

NISEI LINGUISTS--EYES AND EARS OF ALLIED PACIFIC FORCES

In the crucial battles of the Pacific, the Japs just didn't have a chance! For unknown to them (as well as to thousands of Americans at home), they were up against not only vastly superior American arms and daring Yankee intrepidity, but they were confronting an enemy who already had much detailed information of the Japanese plans for attack or defense. If the poor analogy of football to which some of the defeated Jap war lords have resorted recently is at all relevant, then the Japs were playing with their signals entirely known by their heavier and harder hitting opponents. But the Japs didn't know. They had lulled themselves into a self-complacent sense of security. They thought the complexities of the Japanese language in which their plans were written or communicated would be unfathomable to the "dumb" Western mind.

Thousands of Americans on the fighting fronts knew this was so. What is more, they knew that the American-born Japanese (better known as "Nisei") language specialists--translators, interrogators, radio monitors, and order of battle experts--were one of the chief means of obtaining intelligence concerning the enemy and his plans. The training of Nisei for combat intelligence and allied language work has been accomplished at the Military Intelligence Service Language School located first at Camp Savage and later at Fort Snelling, Minnesota. There the American Nisei had been training as the eyes and ears of not only the American fighting forces, but also that of the other allied armies fighting Japan.

These language specialists working in anonymity translated from

the Japanese language to English the available information concerning the enemy and of the terrain under enemy control. This enabled our commanders in the field to make sound decisions, conduct sound maneuvers, and avoid surprise. It has been remarked by American officers in the field that never before in history did one army know so much concerning its enemy prior to actual engagement as the American army did of the Japanese towards the latter half of the Pacific campaign.

It became commonplace that the work of the language units was so rapid and accurate that our artillery was dropping shells on enemy command posts and gun emplacements within a few minutes of the time that the information was obtained by the language detachment. Many times this tactical coordination cleared the way for our doughboys inching forward through the jungles.

The official reports of the Americal Division disclose that it was the work of the language detachment which was largely responsible for the fact that their Commander knew as early as a month in advance just where and approximately at what time and in what strength the Japanese would attack that division along the Torokina River in Bougainville.

Graduates of the Military Intelligence Service Language School translated the entire Japanese battle plans for the naval battle of the Philippines. These plans were carried by Admiral Koga, erstwhile Commander-in-Chief of the Combined Japanese Fleets, when the plane in which he was hurrying to join his fleet made a forced landing in the Philippines. Slight wonder then, that the Japanese suffered practically total annihilation and the worst defeat in naval history in the San Bernardino Straits and off the northeast coast of the Philippines.

Even the names of each Jap vessel, its position in formation, and each unit's mission was known to the American command.

Likewise, the complete Japanese plan for the defense of the Philippines was also made known through the work of the language specialists from the Military Intelligence Service Language School long before our forces had hit Leyte.

Graduates of the Military Intelligence Service Language School include Americans of many racial backgrounds. There are Caucasian, Chinese, Korean, Negro, Egyptian, and Japanese. Roughly 85% of its graduates are Nisei Americans. Concerning the work of these Japanese-American language specialists, Joe Rosenthal, AP news cameraman who won the Pulitzer Award for his spot photo of the raising of the Stars and Stripes at the crater rim of Mt Suribachi, has written:

"Usually they work with headquarters in serving as interpreters. Armed with hand grenades at the entrances to Jap pillboxes or caves, they often convince the enemy to surrender where other officers, lacking the proper diction of the Jap language, would fail.

"They work so close to the enemy on these missions that along with the danger of being killed by Japs, they run the risk of being shot, unintentionally, by our own marines. Their dungarees soon become ragged in rough country and the similarity of their physical appearance to that of the Japanese enemy makes their job that much tougher.

"Many have paid with their lives, and many more have been wounded. They have done an outstanding job, and their heroism should be recognized. It has been recognized by the marine commanders where I saw them in action at Guam, Peleliu, and Iwo."

Two of these Nisei, Technical Sergeant Kazuo Komoto with the 11th Airborne Division, and a Japanese-American Staff Sergeant with the 1st Radio Squadron Mobile, were among the first troops that landed at Atsugi Airfield near Tokyo. Komoto, incidentally, was the first graduate of the Military Intelligence Service Language School to win a purple heart when he was shot by a Jap sniper on New Georgia Island.

Another graduate, Technical Sergeant Robert Oda acted as interpreter when our naval forces took over the Japanese naval base at Yokosuka.

