

Reflections of a Nisei Vet---

Bullets Made Us All Equal

IT may seem strange that a record of fierce and efficient fighting should serve as a force for good feeling between people, but that is exactly what the fame of the 442nd Regimental Combat Team is achieving today.

Much of the bigotry and hoodlumism that had been expected upon the return of the Japanese-Americans to their former homes has been counteracted by the wide publicity given to achievements of the 442nd.

Melvin Harter, administrative assistant to the Church Federation of Los Angeles, recently told Col. V. R. Miller, commanding officer of the 442nd, that since the facts on his unit had been told along the West Coast, "anti-Nisei incidents have almost become a thing of the past."

The Christian Science Monitor's West Coast correspondent reported: "There was a period when it appeared that hoodlums were trying to set up a wave of incidents for fright purposes, but many fine soldiers and officers who had fought side by side with the Nisei (Japanese - American) soldiers both in Europe and in the Pacific, came into California and told of the unwavering bravery and stout service of their Nisei comrades—AND SHAMED THE FRIGHT-MAKERS INTO SILENCE AND INACTIVITY."

They had something to "sell," too. The 442nd, which fought in Italy and France, was the most decorated unit in U. S. military history in relation to time spent in combat. One out of every two men got the Purple Heart. Sixty-five got Distinguished Service Crosses. Two hundred and ninety got the silver star. Seven hundred and eighty-two got the bronze star.

Re-assimilation of the Nisei is still not perfect everywhere. One veteran of the 442nd, invited to speak recently in a small California town, had to be escorted out under the protection of an armed guard. Native fascists calling themselves the Associated Farmers had broken up the meeting. Yet, most Nisei agree that substantial gains have been won in their fight against bigotry.

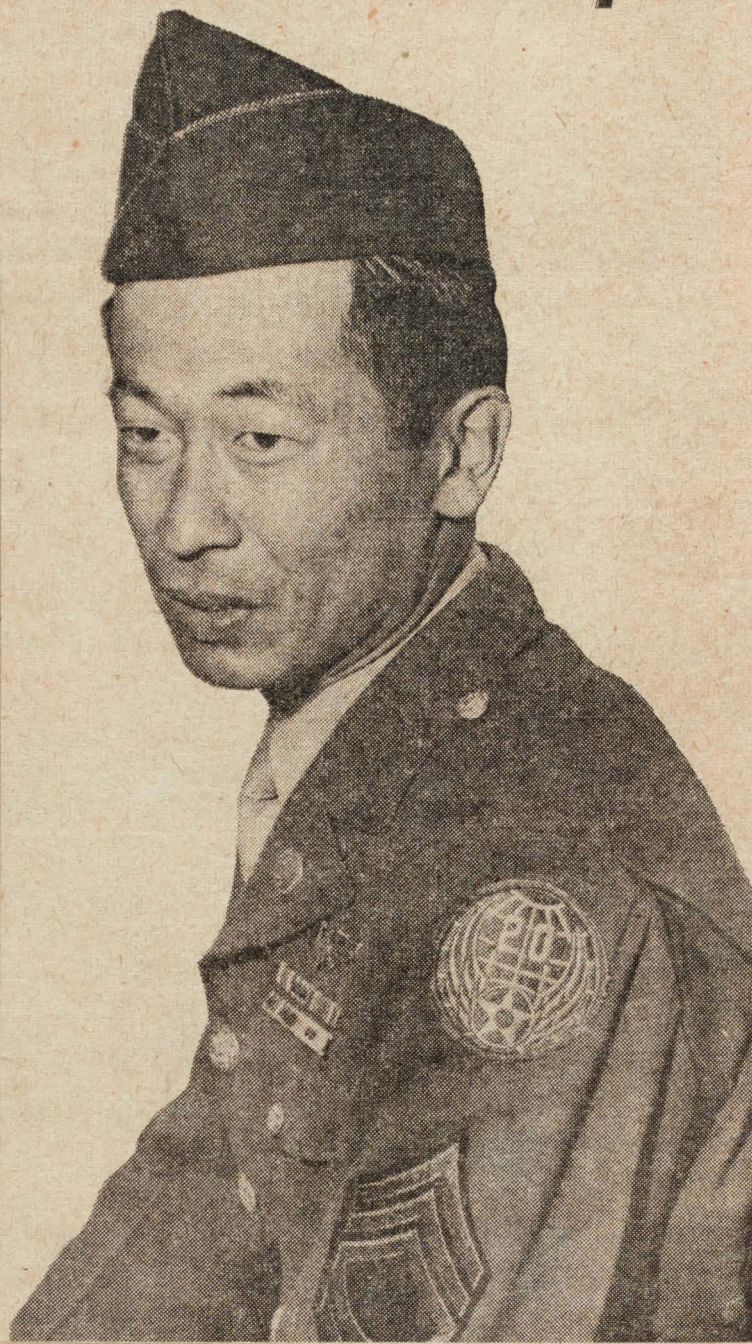
THIS decline in bigotry is due to the efforts of people representing many creeds and races. But special credit is due the young Nisei who are working on their own behalf. Outstanding among them is 27-year-old Ben Kuroki, from Hershey, Neb.

