives or friends at the army post, are invited to board the special train that will carry the visitors to Fort Ord early on that Sunday morning.

During the luncheon that will be served at the camp, the draftees will be allowed to sit with the Alamedans visiting for the day.

**Joe** was quite fond of photography. He enjoyed photographing the many friends he made in the military, his training and the kinds of things that his daily life was filled with... such as his photo of a standard army issue M-1 rifle, and the larger BAR: a Browning Automatic Rifle.

Joe would train on the BAR, which in war, was a huge advantage. While both weapons were semi-automatic, the BAR was more capable of quick bursts of deadly fire.

The BAR proved to be durable under the toughest conditions, from WW1 to Vietnam.

“G.I.s begged, borrowed, or stole additional BARs to lay down suppression fire in the face of Germans who carried many more portable machine guns,” wrote Paul Richard Huard, for the *National Interst* website.





Joe photographs machine gun training at Fort Ord (above) and maneuvers in Washington State (below) in August 1941. Note that Joe's unit was not segregated.





**Washington:** Joe (above, far left) relaxes with his pals from the BAR squad and then photographs what looks like cleanup using a trashcan in his Army camp.





“Leaving Fort Ord, our regiment was assigned to guard the Southern Pacific railroad tunnels, trestles and bridges from Salt Lake City, Utah to Sacramento, California. Our company was stationed just outside of Reno,” Joe wrote.

“Soon after we began guard duty, I heard that some townspeople, upon seeing me on duty by the trestle, reported to the authorities that ‘there was a Jap soldier loitering near the trestle.’”

“They were quickly assured that I was a bona fide American soldier.”



Joe photographs one of the trains and tracks he was assigned to guard, from December 9, 1941, to the end of March 1942.



Camp Belden, Northern California: Joe documents his unit near a snowy Camp Belden.







DESOLATE NEVADA -



CALIFORNIA

WE GUARDED THESE R.R. BRIDGE

A page from Joe's Army photo album



JUST ARRIVED

WHITE CHRISTMAS



Joe Iwataki



HARRISON



SAM LEU

*Joe would later find himself* at Camp Crowder, in Missouri. It's a mystery why the Army sent any of the Niseis there. Home to the U.S. Army's Pigeon Breeding and Training Center, soldiers could also learn to repair radios, but not the Niseis.

“In March 1942, all Nisei soldiers in the regiment were gathered together and shipped to inland Army camps,” Joe wrote. “I was in a group that was sent to Camp Crowder, Missouri, where they didn't know what to do with us except to give us odd jobs to keep us busy.”

Niseis did nothing but menial jobs there, including KP (kitchen patrol), garbage detail and working the rifle range.

“Just about the same time, my sisters and brothers were first sent to the Tanforan (racetrack) Assembly Center, then to Topaz Relocation Camp in Utah. All had left the Camp by mid 1944 and had become reestablished in St. Paul, Chicago, and Kansas City.”

“While in Topaz, they didn't complain too much. Just took the attitude of ‘shikata ga nai’, which means roughly, a situation they could do nothing about so they might as well accept it and make the best of it.”