These language specialists came to the Military Intelligence Service Language School from all walks of life and from various parts of the United States, Hawaii, and Alaska. Among them were dentists, Lawyers, PhD's, cooks, farm-hands, gardeners, laundrymen, houseboys, and even a professional gambler. One was a former member of the Territorial Legislature in Hawaii. A good cross section came as volunteers from behind barbed wire fences of the Relocation Camps to which they had been whisked by Army order shortly after Pearl Harbor. Some were veterans of World War I, well over 45 years old, and with three or more teen age children, like Technician 3d grade James Yoshinobu who served with the 4th Marine Division on Iwo Jima and Technical Sergeant John Tanikawa, who was awarded a Bronze Star for his work with the 41st Division on Leyte.

These Nisei language specialists have been with every major unit in every engagement from Guadalcanal and Attu to the march into Tokyo. Some of the units with which they served are the 2nd, 27th, 43rd, 33rd, 81st, 25th, 37th, and Americal Infantry Divisions; Merrill's Marauders; Mars Task Force; the 11th Airborne Division; the Alaska Defense Command

in the Aleutians; 13th and 5th Army Air Forces; the Sixth, Eighth, and Tenth Armies; Far Eastern Air Forces; Allied Translator and Interpreter Section; Technical Air Intelligence; 7th Radio Squadron; XXIV Corps; British Fourteenth Army; Royal Air Force Crash Intelligence; 1st Air Commando Group; Mobile Radio Squadron; Office of War Information in India; 20th, 21st, and 25th Australian Brigades and the 7th and 9th Australian Divisions. They likewise served with the 3rd, 4th, and 5th Marines. To mention all units with which they served would be to list every major unit that has engaged in combat in the Pacific. So great was the demand for these linguists that the Military Intelligence Service Language School could only supply a fraction of those requested.

It was only after a trying up-hill fight that units in the field were persuaded to accept these loyal American born "Japs". Lieutenant General DeWitt, the commanding general under whom the first class had trained at the Presidio of San Francisco, had stunned the graduates of the Military Intelligence Service Language School with his indictment, "A Jap is a Jap. It makes no difference whether he is an American citizen or not." It was not very long until they had won full confidence, and trust in every sector and in every theater opposing the Japanese.

A story is told about General Patch's reaction to the Nisei. When the first group of Nisei arrived at his command, he is reported to have remarked that he didn't want any Japs. He begrudgingly tolerated them through a campaign. After that he thought so much of them that it is reported that he used to go personally to the transports and welcome each group as they came off the gangplank. Today, General Patch who

also had under his command the 442nd Regimental Combat Team in the European Theater of Operations (also composed of Nisei) is one of the most staunch supporters that the Nisei have.

From Guadalcanal, Lieutenant Colonel John A. Burden, then Captain in the G-2 Section of the XIV Corps, wrote:

"The use of Nisei in the combat area is essential to efficient work. There has been a great deal of prejudice and opposition to the use of Nisei in combat areas. The two arguments advanced are: (1) Americans of Japanese ancestry are not to be trusted, and (2) the lives of the Nisei would be endangered due to the strong sentiment against Japanese prevailing in the area. Both of these arguments have been thoroughly disproved by experiences on Guadalcanal, and I AM GLAD TO SAY THAT THOSE WHO OPPOSED THE USE OF NISEI THE MOST ARE NOW THEIR MOST ENTHUSIASTIC ADVOCATES. It has been definitely proven that only the Nisei are capable of rapid translation of written orders and diaries, and their use is essential in obtaining the information contained in them."

Major Luther Meyer, then Assistant Assistant Chief of Staff, G-2, Advance Command Post, Headquarters of Alaska Defense Command, wrote to the Assistant Chief of Staff, G-2, Western Defense Command and Fourth Army, on June 24, 1943, in part as follows:

"If, however, the second-generation Japanese, as a source of competent interpreters and interrogators, are to be ignored, then the problem of obtaining intelligence of the enemy becomes in every way and dimension more difficult."

Lieutenant Colonel William M. Van Antwerp, in charge of intelligence

for the 27th Infantry Division, had this to say: "The MAKIN operation afforded the first opportunity for the Language Section of this Division to operate in combat. Their actions and the results of their work reflect high credit on them and the Military Intelligence Service Language School."

Major General Ralph C. Smith who commanded the 27th Infantry Division added: "The language section attached on the 27th Division was invaluable in the MAKIN operation."