Wherever he can find an audience to listen to him—from a New York forum to some small-town schoolroom—Kuroki explains his people's problem against the background of American tolerance. "An attack on one minority is an attack on all minorities—an attack on one minority is an attack on all the people," he declares. Sparked by Kuroki's forceful delivery, that message usually goes over.

Kuroki, holder of two DFCs, typifies the spirit of the Nisei vet. He and his brother volunteered for the Army two days after Pearl Harbor. He wanted to be a "hot pilot," but somehow his papers got lost and he was sent to a clerical school at Fort Logan, Col. His first permanent assignment was with the 93rd Bomb Group, first Liberator sent to the ETO.

One morning in England, Kuroki read in a magazine where another of Hitler's arms in California, the Native Sons and Daughters of the Golden West, had advanced a plan to isolate all Japanese-Americans in a swampland somewhere. After that Kuroki—who hated his pencil-pushing anyhow, begged to be given a chance to fly combat missions. He was finally sent to gunnery school, then assigned as waist gunner in a crew which flew the first bombing mission over Bizerte on Dec. 13, 1942.

"I FOUND OUT FOR THE FIRST TIME IT DIDN'T MAKE ANY DIFFERENCE WHAT RANK OR ANCESTRY MEANT," KUROKI RECALLS.



Nebraska's Ben Kuroki

AFTER completing his twenty-five required missions he volunteered for five more before returning to the U. S. on Dec. 7, two years after Pearl Harbor. On a visit to California, Kuroki was asked to appear on a national radio program, but someone thought the Japanese-American question too controversial—and so he was withdrawn from the program at the last minute.

"It was hard to believe, after Ploesti and 29 other missions that I still hadn't proved myself for acceptance among some of my own people," the flyer says. "THEN AND THERE I DECIDED IT WAS TOKYO OR BUST."

He tried to get into the B-29s. After two months of training, he was told he couldn't go to the Pacific with the Superforts because of existing air force regulations.

But this time a lot of people went to bat for him. A

congressman from Nebraska wired General Marshall, and three prominent Californians wired the Secretary of War. Soon the War Department waived its rules, and Kuroki made his mission over Tokyo.

"I used to think I could finish my stretch, then come home and lie out under a tree somewhere, and forget the war," he tells his audiences. "But I've learned that WAR DOESN'T END ON ANY HOUR OR ANY DAY. The last shot is fired and the surrender is signed, but there's no special day when war ends and peace begins.

"YOU CAN ONLY WIN PEACE SLOWLY, DAY AFTER DAY IN A FIGHT FOR A DECENT JOB FOR EVERY MAN AND A GOOD HOUSE TO LIVE IN, AND A CHANCE OF LIVING WITHOUT PREJUDICE IN A WORLD WHERE OUR KIDS WON'T HAVE TO FIGHT ANOTHER WAR IN TWENTY YEARS."