

THIS IS A SPEECH THAT I
GAVE BEFORE A GATHERING OF
YOUNG BUDDHISTS ON THE 35TH
ANNIVERSARY OF THE SIGNING
OF EXECUTIVE ORDER 9066.

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AS I QUIETLY CONSIDERED MY ROLE AS SPEAKER FOR THIS MEMORIAL SERVICE PROGRAM, I FOUND MYSELF ASKING THESE QUESTIONS; "SHOULD I SPEAK TODAY AS A VETERAN, PAYING TRIBUTE TO COMRADES IN ARMS WHO HAD FALLEN ON THE FIELDS OF BATTLE? OR, SHOULD I SPEAK AS A FORMER OFFICER OF THE JAPANESE AMERICAN CITIZENS LEAGUE, THE ORGANIZATION THAT HAS SO OFTEN PURPOSEFULLY AND UNASHAMEDLY USED THE WARTIME RECORD OF THE NISEI SERVICEMEN TO FURTHER AND ADVANCE THE CAUSE OF PERSONS OF JAPANESE ANCESTRY IN AMERICA? OR, RATHER SHOULD I SPEAK AS A PRIVATE CITIZEN, ATTEMPTING TO COMMUNICATE HIS GRATITUDE FOR ALL THE BLESSINGS THAT I NOW ENJOY THAT WERE BOUGHT AT SUCH A TERRIBLE COST OF BLOOD, SWEAT AND TEARS?"

AS I PONDERED THESE QUESTIONS I WONDERED, TOO, "IF THE HONORED DEAD COULD BE AMONG US TODAY, WHAT WOULD THEY HAVE US SAY?" WHAT WOULD PETER MASUOKA OF SEBASTOPOL, ARNOLD OHKI OF LIVINGSTON, KAZUO MITANI OF SALT LAKE CITY, AND OTHERS WHOM I NUMBERED AMONG MY PERSONAL FRIENDS WISH ME TO SAY TO YOU. SHOULD I, WHO RETURNED UNSCATHED AND UNHARMED FROM THE WARS, PRESUME TO GIVE VOICE TO THE DREAMS THEY ONCE DREAMED; THE HIGH HOPES THEY ONCE EMBRACED; OR ATTEMPT TO RECREATE AND RELIVE THE TERRORS AND THE MENTAL AND PHYSICAL ANGUISH THEY ONCE ENDURED? IS IT WITHIN THE POWER OF MY MEMORY AND IMAGINATION TO RECALL THE AGONIZING DAYS, HOURS AND MINUTES BETWEEN AND BEFORE BATTLES? WHAT WERE THEIR THOUGHTS IN THE SOLITUDE OF SOULS THAT WARFARE ENFORCES?"

I AM SURE THAT WITHOUT EXCEPTION THEIR THOUGHTS SPED HOMEWARD TO THEIR AGEING PARENTS, WHOM THEY HAD NEVER GOTTEN TO KNOW. THE SPAN OF YEARS, THE VERY LANGUAGE, AND THE CULTURAL DIFFERENCES SEEMED ALWAYS TO POSE AN INSURMOUNTABLE BARRIER. THIS, HOWEVER, DID NOT LESSEN THEIR LOVE AND RESPECT FOR THEIR ISSEI PARENTS WHO THROUGH THE DIFFICULT YEARS HAD PROVIDED THE NISEI CHILDREN WITH EVERY POSSIBLE OPPORTUNITY TO DEVELOP INTO WORTHY CITIZENS OF A LAND THAT THEY THEMSELVES COULD NOT CALL THEIR OWN. NO ONE COULD HAVE APPRECIATED MORE THAN THE NISEI SERVICEMEN THE HARSH REALITIES, THE HONEST MISGIVINGS AND THE SOUL SEARCHING THAT CONFRONTED THE ISSEI PARENT AS THEY WATCHED THEIR SONS MARCH OFF TO WAR, MANY OF THEM AGAINST THE LAND OF THEIR ANCESTRY. I SHALL ALWAYS BE HAUNTED BY THE SIGHT OF THE ISSEI MOTHER WHO BRAVELY SMILED THROUGH HER TEARS. THERE COULD ~~NOT~~ HAVE BEEN BUT A FAINT LINE BETWEEN THE TEARS OF BITTERNESS AND THE TEARS OF PRIDE.