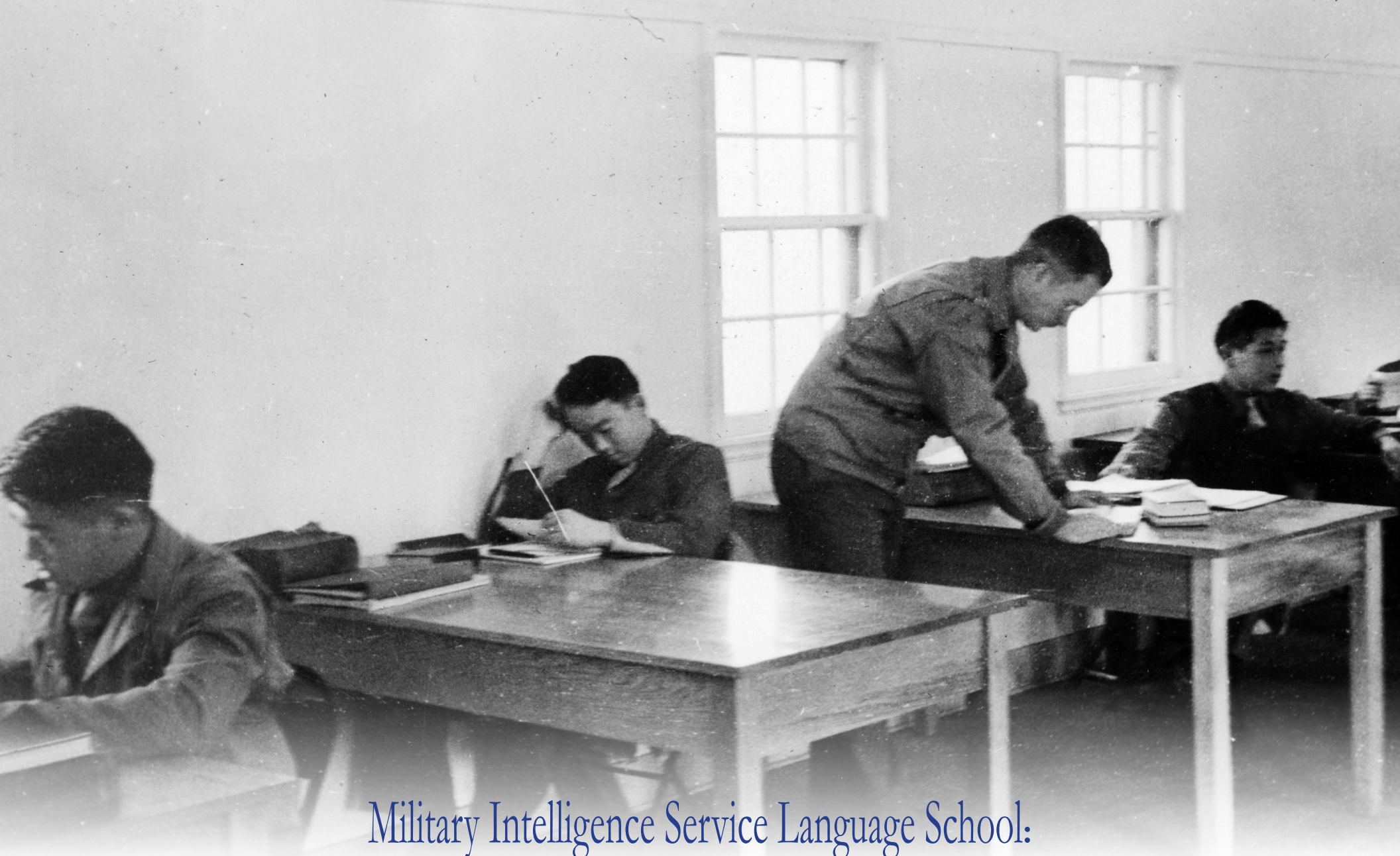
Joe spent a wasted April to December 1942 in Missouri, but was promoted to Sergeant. His next stop was Camp Savage, Minnesota.



**While at Camp Crowder Joe (at right) sits with new pal, Dick Otsubo, of Stockton, CA.**

**Otsubo was later killed in Italy.**

***August 26, 1942.***



### Military Intelligence Service Language School:

Joe and his fellow C-3 classmates study at Camp Savage. Photo October 1942-June 1943. Below: The interior of Barracks 10, where some of Joe's Japanese instructors lived. "In October 1942, about 10 of us Nisei soldiers were shipped from Camp Crowder to Camp Savage with the understanding that we would be working in the administrative office as clerks. However, upon arrival, we found out there were no such jobs available, and we were told that we either go to the language school or work in the maintenance gang," Joe wrote.

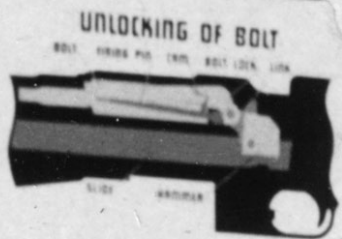


Army at  
Robinson  
DAY  
6.1942



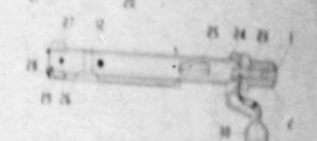
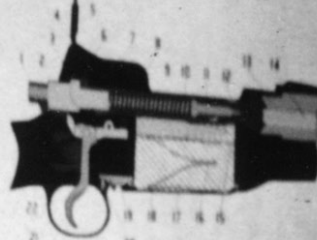
LET'S GO TO THE OPENING OF  
THE OFFICERS MESS  
MESS HOTEL ROOM 3 THE DANKE HUT  
BUILDING 407-2000 PLACE WAT 8 842

