

By Boyd Sinclair

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## Valuable As a Company Of Men!

That's What an Officer Who Should  
Have Known Said About Each Nisei  
Who Served With the U. S. Forces

THE NISEI, second-generation, American-born Japanese-American GIs, probably did more to expedite CBI intelligence effort than anyone else. Col. C. F. Blunda, commanding officer of the Southeast Asia Translation and Interrogation Center, declared that in Burma each Nisei was as valuable as a company of men.

"Each one was as valuable as an Infantry company, despite the fact they were not combat troops," Blunda said. "Many allied soldiers returned safely to their homes because the Nisei lighted the darkness in front of them by interrogating prisoners and translating documents. The value of the Nisei was that they supplied the missing link—understanding of the shades of meaning of the Japanese language—between the enemy and British and U.S. intelligence."

Many of these Nisei GIs were attached to front line units, British, American, and Chinese. Capture, ever a haunting specter, meant, at the best, death, and at the worst, cruel torture for these volunteers recruited from relocation centers in the United States. Despite the fact that 150 Nisei GIs at one time or another were attached to Allied troops at the front, none was captured or killed and only one was awarded the Purple Heart. This is by no means a true measure of their courage, but a ~~favor~~ <sup>favor</sup> ~~not~~ <sup>not</sup> Lady Luck. Because they were so valuable, the Nisei were restrained from endangering their lives—but, even so, they were involved in precarious combat situations on numerous occasions.

T/3 Paul Miwa, attached to the 475th Infantry, Mars Task Force, hit the ground behind a log on the Burma Road and was nicked by machine gun bullets to win the only Purple Heart the Nisei boys got. The only "captured" Nisei was also with the Marsmen. He was seized by the Chi-



nese south of Tonkwa. He was Cpl. Tokyo (Tony) Uemoto, Honolulu-born Nisei. Only the most delicate persuasion saved him from being shot. He was forced to take off his shoes so he could not escape, then was marched to the American lines as a "prisoner." After four hours of walking on his bare feet, he reached the American positions and was identified and liberated from his Chinese captors.

These Jap-Yanks, as they were called sometimes by the men with whom they fought and worked, had their share of danger, their share of courage and brav-

"As for the value of the Nisei group, I couldn't have gotten along without them. Probably few realize that these boys did everything that an Infantryman normally does plus the extra work of translating, interrogating, etc., etc. Also, they were in a most unenviable position as to identity as almost everyone from the Japanese to the Chinese shot first and identified later. General Sun Li-Jen of the New First Army always came to see me with an initial inquiry as to how Hank was. Hank was, of course, Hank Gosho to whom General Sun took an especial liking. He always used to leave saying, 'Don't let anything happen to Hank.'"

Maj. Gen. Frank D. Merrill

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ery, and got their share of decorations. Silver stars for gallantry in action were awarded T/3 Eichi Sakauye and Staff Sgt. Kenny Yasui, the latter being CBI's prototype of Sergeant York. Yasui became a legendary figure known as "Baby York" because of his exploit in impersonating a Jap colonel, making 13 Jap enlisted men perform close order drill, and then marching them into Allied lines. Sakauye got his Silver Star for rescuing a British officer of an Indian division under fire at the Mawlu Road Block in April 1944. The officer, buried by a shell burst, was in a desperate predicament when the Nisei GI came to his rescue. T/3 Henry Kuwaba of Salt Lake City, Utah, told of an amusing experience of Sakauye with the Indian division 150 miles behind the Jap lines. Kuwaba, who had served with the British 36th Division, the Chinese 22nd Division, OSS and OWI, recalled that Sakauye had tapped a Jap telephone line. Burmese agents, however, reported the fact to the enemy. "Damned if the Jap commander didn't address Eichi personally over the telephone and tell him to get the hell off the line," related Kuwaba. "He didn't reply, of course."