INCLUDED AMONG THEIR THOUGHTS WERE ALL OF THEIR LOVED ONES—WIVES, CHILDREN, SWEETHEARTS, BROTHERS AND SISTERS, AND A PRAYER THAT NONE OF THEM SHOULD EVER KNOW THE TERRORS AND DEVASTATION OF WAR. WHILE THEY ATTACHED NO SPECIAL SIGNIFICANCE TO THEIR MILITARY SERVICE, THEY HOPED THAT THEIR PERFORMANCE AND DEVOTION TO DUTY, HOWEVER GREAT THE PRICE, WOULD ONE DAY OPEN NEW HORIZONS OF JUSTICE, DIGNITY AND OPPORTUNITY FOR ALL AMERICANS OF JAPANESE ANCESTRY, AND THAT FROM THAT DAY FORWARD THE NISEI, SANSEI AND THE GENERATIONS TO FOLLOW MIGHT WALK SHOULDER TO SHOULDER WITH THEIR FELLOW AMERICANS, PROUD OF THEIR HERITAGE AND FREE OF THE FEARS AND FRUSTRATIONS THAT PLAGUED THEM EVEN AS THEY FOUGHT FOR DEMOCRACY.

NONE WILL DENY, NOR WOULD ANYONE WISH TO BEGRUDGE, THE PURELY PERSONAL AND PRIVATE THOUGHTS THEY RESERVED FOR THEMSELVES—THE SCHOOLS THEY WOULD ATTEND; THE WORK THEY WOULD SEEK; THE HOMES THEY WOULD BUILD; AND THE FAMILIES THEY WOULD RAISE. DREAMS OF A BRIGHT AND HOPEFUL FUTURE THEY WOULD BUILD FROM THE ASHES OF WAR AND THE TRAGEDY OF EVACUATION, BLISSFULLY UNAWARE AND UNCONCERNED THAT FOR THEM TOMORROW WAS NOT TO BE.

IT WOULD BE DIFFICULT, IF NOT IMPOSSIBLE, TO COMPRESS INTO THESE BRIEF MOMENTS THE AGONY AND TRAGEDY THAT WERE TRIGGERED BY THE OUTBREAK OF WWII AND BY EXECUTIVE ORDER 9066 SOME 35 YEARS AGO, WHICH CAUSED THE INCARCERATION OF OVER 110,000 PERSONS OF JAPANESE ANCESTRY, TWO THIRDS OF THEM AMERICAN CITIZENS, INTO "CONCENTRATION CAMPS," EUPHEMISTICALLY CALLED "RELOCATION CENTERS."

BUT, BARBED WIRES DO NOT A PRISON MAKE. IT COULD NOT CONFINED OR SUPPRESS THE HUMAN SPIRIT. INDIVIDUALLY AND COLLECTIVELY, THROUGH JACL, THE NISEI DEMANDED THE RIGHT AND THE OPPORTUNITY TO DEMONSTRATE THEIR LOYALTY BEYOND ALL DOUBT, ON THE FIELD OF BATTLE, IN MORTAL COMBAT. ON FEBRUARY 1, 1943, THE SAME PRESIDENT FRANKLIN DELANO ROOSEVELT, WHO SIGNED THE FATEFUL ORDERS FOR THE EVACUATION, AUTHORIZED THE FORMATION OF A NISEI COMBAT UNIT AND IN SO DOING, WROTE IN PART: "NO LOYAL CITIZEN OF THE UNITED STATES SHOULD BE DENIED THE DEMOCRATIC RIGHT TO EXERCISE THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF CITIZENSHIP, REGARDLESS OF ANCESTRY. THE PRINCIPLE ON WHICH THIS COUNTRY WAS FOUNDED AND BY WHICH IT HAS ALWAYS BEEN GOVERNED IS THAT AMERICANISM IS A MATTER OF HEART AND MIND. AMERICANISM IS NOT, AND NEVER WAS, A MATTER OF RACE AND ANCESTRY."