### AUTOMATIC RIFLE BROWNING. CALIBER 30. M1918A2



SELECTOR  
MAGAZINE LATCH  
MAGAZINE RELEASE  
SLIDE SPRING  
TRIGGER  
BOLT  
FIRING PIN  
LAMP  
BOLT LOCK  
LAMP  
SLIDE  
SEAR RELEASE  
BROWNING  
SEAR RELEASE  
STOP LOCK  
SEAR  
SEAR SPRING  
STOP LOCK  
SEAR  
SEAR RELEASE  
STOP LOCK  
SEAR  
SEAR SPRING  
STOP LOCK  
SEAR

### U.S. RIFLE CALIBER 30. M-1917



- 1- COCKING PIECE
- 2- SLIDE
- 3- BATTLE SIGHT
- 4- REAR SIGHT
- 5- REAR SIGHT SLIDE
- 6- SEAR
- 7- REAR SIGHT GAUGE
- 8- SEAR SPRING
- 9- MAIN SPRING
- 10- BOLT
- 11- STRIKER
- 12- EXTRACTOR COLLAR
- 13- BARREL
- 14- CARTRIDGE IN CHAMBER
- 15- FOLLOWER
- 16- MAGAZINE SPRING
- 17- MAGAZINE
- 18- FLOOR PLATE
- 19- FLOOR PLATE CATCH
- 20- FLOOR PLATE SPRING
- 21- BOW
- 22- TRIGGER
- 23- COCKING PIECE LUG
- 24- EXTRACTING CAM
- 25- CLEARANCE
- 26- GAS ESCAPE HOLES
- 27- SLOTTED LOCKING LUG
- 28- EXTRACTOR HOOK
- 29- SOLID LOCKING LUG
- 30- BOLT HANDLE



Pvt. HIKIDO

Private Don Hikido at Camp Savage

Harry Sekiya

Joe Iwataki

Moff Ishikawa

Frank Hachiya



### *Activities in Minnesota*

Joe and friends take advantage of the winter conditions.  
Below: Sho Ishii at the U.S.O. club at 72 W. 7th Street in St. Paul.







*At the Camp Savage* open house, Joe enjoys the company of Mary Hayano. The event included a concert band, buffet luncheon, and other entertainment. May 1943



*While on a three-day pass*, Joe takes in Chicago, Il., with Joanne Nagata, Mary Tani & Midori Inouye (left to right). Below: The MIS graduation ceremony on June 18, 1943. Speaking that day was Major General George W. Strong, the Assistant Chief of Staff, G-2. He is seated just to the left of the microphone.



“After graduation, I was shipped overseas to Brisbane, Queensland, Australia, in November 1943, and was attached to the Allied Translators and Interpreter’s Sections (ATIS) at Indooroopilly,” Joe wrote. “I must admit that I had a tough time trying to translate captured documents due to my limited knowledge of Japanese. In February 1944, my superior officer asked me if I knew how to type, I replied ‘yes,’ and the following day I was transferred to General MacArthur’s General headquarters (GHQ) in downtown Brisbane.”



**A prized possession:** Among Joe’s albums was this hand signed photo of General Douglas MacArthur.

## JOE in AUSTRALIA

MIS headquarters was located in Australia under MacArthur in the southwest Pacific. At its peak, the MIS had some 4,000 mostly Nisei linguists. They translated 2 million documents and interrogated 14,000 prisoners of war.