MAJ. WILLIAM E. COS, assistant intelligence officer of CBI, later intelligence officer of the Northern Combat Area Command in North Burma, revealed that the Nisei were model soldiers, that there was never one instance of disciplinary action among them and no instances



MEMBERS OF the 475th Infantry pose with two interpreters of the NCAC Headquarters near Bhamo. Photo by Hunt D. Crawford.

of disaffection. It was not in their nature to gripe at the hardships of the field. The first group of Nisei, a 10-man language team, arrived in India in August 1943 as members of the Joint Intelligence Collection Agency. In May 1944 the Southeast Asia Translation and Interrogation Center was established in order to pool the re-

sources of British and U.S. linguists. Col. Alexander Swift was selected to head the command, being later succeeded by Colonel Blunda. The Nisei performed in two echelons, one at CBI New Delhi headquarters and the other of course with the combat units. Behind locked doors in



T/Sgt. ROY MATSUMOTO is greeted by Noel Coward, British actor and playwright, at the 14th Evacuation Hospital, Ledo, while on tour of the area, June 28, 1944. U.S. Army photo.

New Delhi they translated documents and interrogated prisoners under British supervision at the Red Fort. In time, practically all spent at least six months in the field, many better than a year.

Lt. Kan Tagami, Selma, California, one of 14 Nisei awarded direct commissions in the theater, who accompanied the 124th Cavalry from training in Ramgarh through the capture of Lashio, said that captured Japs talked freely in interrogation.

"The only difficulty in interrogation of Jap prisoners," he said, "was overcoming their fear. But after medical attention, a hot meal, bath and cigarette, they realized they weren't going to be killed or tortured, as their leaders had led them to believe. They then gave information freely. Their only reticence was in disclosing their names, for they feared disgrace at home."

Major Cox confirmed the Japs verbosity, once they knew they would be humanely treated.

"The enemy soldiers were often in possession of a great amount of information," he said. "They were not security conscious, possibly because the Jap leaders didn't recognize the fact that some of their enlisted men would accept capture. They carried operations on their persons and

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wrote everything they knew in their diaries. And talk—why, they'd talk their heads off."

If this was puzzling to Cox, consider his amazement when a few of the captured Japanese applied for positions with the American forces in the same role as that of the Nisei.

The only Legion of Merit presented a Nisei was awarded Technical Sgt. Roy Masumoto, one of Merrill's Marauders. On one occasion, Masumoto crawled to within hearing distance of a Jap command post and listened to verbal orders, learning that the Japs were going to attack a certain area. The Marauders evacuated the area, took up new positions overlooking the old. When the Japs approached at the set time, Masumoto shouted, "Charge! Charge!" in Japanese. Fooled by the Nisei, they charged, and 30 minutes later the Marauders counted 54 dead Japs.

"Some of the other Nisei with the Marauders," related T/3 Tomochi Tsuruda, verbal orders given by enemy commanders Santa Barbara, California, "translated in combat. This enabled the Marauders to mow down the Japs, as you can well imagine. Of course, don't think this was an everyday occurrence—but it did happen on a few occasions."

**T**HE AWARD OF bronze arrowheads by the OSS for parachute jumps brought to light the unique experiences of four Nisei. T/5s Hideo Imai and Robert Honda operated with the OSS Kachin Rangers in the Myitkyina-Fort Hertz area for eight months from March to November 1944. Led and supplied by the OSS, the Kachins continually harassed the Japs with ambushes. Imai and Honda did not participate in the grim game of jungle chess. Their principal task was to translate documents from dispatch cases taken from the dead and to interrogate the occasional prisoners captured.

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"It was a rugged existence," said Imai. "We were supplied by air drops, food, books, clothes, ammunition, equipment, and even copies of the **Roundup**. Because of Jap agents among the tribes, we were forced to shift our command post continually. I had malaria several times and always suffered from dysentery."

When Imai and Honda reached the limit of their physical endurance, T/3 Shigeto Mazawa and T/5 Charles Matsunaka volunteered on 24-hour notice to parachute into the hills as replacements. Mazawa on several occasions took an active part in ambushes as a commander of the Kachins, but like his fellow Nisei, translated and interrogated mostly.

Although loath to single out any individual for praise above the rest, Colonel Blunda, the translation and interrogation head, in 1945 took occasion to designate Lt. Eddie Mitsukado, one of seven Nisei awarded the Bronze Star Medal, as the outstanding Japanese-American in CBI.

"Mitsukado, born in the Hawaiian Islands, was the best language man and team leader in the group," Blunda said.

