



G.I. JAPYANK

BY GENE CASEY

When they were training in the United States, the Japanese-American soldiers from Hawaii had to take considerable kicking-around from professional Jap haters. In Italy they tried so hard to prove their loyalty to their country that fully two thirds of the battalion became casualties

Pvt. Mac Yazawa's double row of campaign ribbons is tangible proof of his loyalty to the U.S. Below, members of the famed 100th Infantry Battalion move up to a forward position in Italy



SIGNAL CORPS, U.S. ARMY



THE kid hesitated on the other side of the room, anxious to see how he stood, but when I said, "Hello, Soldier," he bounded across with his hand out and smiled all over his face. I never thought I'd shake hands with a Japanese, but I felt pretty good about it afterward, because this kid was a different kind. His blood was Japanese but he was all American.

I'm suspicious by nature and I didn't approach this kid with any social service worker's milk of human kindness bubbling in my veins. I wanted to talk with him because he was from the famous 100th Infantry Battalion, and dozens of big questions had been forming in my mind as to just what made that outfit tick. The Hundredth was composed almost entirely of Japanese-Americans from the Hawaiian Islands, and it was public knowledge that they'd licked the pants off Hitler's boys in Italy and had kept going in the face of terrific casualties. I was wondering why they'd fought like a gang of tigers.

The kid grinned. "It was so damn' cold and rainy," he said, "we got fighting mad. We didn't care a hell of a lot whether we lived or died. We just wanted to go after those Nazis who were keeping us there."

But that wasn't the whole answer.

The kid's background was typical of the rest of the battalion, all of whose enlisted men and half of whose officers were of Japanese descent. He'd been in constant action with them for six weeks in Italy and had had six months in hospitals to think things over.

"My first name is Mac," he said, "but I'd better spell the last one. It's Y-a-z-a-w-a." He stopped to light a cigarette. "I have to watch out I don't smoke too many. They got all the shrapnel out of my lung, but I'm sorta short of breath."

I could close my eyes and listen and he was strictly a G.I. Joe. He was an American kid with an unruly lock of black hair that hung down over his forehead, and he was still young in his ideas, even though he had been sobered by a large chunk of war. He looked more like an Indian from the Southwest than he did like a Japanese. He was short, just under 5 foot 5, and he only weighed 130 pounds with the shrapnel still in his right arm (which had been nearly torn off) and right foot. Normally, he said, he'd go 140 to 143.

He was wearing two rows of ribbons. There was the Purple Heart, and service ribbons for the European, Pacific-Asiatic, Mediterranean and American theaters of operation, and two battle stars—one for the Italian campaign and one for that one-sided scrap at Pearl Harbor. I'd never stopped to think before that there were Japanese fighting on both sides at Pearl Harbor.

The Story Behind the Decorations

Those Japanese-Americans of the Hundredth knew it, because most of them were there, and their battle slogan, "Remember Pearl Harbor," showed how they felt about the sneak attack. But that wasn't what kept them going in Italy after two thirds of the outfit became casualties. There were more personal reasons for the battle spirit which won them three Distinguished Service Crosses, 21 Bronze Stars, 36 Silver Stars and 900 Purple Hearts.

Pvt. Mac I. Yazawa was celebrating his twenty-fifth birthday the day I talked to him. He was born in Honolulu, the son of Mr. and Mrs. Tokujii Yazawa, who settled there forty years ago and raised eight children. He has an older brother, John (who is probably in the Army now, because he was in I-A the last Mac heard), three older sisters who are married, and two brothers and a sister who are younger than he. One of his married sisters, who lived on the West Coast, is at the Gila Relocation Camp in Arizona, but the rest of his family are still in Honolulu.

Mac and about half of the other boys of the 100th Infantry Battalion attended Honolulu schools. Most of these kids never learned anything about Japan and weren't particularly interested in the country of their ancestors. Mac never even bothered to learn to speak Japanese. Honolulu was the only home they ever knew, and the United States was their country.

The only time they ever wanted to visit

Officers of 442nd Regiment Institute Own Relocation Plan

SATURDAY, SEPT. 23, 1944

Veterans of "Over There"



Back from the war, battlestarred, but with a cheerful outlook on life, are two veterans from the Fifth Army. Pictured above, left to right, are Cpl. Seiko Arakaki and Pvt. Joe Higa.

