

100/442

Chir Loni ☺ Thought this little  
writing may interest you -

P.S. Need the photos back soon - ok?

Love,  
Naomi

## A FELLOW VETERAN REMEMBERS

Dear Editor,

As a former buddy of his, I read with interest that your next story in the centennial series saluting the men of the 100th Infantry will be about Sadao Munemori.

Spud, as he asked that we call him, joined us only a few months after we ourselves had joined the outfit as replacements. We were then near the bombed-out town of Cisterna, in the Alban foothills on the way to Rome.

We quickly found that he did not fit our image of the typical "kotonk." He was very friendly, outgoing, accepting and it didn't take him long to pick up pidgin and become one of us.

There is much about those years that I do not recall, but two incidents involving Spud I do, if it is of any interest to your writer.

The first occurred in the Vosges Forest in France just before the 442nd's rescue of the "Lost Battalion." Our platoon had taken heavy casualties in the thick woods and had been pulled back for a brief respite. The night before we were to go back to the front Spud came to me and said, "I'm not going back up. I don't care what they do to me, I'm not going back up!" Not knowing what else to do I just heard him out and responded something like, "Don't worry. You'll be all right."

Before dawn the next day we went back up and he was right there.

The other happened in April, in or near the town of Carrara, about the time of President Roosevelt's passing.

Spud and I were at company headquarters (I don't remember

why) and were to go back to the lines the next day. We noticed several cartons of Christmas candy which we concluded were unwanted. It was early evening and we each loaded up a musette bag with the candy, walked into the town, and started giving out handfuls of candy to any kids we came across. Within minutes we had unintentionally started a small riot. Suddenly, it seemed, kids were coming from everywhere, yelling, pushing, clawing for the candy. I don't know what happened afterwards. We just dumped the candy on the street and ran. I don't recall what we said to each other on the way back, but the experience is one I always remembered.

It wasn't long afterward that Spud was killed in action.  
Stanley Izumigawa  
Kula, Maui

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*From Pearl Harbor to the Po*


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# The Congressional Medal of Honor: Sadao Munemori

**An Imin Centennial Series Saluting the Men of  
the 100th Infantry Battalion**

By **BEN H. TAMASHIRO**

*Special to The Hawaii Herald*

"Aw, you're good for nothing," taunted Yaeko as she again bested her 8-year-old kid brother, Sadao, in their playful tussle, his precociousness not quite enough to help him overcome the tomboy in her, much less the fact that she was older by two years. And although these tender and warm-hearted sisterly joshings would stay in Sadao's consciousness through the years, they would come to find their greater consequence in Yaeko herself.

Sadao Munemori's father, Kametaro, had migrated from Hiroshima to California after the turn of the century. His wife, Nawa, followed shortly with their baby, Yuriko. Then came the rest of the family: Isao (Bob), Yaeko, Sadao and Kikuyo (Keech), all born in Los Angeles.

Kametaro died in 1938, so he was spared the agony and the humiliation of the forced relocation of the Japanese people from their West Coast homes to inland centers as a result of Japan's December 7, 1941, attack upon Pearl Harbor. Along with over a hundred thousand Japanese, citizens and, non-citizens alike, the Munemori family was swept out of its home the following March. Then consisting of the mother, son Bob, and two daughters (Yuriko was in Japan), the family was displaced to the Manzanar relocation center. Sadao, who had volunteered for the Army a month before Pearl Harbor, had been inducted just the month before and was in an Army training

Benedictine monastery standing guard over the southern gateway to Rome. The beachhead at Anzio was designed as an "end-around" maneuver to break the enemy's grip upon Cassino and that highway to Rome, but the undertaking was going askew in the face of stiff enemy opposition. The 100th suffered horrendous combat losses.

But, on June 5, Rome ultimately did fall into Allied hands. It was after that battle that the 442d arrived in Italy, at which point the 100th became the 1st Battalion of the larger nisei unit. Three months later the 100/442 was withdrawn from the Italian theater and shifted over to France where they played a heroic role in the rescue of the "Lost Battalion" in the forests above Bruyeres, a little town up near the northeast corner by the Franco-German border. After the battle, Sadao wrote to Yaeko that "the scenery is very beautiful here, but all the beautiful forests remind me of now is terror, destruction and the painful cries of my buddies in agony. We all hate the Nazis over here, but every front line man respects the German soldier because he really is an artist in that line."



massive artillery barrage, they attacked—the 100th's objective, Hill "Georgia" while other units of the 442d attacked "Florida." With Company A in the lead, the initial push advanced several hundred yards, then faltered as the enemy, recovering from the artillery barrage and the surprise appearance of the Americans, fought back with machine guns and pistols, rifles and grenades. Although the early morning darkness made the enemy fire inaccurate, their fire nevertheless took its toll. But as one soldier dropped, another took his place and so the attack continued until the hills had been secured. The time was 0532. In the wash of the concentrated attack lay the mangled body of Pfc. Sadao Munemori in a shell crater.

