

## II

### NISEI LINGUISTS -- EYES AND EARS OF ALLIED PACIFIC FORCES

In the crucial battles of the Pacific, the Japs did not know (nor did thousands of Americans at home) that they were confronted not only by vastly superior American arms and daring Yankee intrepidity, but by an enemy who already had much detailed information of the Japanese plans for attack and defense. If the analogy to football to which some of the defeated Jap war lords have resorted recently is at all relevant, then the Japs were playing with their signals entirely known by their heavier and harder hitting opponents. But the Japs didn't know. They had lulled themselves into a self-complacent sense of security. They thought the complexities of the Japanese language in which their plans were written and communicated would be unfathomable to the Westerner.

For thousands of Americans on the fighting fronts knew this was so. They knew, however, that the American-born Japanese (better known as "Nisei") language specialists -- translators, interrogators, radio monitors, and order of battle experts -- were one of the chief means of obtaining intelligence of the enemy and his plans. The American Nisei trained at the Presidio, Camp Savage and Fort Snelling became the eyes and ears of not only the American fighting forces, but also that of the other allied armies fighting Japan.

These language specialists, working selflessly and in complete anonymity, translated from the Japanese language to English the enemy information concerning his tactical decisions and dispositions. This information greatly assisted our commanders in the field in making decisions, conducting effective maneuvers and avoiding surprise. Never before in history did one army know so much concerning its enemy prior to actual engagement as did the American army during most of the Pacific campaign.

It became almost routine practice for our Japanese-American language units to work so rapidly and accurately that our artillery was dropping shells on enemy command posts and gun emplacements within a few minutes of the time that information was obtained by the language detachment. On many occasions this intelligence helped clear the way for our doughboys slowly moving forward through the jungles.

As one example, the official reports of the Americal Division disclose that it was the work of the language detachment that largely was responsible for the Divisional Commander knowing well in advance where and approximately at what time and in what strength the Japanese would attack the division along the Torokina River near Bougainville.

Graduates of the Military Intelligence Service Language School translated the entire Japanese battle plans for the naval battle of the Philippines. These plans were captured with Admiral Koga, then Commander-in-Chief of the Combined Japanese Fleets, when the plane in which he was hurrying to join his fleet made a forced landing in the Philippines. Slight wonder then that the Japanese suffered practically total annihilation and the worst defeat in naval history in the San Bernardino Straits and off the northeast coast of the Philippines.

Likewise, the complete Japanese plan for the defense of the Philippines also was made known through the work of the language specialists from the Military Intelligence Service Language School long before our forces had landed on Leyte.

Graduates of the Military Intelligence Service Language School include Americans of many racial backgrounds, but roughly 85 per cent of its graduates are Nisei Americans. Concerning the work of these Japanese-American language specialists, Joe Rosenthal, AP newscameraman who won the Pulitzer Award for his spot photo of the raising of the Star and Stripes at the crater rim of Mt. Suribachi, has written:

"Usually they work with headquarters in serving as interpreters. Armed with hand grenades at the entrances to Jap pillboxes or caves, they often convince the enemy to surrender where other officers, lacking the proper diction of the Jap language, would fail. They work so close to the enemy on these missions that with the danger of being killed by Japs, they run the risk of being shot, unintentionally, by our own marines. Their dungarees soon become ragged in rough country and the similarity of their physical appearance to that of the Japanese enemy makes their job much tougher.

"Many have paid with their lives, and many more have been wounded. They have done an outstanding job, and their heroism should be recognized. It

has been recognized by the marine commanders where I saw them in action at Guam, Peleliu, and Iwo."

Two of these Nisei, Technical Sergeant Kazuo Komoto with the 11th Airborne Division, and a Japanese-American Staff Sergeant with the 1st Radio Squadron Mobile, were among the first troops that landed at Atsugi Airfield near Tokyo. Komoto, incidentally, was the first graduate of the Military Intelligence Service Language School to win a purple heart when he was shot by a Jap sniper on New Georgia Island.

Another graduate, Technical Sergeant Robert Oda acted as interpreter when our naval forces took over the Japanese naval base at Yokosuka.

These language specialists came to the Military Intelligence Service Language School from all walks of life and from various parts of the United States, Hawaii, and Alaska. Among them were dentists, lawyers, PhD's, cooks, farm-hands, gardeners, laundrymen, houseboys, and even a professional gambler. One was a former member of the Territorial Legislature in Hawaii. A good cross section came as volunteers from behind the barbed wire fences of the Relocation Camps in which they had been placed shortly after Pearl Harbor. Some were veterans of World War I, well over 45 years old, and with three or more teen age children. Technician 3a grade James Yoshinobu who served with the 4th Marine Division on Iwo Jima and Technical Sergeant John Tanikawa, who was awarded a Bronze Star for his work with the 41st Division on Leyte, were veterans of World War I.

