

FRED SHIOSAKI

The rescue of the
Lost Battalion



*“Dogface GIs like us could sympathize with the German soldiers.
They were living like animals, just like us.
You dig a hole; you’re wet all day, cold all night,
then you get up and shoot some kid your own age.”*

–Staff Sgt. Fred Shiosaki, 442nd Regimental Combat Team



“You fought not only the enemy, but you fought prejudice and you’ve won,” President Harry S. Truman told the 442nd Regimental Combat Team on July 15, 1946. By then, Fred Shiosaki and most of the other original members of the 442nd had been discharged from the Army. *National Archives*

Fred Shiosaki, a high school senior, was doing his homework and listening to the radio. It was December 7, 1941, a cold, gray Sunday in Spokane. Shortly before noon, an announcer broke in. “We interrupt this program to bring you a special news bulletin: The Japanese have attacked Pearl Harbor Hawaii by air, President Roosevelt has just announced.”

Fred’s father, who ran the laundry below their tiny apartment, was in the next room. “Hey, Pop,” Fred said. “The Japanese have attacked Hawaii!”



Nearly 1,200 sailors and Marines died on the *USS Arizona* at Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941. *National Archives*

Kisaburo Shiosaki was at first skeptical. Then, as more details came in, he predicted, “It’s not going to last long.” By supper time, however, with the Japanese reportedly advancing everywhere in the Pacific, Fred remembers that his parents were visibly shaken. Their firstborn, 24-year-old George, was attending college in Japan. What would happen to their family now? The five Shiosaki children were U.S. citizens, second-generation *Nisei* (nee-say). But Kisaburo and his wife Tori, were *Issei* (e-say)—immigrants who couldn’t even own property. Now they all had the face of the enemy in a city that was 99.1 percent white.

Across the state at Grays Harbor, Natsu Saito, a widow who ran an Asian import shop, was getting ready for church. Her oldest son, Lincoln, was in Tokyo studying for the ministry. Two FBI agents in fedoras and trench coats soon took her into custody as a suspected spy. The captain of a Japanese ship docked at the port reportedly had asked her for maps. Mrs. Saito vehemently denied being disloyal. The agents insisted she had “patriotic ties to Japan,” never mind that her sons bore the names of great Americans. Her No. 2 son, Perry, had to

rush home from college at Pullman to care for his younger siblings. It was two frightening weeks before they learned their mother was being held in Seattle.

The Saitos and 120,000 other American Japanese were sent to concentration camps. "A Jap's a Jap," said the general heading the Western Defense Command. "It makes no difference whether he's an American citizen or not. I don't want any of them here."

The Shiosakis, by virtue of living east of the Cascades, were allowed to stay in Spokane, but they sent two sons into combat. Staff Sgt. Fred Akira Shiosaki, whose story this is, won a Bronze Star and Purple Heart with the U.S. Army's 442nd Regimental Combat Team. Comprised of Japanese American volunteers from Hawaii and the mainland, the "Go for Broke" 442nd is one of the most decorated units in American military history: twenty-one Medals of Honor and nearly 10,000 Purple Hearts. Its rescue of the "Lost Battalion," an infantry outfit surrounded by Germans in the long, cold winter of 1944, is legendary. And for good reason. Shiosaki's platoon pushed ahead through murderous machine-gun and artillery fire. "Chills went up our spines when we saw the Nisei soldiers," one grateful white GI said. Though their average height was only 5-3, "honestly, they looked like giants to us." Company K of the Third Battalion of the 442nd went into the Vosges mountains with 186 men and came out with 17. Miraculously, Shiosaki was only slightly wounded. "I looked around and said, 'Goddamn, this is all we have left?' Some of those guys had saved my skin and I'm pretty sure I saved some of theirs. So we were really blood brothers. How do you mourn when you lose five guys in your platoon? You're just numb. I cried inside."

It's said that war is hell. Shiosaki was there and back. At 92, Fred is a slightly stooped old infantryman with lovely manners, an infectious laugh and a good memory, though there are some things he'd like to forget. Fred shakes his head over the friends he lost and rails at the "stupid sonofabitch" generals on both sides who saw young men as expendable. "Dogface GIs like us could sympathize with the German soldiers. They were living like animals, just like us. You dig a hole; you're wet all day, cold all night, then you get up and shoot some kid your own age."



Fred “Rosie” Shiosaki as a 19-year-old infantryman.

Fred Shiosaki collection

Have you ever heard it put better than that?

Fred Shiosaki is such a gentle, well-spoken man that when his jaws clench and profanity emerges like a hiss you know you’re hearing the authentic voice of the GI’s who were doing the dying. Listen carefully, too, because time is the enemy now.

IRONIES ABOUND in the stories of the Japanese Americans who fought the Nazis and Imperial Japan while back home, fathers, mothers, brothers and sisters were living in tarpaper huts at desolate camps ringed with barbed wire and guard towers.

The “relocation center” plan was authorized by a president who in his 1941 State of the Union Address pledged “the preservation of civil liberties for all.”

