

Shig. Ito 2nd assignment 77th (Army) Division

The 312th Intelligence Unit

Lt. Harvey Daniels, Team Leader Sgt. Shigeo Ito, Sgts. Frank Mori, Jim Sugimura, Mits Shibata, Eddie Fukui, Aki Hayashi, Tets Yamada, Vic Nishijima, Kunio Endo and Mac Miyahara.

The history of the 77th Infantry Division noted "one of the many unique attachments to the Division was a team of Nisei interpreters who joined about this time (early 1944). In five operations they proved themselves excellent soldiers and splendid Americans."

The ten-men interpreter team was formed at Camp Savage, Minnesota in December, 1943. Shigeo Ito who had just completed an assignment at Kiska, Alaska was appointed as the team leader. Two teams left Savage in December and later that month arrived at the Port of Embarkation in San Francisco. While enroute by train, team members were generally considered Korean or Chinese special troop to avoid incidents. Teams were billeted on Angel Island while awaiting assignment. During this period, some team members were given special duty to inspect records of Japanese firms for intelligence data.

On January 27, 1944, our team received notice to board a troop ship headed for Hawaii. Arrived Honolulu on Feb. 5, 1944 and became temporarily attached to the 38th Division in Wahiawa (and later Aiea.) The war was still far off. As the local families learned of our presence, especially those families whose sons were training with the 100th Bn. or 442nd Rgt. in United States, we were invited out to dinner almost nightly. Eddie Fukui met and became engaged to a local lass, Elaine "Pee Wee" Kato.

March, 1944, Jim Sugimura and Aki Hayashi were assigned to the 7th Air Force on temporary duty at Hickam Field. The rest of the team were sent to Fort Hase and assigned to the 77th Infantry Division as the 312th Intelligence Unit.

Jim and Aki rejoined the unit as the division began "jungle" training at Kahana Bay. Lt. Harvey Daniels, who spoke Japanese fluently, joined the unit around May as preparation for oversea action was stepped up. Team assignments were made as follows:

305th Regiment: Kunio Endo and Vic Nishijima
306th " : Frank Mori and Mac Miyahara
307th " : Tets Yamada and Mits Shibata
Division Headquarter: Lt. Harvey Daniels, Shig Ito, Aki Hayashi, Jim Sugimura
and Eddie Fukui.

Early in July, 1944, the 77th Division boarded troopships headed for their action. Destination was already known to the team since we were called upon to translate maps and documents of Guam.

On July 22, 1944, the 77th Division landed south of Agat in Guam in support of the First Marine Division. Team members with the Division command received their first taste of the war when the command was shelled during the night by enemy anti-aircraft guns. As the 77th moved forward, we caught first sight of dead Japanese soldiers, their bodies rotting in the tropical humidity. The island was secured on August 10, 1944. Some of the members attached to the regimental commands got their first experience interrogating enemy prisoners. With the island secured, team was reassembled in the rest area where beer was distributed for the first time. That night, we relaxed for the first time since leaving Hawaii, getting slightly high on beer. It is said that some of the members even broke into Japanese songs. Wonder no one was shot!

On Nov. 3, 1944 the Division was ordered back to the rest area and we headed for New Caledonia. However, just after crossing the equator, the Division received new orders to turn back and proceed to the Philippines. On Nov. 25, we landed near Tarragona on the island of Leyte. Combat forces of the 77th proceeded inland to form a pincer with the 7th Infantry Division and the 11th Airborne. General Bruce dispatched his famous message "rolled two 7's into Ormoc, come seven, come eleven!"

In Ormoc, the division command was shelled again and Shig almost get hit. In the field, team members assigned to regimental units were getting increasingly more prisoners to interrogate and documents to translate. Jim Sugimura interrogated the highest ranking officer yet to be taken prisoner - a captain whose legs were shot off.

Early in February, 1945, the island was declared secured and the 77th was pulled back to prepare for the next campaign

On March 22, 1945, we headed for Kerama Retto off Okinawa - the first action on Japanese soil! 77th assignment was to secure the key islands so that the main invasion of Okinawa can commence. Team members were separated for the first time with members being assigned singly to battalions. Shig and Aki stayed with the command ship.

On March 26, D minus 6, the battalions landed on Tokashiki, Zamami, Aka, Hokaji, Geruma, Amuro, Kuba, Yahabi islands. It was a traumatic experience for team members as they encountered scene after scene of mass suicides by the civilian population who had been told by the Japanese army of the "atrocities" they could expect if the Americans came. One of the major achievements of the 312th unit occurred during this campaign. Through interrogation of civilians and from documents, placements of almost 350 "suicide" one-man crafts were located. These boats were being readied for the expected invasion of Okinawa. It was also during this campaign, that our team suffered two casualties, Eddie Fukui and Mits Shibata.

On April 2, our convey was attacked by "kamikaze" planes. Shig on the command ship received word that one plane made a direct hit on the ship which carried the 305th Regimental command and that almost the entire command had been killed including Eddie Fukui. Shig and Aki went ashore soon after to try and identify Eddie's remains.

On April 16, word reached us that Mits Shibata who was with the battalion that landed on Ie Shima was killed in action. Meanwhile the main elements of the 77th were ordered into Okinawa to join the US forces there. This was a change in orders since the 77th was being readied for landings next on Koshiki Retto to gather information for the later invasion of mainland Japan.

During the Okinawa campaign, the 312th members engaged in increasingly heavy interrogation as Japanese troops for the first time began surrendering in numbers; also team members were used in talking civilians out of caves or to try and persuade soldiers to surrender. On June 25, Okinawa was declared secured and the 77th was sent to the island of Cebu in the Philippines for rest. About this time, the "point" system for being rotated home came into effect. While most of us boarded troop ships for Cebu, Shig remained behind in Okinawa to go back to the U.S. Tets Yamada took over as team leader.

Cebu was a pleasant interlude except for the fact three members of the original team was no longer with us. Most of Cebu populace bore no antipathy to us as Japanese, would greet us in Japanese and some even sang Japanese songs for us.

On August 26, 1945 while we are assembled watching a show, message was read to us from general command that Japan had surrendered. The message was received, first in silence as those who had survived the many campaigns the 77th were engaged in, remembered those for whom the surrender came too late. As the impact of the message sank

in, many quietly left the area to return to their camps.

Soon after, Aki Hayashi left for the states on an emergency furlough to help his parents relocate from the Minidoka Camp. Rest of the team participated in accepting the surrender of Japanese troops scattered in the Cebu hills. Later we learned that there over 12,000 soldiers still on that island.

On Sept. 26, the 77th was ordered to Hakodate, Japan as occupation troop. On October 4, entered Sapporo in Hokkaido and set up occupation activity. Members of the 312th became quite in demand as interpreters for official and personal transactions by officers.

March 15, 1946, 77th left Japan for U.S.