### RAMBLINGS

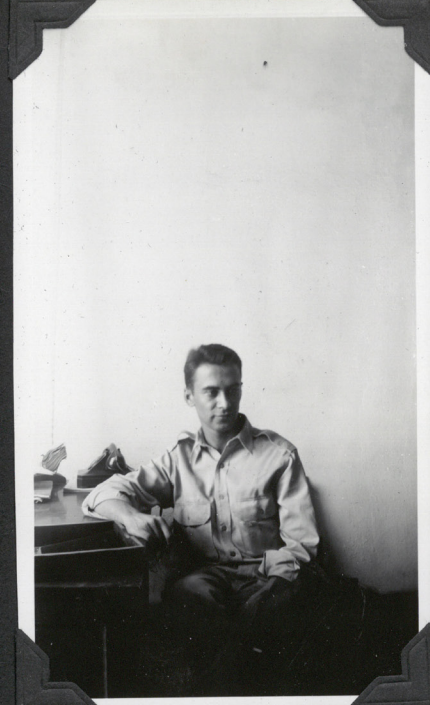
Speaking of overseas matter, Sgts. Joe Iwataki, Yukio Kawamoto, Yasuharu Koike, Shiz Tanaka, Nobuo Yoshimura, and Akiji Yoshimura are anywhere from Australia to India,  
\* \* \* \* \*



Joe



MAJOR DEAN S. MCGAUGHEY  
DECATUR, ILLINOIS



MAJOR ROBERT P. MCCAMPBELL  
OMAHA, NEBRASKA



SGT. WILLIAM M. COX  
NEWTON, NEW JERSEY



S/SGT WILLIAM FINKELDEY  
HASTING-ON-HUDSON, N.Y.



LT. EDWARD G. COWAN  
DETROIT, MICHIGAN



S/SGT RICHARD T. WATANABE  
LOS ANGELES

“I was assigned to the Order of Battle Section of the G-2 (Intelligence) Section,” Joe continued. “This is where I started to work with Taro Yoshihashi. I was in charge of maintaining a file of names, rank and outfit of the officers in the Imperial Japanese armed forces. This information was obtained by my scanning captured Japanese documents.”

“The best part of my new job, as far as I was concerned was that my work was all in English since all of the documents I had to read were already translated. I remained with the Order of Battle Section until October 1945, when I was shipped home from Manila for discharge.”

“During my overseas tour of duty, I served in Brisbane; Hollandia, New Guinea; Tacloban, Leyte, Philippines; and Manila. My only regret was that since I was so anxious to get out of the Army, I passed over the opportunity of going to Japan.”



*Lake Sentani:* Joe's pal, Remo Peduzzi, floats by with children from Hollandia, New Guinea, on a canoe made from a single tree in December 1944. Below: Joe and his "original tent 29" roommates at Camp Chelmer, in Indooroopilly, near Queensland, Australia.



Cholo  
Fuchiwaki

George Terazawa

Joe Ikuta

# DAILY PACIFICAN EXTRA

The Army Newspaper

in the Western Pacific

Vol I No. 59

# WAR

# OVER

WASHINGTON (AP) The White House has announced the war has ended. Japan has accepted the Allied demands in full.

*Collection of Joe Iwataki*

GENERAL HEADQUARTERS  
SUPREME COMMANDER FOR THE ALLIED POWERS

22 October 1945

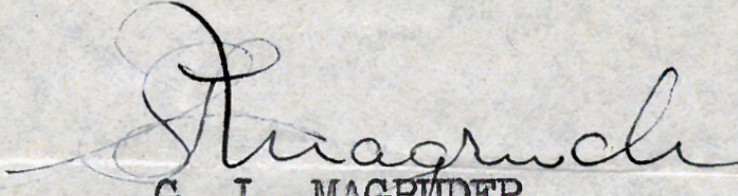
TO : Whom it May Concern

SUBJECT: Letter of Recommendation

1. This will certify that Sgt. Hideo J. Iwataki served under my personal supervision in General MacArthur's Headquarters during the campaigns from Australia to the Philippines including the period January 1944 to October 1945.

2. During this time, Iwataki took charge of an important subsection of this Headquarter's Intelligence files and by his own perseverance and genuine ability made it an important adjunct of the Intelligence Section and a real contribution to the war effort.

3. I have at all times found Iwataki a thoroughly willing and extremely conscientious worker, good at organization and with a real flair for sensing what is important and what is of no consequence. His continued even humor and pleasant personality, even under long hours and unpleasant conditions of work, were most noteworthy. I had a real personal attachment for him and felt a sense of personal loss when Iwataki's return home for discharge under the Army point system took him from my section. I have no hesitation in highly recommending Iwataki to anyone, both as a good American citizen and as a real honest worker.