Only one cabinet member, Interior Secretary Harold Ickes, decried “these fancy-named concentration camps.”

Earl Warren, the California attorney general who pushed for internment, went on to become chief justice of the U.S. Supreme Court that unanimously struck down state-sanctioned racism—segregated schools.

FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover, who operated with impunity, put out a nationwide dragnet for suspicious aliens—Germans, Italians and Japanese—but opposed wholesale incarceration of Japanese Americans.

Army Colonel Karl Bendetsen, the architect of Roosevelt’s executive order, was a Jew from Grays Harbor who lied about his ethnicity to get ahead in college and the military.

In the South, where blacks were subjected to dehumanizing Jim Crow laws, the Japanese American soldiers who arrived for boot camp were told they were “honorary whites.” Fred Shiosaki, though only a teenager, was dumbfounded. “Can you imagine coming out of a concentration camp and

suddenly discovering that in Mississippi you're a white man? It was ridiculous and illogical." Pullman porters looked on in amazement as the cocky little soldiers piled out of the trains. Black GIs—with a few exceptions, notably the Tuskegee Airmen and Montford Point Marines—were relegated to menial jobs in the mess hall and ammunition dump.

Shiosaki, immune to prejudice because he'd lived it, knew one thing instinctively even before he arrived in the heart of darkness: When you're in combat "everybody's blood looks the same."

THERE WERE ONLY 276 JAPANESE in Spokane in 1941. Fifty-five percent were young American-born Nisei like Shiosaki, who was 17 when America entered World War II. Eighty-two percent of the state's 14,500 Japanese lived in King and Pierce counties along Puget Sound. Thousands of them tended immaculate truck farms on leased land. "Fully 90 percent of the vegetables sold in Seattle and Tacoma up to now have been raised by Japanese," the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* reported in 1942.

The Issei immigrant elders had left behind a land of peasantry and upheaval. Like immigrants of every nationality, they especially wanted something more for their children. "My father's story," Fred Shiosaki says, "is really an American saga."

Kisaburo Shiozaki—the "z" was changed to an "s" by mistake in America—left Japan in 1904 when he turned 21. "As the No. 3 son of a tenant farmer, my father stood no chance of inheriting anything," Fred says, "so he indentured himself to the Oriental Trading Company, which imported thousands of Japanese boys with strong backs and weak minds to lay railroad track in the Northwest, from British Columbia to Montana." Nearly 26,000 Japanese came to Washington State between 1899 and 1910.

Though his formal education ended with the equivalent of fourth grade, Kisaburo did not have a weak mind. And his ambition was even stronger than his back. Family lore has it that he jumped rail, so to speak, in Montana after meeting a family from his home town. Their relatives ran a restaurant in Spokane. Kisaburo became a short order cook, with an as-

sortment of odd jobs on the side. When Spokane's grand Davenport Hotel opened in 1914, Kisaburo landed a fulltime job as a bus boy, setting tables and schlepping dirty dishes in a handsome uniform. With a steady job, what he needed now, at 31, was a wife. Kisaburo, a determined looking young man with a shock of coarse black hair, sailed home to Japan. "Find me a bride," he told his family. Soon, in a neighboring village, he was introduced to 18-year-old Tori Iwaii, a classic Japanese beauty.



Newlyweds Tori and Kisaburo Shiosaki in 1915. *Fred Shiosaki collection*

The newlyweds rented a tiny apartment in Hillyard, the blue-collar railyard town northeast of downtown Spokane. In 1915 when Shiosaki and two partners opened a hand laundry at 3108 East Olympic Avenue, a half-block from the Great Northern tracks, Hillyard had grown to some 4,000 residents. Many were immigrants, including clusters of Japanese, Italians and Germans. Hillyard had a lively business district and its own weekly newspaper.

Kisaburo shortly became sole proprietor of the Hillyard Laundry. He worked 16-hour days to make it thrive, adding new washing machines and steamers. Gallingly, he couldn't own the property or become a naturalized citizen. Strident exclusion laws targeting Asian immigrants—the "yellow peril" to white jobs and Anglo-Saxon nativist Americanism—saw to that.

