

Sorry! I thought the first draft I mailed was complete and final; but after 5 revisions (with the 6th and 7th still in my mind), I decided to rework the whole story -- which is enclosed. Please destroy all the others.

This is it (I hope). Recalling events and emotions that occurred 40 years ago is tough on a mind slowly going senile!

C.M. Shimo  
7/6/86

DEAR LONI, I'M STILL RECOLLECTING + "GETTING WORKED UP" — FOR BETTER OR FOR WORSE! *Red*

Rec 7/9/86

THE STORY OF THE "NO/NO-NO/YES" SOLDIERS  
OF THE 1800 GENERAL SERVICE BATTALION, U.S. ARMY

Written for Loni Ding, Producer/Director of Vox Productions, Inc.  
for her Nisei story sequel to the NISEI SOLDIER.

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A special army unit existed during World War II which was made up of "suspect" U.S. soldiers of German, Italian and Japanese descents whom the army wanted to keep under surveillance.

SEQUENCE:  
525 QM  
1800 ENGR  
4000 ENGR  
HQ. DETACH

Originally, these soldiers were gathered into an outfit called the 525 Quartermaster Service Co. in Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri. This took place during the period of July 1943 to March of 1944. Subsequently, it became the 1800 Engineer General Service Battalion until August of 1945. This unit in essence was a labor battalion armed with picks and shovels, and manning heavy duty equipment to build and repair bridges, roads and fences damaged during military training manuevers held in the South. As a result, the 1800 did not have a permanent home base. This unit moved from one area to another as needed, and constructed its own camp facilities in various remote areas of Tennessee, Mississippi, Louisiana, and Arkansas. Although the members became skilled in operating and maintaining equipments such as bull dozers, road scrapers and heavy duty trucks or running and operating supply warehouses, motor pools, and company offices, all members of this unit were barred from receiving promotions. In August of 1945 the 1800 was reassigned and permanently stationed in Camp Shelby, Mississippi. The 1800 was renamed the 4000 Engineer General Service Co. until October. Then it became known as the Hq. Det. Sec 3 1473 SCU until the discharge of its members around March of 1946.

"MEMBER-SHIP QUALIFICATIONS"

All of the Japanese Americans -- both Niseis and Kibeis -- that were ordered into this unit were there because of their angry reactions to

racial discriminatory incidents in the army and/or to the compulsory mass evacuation of their families from the West Coast into one of 10 relocation (evacuation? detention? concentration?) and/or into one of six "enemy" alien internment camps.

LIFE IN  
1942

1942 was the year when Nisei/Kibei soldiers were stripped of their arms and issued "brooms and mops." This was the period when news of the evacuation and the 1st difficult years of camp life were reaching the ears of the Nisei/Kibei GI's. Individual circumstances varied with each situation, but it was only natural that those undergoing this traumatic experience felt betrayed and became more resentful and bitter with each passing day. Some kept their frustrations quietly and stoically to themselves, many seethed and cursed among themselves, while others vented their feelings in an outburst of wrath to the "establishment" whether it be white or yellow. The destiny of the Niseis in the camps or in the Army depended upon when, where, how and to whom their rage was directed. Most of the men of the 1800 were placed in this battalion because of remarks made in 1942 or 1943, usually not volunteered but in response to either a questionnaire or to questions asked during an interview.

"THAT"  
QUESTION-  
NAIRE

The questionnaires passed out to most of the Nisei/Kibei in the army and in the camps asked in essence whether (1) they were willing to serve in overseas combat wherever ordered; and (2) whether they would swear allegiance only to the United States.

DIFF. IN  
RESPONSE:  
IN THE  
ARMY/IN  
THE CAMPS

In the army, most answered yes/yes, some answered no/yes, and others no/no. In the camps, however, only a small percentage answered yes/yes, whereas the majority, we assume, answered no/yes, no/no or simply refused to comply.

WHY?

Why this difference? The anguished frame of mind of the Niseis and Kibeis in the army with interned families were undoubtedly the same, in varying degrees of course, with those who were behind barbed wires.

YES/YES  
IN THE  
CAMPS

Many, if not most of those that answered yes/yes and volunteered from the camps were young teenagers who "came of age" in the camps and many of whom did not have the same psychological wounds suffered by the older niseis or the isseis. Their youthful zest and urge to leave the camps and serve loyally was genuine, and all Japanese American enjoying their improved status today should give grateful thanks to their courage in defying the camp's majority sentiments by volunteering and serving so gallantly in the 442 or MI.