THUS BEGAN THE SAGA OF THE 442ND REGIMENTAL COMBAT TEAM, WHOSE MOTTO "GO FOR BROKE" WAS TO THRUST THEM INTO THE ~~NUMBERED~~ ^{MOST BITTER} FIGHTING IN THE EUROPEAN THEATER OF WAR AND EARN FOR THEM THE REPUTATION AS THE "MOST DECORATED UNIT OF ITS SIZE AND LENGTH OF SERVICE IN AMERICAN MILITARY HISTORY." THE 442ND WAS, HOWEVER, PRECEDED IN COMBAT BY THE 100TH INFANTRY BN COMPOSED OF AMERICANS OF JAPANESE ANCESTRY FROM HAWAII, WHERE NO MASS EVACUATION OR INTERNMENT HAD TAKEN PLACE DESPITE THE ISLANDS 3,000 MILES PROXIMITY TO THE JAPANESE ENEMY. THE 100TH WAS ORGANIZED IN HAWAII, TRAINED ON THE MAINLAND AND COMMITTED TO ACTION AT SALERNO, VOLTURNO, AT THE RAPIDO RIVER, AT CASSINO, THE ANZIO BEACHHEAD AND THE BREAKTHROUGH TO ROME. IT WAS LATER MERGED WITH THE 442ND, BUT NOT BEFORE EARNING ITS PLACE IN THE MILITARY ANNALS OF OUR NATION AS THE "PURPLE HEART BATTALION" BECAUSE OF ITS INORDINATELY HIGH BATTLE CASUALTIES.

TOGETHER THE NISEI TROOPS WERE TO COMPILE AN INCREDIBLE RECORD OF SACRIFICE AND VALOR. PERHAPS THEIR CAMPAIGNS ARE BEST DESCRIBED BY THAT RECORD. THEIR NUMEROUS BATTLE ACTIONS TOOK A TERRIBLE TOLL. IT SUSTAINED 9,486 CASUALTIES OR MORE THAN 300 PERCENT OF ITS AUTHORIZED STRENGTH, INCLUDING MORE THAN 600 KILLED IN ACTION. AMONG THE 16,143 INDIVIDUAL DECORATIONS FOR BRAVERY WAS THE CONGRESSIONAL MEDAL OF HONOR, 52 DISTINGUISHED SERVICE CROSSES, 1 DISTINGUISHED SERVICE MEDAL, 560 SILVER STARS WITH 26 OAK LEAF CLUSTERS, 22 LEGIONS OF MERIT, 15 SOLDIER'S MEDALS, OVER 4,000 BRONZE STAR MEDALS AND 1,200 OAK LEAF CLUSTERS, 12 FRENCH CROIX DE GUERRE AND TWO PALMS, AND TWO ITALIAN MEDALS OF MILITARY VALOR. AMONG ITS UNIT HONORS WERE SEVEN PRESIDENTIAL CITATIONS, TWO MERITORIOUS SERVICE PLAQUES, AND 13 ARMY AND 43 DIVISIONAL COMMENDATIONS. ONE OF ITS FINEST HOURS AND ITS COSTLIEST ACTION WAS THE RESCUE OF THE "LOST BATTALION." AFTER MANY ATTEMPTS BY OTHER UNITS, THE NISEI TROOPS WERE ORDERED TO BREAK THROUGH TO THE BELEAGUERED ELEMENTS OF THE 141ST TEXAS REGIMENT. THE 442ND SUFFERED CASUALTIES IN EXCESS OF THREE TIMES THE NUMBERED OF 211 SURVIVORS RESCUED FROM THE SEVEN DAY SEIGE.

WHEN THE THEN PRESIDENT TRUMAN AFFIXED THE SEVENTH PRESIDENTIAL UNIT CITATION ON THE COLORS OF THE 442ND, FOLLOWING A SPECIAL WASHINGTON D.C. PARADE ON JULY 15, 1946, HE DECLARED: "YOU ARE NOW ON YOUR WAY HOME. YOU FOUGHT NOT ONLY THE ENEMY, BUT YOU FOUGHT PREJUDICE--AND YOU WON. KEEP UP THAT FIGHT AND WE WILL CONTINUE TO WIN, TO MAKE THIS GREAT REPUBLIC STAND FOR WHAT THE CONSTITUTION SAYS IT STANDS FOR: THE WELFARE OF ALL THE PEOPLE, ALL THE TIME."