From the China-Burma-India Theater, Captain Barton Lloyd, a graduate of the Military Intelligence Service Language School, wrote: "I cannot overstate the value Colonel Stilwell (son of General Stilwell) and his headquarters place on Nisei language men. As far as everyone who has had contact with the Nisei are concerned, they are tops--they are doing a darned good job, much of it under conditions they never expected. Sergeants Matsunaka and Mazawa were dropped by parachute deep in Kachin territory to an Office of Strategic Services unit. They have been working in areas behind enemy lines, doing both language and radio intercept work. These two volunteered without any hesitation and took their jumps in fine form although having had no previous training in parachute jumping whatsoever. The paratrooper who gave them instructions and who accompanied them on their jump flight told me that when their turns came to jump, they took off themselves with 'no assistance'.

"Colonel Stilwell personally told me that it is his intention to see to it that every Nisei man gets whatever recognition he is due. As far as he is concerned, if the headquarters personnel were ever to be cut down, there are Colonels who would go before any of the language men."

According to reports from Leyte, General Druger has time and again congratulated and commended the Nisei language men for their fine work on Leyte.

A Nisei Technical Sergeant wrote from the Marshalls, "Incidentally, I was called in by Major General Corlett, the commanding general of the 7th Division, and he personally extended his congratulations to our team for the work that the boys did."

It is no wonder that recognition has been given to these Nisei Americans in the field. Although the complete reports are not in and the records are only fragmentary, at least 50 Nisei have received direct commissions from the ranks as Second Lieutenants, and another 25 or 30 have been commissioned through the various Officer Candidate Schools in Australia and in the United States. One of these, Masaji Marumoto of Honolulu, has received a commission as a First Lieutenant in the Judge Advocate General's Department and was the civil affairs legal officer attached to Military Government in Okinawa when the last report was received.

The list of Nisei decorations available to the writer is extremely fragmentary. To date it includes 1 Distinguished Service Cross, 2 Legion of Merits, 5 Silver Stars, 1 Soldier's Medal, over 50 Bronze Stars, and 15 Purple Hearts. No doubt there are more for these are only cases of which the writer has personal knowledge.

A great deal of the work of these language specialists has been prosaic especially for those who have been stationed in rear echelons and in various stations in the continental limits of the United States. Most of the honor graduates of each graduating class were retained as instructors at the Military Intelligence Service Language School to train

other students. The Director of Academic Training at the language School, Major John F. Aiso, is himself a Nisei. He has said that every time these graduates learned of their assignment to the school teaching staff, they were most disappointed. 98% of the men selected wanted to go overseas to see action. It was only by convincing them after long hours of argument that they could each render greater service by training 30 or 50 other Nisei to do language work, that they could be persuaded to remain as instructors.

Others were sent for language duty at the Pentagon or with the Pacific Military Intelligence Research Section at Camp Ritchie, Maryland, to Signal Corps activities, or to the Japanese Prisoner of War Camp at Camp McCoy, Wisconsin. It may well be noted that it was the graduates of the Military Intelligence Service Language School that did the recruiting in the Relocation Camps for the 442nd Regimental Combat Team which has won such an enviable record in the European Theater of Operations.

Roy Cummings, Honolulu Star Bulletin correspondent, has pointed out the non language side of their roles in the Pacific. He wrote: "Pocket dictionaries aren't the only articles the men of the school make use of out there. Things happened fast after the landing on Okinawa. One of the language men was on guard the third night that we were there, when he challenged a man who came out of the darkness. The man did not halt and when he came closer the sergeant saw that it was an enemy soldier, so he cut him down with his carbine."

Fourteen Nisei volunteered for service with Merrill's Mauraunders. An officer writing of their exploits says: "Throughout, whenever and wherever there was need for any of the boys, they never hesitated. They were not only interpreters but soldiers at the front. They faced danger

willingly, whenever called upon. They faced the enemy, fought against him. Roy Matsumoto, Ben Sugeta, Robert Honda and Henry Goshō are credited with about 30 Nips. You can see by that that the boys have been right upon the line.

"During battles they crawled up close enough to be able to hear Jap Officers' Commands and to make verbal translations to our soldiers. They tapped lines, listened in on radios, translated documents and papers, made spot translations of messages and field orders, and in numerous other ways made themselves invaluable."

It was in the engagement at Myitkyina that these "Maurauder boys" lost their commanding officer, Captain William Laffin (his mother was a Japanese) when he was strafed by enemy planes. Of the 14 Nisei who started out with General Merrill, six were commissioned as officers for meritorious service in the field, one was decorated with the Legion of Merit, and three received the Bronze Star. All received the Combat Infantryman's Badge and the Presidential Unit Citation.

It is interesting to note that many of the outstandingly daring feats were performed by graduates who were "Kibei" (those sent at an early age to Japan and reared and educated there). These "Kibei" are erroneously judged in some quarters as being pro-Japanese elements in the Japanese-American community.