WOUNDED VETERANS OF ITALY MAKES SHORT VISIT TO HUNT

Wounded in the Italian battlefield, two veterans of the famous 34th "Red Bull" Division of the Fifth Army, were recent honored visitors of this project Wednesday and Thursday. Wearing the multi-colored ribbon for the European theater, an orange one for the Asiatic Pacific theater, a yellow one for Pre-Pearl Harbor, and a red one for good conduct, the two men made a proud picture as they stood there, looking cheerful and satisfied that they had done their job. Both wear the purple heart ribbon.

One of them is Cpl. Seiko Arakaki from Honolulu, Hawaii. The

other, who wears an additional Combat Infantryman's bar, is Pvt. Joe Higa, who does not look unlike Glenn Ford, the former screen star. He is not related to Pfc. Tom Higa. He is from Honolulu, Ewa, Hawaii. Cpl. Arakaki's Combat Infantryman's bar is forthcoming.

Both of them accompanied Otis Peterson, Salt Lake area relocation supervisor, who brought them to a luncheon at the Rupert Rotary club, where they spoke of their experiences.

Twenty-six year old Pvt. Higa served in Italy for seven months, before he was injured in the leg in November last year at Vancetra. The injury was serious to the extent that the medics were forced to amputate his left leg. He has been resting at the Bushnell General hospital for four months. Corporal Arakaki, 24, was drafted on the same date as Pvt. Higa, Nov. 15, 1941, and both were patrolling the beaches of Pearl Harbor as members of the National Guard, when the attack came. He was injured on the arm at Cassino on Jan. 25 of this year, and has been convalescing at the hospital in Brigham, Utah, for 3 months. Both of them are single, and claims that they see no particular difference in the mainland girls as compared to the Hawaiian. Coming from the land of palm trees and pineapples, they mentioned that they enjoyed the visit here, and that they liked the smell of the sagebrush.

First Nisei Girl Returns To Enroll At Pasadena J. C.

PASADENA, CALIF. — Esther Takei, former Venice, Calif., High School student, became the first Nisei girl to return to the Pasadena area since evacuation when she arrived here on September 12, according to the Pasadena Star-News.

Granted special permission by the commanding general of the Western Defense Command, Maj. Gen. Charles Bonesteel, Miss Takei came here from the Granada War Relocation Center near Amache, Colo., to attend the Pasadena Junior College this fall.

Welcoming her at the Santa Fe Station was a committee of 15 from the Student Christian Association at P.J.C. and officials of the Friends of the American Way which has its headquarters in Pasadena with a membership of approximately 70 here and 200 along the West Coast.

As for possible student reaction to the new enrollee, Carl Palmberg, editor of the P.J.C. Chronicle, who served in the Army in this war and has received his medical discharge, said that in his opinion students at the school would welcome Miss Takei as they would any other incoming student.

Japan was after the sneak attack, and then they wanted to go with a lot of other Americans in uniform. They were dying for a crack at the Jap army all the time they were fighting in Italy. Some of them couldn't understand why they'd been sent to fight the Germans when they had a personal bone to pick with the Japs who had attacked their homes.

Like many American kids, Mac left high school after his junior year to earn a living. He'd always wanted to be a pipe fitter and he had a chance to learn the trade at the Masaki Plumbing Shop. He became pretty good, too, and he got a Civil Service job as pipe fitter, engineer and general handy man at Fort Armstrong. He left this job by the Selective Service route on November 15, 1941, just three weeks before the attack on Pearl Harbor.

He was assigned to a former National Guard regiment made up of Oahu residents and was sent to Schofield Barracks for training. His company was composed of boys of Hawaiian, Chinese and Japanese ancestry, and they got along beautifully.

Guarding the Beaches

When the December 7th attack came, the airfield near their barracks caught hell, and Mac's outfit turned out with full combat equipment and was sent to Waiananalo Beach to repulse possible landing attempts. There weren't any, but the morning of the second day on the beach, a sentry from Mac's company spotted something offshore that might or might not be a log. One of the company's strongest swimmers stroked out for a closer look, then splashed back to report to his captain: "It's one of those two-man Jap subs!"