Nisei language specialists have been with every major unit in every engagement from Guadalcanal and Attu to the march into Tokyo. To mention all units with which they served would be to list every major unit that has engaged in combat in the Pacific. The great task of the War Department and the Military Intelligence Service Language School was to supply the demand for these linguists. This entailed a comprehensive study of the history of practically every Japanese-American male of military age.

A story is told about Lt. General Alexander M. ("Sandy") Patch's reaction to the Nisei. When the first group of Nisei arrived at his command, it is reported that he hesitated to use them. It is reported (perhaps apocryphally) that after their first campaign he thought so much of them that he would go

personally to the transports and welcome each group as they came off the gangplank. Today, General Patch, who also had under his command the 442nd Regimental Combat Team in the European Theater of Operations (also composed of Nisei), is one of the staunchest Nisei supporters.

From Guadalcanal, Lieutenant Colonel John A. Burden, then Captain in the G-2 Section of the XIV Corps wrote:

"The use of Nisei in the combat area is essential to efficient work. There has been a great deal of prejudice and opposition to the use of Nisei in combat areas. The two arguments advanced are: (1) Americans of Japanese ancestry are not to be trusted, and (2) the lives of the Nisei would be endangered due to the strong sentiment against Japanese prevailing in the area. Both of these arguments have been thoroughly disproved by experiences on Guadalcanal, and I AM GLAD TO SAY THAT THOSE WHO OPPOSED THE USE OF NISEI THE MOST ARE NOW THEIR MOST ENTHUSIASTIC ADVOCATES. It has been proven that only the Nisei are capable of rapid translation of written orders and diaries, and their use is essential in obtaining the information contained in them."

Lieutenant Colonel William M. Van Antwerp, in charge of intelligence for the 27th Infantry Division, had this to say: "The MAKIN operation afforded the first opportunity for the Language Section of this Division to operate in combat. Their actions and the results of their work reflect high credit on them and the Military Intelligence Service Language School."

Major General Ralph C. Smith who commanded the 27th Infantry Division added: "The language section attached to the 27th Division was invaluable in the MAKIN operation."

From the China-Burma-India Theater, Captain Barton Lloyd, a graduate of the Military Intelligence Service Language School, wrote: "I cannot overstate the value that Colonel Stilwell (son of General Stilwell) and his headquarters place on Nisei language men. AS far as everyone who has had contact with the Nisei is concerned, they are tops -- they are doing a damned good job, much of it under conditions they never expected. Sergeants Matsuna and Mazawa were dropped by parachute deep in Kachin territory to an Office of Strategic Services unit. They have been working in areas behind enemy lines, doing both language and radio intercept work. These two volunteered without

any hesitation and took their jumps in fine form although having had no previous training in parachute jumping whatsoever. The paratrooper who gave them instructions and who accompanied them on their jump flight told me that when their turns came to jump, they took off themselves with 'no assistance'."

According to reports from Leyte, General Krueger repeatedly has congratulated and commended the Nisei language men for their fine work on Leyte.

A Nisei Technical Sergeant wrote from the Marshall Islands, "Incidentally, I was called in by Major General Corlett, the commanding general of the 7th Division, and he personally extended his congratulations to our team for the work that the boys did."

Recognition has been given to the work of these Nisei Americans in the field. Although the reports are not complete and records are only fragmentary, at least 50 Nisei have received direct commissions from the ranks as Second Lieutenants, and another 25 or 30 have been commissioned through the various Officer Candidate Schools in Australia and in the United States. One of these, Masaji Marumoto of Honolulu, has received a commission as a First Lieutenant in the Judge Advocate General's Department and was the civil affairs legal officer attached to Military Government in Okinawa when the last report was received.

A number of Nisei have been awarded decorations for intelligence work in combat but complete information in this respect also is lacking. As far as is known at present 1 Distinguished Service Cross, 2 Legion of Merits, 5 Silver Stars, 1 Soldier's Medal, over 50 Bronze Stars, and 15 Purple Hearts have been awarded. It is certain that many more decorations have been received by Nisei intelligence personnel.