His squad leader injured, Pfc. Munemori had taken charge of the leading squad. With him were Pfc. Akira Shishido of Paia, Maui, and Pvt. Jimi Oda, Ogden, Utah. The following is Pfc. Shishido's eyewitness account of the ongoing fight: "We advanced nearer the objective until another machine gun opened up right there. Pvt. Oda and I scrambled into a shell crater and Pfc. Munemori crawled back and joined us. The Germans began hurling grenades again. Ten or 12 landed near our crater but we were unhurt by the explosions."

The machine guns had to be silenced. Munemori crawled out of the hole, then made a one-man frontal attack on two machine gun nests, knocking off both with hand grenades. But as he crawled back into the crater, a grenade bounced off his helmet and rolled into the hole. It would go off before anyone could scramble out, nor was there time to make a grab for it and attempt to throw it

center.

His first two years of military training were spent in such scattered locations as Arkansas, Illinois and Minnesota. In January 1944, he was sent South to Camp Shelby in Mississippi and there was subsequently assigned to Company A, 442d Regimental Combat Team, then in training for overseas combat duty.

In one of his first letters from Shelby to the family in Manzanar, he recalled that he was only 19 when he had volunteered for the Army and that it "was a big decision I had gone over and over again at nights when you all were sleeping. I think I did right by enlisting because my home is here in the U.S. and it helped a lot to bind the family together more than ever."

He had other things to say. From having observed young recruits "actually cry for not having taken advice from their parents," he had come to the conclusion that "Your mother is NEVER wrong." And, comparing himself to those "kids" as he called those 19-through-21 year olds, he had a confession to make, of sorts: "I haven't cried because you know what kind of guy I am. I'm just a good-for-nothing like Yaeko used to say."

Yaeko, now Mrs. Albert Yokoyama and a resident of Honolulu since 1946, recalls that particular time when the young Sadao was at the point of losing yet another fight with her and began to pout: "You just wait. When I grow up, they're going to name a ship after me. And I'm not going to let you ride on it." Like the reverberations of a temple bell that keep ringing in the ears long after the last striking, Sadao's words keep coming back to Yaeko whenever her thoughts dwell on him, which is often, inasmuch as he is the first nisei recipient of the congressional Medal of Honor. And the pulsations out of the past come to her all the more vividly because of her flippant rejoinder: "I don't care. I wouldn't ride on your ship anyway."

Sadao was in one of the first group of replacements for the 100th Infantry Battalion then fighting at Anzio. He left the 442nd in Shelby in April and arrived at the Anzio beachhead a month later and was assigned to Company A.

By then the 100th had been in combat in Italy for nine months, having entered the Italian theater in September 1943 at Salerno Bay, south of Naples. By January, it was engaged in the tremendous battle for Cassino, the town with the towering



*Sadao Munemori was posthumously awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor. His citation reads: "He stands in the unbroken line of patriots who have dared to die that freedom might live, grow and increase its blessings. Freedom lives, and through it, he lives—in a way that humbles the undertakings of most men."*

Following several months of light patrol duty in southern France in the Maritime Alps, the 100/442 was pulled out and secretly returned to Italy. General Mark Clark, 5th Army Commander, greeted the return of the 100th to his fold with these words: "You, of all battalions, I pledge, will share in the great victory ahead." But ahead of that victory lay the enemy's nigh-impregnable Gothic Line, a defensive barrier built into the northern Apennines mountain range blocking the entrance into the Po Valley. It had repulsed repeated 5th Army assaults for nearly half a year, much as Cassino a year earlier had withstood similar attempts for five months.

But then, in one of the war's most magnificent assaults upon an enemy stronghold, the 100/442 scaled the mountain heights of the Gothic Line in the early morning hours of April 5, 1945, and reached the top undetected by the enemy. At 0500 hours (5 a.m.) they were in position. Following a

out. In that decisive moment, Pfc. Munemori threw his body over the grenade and smothered it by bending his head over his chest and hunching his shoulders so that the blast would not leak out. He was killed instantly. The other two suffered concussions and partial deafness but were unhurt otherwise.

