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Hschiya

Symbol of protest

Oregon war hero honored

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It will be in a brief ceremony Friday at the Defense Language Institute in the Presidio of Monterey, Calif., that Sgt. Frank Hachiya — a World War II hero from Hood River whose death became a symbol of protest against racial intolerance — receives his final memorial.

The central building in the newly built Asian language complex at the institute, which is the foreign language training base for intelligence personnel of all the armed forces, will be dedicated in Hachiya's honor by a gathering of politicians and military officials.

Two other Japanese-American war dead, Yukitaka Terry Mizutari and George I. Nakamura, will have wings in the new complex named in their honor.

And Hachiya — who became a national sensation after his death when it was mistakenly believed that his name had been erased from an American Legion honor roll because of his ancestry — will finally have a resting place in the memory of future generations of American soldiers.

U.S. Rep. Al Ullman, D-Ore., once called Hachiya "perhaps the greatest Japanese-American war hero of World War II."

A fluent speaker of Japanese who served in a Japanese-American intelligence team in the South Pacific, Hachiya was fatally wounded in combat during the battle of Leyte in the Philippines Dec. 30, 1944, and later was awarded a Silver Star.

He had been raised on a farm in Hood River and spent several years in Japan before returning in 1939. Friends in Hood River like Min and Taro Asai remember that Hachiya enlisted just after Pearl Harbor and seemed driven to excel in military service, perhaps because he had been separated from his mother and brother who remained in Japan during the war.

But Hachiya's legacy went beyond the battlefield.

His death came only weeks after erasure of the names of 16 Japanese-American soldiers from the town's war memorial by the Hood River American



Photo by JEANIE SENIOR

OLD FRIEND — Min Asai, a Hood River grower who grew up with Frank Hachiya and gave the eulogy at his funeral in 1948, stands beside the grave of the man who became a symbol against the racial intolerance of some town residents during World War II. The grave is located in the Japanese section of Idlewild Cemetery just outside Hood River.

Legion post. It was trying to block the return of Japanese-Americans because of reports that they would be allowed to return to their former homes from the internment camps established for citizens of Japanese ancestry during the war.

Though initially it was reported in the news that Hachiya's name was taken off the list of Hood River men serving in the war, it later was learned that his had never been added and could not have been removed.

At the time, anti-Japanese groups consisting mainly of farmers in rural areas of Oregon opposed the return of Japanese-Americans on grounds that they were unpatriotic and had unfairly driven farm wages and prices down while breaking a state law that barred aliens from owning land.

In Hood River, the Legion called for formation of a corporation to appraise



MEMORIAL — Frank Hachiya of Hood River, who died a hero's death in World War II, will have a building named for him at Defense Language Institute base in California.

and buy "all real property remaining in title to persons of Japanese origin" and to prevent their buying or leasing land in the future.

The honor roll erasures created a national uproar among government officials, including then-Secretary of War Henry Stimson, and publications including *Colliers* and the *Stars and Stripes* demanded restoration of the names, citing the war contributions of Japanese-American troops.

Hachiya died a month after the uproar over the name erasures began. There are varying accounts of how he died. The official account, taken from his Silver Star citation, says Hachiya was on patrol and was trying to follow or capture a group of three Japanese soldiers he had seen enter a wooded gorge. There he was met by a 12-man enemy unit and was wounded in the abdomen. He died four days later.

Another account, which was read into the Congressional Record in 1963 by Ullman and U.S. Sen. Hiram Fong, R-Hawaii, said Hachiya actually may have been mistaken for an enemy soldier and shot by his own troops, but that was discounted by persons close to Hachiya before his death.

An account published in the 1979 book "Yankee Samurai," which described the exploits of Japanese-American troops in the Pacific Theater, is one told by Sam Rokutani of White Bear Lake, Minn., and Harold O'Neil of Panhandle, Texas, who served in Hachiya's intelligence platoon and talked to him just before his death. Author Joseph Harrington said Hachiya was felled by a single sniper's bullet while trying to reach an embattled unit that had called for help.

Hachiya's death on Jan. 3, 1945, prompted several publications, including *The Oregonian*, to editorialize against the prejudice of the Hood River Legion post. And in April the names were restored.

In the audience Friday at Monterey will be Monroe Sweetland, a former Newport and Milwaukie newspaper publisher who befriended Hachiya in the South Pacific and remembers the years immediately after World War II when Hood River was a town wrestling with its conscience and its desire to wash away the stigma of wartime racism.

In a recent telephone interview from his home in San Mateo, Calif., Sweetland recalled visiting Hachiya's father in Illinois in 1946 and discussing the U.S. Army's offer to return the dead soldier's body.

"Mr. Hachiya didn't want to cause

another incident. He asked me to go back to Hood River and ask if they would be willing to let us bring Frank there," he said.

In Hood River, Sweetland met with Hugh Ball, then publisher of the town newspaper.

"He (Ball) said, 'Great,'" Sweetland said. "The people of Hood River have been trying to figure out a way to remove the stigma from our name. We'll make make the most of this. We'll really show the real sentiment of Hood River."

In 1948, three years after war's end, Hachiya's funeral became a headline-making event. His honorary pallbearers included bankers, educators and a former governor, Charles Sprague.

Members of the American Legion attended the funeral but were not allowed to serve in the honor guard formed by the Hood River Veterans of Foreign Wars.

Evi Jakku, 77, who was Hachiya's teacher at Oak Grove School, remembers the event as a somber one that helped turn a tide of anti-Japanese sentiment among some Hood River residents.

"At the time of the funeral," she said, "some were worried (that) something might come up, but people at the (Asbury United Methodist) church didn't care. They wanted to do it. And as it turned out, nothing happened. I never could understand the people that were anti-Japanese. It broke my heart when the Japanese were taken to the camps."

She said only gradually did the racism of some town residents fade.

Hachiya was buried in the Japanese section of a cemetery outside town where gravestones had been overturned by vandals during the war. And in 1978, Mrs. Jakku made certain that his name was on a bronze plaque that she and her husband bought and placed in front of the county courthouse to list the names of 77 Hood River County men killed in American wars.

Oregon's representative at Friday's dedication ceremonies for the new Asian language center will be Koe Nishimura of Hood River, who will carry a message from Gov. Vic Atiyeh.

Nishimura, who also served with military intelligence in World War II, is now Oregon commander of the Veterans of Foreign Wars. Though he was somewhat hesitant because of events during World War II, Nishimura said he recently accepted an invitation to an American Legion gathering in Hood River and decided to join the Legion post.

"Times change," he said.

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1
2
3
4