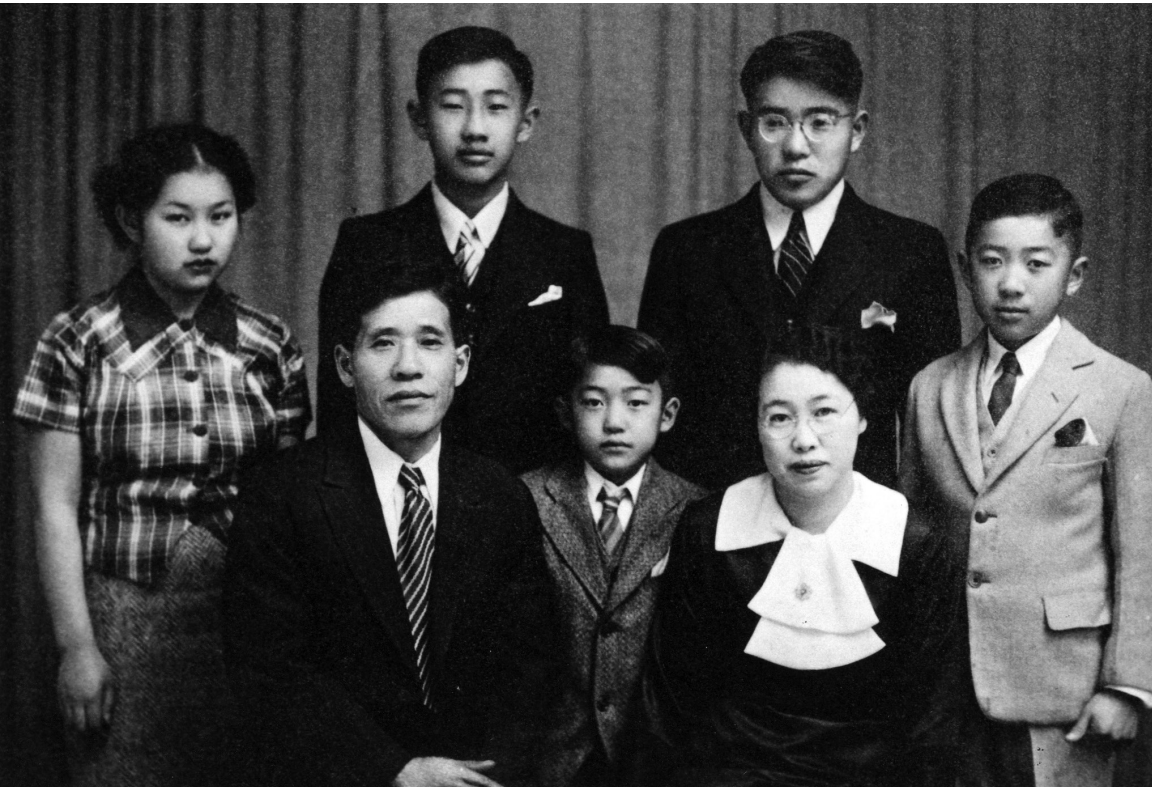
THE FIRST THREE SHIOSAKI CHILDREN arrived in quick succession—George in 1917, Blanche in 1919 and Roy in 1920. Fred was born in 1924, the year Hillyard was annexed to Spokane, Floyd

in 1927. Kisaburo proudly acquired a second-hand Maxwell automobile. He was now a business proprietor and family man.

In Hillyard everyone knew the Shiosakis. They starched shirts, laundered bedsheets, cleaned butcher shop aprons and somehow got the grease out of railroad work clothes. Kisaburo and Tori became “Kay” and “Mrs. Kay” to their customers. They were both about five feet tall, and their English was a long ways from fluent. Shy smiles and efficient service never got lost in translation. The kids helped out after school from an early age, doing homework between chopping wood for the boiler and learning how to shake out sheets. “You were to do well in school so you could go to college,” Fred says emphatically. “That was the expectation. We all lived in the shadow of George, who was the family genius.” Eighty years on, Fred and Floyd remember their big brother as bearing the weight of filial piety and scholastic pressure. “George set a bad example for the rest of us!” Floyd, a retired architect on Vashon Island, quips. As the only girl and second oldest, Blanche was also a role model. She did her best to help keep the younger boys in line. Roy, Fred and Floyd were bristling at old-school Japanese patriarchal norms.

“All our friends were Caucasian,” Fred remembers. “Saturday was football and baseball and running the streets, but our parents insisted that we attend Japanese language school at the Methodist Japanese Mission in downtown Spokane. Honest to God, it was just a rebellion every Saturday. I felt sorry for my mother and dad. I can still hear them saying, ‘You are not to talk English at the meal table. You will talk Japanese!’ So it was absolutely silent. And they were furious with us. I knew *Dōmō Arigatō* (thank you very much) and some other everyday phrases. But that was the extent of it. There were no enlightening conversations at supper time!” Fred says, laughing at the memory of all those tight lips. “That’s got to be so typical for immigrant families. You have kids in America and they grow up speaking English. They’re Americanized. It’s the way things work.”

George Shiosaki, the salutatorian of the Class of 1935 at Spokane’s Rogers High School, left that winter to study sciences at a prestigious Japanese university and become fluent in



Kisaburo and Tori Shiosaki with their five children in 1935. Fred, 11, is standing at right. The other children are Blanche, Roy, George, the eldest, and Floyd, between his parents. *Fred Shiosaki collection*

the language. Blanche dutifully went next, but was back home by 1940, working at the laundry. Roy, who graduated in 1938, insisted on staying home to attend Gonzaga. “He was as stubborn as his father,” Fred remembers. “If the war hadn’t started I think I would have said ‘no’ too. I didn’t want to go to Japan.”

Roy was a good student, studying engineering, but he left college in 1940 when his father bought him a laundry in Whitefish, Montana.