Some Japanese-American language specialists have been assigned to the larger headquarters and in various stations in the continental limits of the United States and have been denied the opportunity of serving in combat. Most of the honor graduates of each graduating class were retained as instructors at the Military Intelligence Service Language School to train other students. It has taken considerable discussion to convince these men that they could render more important service in non-combat assignments.

Roy Cummings, Honolulu Star Bulletin correspondent, has pointed out the non-language side of their roles in the Pacific. He wrote: "Pocket

dictionaries aren't the only articles the men of the school make use of out there. Things happened fast after the landing on Okinawa. One of the language men was on guard the third night that we were there. He challenged a man who came out of the darkness. The man did not halt and when he came closer the sergeant saw that it was an enemy soldier, so he cut him down with his carbine."

Fourteen Nisei volunteered for service with Merrill's Marauders in Burma. An officer writing of their exploits says: "Throughout, whenever and wherever there was need for any of the boys, they never hesitated. They were not only interpreters but soldiers at the front. They faced danger willingly, whenever called upon. They faced the enemy, fought against him. Roy Matsumoto, Ben Sugeta, Robert Honda and Henry Goshō are credited with about 30 Nips. You can see by that that the boys have been right upon the line."

"During battles they crawled up close enough to be able to hear Jap officers' commands and to make verbal translations to our soldiers. They tapped lines, listened in on radios, translated documents and papers, made spot translations of messages and field orders, and in numerous other ways made themselves invaluable."

It was in the engagement at Myitkyina that these "Marauder boys" lost their commanding officer, Captain William Laffin (his mother was a Japanese) when he was strafed by enemy planes. Of the 14 Nisei who started out with General Merrill, six were commissioned as officers for meritorious service in the field, one was decorated with the Legion of Merit, and three received the Bronze Star. All received the Combat Infantryman's Badge and the Presidential Unit Citation.

It is interesting to note that many of the outstandingly daring feats were performed by graduates who were "Kibei" (those born in the United States but sent at an early age to Japan and educated there). These "Kibei" are mistakenly judged in some quarters as being pro-Japanese elements in the Japanese-American community.

Tech Sergeant Kaz Kozaki, a former non-commissioned officer instructor at the Military Intelligence Service Language School, is a "Kibei" and so is Technician 3d Grade Eiichi Sakaya. Kozaki won a Silver Star and a Purple Heart for rescuing an American army officer under fire when they were attacked

by the Japanese as they were landing on New Guinea from their landing craft. Eiichi Sakauye rescued a wounded British officer under fire in the China-Burma-India Theater and likewise became the recipient of a Silver Star.

Technician 5th Grade Terry Takeshi Doi was an out and out "Kibei". His Japanese was stronger than his command of English. He had been caught as a dual-national in Japan and had been forced to serve in the Japanese army, thereby losing his American citizenship. He had been kept at the Military Intelligence Service Language School after graduation before he was cleared as being trustworthy for service in the combat zone. When Doi appeared before Judge Robert Bell of the U. S. District Court in the Twin Cities for restoration of his American citizenship, a Canadian dancer who also was scheduled to be sworn in as an American citizen requested Judge Bell to swear her in separately. As she put it, she refused to be "sworn in with a Jap". Judge Bell denied her request and she walked out of court.

Terry Doi was one of the first Nisei to land on Iwo Jima. Several had landed among the first waves, about "H hour plus 45". And from that time on he distinguished himself going into cave after cave with only a flashlight and knife persuading many enemy soldiers to come out and surrender. Wrote Lt. Wesley H. Fishel, Doi's commanding officer, to Judge Bell, "I know you'll be happy to know that Terry did one of the finest pieces of work possible. Doi was one of the first GIs to land on Iwo Jima. The limits of censorship prohibit details, but I can say Terry is one of the bravest and most capable men I have seen out here."

Another Caucasian officer graduate of the Military Intelligence Service Language School, Lieutenant Squire wrote: "There was nothing but praise for the Nisei boys, particularly a boy by the name of Doi.....There is a story about him people tell which goes something like this. He was continually going into caves with a knife and flashlight and hollering to the enemy to 'get the hell out or else'. Mr. Doi's middle name is now 'Guts'."