WHILE THE 442ND WAS DRAMATIZING THE LOYALTY OF JAPANESE AMERICANS ON THE WESTERN BATTLEFRONTS, OTHER NISEI WERE SERVING IN VIRTUAL ANONIMITY IN THE PACIFIC WAR AGAINST THE LAND OF THEIR ANCESTRY. LONG BEFORE THE 100TH INF BN AND THE 442ND WERE COMMITTED TO BATTLE, AND EVEN BEFORE THE BOMBS FELL ON PEARL HARBOR, THE WAR DEPARTMENT HAD BEGUN TO TRAIN AND USE JAPANESE AMERICANS IN THE HIGHLY SENSITIVE AREA OF MILITARY INTELLIGENCE. A SELECT FEW WERE ENGAGED IN INTELLIGENCE ACTIVITIES IN THE PHILIPPINES BEFORE THE WAR. THEY WERE WITH THE AMERICAN FORCES AT BATAAN AND CORREGIDOR UNTIL FINALLY ORDERED TO AUSTRALIA BY BEN DOUGLAS MACARTHUR. OTHERS WERE BEING TRAINED AT THE MILITARY INTELLIGENCE SERVICE LANGUAGE SCHOOL AT THE PRESIDIO OF SAN FRANCISCO FOR ANY EVENTUALITY, AND WITHIN WEEKS AFTER THE OUTBREAK OF HOSTILITIES, NISEI LINGUISTS WERE DISPATCHED TO THE PACIFIC ISLANDS AND ALASKA.

BY WAR'S END, OVER 6,000 NISEI LINGUISTS HAD SERVED IN EVERY MAJOR CAMPAIGN IN THE SOUTH PACIFIC AND ON THE CONTINENT OF ASIA, WHERE THEIR WORK AS INTERROGATORS, INTERPRETERS AND TRANSLATORS, AND SOMETIMES AS COMBAT SOLDIERS, HAS BEEN CREDITED WITH THE SHORTENING OF THE WAR BY MANY MONTHS AND THE SAVING OF COUNTLESS THOUSANDS OF AMERICAN LIVES. NISEI IN COMBAT INTELLIGENCE PLACED THEIR LIVES IN DOUBLE JEOPARDY, AS THEY WERE EXPOSED BOTH TO ENEMY FIRE AND THE THREAT OF MISTAKEN IDENTITY. A CLASSIC AND TRAGIC EXAMPLE OF THIS IS THE STORY OF SGT FRANK HACHIYA, WHO WAS MORTALLY WOUNDED BY INVADING AMERICAN TROOPS AT LEYTE IN THE PHILIPPINES AS HE WAS ATTEMPTING TO RETURN TO HIS OWN LINES WITH VALUABLE INFORMATION ABOUT ENEMY DEFENSES. HE ACCOMPLISHED HIS MISSION, AND A GRATEFUL NATION AWARDED SGT HACHIYA, POSTHUMOUSLY, THE DISTINGUISHED SERVICE CROSS, EVEN AS HIS NAME WAS BEING STRICKEN FROM THE HONOR ROLL OF HIS HOMETOWN IN OREGON BECAUSE HE WAS OF JAPANESE ANCESTRY.