GLOOM DESCENDED on the Shiosaki apartment as the radio crackled with the news that Pearl Harbor was awash in oily death and destruction. Much of the U.S. Pacific Fleet had

been caught napping by the Imperial Japanese Navy. In addition to the carnage on Battleship Row, 180 military aircraft had been destroyed on the ground.

Fred, Blanche and 14-year-old Floyd sat transfixed with their worried parents. Fred suddenly wished he'd paid closer attention to the escalating tension between Japan and the U.S. "I didn't know diddly about what was going on in the world beyond Spokane." His kid brother was even more confused. "I didn't really grasp" that the world had changed between breakfast and lunch, Floyd says. He would soon enough. All three of his big brothers were caught up in the maelstrom. George would suffer terrible deprivations before being forced to join the Japanese army.

"I didn't go to school that Monday," Fred remembers. "I just didn't want to go. My mother insisted that we return on Tuesday, and it was really uncomfortable—for me at least. I felt so conspicuous. My friends were still my friends. I was on the track team at Rogers and active in clubs, but some of my classmates were now standoffish. I don't think I suffered an overt act of any kind. No one beat me up or called me names. There was just this level of discomfort. I was an American but I suddenly felt more Japanese than ever before."

Fred's father arrived at the laundry at the crack of dawn, as usual. Business, as he had feared, was not as usual. By 8 it was obvious customers were staying away. One of Shiosaki's regular rounds was a house call. Spokane's postmaster was



The Hillyard Laundry Building.
*Historic Preservation Office, City/County
of Spokane*



Mr. and Mrs. Shiosaki at work in the Hillyard laundry. *Fred Shiosaki collection*

one of the most influential New Deal Democrats in the county. “Pop considered him a friend and mentor,” Fred remembers. “Every Monday, Pop would drive up to his house, pick up his shirts and return them on Wednesday. On December 8, the fellow met him at the back door and said, ‘Kay, look at this!’ He had the Monday morning extra published by *The Spokesman-Review* with a big headline that said ‘Japanese attack Hawaii.’ Pop didn’t know what to say. Finally he said something like it was a dumb move or it wouldn’t last long. Then his old friend said, ‘I’m sorry, Kay, but I can’t do business with you anymore.’ You’ve never seen a man so crestfallen as my father. They had been friends for 20 years, or so he thought.

“Well, business just about died. Then over the next month rail traffic ramped up with the onset of the war. Hillyard was buzzing. People also suddenly discovered that nobody else would do those dirty, greasy, heavy work clothes. So it got busier and busier until finally Pop said, ‘Old customers, I’ll take you. But new customers, no more.’ He had to turn people away. Some of them said, ‘You just wait ’til the war’s over!’ Then one day, his old friend showed up, saying he couldn’t find anybody to do his shirts like our laundry. ‘Sorry,’ Pop said. ‘I’m just too busy.’ ” Fred believes his father, a proud man, fought back the temptation to say, “By God, I don’t need your

business!” There’s a Japanese word—*Gaman*—that sums up perseverance.

WITH SO FEW JAPANESE in Spokane County, there was no epidemic of fear and loathing, at least nothing to rival the front-page stories about “Seattle Japs Who Disobeyed Orders” and the wild rumors that gripped California. Air raids were imminent, authorities there warned, and “Jap spies” masquerading as ordinary shopkeepers were said to be transmitting coordinates for power plants and military installations. Print shops in California cranked out thousands of pseudo-official “Jap Hunting Licenses.”

Chinese shopkeepers in downtown Spokane, worried that to whites “all Orientals look alike,” as the old saw goes, wore buttons declaring “I am Chinese.”

A handful of Spokane’s Japanese elders “just disappeared that Monday,” Fred remembers. FBI agents searched the Shiosakis’ apartment. They confiscated a short-wave radio, Fred’s camera, a pair of binoculars and a .22 rifle the boys

plunked around with. That the Shiosakis had sent a son and daughter to study in Japan “put an extra stigma on us,” Fred says. “We drove down to the FBI office in Pop’s old Maxwell. I remember being terrified that my parents would never come out. They had to register as enemy aliens. From then on, we knew we had to tread lightly: ‘Stay away from people you don’t know,’ my parents told us. The orders came down that all Japanese in Spokane County were banned from im-



An Uncle Sam propaganda poster.
National Archives

portant public buildings, power plants, airports and dams. Japanese couldn't withdraw more than \$100 a month from their bank accounts. We couldn't travel more than 10 miles from home without a special pass and we had a 9 o'clock curfew."

The Spokesman-Review, Eastern Washington's largest newspaper, editorialized on Dec. 9, that the "great body" of U.S.-born Japanese likely would remain loyal Americans:

But for the others, considering the perfidious example of their government to which they are fanatically devoted, it would be folly to trust them. As a precaution that should be a first essential, it would seem that all Japanese nationals on our islands and our mainland should be rounded up and placed in concentration camps for the duration of the war. That would not only prevent them from committing depredations, but would protect them from harm as outraged tempers rise in this country.