Technical Sergeant Kaz Kozaki, a former non-commissioned officer instructor at the Military Intelligence Service Language School, is a "Kibei" and so is Technician 3d grade Eiichi Sakauye. Yet Kozaki won a Silver Star and a Purple Heart for rescuing an American army officer under fire when they were attacked by the Japanese as they were landing on New Guinea from their

landing craft. Eiichi Sakauye rescued a wounded British officer under fire in the China-Burma-India Theatre and likewise became the recipient of a Silver Star.

Technician 5th Grade Terry Takeshi Doi was an out and out "Kibei". His Japanese was stronger than his command of English. He had been caught as a dual-national in Japan and had been forced "to serve a hitch" in the Japanese army. Thereby he had lost his American citizenship. He had been kept at the Military Intelligence Service Language School for a long time subsequent to graduation before he was finally cleared by Military Intelligence as being trustworthy for service in the combat zone. He had also become a famous character in the Minneapolis-St Paul area because when he appeared before Judge Robert Bell of the U. S. District Court for reinstatement of his American citizenship, a Canadian dancer who was also scheduled to be sworn in as an American citizen requested Judge Bell to swear her in separately. As she put it, she refused to be "sworn in with a Jap." Judge Bell denied her request and she walked out of court.

Terry Doi was one of the first Nisei to land on Iwo Jima. Several had landed among the first waves, about "H hour plus 45". And from that time on he distinguished himself going into cave after cave with only a flashlight and knife persuading many enemy soldiers to come out and surrender. Wrote Lieutenant Wesley H. Fishel, Doi's commanding officer, to Judge Bell, "I know you'll be happy to know that Terry did one of the finest pieces of work possible. Koi was one of the first GIs to land on Iwo Jima. The limits of censorship prohibit details, but I can say Terry is one of the bravest and most capable men I have seen out here."

Wrote another Caucasian Officer graduate of the Military Intelligence

Service Language School, Lieutenant Squire: "There was nothing but praise for the Nisei boys, particularly a boy by the name of Doi.... There is a story about him people tell which goes something like this. He was continually going into caves with a knife and flashlight and hollering to the enemy to 'get the hell out or else'. Mr. Doi's middle name is now 'Guts'."

Technician 3d grade Kenji Yasui is another "Kibei" who has won for himself the title of the "Nisei Sergeant York". Yasui was at times a problem child while at school, but because of his schooling in Japan (middle school graduate and college division graduate of Waseda University) and because of his strong command of Japanese he was sent to the Office of War Information in India to work supposedly on propaganda leaflets to be dropped over the enemy lines. Masquerading as Colonel Yamamoto, the Japanese Commander in the area, he brought in single handed a dozen Jap Prisoners of War. John Emerson, Political adviser, APO 885, wrote Colonel Kai E. Rasmussen, Commandant of the Military Intelligence Service Language School, as follows:

"I don't know whether you have heard yet that one of them, Kenji Yasui, has been recommended for a citation (Yasui received the Silver Star) for his courageous performance in bringing in 13 Japanese prisoners during the mopping-up operations in Myitkyina. Kenji and two others volunteered to go out to an island in the river to round up a bunch of Japs. He swam out, got a cramp half-way across and almost drowned, shouted to the Japs to come out, and finally got 13 together. Two had to be killed and one tried to blow Yasui and himself up with a grenade. Kenji luckily escaped that. He announced that he was a Colonel

and made them line up and execute close order drill. Then he made them get in the river and swim across pushing a raft on which he stood with carbine aimed at them. Afterwards he learned the Japs had 20 rounds each and had a bead on him when he came ashore. Only because he started shouting military commands in Japanese did they hold fire."

There have also been some amusing incidents. Technician 3d grade Shigeto Mazawa served with the KACHIN RANGERS (native troops) and took part in daring raids against the enemy in Burma. Much to his surprise, he found himself a temporary Captain in the British Army commanding a whole company of KACHIN RANGERS.

Several have reported not too amusing incidents so far as they personally were concerned—that of being captured by Chinese troops and being mistaken for Japanese soldiers. They have reported that they never talked so fast with sign language and wrote so many "Kanji" (Chinese characters used in the Japanese language) in all their lives to explain that they were "Minkuo" (American) soldiers. They have described their complexion as having remained a pale green for the next three months or more.

Sergeant Vic Nishijima was on Ie Jima on the morning that Ernie Pyle, the GI's favorite correspondent, was killed by a Japanese machine gun ambush. Writing to his friends at Fort Snelling, Nishijima wrote: "I had to give war scribe Ernie Pyle hell for trying to cross a mine field. Also wound up in a newsreel with him but didn't know who the 'elderly private' was until next morning."