HAWAII  
TO THE  
RESCUE

But at the same time it must be remembered that only a small percentage volunteered. In fact the quota from the camps was not met, so the army recruiters had to fall back to Hawaii where they were able to enlist more volunteers than they could handle. We understand that some 10,000 applied for 1,500 "openings." Imagine how many would have volunteered from the mainland if the forced evacuation had not taken place.

YES/YES  
IN THE  
ARMY

In contrast to the camp outcome, most of Nisei soldiers wound up in the 442, whereas the Kibeis and the bi-lingual Niseis served with the Military Intelligence. What percent of the nisei soldiers had this questionnaire thrust upon them is not known, but regardless, all served with unquestioned valor in both the European and Pacific theaters.

HOW MANY?

Of those that that did answer yes/yes, many (majority? some? a few? who knows?) did so with a fervent desire to prove their loyalty; and many (majority? some? a few? who knows?) did so, fearing the possibility of a court martial if they answered otherwise;

YES/NO  
NO/NO  
IN THE  
ARMY

and the others (majority? some? a few? who knows?) did so as disciplined soldiers well trained to obey orders regardless of their inner turmoil.

On the other hand, most of those that answered no/yes or no/no, did so with either the willingness to face the consequences and/or with the conviction that that their response was not a question of loyalty or disloyalty, but a justifiable response to a terribly flagrant un-American treatment. In either case, the tormented state-of-mind of the Nisei GI's that answered no/yes or no/no was no different from most of the yes/yes **mainland** Nisei soldiers whose families were incarcerated. **(A distinction is being made between the mainland and Hawaiian Niseis only because no mass evacuation took place in Hawaii, although many of the community leaders were interned.)** And the same could be said of the Kibeis of the 1800 and those in the Military Intelligence. Because of their upbringing in Japan, most of the Kibeis (with exceptions of course) whether in the M.I. or in the 1800 did have varying degrees of sentimental love for Japan; but for unusual cases, the question of disobeying a U.S. army military order was not an inherent characteristics of a Japanese reared in a tradition of obedience.

THE MEN  
OF THE  
1800

The military record of the boys in the 1800 proves that they obeyed all military orders -- including assignments which on two occasions resulted in special commendations. The men of the 1800 would also have served in oversea combat if so ordered, but "not willingly" as long as their family and friends were behind barbed wires and not allowed to return to their homes. Our fight for liberty is "over here" and not "over there," -- a point I stressed so often to my FBI and G-2 (Military Intelligence) interrogators.

THE  
RENUNCI-  
ANTS:  
"GIVE ME  
LIBERTY..."

We empathized with those camp renunciants (many of whom today are leading citizens in our community) who had the courage to be willing to renounce their most precious birthright, their citizenship, as they cried out: "Equal justice? What freedom? What liberty? Give me liberty or give me death."

THE MEN  
OF THE  
1800

But because these soldiers had the courage to be honest with their opinions and bold enough to express them **when asked**, their fate was to wield a pick and shovel in the 1800 -- a labor battalion where promotions were barred and with no incentives whatsoever. Yet,

"COMBAT-  
ING" FLOOD  
WATERS

every member obeyed all orders, and worked hard and diligently wherever ordered -- including harrowing experiences lacking only the flying bullets. This included being marooned on a buff while helping fight one of the worst flood conditions in the lower Mississippi valley. Army Engineer steamboats rescued this battalion in the nick of time. Thereafter, the 1800 "bivouaced" on river boats on the Mississippi River and continued their efforts to save the area from further damages.

WAR DEPT.  
COMMEND-  
ATIONS

Excerpts of a War Department commendation reads as follows:  
"Special reports have reached me...covering the emergency service rendered by the 1800 Engineer G.S. Bn. which was placed on temporary duty in the 8th Service Command during the recent high water operations in the lower Mississippi Valley. This unit was engaged in the White River in Arkansas...from the 22nd of March through the 4 April 1945, and on the Mississippi and Red River, La...from 5 April until 12 May 1945. ...These troops did everything humanly possible to avert failure of inadequate levees in a record flood. ...This section of the Mississippi Valley experienced its greatest flood on record. The fact these extreme flood conditions were met successfully throughout was due in considerable measure to the effective work of this battalion in all its assignments...." Signed by Brig. Gen. S.M.C. Tyler, and endorsed as follows: It is most gratifying to transmit basic communication and preceeding endorsements to you, and through you I desire to take this opportunity to express my appreciation to all personnel for a job well done. The contents of this communication will be read to all personnel at the next mess assembly, and then posted on all organization bulletin boards for one week. Signed by Army Brigadier General, G.M.Halloran.