As tempers rose, the influential morning daily backed away from the "Jap" headlines that pockmarked most newspapers and on Dec. 11 warned:

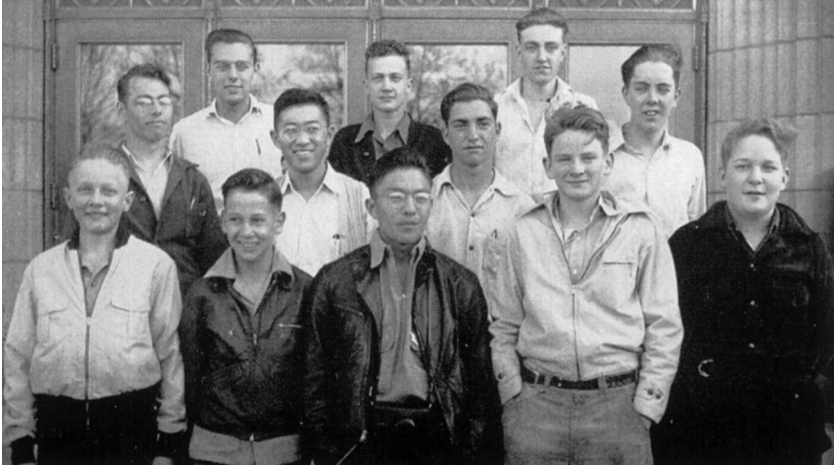
...nothing could be more unjust or unbecoming loyal Americans than indiscriminately to suspect or persecute their fellow citizens of Japanese birth or descent. The patriotism of a citizen can not be distinguished by the color of his skin, and many a Japanese, both native born and naturalized, is just as devoted to America as any white American of Revolutionary stock. ...Let us not repeat the shameful cruelties of ostracism and persecution against these fellow citizens that was visited against so many loyal Americans of German birth or descent in the last world war.

During World War I, Germans were depicted as "Mad Brute" gorillas and drooling "Huns." Hamburgers became

“liberty burgers,” sauerkraut “liberty cabbage.” Many German American merchants renamed their stores. At the outbreak of World War II, when the systemic evil of the Nazis’ “final solution” to European Jewry had yet to be fully revealed, the most popular anti-German lapel pin was “To Hell with Hitler!” Relatively mild stuff compared to the tsunami of race hate generated by Pearl Harbor. The “dirty Japs” had enslaved Korea and raped and murdered tens of thousands in China, beheading civilians and bayoneting babies. Now they had killed 2,500 Americans in a sneak attack. There was no compunction about giving blatantly racist patriotic propaganda Uncle Sam’s seal of approval. Superman was enlisted in Action Comics to vanquish Japanese soldiers caricatured as bespectacled buck-toothed rats. An office supply company in Hoquiam on the coast, where there were fears of an invasion, advertised that the job at hand was to kick “every dirty yellow tooth ... out of every repulsive Jap’s mouth.” In *Our Enemy: The Japanese*, a U.S. Office of War Information film shown in theaters around the nation, the narrator intoned that the Japanese “are as different from ourselves as any people on this planet. ...They are primitive, murderous and fanatical.” In truth, 99.9 percent of Japanese Americans would prove to be just as devoted to America as, well, any white American of Revolutionary stock.

The FBI rounded up 11,000 German “enemy aliens”—some had been engaged in major espionage since 1939—together with approximately 2,000 Italians, yet there was no call for wholesale incarceration of either ethnic group. That would have been a taller order than incarcerating the Japanese: There were 1.2 million German-born Americans and nearly 700,000 Italian immigrants in the U.S. in 1942.* Nazis on the home front worried Roosevelt. He dismissed the Italians as “just a bunch of opera singers.” And, like the Germans, they were white.

* By the same token, authorities deemed it impractical to incarcerate the 150,000 Japanese Americans living on the Hawaiian Islands. Nearly 90 percent of the 127,000 mainland Japanese were on the West Coast.



Fred, second from left, second row, with the Camera Club at Spokane's Rogers High School in 1941. Fred was vice-president of the club. *Rogers High School Treasure Chest yearbook*

A DARK SHADOW had descended over the last semester of Fred Shiosaki's senior year. He looked like the enemy.

After a motorist spotted him photographing the front of the high school, he was summoned to the principal's office. "An ominous looking" FBI agent wanted to know what he was up to. "I stammered that I was the snapshot editor for the school annual and we needed a photo of the exterior of the school. The agent warned me to cut it out—that I was not allowed to take pictures of buildings. It scared the hell out of me. I thought they were going to haul me off to jail. From then on someone else took the pictures because I just didn't need any more problems. You learn to keep your mouth shut. It was a painful experience. But when they rounded up the Japanese on the other side of the mountains and sent them to concentration camps with only what they could carry, I began to realize we were lucky. I was still angry, but if we had been sent away my father would have lost everything he'd worked for. On the west side, the property owners had the farmers by the short hairs. Just as soon as they had the chance, they took all that property. Japanese guys had worked the soil for years, made it very productive. And when the Caucasians took it back they couldn't raise the fruit and vegetables the way the Japanese had. Nobody wanted to work as hard as those Japanese immigrants."