Technician Grade 3 Kenji Yasui is another "Kibei" who has won for himself the title of the "Nisei Sergeant York". Yasui, because of his schooling in Tokyo (middle school graduate and college division graduate of Waseda University) and his command of the Japanese language, was sent to the Office of War Information in India to work on propaganda leaflets to be

dropped over the enemy lines. Masquerading as Colonel Yamamoto, a local Japanese Commander, he brought in single handed a dozen Jap. prisoners of war. John Emerson, State Department Political Adviser to the Theater Commander, and himself a former State Department language officer in Tokyo, wrote Colonel Rasmussen as follows:

"I don't know whether you have heard yet that one of them, Kenji Yasui, has been recommended for a citation (Yasui received the Silver Star) for his courageous performance in bringing in 13 Japanese prisoners during the mopping-up operations in Myitkyina. Kenji and two others volunteered to go out to an island in the river to round up a bunch of Japs. He swam out, got a cramp half-way across and almost drowned, shouted to the Japs to come out, and finally got 13 together. Two had to be killed and one tried to blow Yasui and himself up with a grenade. Kenji luckily escaped that. He announced that he was a Colonel and made them line up and execute close order drill. Then he made them get in the river and swim across pushing a raft on which he stood with carbine aimed at them. Afterwards he learned the Japs had 20 rounds each and had a bead on him when he came ashore. Only because he started shouting military commands in Japanese did they hold fire."

Technician 3d grade Shigeto Mazawa served with the KACHIN RANGERS (native Burmese levies) and took part in daring raids against the enemy in Burma. Much to his surprise, he found himself a temporary Captain in the British Army commanding a whole company of KACHIN RANGERS.

Several have reported none too amusing incidents--that of being captured by Chinese troops and being mistaken for Japanese soldiers. They have reported that they never talked so fast with sign language and wrote so many "Kanji" (Chinese characters used in the Japanese language) in all their lives to explain that they were "Minkuo" (American) soldiers. They have described their complexion as having remained a pale green for the next three months or more.

Sergeant Vic Nishijima was on Ie Jima (Ie Island west of Okinawa) on the morning that Ernie Pyle, the GI's favorite correspondent, was killed by a Japanese machine gun ambush. Writing to his friends at Fort Snelling, Nishijima wrote: "I had to give war scribe Ernie Pyle hell for trying to cross

a mine field. Also wound up in a newsreel with him but didn't know who the 'elderly private' was until next morning."

Technician 4th Grade Seiyu Higashi was born in Los Angeles, but was taken back to the town of Naha in Okinawa in his early years. He was reared in Naha, completed middle school, and then returned to Los Angeles. He graduated from high school in Los Angeles and shortly after Pearl Harbor he enlisted in the United States Army. Higashi was sent to Okinawa because of his knowledge of the Okinawa dialect. Upon reaching the town of Naha, he accidentally ran into his father that he had not seen for eight years.

Like all troops in the combat zone, some of these Nisei language specialists will never return to the country they fought for. Many have given their lives in the service of their country. Ten were killed in an airplane accident in Okinawa a day before VJ-Day. Others have been killed by enemy action.

Technician 3rd Grade Frank T. Hachiya was born in Hood River, Oregon, the place where the local American Legion Post erased the names of 16 Americans of Japanese ancestry from the country memorial honor roll. After basic training at Camp Roberts in California, Frank was assigned to the Military Intelligence Service Language School at Camp Savage. At the time of his death, he was a veteran of the Kwajalein and Eniwetok campaigns. He had been sent out as a special replacement to the language team working with the Sixth Army headquarters on Leyte. He was scheduled to fly back to Honolulu the following day. His father was in a Relocation Camp, but his mother was in Japan.

Hachiya volunteered to cross an enemy infested valley to question a prisoner of war who had been captured by friendly units on an adjacent ridge. Lieutenant Howard M. Moss, his commanding officer, said, "It was essential to get the information from the prisoner of war immediately as some of our units were in a bad spot.....When they reached the bottom of the valley a Jap sniper let them have it at close range when he started hollering to the Japs in the valley in Japanese. Frank emptied his gun into the sniper. Then he walked back up the hill where he was given plasma.....At the hospital he was given every possible care, but the bullet had gone through his liver."

wrote to one of the graduates who has seen service in the Philippines: "If all Americans-Japanese or I might say 'democratic Japanese' feel like you fellows did, things are 'on the ball' and this old 'democratic way of life' is worth fighting for."

These Nisei eyes and ears of the Allied Forces that greatly assisted in bringing Japan to her knees in unprecedented defeat have vindicated in their way the faith which President Roosevelt, our great wartime president and commander-in-chief, placed in them when he said, "Americanism is not, and never was, a matter of race or ancestry.....Every loyal American citizen should be given the opportunity to serve this country wherever his skills will make the greatest contribution....." In military Japanese language work, the Nisei language specialists have done just that.