  
G. L. MAGRUDER  
Lt. Colonel, FA  
Chief, Order of Battle Section



GENERAL HEADQUARTERS  
UNITED STATES ARMY FORCES IN THE PACIFIC  
AND SOUTHWEST PACIFIC AREA

MILITARY INTELLIGENCE SECTION

GENERAL STAFF

1 NOVEMBER 1945

A.P.O. 500

THIS IS TO EVIDENCE THAT

**T/3 JOSEPH HIDEO IWATAKI**

SERVED EFFICIENTLY AND FAITHFULLY IN THE MILITARY  
INTELLIGENCE SECTION (G-2), GENERAL HEADQUARTERS,  
UNITED STATES ARMY FORCES IN THE PACIFIC AND/OR  
SOUTHWEST PACIFIC AREA, DURING THE PROSECUTION OF  
OPERATIONS AGAINST THE FORCES OF THE JAPANESE  
EMPIRE IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR. PERIOD INCLUDED:

15 JANUARY 1944 - 1 NOVEMBER 1945

*C. A. Willoughby*  
C. A. WILLOUGHBY

MAJOR GENERAL, UNITED STATES ARMY  
A. C. OF S., G-2 GHQ, USAFPAC



Right after leaving the Army, Joe worked for the Naval Supply Depot in Oakland as a clerk-typist. He married Nami Oka on July 18, 1948 at the Buddhist Temple of Alameda and had one child, Ellen.

TSUNCH PAUL  
YAMAD

The early deaths of his parents didn't seem to affect him later in life, and he never talked about it.

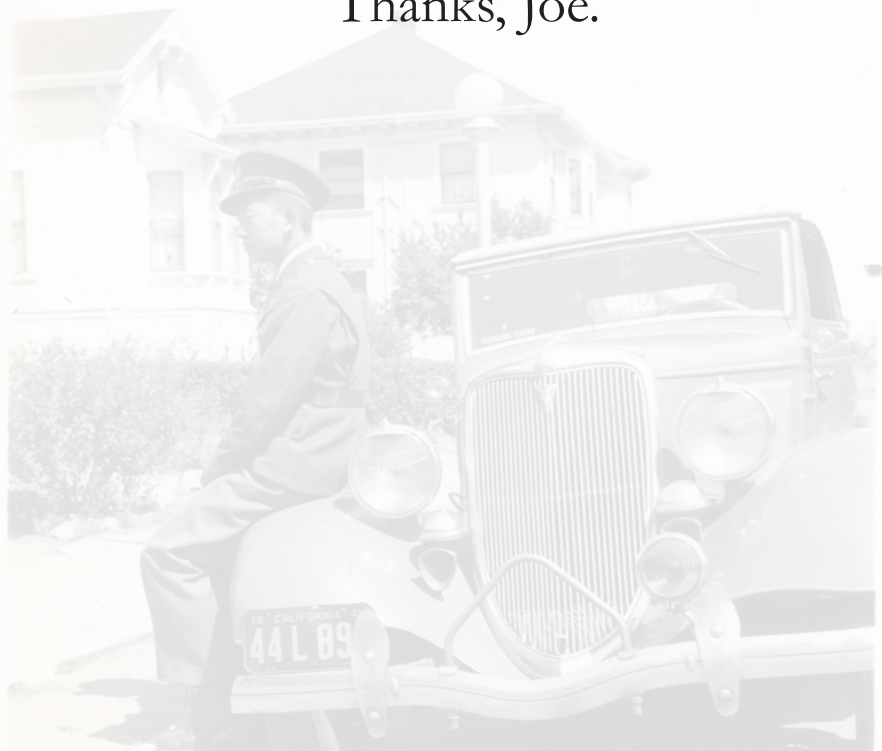
"He was on the quiet side, my mom was the boss of the house," said Joe's daughter, Ellen. "So he just went along with everything. When we would have family gatherings for holidays I would look over and he would be sitting in the corner, reading. He was a mild-mannered guy, a really great guy. Not a story teller, not boisterous."