ON FEBRUARY 19, 1942, a date Japanese Americans believe should live in infamy, Franklin D. Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066. It authorized the Secretary of War and his designated commanders to create military areas “from which any or all persons may be excluded” and to provide transportation to new “accommodations” for those thus excluded. A month earlier, the Canadian government had set in motion the removal of 23,000 Japanese Canadians from British Columbia.

Besides being incensed by Pearl Harbor, Roosevelt had long harbored doubts about whether the Japanese were assimilable. As an exercise in executive power, his order was breathtaking in its scope. With the stroke of a pen, the president gave the military the power to incarcerate civilians without a declaration of martial law—never mind habeas corpus and the constitutional prerogatives of Congress. “More importantly,” historian Greg Robinson notes in *By Order of the President*:

Executive Order 9066 was unprecedented in the extent of its racially defined infringement of the basic rights of American citizens. The evacuation was not limited to the approximately 30 percent of the Japanese-American population that consisted of immigrant “enemy aliens.” If it had been, it would still have been arbitrary, but it would clearly have fallen outside the guarantees of due process and equal protection of the laws granted to American citizens by the Constitution.

General John DeWitt, the military’s West Coast commander, was a flighty character who disseminated incendiary rumors about air raids and Japanese espionage—“farcical and fantastic stuff,” one disgusted peer told his diary. The “military necessity” rationale for incarceration was crafted by DeWitt’s ambitious young legal aide, Karl Bendetsen. A Stanford Law School graduate, Bendetsen had advanced from captain to colonel in the space of a few months. It was Bendetsen who asserted that “a substantial majority of the Nisei bear allegiance to Japan, are well controlled and disciplined by the enemy, and

at the proper time will engage in organized sabotage, particularly should a raid along the Pacific Coast be attempted by the Japanese.” It’s tempting to call this bald-faced chutzpah, except that Bendetsen was also busy inventing Danish ancestors. That he was suddenly no longer Jewish would come as a shock to the parishioners of Temple Beth Israel in Aberdeen, where he had grown up as the son of an observant haberdasher.

Michi Nishiura Weglyn, who was interned in Arizona as a teenager, wrote that “one of the gross absurdities of the evacuation was that a preponderance of those herded into wartime exile represented babes-in-arms, school-age children, youths not yet of voting age, and an exhausted army of elderly men and women hardly capable of rushing about carrying on subversion. The average age of the Nisei was 18. The Issei’s average age hovered around 60.”

“Be as reasonable as you can,” Roosevelt told aides.

When a Catholic priest in Los Angeles informed Bendetsen that the parish orphanage was home to children who were Japanese, half Japanese and “others one-fourth or less,” the colonel declared, “I am determined that if they have one drop of Japanese blood in them, they must go to a camp.”

U.S. Senator Mon Wallgren, a Democrat from Everett, was the de facto leader of a West Coast senatorial delegation united in its call for removal of Japanese Americans from the coast. Washington Governor Arthur B. Langlie, a strait-laced Republican reformer, backed internment. So did two up-and-coming congressmen, Democrats Warren Magnuson and Henry M. “Scoop” Jackson—Jackson with such vehemence that the episode would go down as one of the few blots on his illustrious political career. At the time, however, Magnuson’s statements were no less bellicose: “I can’t believe that any informed, right-thinking American wants any Japanese on this Pacific Coast for the



Colonel Karl Bendetsen,
architect of the exclusion
order. *U.S. Army*

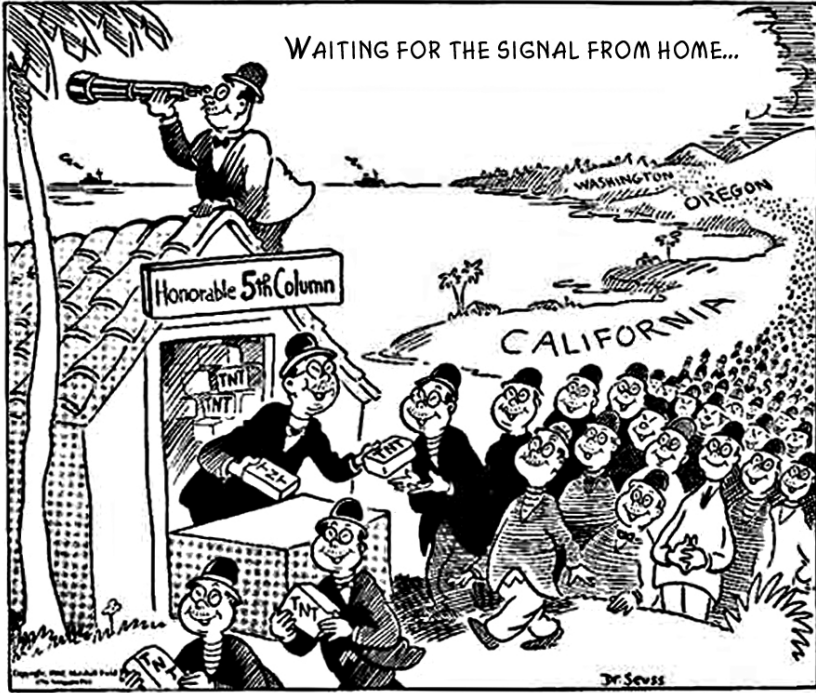
duration of the war,” Magnuson said, “and I might add that there are some of us who don’t want them here even then.” Tacoma Mayor Harry P. Cain’s opposition to incarceration was a lonely profile in courage.