IN HIS BEAUTIFULLY PERCEPTIVE AND LITERATE HISTORY OF THE "MERRILLS MARAUDERS," AUTHOR CHARLTON OGBURN JR, HIMSELF AN EX-MARAUDER, WROTE OF THE NISEI "ALL OF US I SUPPOSE, WHEN WE ARE MOVED TO REFLECT UPON WHAT HUMAN BEINGS ARE CAPABLE OF, FIND CERTAIN IMAGES COME TO MIND AS ILLUSTRATIONS OF SURPASSING ACHIEVEMENT. ONE THAT WILL ALWAYS LEAP TO MINE IS THE COMPOSITE RECOLLECTION OF THE BATTLE OF NPUM GA HILL, AND NO PART OF IT MORE THAN THE HEROISM, MORAL AS WELL AS PHYSICAL, OF THE NISEI....WHAT WAS UNSPEAKABLY HARD FOR THE OTHERS CAN ONLY HAVE BEEN HARDER STILL FOR THEM. SOME HAD CLOSE RELATIVES IN JAPAN, ALL HAD ACQUAINTANCES, IF NOT RELATIVES HELD IN CONCENTRATION CAMPS IN THE UNITED STATES ON THE GROUNDS THAT PERSONS OF JAPANESE ANCESTRY AND FEATURES WERE PRESUMED TO BE DISLOYAL. TO HELP JUSTIFY THE UNHAPPINESS THAT WE WERE ENDURING, MOST OF US COULD TELL OURSELVES THAT THE SURVIVAL OF OUR PEOPLE AND THE COUNTRY OUR FOREFATHERS HAD FOUGHT AND DIED FOR WAS WORTHY OF SACRIFICE. FOR THE NISEI, HOWEVER, THERE WAS ONLY THE "VALUE OF AN IDEA."

"THE VALUE OF AN IDEA." THE "VALUE OF AN IDEA" WAS TO CAUSE 33,300 NISEI, MORE THAN HALF FROM THE CONTINENTAL UNITED STATES TO MARCH OFF TO WAR, MANY THOUSANDS FROM BEHIND BARBED WIRES. THEY FOUGHT, MANY DIED, LEAVING BEHIND A LEGACY OF HONOR, DEVOTION TO DUTY AND SACRIFICE. YET FOR ALL ITS IMPORTANCE TO OUR HERITAGE, IT IS NOT SIMPLY THIS WAR RECORD THAT I WOULD HAVE YOU REMEMBER IN GASSHO THIS MORNING.

I WOULD HAVE YOU REMEMBER THE STORY OF SGT GEORGE SAWADA OF SEATTLE, WASH. ON APRIL 30, 1943 GEORGE SAWADA, THEN ENROUTE TO CAMP SHELBY, MISS TO BEGIN HIS BASIC TRAINING, WROTE A LONG AND THOUGHTFUL LETTER TO HIS AGEING FATHER. HE CLOSED HIS LETTER WITH THESE WORDS: "THERE IS AN OLD SAYING THAT A MAN MUST CRY THRICE ERE HIS SPAN OF LIFE IS DONE. I DO NOT KNOW WHETHER THIS IS TRUE, BUT I

HAVE ALREADY SEEN YOU WEEP TWICE, ONCE IN SORROW AND ONCE IN JOY. AND, IF IT IS PREDESTINED THAT YOU MUST WEEP AGAIN, THEN DAD, LET IT BE FOR ME--ONCE IN GLORY, FOR THE VICTORY THAT SHALL SURELY BE MINE." AS A CHILD GEORGE HAD SEEN HIS FATHER WEEP IN GRIEF WHEN HIS MOTHER DIED, AND FOR A SECOND TIME WHEN GEORGE PRESENTED HIS FATHER WITH HIS DIPLOMA FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON. HE WATCHED AS HIS FATHER CLUTCHED THE DIPLOMA TO HIS BREAST AND HIS EYES FILLED WITH TEARS OF JOY. GEORGE SAWADA WAS NOT TO SEE HIS FATHER CRY FOR THE THIRD TIME WHEN HE WAS NOTIFIED THAT HIS SON HAD BEEN KILLED IN ACTION ON THE ITALIAN FRONT.

I AM REMINDED, TOO, OF GEORGE SAITO OF LOS ANGELES, WHOM I MET IN AMACHE SHORTLY AFTER HE HAD VOLUNTEERED FOR THE 442ND. HE JOINED HIS BROTHER, WHO WAS ALREADY IN THE SERVICE. GEORGE SAITO'S BROTHER WAS TO FALL ON THE FIELD OF BATTLE SHORTLY AFTER REACHING THE FRONT. GEORGE WROTE A LONG AND COMPASSIONATE LETTER TO HIS FATHER TO COMFORT HIM AND TO URGE THAT HE NOT LOSE FAITH IN AMERICA BECAUSE OF THE TRAGEDIES THAT HAD BEFALLEN THE FAMILY. GEORGE SAITO, TOO, FOLLOWED HIS BROTHER IN DEATH ON THE BATTLEFIELDS OF EUROPE.