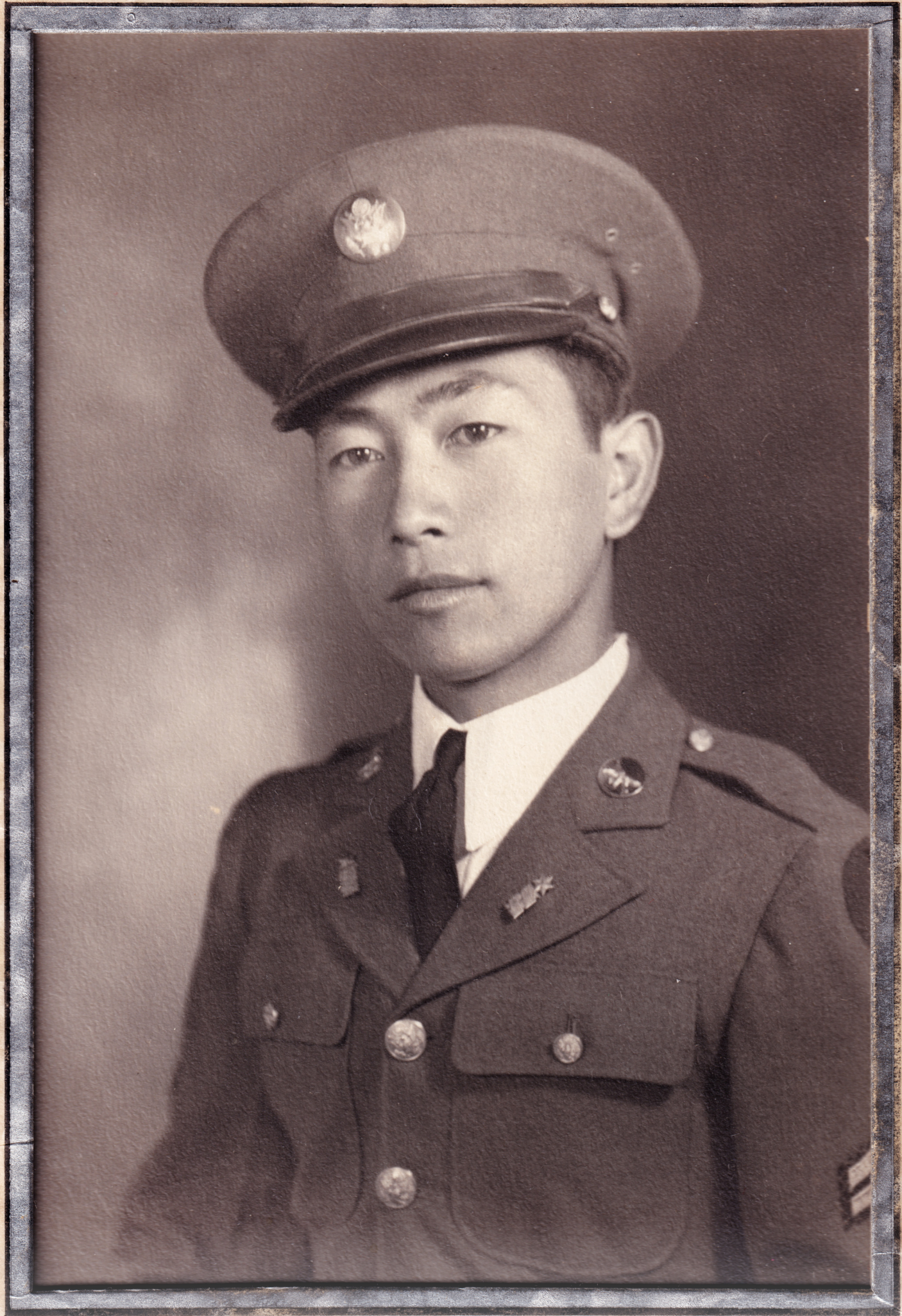
Joe had a serious operation in 1955, and in 1987, he was stricken with brain tumor and was bedridden. Joe was 70 when he died on Dec. 1, 1988.

Jimmy KUSUDA

More than "just another soldier," Joe was an excellent photographer, a great husband and father. He left behind a record of his life filled with visual details that allow those of us who never served in the war, to experience some of what that life was like.

Thanks, Joe.





Special thanks to Ellen Iwataki Takayama for access to photographs and documents, this story would not be possible without them.

ALAMEDA  
**Japanese**  
**American**  
HISTORY PROJECT