SOON AFTER THE PRESIDENT SIGNED the exclusion order, Fred Shiosaki remembers that hundreds of new Japanese families began arriving in Spokane. Those living west of the Cascades had been urged to vacate the newly designated Military Areas. Spokane County Prosecutor Carl Quackenbush, a former Hillyard school teacher, assembled business and civic leaders to discuss what he saw as “plans to make Spokane a dumping ground of aliens.” By March 27, when General DeWitt canceled voluntary relocation, some researchers estimate as many as 4,500 Japanese had moved to Spokane County. Shiosaki believes it was around half that. Most Japanese on the West Side hadn’t enough money to just pick up and move, he says, and only a lucky few had friends or family to take them in. The influx worried some members of Spokane’s longstanding Japanese community. “Are we drawing attention to ourselves?” Shiosaki remembers the elders thinking. “Are they going to move us *all* out of here?”



In California, Nisei children wearing I.D. tags await a bus for a “relocation center.” *National Archives*

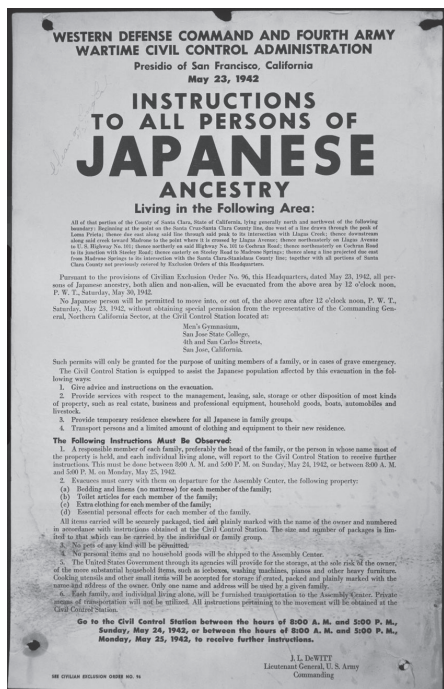
From Port Angeles to San Diego that spring, the exodus to 10 bleak concentration camps, and that’s what Roosevelt himself often called them, was under way. Boats, cars, tractors, furniture, washing machines and pianos—prized possessions—had to be left behind as 110,000 people were uprooted from the West Coast. Some 13,000 were from Washington



Theodore Geisel, who would become “Dr. Seuss,” drew this cartoon for the New York newspaper *PM* in 1942. Mandeville Collection, University of California at San Diego

State, 93,000 from California. They couldn’t even take their pets, particularly heartbreaking for Nisei children. On Bainbridge Island, home to 271 Japanese, mostly strawberry farmers, one evacuee remembers men in trucks “rolling through his neighborhood” like packs of looters, shouting, “Hey, you Japs! You’re going to get kicked out of here tomorrow. I’ll give you ten bucks for that refrigerator.” In Los Angeles, a hotel valued at \$6,000 was sold for \$300. Random acts of kindness—white neighbors who carefully stored household possessions, tended crops and placed the profits in savings accounts—would be long remembered too.

It may surprise many, particularly young Japanese Americans, that Shiosaki empathizes with Roosevelt. And some might suggest it’s easier for Shiosaki to be charitable since his family was not incarcerated. “I’m not saying Roosevelt was right,” Shiosaki emphasizes, “but there were enormous



A U.S. Army poster announces the internment of Japanese Americans. *Washington State Archives*

It was a very, very difficult time. We were a tiny minority with no political support; 120,000 Japanese Americans didn't amount to a hill of beans. Hell, they could have taken us out and shot us and nobody would have done anything about it. There was this whole crew of Caucasian farmers who were out to get the Japanese Americans' property and eliminate the competition." An official with a California agricultural group made no bones about it. The Japanese could "undersell the white man" because they put their wives and children to work in the fields, he told the *Saturday Evening Post*. "We're charged with wanting to get rid of the Japanese for selfish reasons. We might as well be honest. We do."