MISFITS?  
TROUBLE  
MAKERS?

THE  
NASHVILLE  
BANNER

Excerpts of an article that appeared in the Nashville Banner on January 29, 1945 entitled "RESIDENTS PRAISE AS LAST UNIT LEAVES MANEUVER AREA" by Gene Sloan reads in part as follows: "Highway and fence damage proved to be a new problem and a vexing one. At one time, 11 combat engineer battalions were engaged solely in repairing fences and keeping roads passable. "But (the official reports read) they were not able to keep up with the complaints." Later, a policy of having each division organize a fence repair company was tried with equal lack of success. ...Early in 1944 a special battalion of engineer troops was sent into the maneuver area, **each soldier of which was fueled with the ambition to prove his loyalty to America.** This command was capable of being divided into groups as small as 3 members. The work of this unit was uniformly lauded by land owners for their work on fences, rebuilding fields and maintaining roads. These troops, leaving the area in mid December of 1944, were the last troops to quit this Tennessee maneuver area."

SUSPECT  
SOLDIERS?

WHAT IS  
LOYALTY?

Does this sound like a group of misfits shirking their duties? Incidentally, **how many Italian or German Americans would have been "willing" to serve in oversea combat if their families were stripped of everything including dignity, and similarly imprisoned? IS THIS QUESTION OF "WILLING OR NOT WILLING" A TRUE MEASURE OF LOYALTY UNDER THESE CIRCUMSTANCES?**

WHEN/  
WHERE/  
HOW/  
TO WHOM

That the ~~Nisei~~/~~K~~ibei ended up in the 442, the M.I., the 1800, or remained in the "regular" camps or in Tule Lake was not a matter of one being more loyal than the other, but the "when, where, how and to whom" his frustrations were expressed.

RIGHT  
AND  
WRONG?

Many who expressed their rage in violent terms in 1942/3 turned up as gallant heroes in overseas combat, whereas others wound up in prison, Tule Lake, the 1800, or in Japan. Should one be glorified over the other? **Who can dare stand in judgement and proclaim that one was right and the other wrong?**

PROUD? The 442 on the European front and the thousands in the Military Intelligence in the Pacific Theater have been justly glorified for making tremendous sacrifices for which we are all grateful and proud. But should the others (the majority) hold their heads in shame? Those who spoke out in camps and in the army should stand just as tall and hold their heads just as high as our Nisei veterans.

ASHAMED? Perhaps it is sacriligious to publicly make this statement, but even some of the mainland Nisei/Kibei soldier heroes and some in the camps (a few? some? majority? who knows?) actually did not have the backbone to stand up and speak out against the authorities when the chips were down. But perhaps it was fortunate that they didn't, or we might still be in the camps -- like those on the Indian reservations.

A SACRILEGE?

ANY SECOND THOUGHTS? Those who did speak out both in the camps and in the army no doubt would again react in the same manner if the circumstances were identical to that which existed in 1941/2/and early 1943. Their country had betrayed them, and each reacted in his own manner depending upon his character and his own personal circumstances.

PERSONAL STORY In my own particular case I had volunteered for the Military Intelligence Language School in Camp Savage, Minnesota in 1942. Upon acceptance in early 1943, I again wrote to Mr. Edward J. Ennis, head of the Enemy Alien Control Unit in Washington, D.C. I requested that my father, then interned in the Lordsburg Internment Camp be allowed to join my mother in the Manzanar Relocation Camp. Both were behind barbed wires, I wrote, so would it endanger the security of the United States if they could be together? Nothing came of this or of other pleas I had made to him and to other authorities.

THAT QUESTIONNAIRE AGAIN When "that" questionnaire was distributed to every student in the Camp Savage Military Intelligence School, I answered no/yes, but with my "no" qualified with an attached letter of explanation. But the crusher came just before graduation when my request for a furlough to visit my mother in Manzanar was denied because no Niseis -- soldiers or otherwise -- were allowed into the Western Defense Zone in which Manzanar was located. Here we were being prepared for a dangerous and highly

THE CRUSHER

BLEW  
MY  
STACK

secretive overseas military mission for the U.S. Army, and yet were forbidden to make a "farewell" visit to our family and friends if they were confined in a camp located in California. This ridiculous military order was later rescinded, but only after I had "blown my stack" to the "wrong" people at Camp Savage. As a result, I along with approximately 18 others were ousted. We were eventually demoted to the rank of private, and transferred<sup>14</sup> to the 525 and then<sup>14</sup> to the 1800 for bearing an "attitude which is considered undesirable in a first class soldier of the Army of the United States."