Nisei took part in practically all the surrender activities in the Far East, interpreting Allied terms to the beaten Nips. Master Sgt. Fred Friendly of **Roundup** said GIs swelled with pride when Nisei rose to interpret terms in China. In describing the meeting of American, Chinese and Japanese military figures, Friendly said that when Nisei asked the Japs if they carried a letter of instructions from their commander, they replied that they had no such letter. All faces, said Friendly, both those of the victors and the vanquished, were pictures of futility, until one of the Nisei translated a later statement of one of the Japs.

"But," the Jap had declared after a long silence, "we have our special orders with us."

The faces, then reported Friendly, brightened up, and grins spread all around when the papers were produced. The GIs present noted that they were not mimeographed and thereby evolved a theory as to what had won the war.

Staff Sgt. Edgar Laytha of **Roundup**, who knew both Japanese and Japanese-Americans well, having lived in Japan for a time before the war, told the story of Staff Sgt. Kenny Yasui, the five-foot-two-inch, 120-pound Nisei who became CBI's "Baby York" after he captured a big batch of Japanese prisoners. It happened on the Irrawaddy River during a mopping up procedure. A group of about

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17 Japanese were isolated on an island. There was a call for volunteers to capture the Japs. Yasui, who was to become another Sergeant York in the process, stepped out with three Americans of the non-Nisei brand. After they had stripped and swam to the island, little Yasui took charge.

The Japs had hidden in the underbrush and none was seen. Then California-born Kenny yelled into the bush in the Japanese he learned while a student at Wasedo University in Tokyo. He ordered the enemy to come out and surrender. Instantly a Jap sergeant appeared, looking amazedly at the little naked man who said he was a Japanese colonel working with the Americans. Yasui ordered the Jap sergeant to reveal the hiding places of his comrades. The Nip sergeant was bewildered but impressed. He took Kenny around on



Col. CHUN LEE, General Merrill's Chief of Staff (left), T/Sgt. Akibi Yoshimura and T/Sgt. Herbert Myasaki talk to group of Chinese soldiers in Burma. U.S. Army photo.

an inspection tour, and out of foxholes jumped Japs, fully armed, 20 rounds of ammunition in each man's belt. When Yasui had collected his group of Japs, he asked them for their arms and ordered them to line up. Suddenly a Jap officer sprang from a thicket, threw a hand grenade to blow up Yasui and himself. Yasui jumped into a foxhole, the Jap officer into the next world. Kenny took his sword. While this happened, a couple of recalcitrant Japanese soldiers were killed by the other Americans, but 13 prisoners waited shamefacedly for the orders of the little "colonel."

**YASUI HAD BEEN** one of the second generation American Japanese on which the Japs had spent many a thousand yen before Pearl Harbor in order to "Japanize" them. He was one of those who had been given money, scholarships and free vacations during the 15 years before the war in order that he might return to the Land of the Rising Sun for re-education in the Japanese spirit. He was one of the **Kibeis**—as these Niseis who went to Japan were called. The Japs had given Kenny a good time in some ways, but they had spent their money in vain. Kenny remembered the close order drills he had been forced to take while he was a **Kibei** in Tokyo. He gave his Japanese prisoners the words:

"**Kio tsuka! Hidari muke hidari! Mae susume!**"

The drill over, Yasui solved the problem of getting the party across the Irrawaddy by having the prisoners swim, pushing a raft against the current. On the raft sat Kenny with the sword in his hand and two of the weaker prisoners at his side.

Laytha, the **Roundup** correspondent, served in the same camp with Yasui in the United States. He was a barracks mate of the little Nisei and came overseas with him in the same unit. Laytha said Kenny was the most intriguing gambler he had ever known. He taught Laytha the Nisei three-die crap game called four-five-six. Laytha declared that back in the State-side camp Yasui would win or lose \$500 a night as if it were two bits. When Kenny started overseas, Laytha related, he sized up what he thought was the amount of pocket cash aboard. He declared all of it was going to be in his money belt by the time they docked, and Laytha said most of it was. When he landed in India, he vowed he was going to make \$10,000 in CBI by gambling.

Laytha said that he and Kenny's buddies on the team worried about Kenny. They thought the little gambler might bring the whole team into difficulties. But the team leader, Technical Sgt. Koji Ariyoshi, a Honolulu boy, was not worried.