The submarine was stuck on a reef, and Mac's company captured it with the aid of a dive bomber from Bellows Field which bombed it free. One of the crew died from bomb concussion, but the other was taken prisoner. Mac will always be proud of the fact that his company captured the first prisoner taken by the United States in this war.

His outfit guarded that beach for seven months, then was called back to Schofield, and the Japanese-American boys in it and those in another regiment made up from all the other Hawaiian Islands except Oahu were sent to the United States for more combat training. There were hundreds of them and they formed the 100th Infantry Battalion.

On the mainland, they first learned of the problem that was making life difficult for great numbers of loyal Japanese-Americans. They were willing to take their government's word for it that there were Jap spies in this country, just as there were German spies. But they thought that most Japanese-Americans were loyal citizens, the same as most German-Americans. They couldn't understand why some folks in the United States were down on everyone of Japanese ancestry.

They trained at Camp McCoy, Wisconsin, for six months, and all the white folks they saw treated them fine, but they worried about the sentiment that was arising against them in other sections. They'd never run into anything like it before, and they didn't know what to do about it.

Then Mac went to the Gulf of Mexico Command with some of his buddies for specialized training in the handling of war dogs. He spent three months at this, rejoined his battalion at Camp Shelby, Mississippi, for seven months, and then went on maneuvers in Louisiana. The G.I. Japanese ran into their first racial trouble in the South. It didn't start out to be serious trouble, because they kept their mouths shut, but they'd never had anything like it up North. Some folks—soldiers and others—made dirty cracks about their Japanese blood. It hurt them.

The Hundredth went to North Africa and joined the 34th Division, becoming part of a regiment the other two battalions of which were made up of boys from Iowa. The white soldiers at first accepted the G.I. Japanese with reservations, but they didn't make any trouble.

In all his time overseas, Mac never heard anyone make a stirring remark about his Japanese blood; nor, to his knowledge, did any of the others in his battalion. They got



"It's not going to rain—that's one of those superfortresses flying over the house."

along increasingly well with the white lad in the regiment, and the Japanese-Americans and Iowans became very proud of one another after they'd been in action. The white soldiers got so they used to brag about their Japanese battalion to the soldiers from Illinois regiments.

The Hundredth landed at Salerno about ten days after the beachhead was opened, and went right up the valley to take the lead in the Fifth Army advance. The kids were happy and they went ahead to establish a number of "fists" in the Italian campaign. They were first to take German prizes, first to destroy a German tank, and first to charge and take a German position, bayonets.

"We weren't," Mac said, "like Jap and German troops who fight only because they are sent somewhere and made to know what we were fighting for—our country and our homes and families, just other American boys. We fought a little harder because we were anxious to let people know we were good Americans, so our lives would be better thought of and treated back home."

Brunt of the Attack

Mac's company was out in front, leading the way up the Salerno Valley, and took most of the punishment when the first German resistance was encountered. Sergeant Joe Takata, who was a close friend of Mac's and one of the best noncoms in the company, was up ahead with his squad suddenly he became suspicious. He and his squad stayed back while he went up a reconnoiter. The Germans spotted him and opened up, and an 88-mm. shell landed him.

Joe was killed, but his caution saved the rest of his squad. He was the first Japanese-American soldier to win the Distinguished Service Cross, but he never knew it. It was sent to his wife in Honolulu, because Mac and Joe's wife were in the class all the way through grammar, intermediate and high schools, Mac wrote better. It was a hard letter to write.

Mac was his company commander's guard. (The company commander was Captain T. Suzuki, of Honolulu, who was wounded about three days after Mac's at Walter Reed Hospital.) The few knew of contact with the Germans when the Nazis opened up with mobile weapons and pinned down Mac's company in an hour.

It was their first time under fire, and of them were pretty frightened. Mac's was, and some of the others told him they were so scared they couldn't move, but of them were frightened very much

for August 5, 1944

... .. Oahu, Hawaii, and, Second Lieutenant, Tatoru Inomoto of Hakalau, Hamakua, Hawaii.