TIME HAS DIMMED OUR MEMORY. QUICKLY FORGOTTEN ARE THE MOMENTS OF CRISIS AND THE URGENT AND FATEFUL DECISIONS WHICH HAD TO BE MADE BY US AS INDIVIDUALS AND AS A GROUP. FOR THE YOUNG WHO ARE ASSEMBLED HERE, THESE THINGS NEVER HAPPENED OR ARE ONLY A HAZY EXPERIENCE FROM THE MISTY PAST. FOR OTHERS, THE WARTIME DRAMA AND TRAGEDY THAT WERE ONCE INDELIBLY ENGRAVED IN OUR HEARTS AND MINDS HAVE FADED INTO A VAGUE SOMETHING THAT HAPPENED SO MANY YEARS AGO AND ARE BEST FORGOTTEN. BUT FOR THE BRAVE WHO SLEEP, THE STORY WILL HAVE NO END, AND IT IS FOR US THE LIVING TO KEEP ALIVE THE MAGNITUDE OF THEIR SERVICE AND THE PURPOSES AND IDEALS FOR WHICH THEY GAVE THEIR LAST MEASURE OF DEVOTION.

THIS MORNING WE HONOR THE SAITOS, GEORGE SAWADA AND COUNTLESS OTHERS WHO FELL ON THE FIELDS OF BATTLE, AND I ASK THAT THEY BE REMEMBERED IN GASSHO, NOT BECAUSE THEY WERE SO YOUNG, BRAVE AND HEROIC, BUT BECAUSE THEY DIED CARING ABOUT US. AS WE GIVE PAUSE THIS DAY TO NOTE THAT 35 YEARS AGO ON FEBRUARY 19, EXECUTIVE ORDER 9066 WAS SIGNED, LET US REMEMBER, TOO, OUR FRIENDS AND RELATIVES WHO DIED ON THE ALIEN SOIL OF AMERICA'S CONCENTRATION CAMPS, NEVER AGAIN TO REENTER THE REAL AMERICA FROM WHICH THEY HAD BEEN UPROOTED.

FINALLY, MAY I QUOTE SOMETHING WHICH I BELIEVE CAPTURES THE ESSENCE AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS DAY THAT YOU HAVE SET ASIDE AS A NATIONAL MEMORIAL SERVICE.

"NO MAN HAS EVER BEEN INDEPENDENT; EVERY MAN HAS LEANED ON THE PAST. EVERY LIBERTY WE ENJOY HAS BEEN BOUGHT AT THE COST OF MATYR'S BLOOD; EVERY ACHIEVEMENT OF THE RACE HAS BEEN MADE AT THE COST OF INCREDIBLE TOIL. THERE IS NOT A PRIVILEGE NOR AN OPPORTUNITY THAT MODERN SOCIETY GRANTS TO US THAT IS NOT THE PRODUCT OF OTHER MEN'S LABORS. WE DRINK EVERY DAY FROM WELLS WE HAVE NOT DUG; WE ARE PROTECTED BY INSTITUTIONS WE HAVE NOT SET UP. OUR CHURCHES ARE BUILT ON ROCKS PUT IN PLACE BY MATYRS OF AGES PAST. OUR GOVERNMENT RESTS UPON THE FOUNDATIONS CEMENTED IN PLACE BY THE BLOOD OF SOLDIERS WHO TRACKED THEIR WAY, BAREFOOT THROUGH ICY BATTLEFIELDS OR OVER BURNING SANDS. OUR COURTS ARE REARED UPON THE BODIES OF THOSE WHO DIED FOR FREEDOM. NO MAN LIVETH UNTO HIMSELF. ALL THE PAST HAS BEEN INVESTED IN HIM."