"Just wait," Ariyoshi told the others. "Watch out how he'll turn out at the front. It's not always the ideal garrison soldier who makes a good fighter. Extraordinary people are capable of doing extraordinary things."

Ariyoshi was proved to be right. Kenny stopped gambling when he reached New Delhi except for occasional poker games at low stakes. He began to spend his free time in Chinese restaurants, studying war maps, and following the war over the globe with interest. He told the others

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that he wanted to fight, and the later events proved that he was not just talking to hear his head roar.

LAYTHA DECLARED THAT his life among the Niseis was an exceedingly happy one, but that when he was transferred from the team for other duties, it



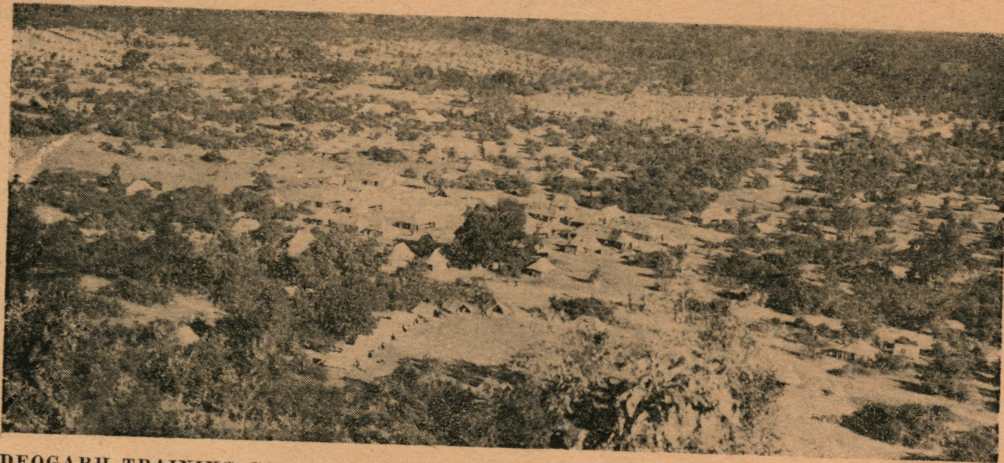
Lt. AKIJI YOSHIMURA (left) acts as Interpreter for the U.N. delegation accepting surrender terms from the Japanese in China on Aug. 21, 1945. To right of Lt. Yoshimura is Gen. H. L. Boatner, Lt. Gen. Hsiao I. Shu, Lt. Gen. Lung Ching, and Col. Wang Wu. U.S. Army photo.

was in some ways a relief from "a little too much discipline and from too much good behavior." He said the men were obsessed with their burden of an unpopu-

lar ancestry and strived in all ways to prove they were good Americans.

"To sum it up," said Laytha, "they were too good for me. Still my happiest times were when I came across them from time to time at places often distant and remote. I remembered the long way we went together—and it was good. I remembered the midnight lunches in our barracks when they cooked rice and spiced it with Japanese radish. I'll always remember them individually. Koji, the leader, was a Hawaiian longshoreman who worked himself up to be graduated with honors from the University of Georgia. Kitsu, the dishwasher from Los Angeles, burned the midnight oil to read John Gunther's *Inside Europe*. Chris, the talented artist from the Walt Disney studios, was able to express his every thought by quick and forceful sketches. Then there was young Kenjiro, who used to work on Nisei farms as a mechanic's job in any plant anywhere over the Coast, and Sam, whose dream where in the United States. There was Clarke, the man of the world and honor student at Harvard, and Karl, the labor leader from San Francisco. Karl, who was 38, was the oldest of us. His name was a hallmark. Karl was working among the longshoremen on the San Francisco waterfront when Pearl Harbor put him into a relocation center. From there, Karl volunteered to fight for the U.S. so his son might live in a better world as a free man."

—THE END.



DEGARH TRAINING CAMP, set up in November of 1943 as camp area for the 5307th Composite Unit (Merrill's Marauders), at Hsamshingyang, Burma. The site was occupied for more than two months during which the group trained for jungle fighting. Headquarters for the unit is the group of larger tents in center of the photo. Since the camp was located near hostile territory, guard posts were established on all sides and throughout the camp. Brig. Gen. Francis G. Brink was in charge of instruction for the 5307th while camped at Deorah. U.S. Army photo.

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