Technician 4th grade Seiyu Higashi was born in Los Angeles, but taken

back to the town of Nago in Okinawa in his early years. He was reared in Nago, completed middle school, and then returned to Los Angeles. He graduated from high school in Los Angeles and shortly after Pearl Harbor he enlisted in the army. Higashi was sent to Okinawa because of his knowledge of the Okinawa dialect. Upon reaching the town of Nago, he accidentally ran into his father that he had not seen for eight years.

Like all troops in the combat zone, some of these Nisei language specialists will never return to the country they fought for. Many have given their lives in the service of their country. Ten were killed in an airplane accident in Okinawa one day before VJ-Day. Others have been killed by enemy action.

Technician 3d grade Frank T. Hachiya was born in Hood River, Oregon, the place where the local American Legion Post had erased the names of 16 Americans of Japanese ancestry from the county memorial honor roll. After basic training at Camp Roberts in California, Frank was assigned to the Military Intelligence Service Language School at Camp Savage. At the time of his death, he was a veteran of the Kwajalein and Eniwetok campaigns. He had been sent out as a special replacement to the language team working with the Sixth Army Headquarters on Leyte. He was scheduled to fly back to Honolulu the following day. His father was in a Relocation Camp, but his mother was in Japan.

Hachiya volunteered to cross an enemy infested valley to question a prisoner of war who had been captured by friendly units on an adjacent ridge. Lieutenant Howard M. Moss, his commanding officer said, "It was essential to get the information from the prisoner of war immediately as

some of our units were in a bad spot....When they reached the bottom of the valley a Jap sniper let them have it at close range when he started hollering to the Japs in the valley in Japanese. Frank emptied his gun into the sniper. Then he walked back up the hill where he was given plasma....At the hospital he was given every possible care, but the bullet had gone through his liver."

Others like Sergeant Omura in New Guinea, Staff Sergeant Shoichi Nakahara, Technician 3d grade Eddie Fukui, Technician 4th grade Mitsuru Shibata, Technician 4th grade Ben Satoshi Kurokawa, and Technician 4th grade Sunichi Bill Imoto on Okinawa have also lost their lives in the service of their country. However, the special circumstances surrounding the death of Sergeant George I. Nakamura, who was killed in action in the Philippines deserve special mention.

George was the son of a Japanese alien who was seized shortly after Pearl Harbor in Watsonville, California, for possessing "rockets and other signal equipment." His father was taken into custody, but was exonerated and is living in Rockford, Illinois today. His son did not hesitate to give his life for the United States in which he was born. Lieutenant James Hoyt, his commanding officer, describing the circumstances of his death wrote: "Nakamura was on temporary duty with the 63rd Infantry Regiment of the 6th Infantry Division and participated in an engagement near Payawan. With heroic intrepidity, he exposed himself to enemy fire in order to issue an oral ultimatum of surrender to several isolated enemy units."

There was also Technical Sergeant Yukita Mizutari who was killed in New Guinea and who received the Silver Star posthumously. This non-commissioned officer language team leader went to the rescue of his

subordinates who had been fired upon by enemy infiltrating into their positions. Colonel Mashbir, Chief of the Allied Translator and Interpreter Section of General MacArthur's Headquarters wrote: "The loss of Technical Sergeant Mizutari is considered with the deepest regret since this soldier was a soldier in every sense of the word, and while serving with various language units in the field as well as at the Allied Translator and Interpreter Section, his contribution in fidelity and devotion to duty was outstanding. His record serves to exemplify the great work of the Nisei for their country to which cause he has given his life."

By their invaluable language work in the field, thousands of American lives have been saved. The job of the Nisei was primarily that of language technicians, but they have demonstrated that they could be soldiers as well. As one First Sergeant at Fort McClellan, where a large group of the men from the Military Intelligence Service Language School went for basic training, wrote to one of the graduates who has seen service in the Philippines: "If all American-Japanese or I might say 'democratic Japanese' feel like you fellows did, things are 'on the ball' and this old 'democratic way of life' is worth fighting for."

These Nisei eyes and ears of the Allied Forces that brought Japan to her knees in unprecedented defeat have vindicated in their way the faith which President Roosevelt, our great wartime president and commander-in-chief, placed in them when he said, "Americanism is not, and never was, a matter of race or ancestry....Every loyal American citizen should be given the opportunity to serve this country wherever his skills will make the greatest contribution...." In military Japanese language work, the Nisei language specialists have done just that.