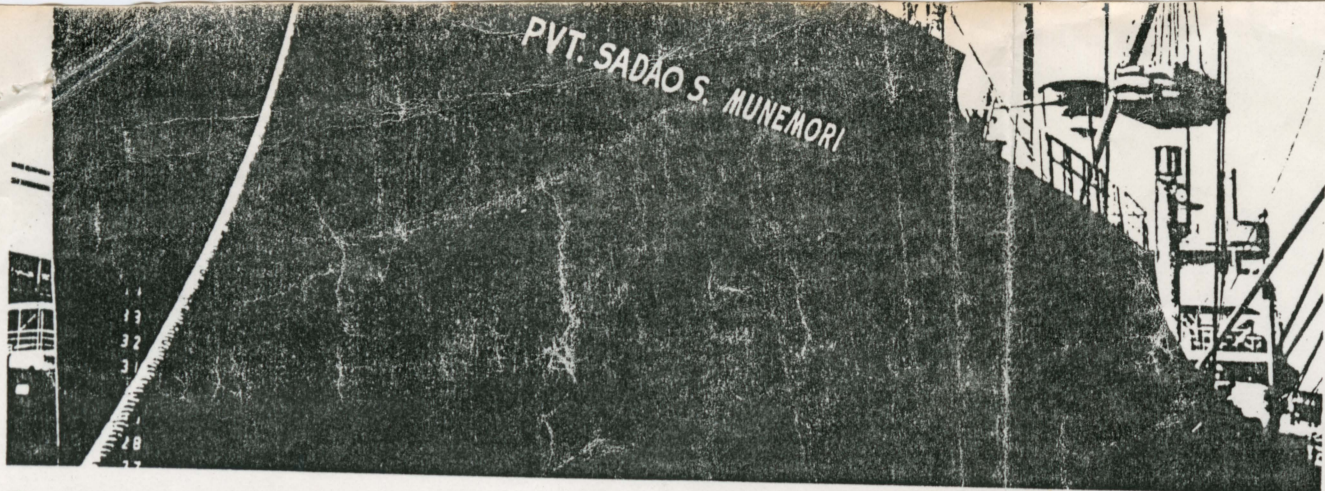
Sadao Munemori was posthumously awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor for "conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity involving risk of life above and beyond the call of duty in action against the enemy."

The undertaking upon the mountain bastions of Hills Georgia and Florida in which Sadao gave his life brings to mind the stroke of boldness that characterized Ichi-no-tani in 1184, one of the great battles in Japanese history. The Minamoto and Taira forces were locked in combat for supremacy of the country. Taira no Munemori had built a military stronghold around Fukuhara, or Ichi-no-tani, on the shores of Settsu province on the Inland Sea, across from modern-day Osaka. With control of the sea in their hands and the high mountains behind forming a natural barrier against land attacks, the Taira felt secure in their base spread along the narrow shoreline. But on that early morning in 1184, Minamoto no Yoshitsune led a group of horsemen around and up the mountain. There, confronted by the steep sides at whose base lay the enemy's camp, Yoshitsune then let his horses slip and slide their way down, the warriors clinging to the mounts while whispering bits of encouragement into their ears. In that manner did Yoshitsune achieve complete surprise. Disorganized by the unexpected appearance of the foe behind them, the retaliation of the Taira was ineffectual. Crushed, they took to flight.

Eight centuries later, the all-night climb of the 100/442 up the steep sides of the Apennines to surprise the enemy and rout him out of his longheld redoubt can be viewed as a feat of boldness and daring in the manner of Yoshitsune at Ichi-no-tani.

That heroic dimension of the human spirit was enjoined by the Army in a ceremony without precedence in the history of the United States when in 1948 at the Brooklyn Army Base in New York, the speedy 10,000-ton troopship "Wilson Victory"—the very ship that had brought back the men and colors of the 100/442 to New York on their

**Continued on page 11**



**Continued from page 10**

triumphant homecoming from Italy after the war—was redesignated the “Pvt. Sadao S. Munemori.”

When the ship made its first call to Honolulu shortly after the redesignation action, Yaeko was invited to be the first to board it. Memories crowded upon her as she awaited the eventful day . . .