This was my when/where/how/and to whom. **Every 1800er had his own painful experience which triggered a response that led to his being exiled into the 1800.**

1800  
SPECIAL  
DISCHARGE  
HEARINGS

Instead of being immediately discharged after the war, every member of our organization had to appear before a special hearing board to determine the type of discharge to be issued. Most of the Niseis received honorable discharges, but the majority of the Kibeis were given a "blue" without honor discharge. This was not dishonorable nor honorable, but something in between. It meant that they retained their American civil rights, but all army benefits were denied -- mustering out pay, GI Bill of Rights, etc.

I appeared as the interpreter for many of the Kibeis, and felt that their inability to articulate in the English language and their heavy accent identical to that of the erstwhile Japanese enemy influenced the hearing board members to make a negative judgement.

MR. HYMAN  
BRAVIN

In the ensuing years, several of them took steps to successfully overturn this decision and have received honorable discharges. In 1984/5, at the request of one of the 1800 members Mr. Hyman Bravin, a practicing lawyer in New York City and who during the 1945 discharge hearing was the army appointed defense counsel for the 1800, made a test case before an army discharge rehearing board. He was successful and as a result all those that so requested have subsequently had their blue discharges changed to an honorable

status. Some, however, have continued to take the attitude of "why should I take the first step?" "They" should take that first step.

DEMOCRACY  
AT WORK

And herein lies the greatness of America. American democracy works, perhaps slowly, but inexorably it moves in the direction of justice for all. Most of the nikkeis today are enjoying the fruits of democracy, almost fully accepted into the American society in a manner that would have appeared virtually impossible back in 1941/2. America has come through. All of the Niseis and Kibeis should, and I am sure are giving gracious thanks to this great country, and are doing their share to make it even greater.

ALL IN  
THE SAME  
BOAT

Recent letters to the editors in the local Japanese vernacular newspapers are beginning to show more sympathy or empathy towards the camp and army "resistors." This is a good sign, for stones should not be thrown at each other -- bickering as to who was right, who had more courage, and who was more loyal. Having shared a unique and very historical experience, hindsight is proving that all the Isseis, Niseis and Kibeis demonstrated tremendous courage, each in his own manner depending upon individual circumstances. In essence, it has forged them into becoming better Americans, appreciative of the words freedom, liberty, democracy, justice.

UNITED  
WE STAND...

No single group should be seeking glorification for itself, but should identify itself with all who suffered through this soul wrenching experience. It now behooves all of us to become a single unified force and stand together on EVERY endeavor that contributes toward making certain that this tragic episode will never again be repeated. This misfortune may not happen to us again (heaven forbid!) but could happen to others whose ancestral countries are not on the best of terms with U.S. foreign policy, or to those whose facial features or color are "different." Let us not be complacent.

HISTORICAL  
ACCURACY

It would be hoped that American history will chronicle this tragic episode accurately with, of course, due glory bestowed upon those that served so heroically with the 442 and the Military Intelligence. But by the same token, all the others -- those that defied the

evacuation order, those that remained in the relocation and "enemy" alien internment camps, those that ventured out of the camps into the unknown, those renunciants from Tule Lake and Crystal City that remained in the United States or "relocated" to Japan, and those so called camp and army "resistors" -- **should not they all be given due credit for their unmeasurable sacrifices and courage?**

Most of them, instead of "breaking" psychologically, stood by their convictions and survived with an undaunted spirit. Today, that same determination and spirit of both the veterans and non veterans are exemplified by the fact that, from scratch, the Japanese Americans have rebuilt and uplifted their lives, and have become an important and integral part of the American society, far beyond what it was prior to Pearl Harbor.

Every Issei, ~~N~~isei and ~~K~~ibeis regardless of <sup>HIS</sup> their wartime stand, need not apologize to anyone for whatever his action. Instead, all of us should stand tall and be proud that **each, in his own way, fought for the very principles upon which America was founded and which has made it so great and unique in world history.**

Cedrick M. Shimo  
July 4, 1986