- *She was an R. N. and had left Manzanar in March 1943 under sponsorship to work in the Madison General Hospital in Wisconsin. It was there, on April 20, 1945, that a telegraph operator called her to read a telegram from her brother, Bob, in Manzanar: KEEP STIFF UPPER LIP RECEIVED MILITARY WIRE SADAO KILLED IN ACTION 5 APRIL ITALY.*

- *Just three days earlier, she had written Sadao telling him that “I was certainly glad to hear from you again and was really surprised to hear you are back in Italy. Then, I take it, you are with the 5th Army in the northern section of Italy, fighting hard. Do be careful.”*

- *“We had sunrise service this morning,” he had written in a letter dated April 1, “and I saw some boys get baptized. Gee but it was nice not to be fighting and able to have a service like we did today with a band.” It was to be his last letter home.*

- *Young Sadao had excitedly dashed off to go swimming at the community pool with his friend, a Norwegian lad. But when he returned he went straight to his room without a word to anyone. They all wondered why and, after a while, Yaeko went to check and found him on his bed, face down, but not asleep. She felt his trunks—dry! Why, he hadn’t even gone swimming! Reluctantly, the boy explained that there was a big sign at the entrance to the pool: NO JAPS ALLOWED. But there were no tears in him. Yaeko wondered why.*

- *Her parents loved Japanese music so they had stacks of records. The children smashed them all. They also smashed the cameras, shredded their Japanese textbooks and notebooks. The evacuation instructions read “no pets” so they tied their dog to a post. And on that Sunday, as they rode off in the Army truck headed for the evacuation center, the dog began yelping and straining at his leash. Long after house and dog were out of sight, she could still hear him crying. . . .*

Now, as she prepared to board the ship, her feet could barely carry her up the gangplank—her body tensed from the anticipation and the intoxicating heart-pounding drama of the moment as Sadao’s pouting cry of exasperation and resignation came echoing over the space and time of thousands of miles and many a year: “And-I’m-not-going-to-let-you-ride-on-it.”

Nawa Munemori died in 1966 and the safekeeping of Sadao’s medal fell to the remaining members of the family. But since they too, in time, would pass away, they decided that the best and most appropriate place for the permanent safekeeping of the medal would be in the U.S. Army Museum at Ft. DeRussy. Sadao’s medal and picture now stand alongside the memorabilia of the many other

heroes of Hawaii.

Sadao had come to manifest a great love for his new-found friends from Hawaii and his thoughts about them are sprinkled throughout his letters:

- from Shelby - “These Hawaiian buddies of mine sure treat me nice.”

- from New York port of embarkation - “One thing about these guys I’m with is that they are always happy and cheerful. I’m just gonna have to visit my buddies in Hawaii after the war.”

- from Anzio - “The 100th Inf. boys are really a swell bunch of guys and they give us good advice which soaks in our brains faster than anything in the world.”

- from France - “All of us boys are already thinking of the future and the fellows want me to come to Hawaii and visit them for sure. That’s one thing that I’ll have to do when I return. You know how I couldn’t get along too good with Japanese boys back home. Well I can get along pretty good with these guys because they don’t try to hold back anything. Yes, Keech! I’m gonna have to visit them after the war.”

And, from a hospital bed in France in January ‘45 where he was recovering from a case of yellow jaundice, he wrote Yaeko that he’d be out in a few days and back with boys, “if there are still some guys I know left. The 100th isn’t the same outfit it used to be when I joined it at Anzio because it’s made up mostly of replacements—but it’s still a very powerful unit.”

One of those replacements was Stanley Izumigawa from Maui who recently wrote The Hawaii Herald that: “Spud, as he asked we call him, joined us only a few months after we ourselves had joined the outfit as replacements. We were then near the bombed out town of Cisterna, in the Alban foothills on the way to Rome. We quickly found that he did not fit our image of the typical ‘kotonk.’ He was very friendly, outgoing, accepting, and it didn’t take him long to pick up pidgin and become one of us.”

An evidence of the mutual affection is in the nickname itself. Yaeko recalls that although Sadao back home used to love potatoes, it was only after he had joined the 100th that monicker began to appear in his letters.

Spud is buried in the veterans section of the Evergreen Cemetery in Los Angeles but a part of him, represented by the Medal of Honor, has come to rest in Hawaii . . . the place he longed to visit, the home of many of his buddies, the place where they, like him, also lie consecrated in hallowed hometown final resting places. [RE]

Next month’s story: Mike Tokunaga was a Pfc. in Charlie Company, 100th Infantry Battalion. After the war, he graduated with a degree in business administration from the University of Hawaii. For the past 17 years he’s been deputy comptroller of the State of Hawaii. A Maui boy, he tells of four generations of the Tokunaga family; his experiences with the 100th; his association with Jack Burns and the Democratic Party; and his part in the social revolution of the Islands.



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