FRED'S 21-YEAR-OLD BROTHER, Roy, was drafted in February before the military cut off induction of Japanese American citizens. No one had heard a word from George in Japan.

political pressures on him. I blame people like Earl Warren, who was politically ambitious and got himself elected governor of California [in 1943]. Practically every politician on the West Coast wanted the Japanese Americans interned. The public was inflamed—"Remember Pearl Harbor!"—and believed all those wild stories about Japanese Americans signaling submarines." Moreover, General DeWitt, Colonel Bendetsen and other military officials misled the president about the danger. "Deluged with problems, Roosevelt did the best he could with what he was being told," Shiosaki

“After high school graduation that June, all of my Caucasian friends who were 18 started disappearing into the military,” Fred remembers. “At the end of the summer when I turned 18 I went down to the draft board and discovered I was classified as ‘4-C’—an enemy alien. That was like a kick in the balls. I told them ‘No I’m not! I was born in America. *I’m a citizen.*’ ‘Well,’ they said, ‘the State Department says you’re an enemy alien, so you’re an enemy alien. You are not eligible to enlist or be drafted.’ I didn’t have a friend left from high school, and I’m sure people wondered, ‘What’s the matter with him?’ ”

Shiosaki’s parents insisted he enroll in college. Washington State College in Pullman was out because he was barred from traveling that far from home. “So it was either Whitworth or Gonzaga and I could ride the bus to Gonzaga. Gonzaga was an all-male school that had lost its student body. But it had landed the Navy V-12 officer training program, so those guys were hup-hup-hopping down the street in uniform and here I was 4-C, the enemy alien. You want to see someone who stuck out like a sore thumb? It was at best a very difficult situation. The military was recruiting translators. I looked the part, but beyond dinner table talk I couldn’t speak, read or write Japanese. So that idea didn’t get very far.”

IN FEBRUARY OF 1943, Roosevelt and the Secretary of War—stung by Japanese propaganda about American concentration camps—announced that “loyal” Nisei would be allowed to volunteer for a segregated infantry regiment. Gung-ho former Hawaii National Guardsmen were already at Camp Shelby, Mississippi, undergoing rigorous combat training. The Hawaiians’ 100th (“One Puka Puka”) Infantry Battalion would keep that designation throughout the war as a salute to its roots and valor. In European combat, however, it would function as the first battalion of the 442nd Regimental Combat Team.

“By spring, I was flunking out of college. I don’t think I passed anything. Can you imagine being 18 years old in the middle of a war where you looked like the enemy and didn’t know what to do next? Then I heard about the new Japanese American infantry outfit.” Without consulting his parents, Shiosaki volunteered for the 442nd, with induction deferred

until the end of the school year. (Fred also surmises the FBI was doing a thorough background check.) A few weeks before he was to report to Fort Douglas, Utah, he broke the news to his folks. "They were in the kitchen. It was a terrible scene. Dad was the *paterfamilias*, and his expectation was that he would run my life until I got married. I thought he was going to hit me."

Fred Akira Shiosaki enlisted in the United States Army on August 14, 1943. He turned 19 nine days later. The next 24 months were the most tumultuous of a long, eventful life.

SHIOSAKI AND THE OTHER MAINLAND NISEI who joined the 442nd were in for a rude awakening when they arrived in Mississippi for basic training: The scrappy Hawaiians were already real soldiers. "They loved to drink beer, play cards, shoot dice and pick fights," Fred remembers. "It was clear from the get-go that they didn't like us. We actually looked different. The Hawaiians were darker from working on the plantations, and those whose parents were from Okinawa were shorter than us. We could not get along. The damn Hawaiians talk pidgin English all the time," Shiosaki says in a dead-on imitation of their plantation patois. "We couldn't understand them and they thought we talked funny. They resented the fact that we talked normal English, like white men—stuck-up *haoles*—or college boys. They'd say, 'Whatsa matter you?' They had a chip on their shoulder all the time. Some night when you'd be walking home from the PX about four guys would jump you. Hawaiians were famous for that. I had that happen to me once. Since we were outnumbered, I got to be a pretty good pidgin English talker!"

Shiosaki says too much has been made of the Hawaiians calling themselves "Buddhaheads" and the mainlanders "Kotonks"—the empty-head sound a coconut makes when it falls to the ground. "Don't let them kid you," he says. "Those were names that got thrown around, but all that got exaggerated after a movie about the 442nd came out after the war." The squabbling wasn't about name calling; it was about differences in culture, "like between people from the North and South," Shiosaki says. The tension began to ease when the Hawaiians

learned that most of the mainland Japanese GIs had left concentration camps to volunteer for the 442nd, with the added insult of filling out loyalty questionnaires as a prerequisite for military service. “Once we got overseas and saw combat, we were all brothers—not Kotonks, Buddhaheads or anything else,” Shiosaki says. “Just brothers. And we all felt like we had something to prove: We were Americans.”

As for nicknames, Shiosaki quickly became “Rosie.” “You had to know me when I was 18,” he says, laughing and touching his cheeks. “I had these beautiful rosy cheeks like my mother and sister. The Hawaiians were all brown, and here’s this Japanese American—an honorary ‘white man’ in Mississippi—with rosy cheeks.”

WHILE THE 442ND was being toughened up with war games, the 100th Infantry Battalion arrived in Salerno for the real thing shortly after the Allied invasion of mainland Italy in September of 1943. Moving out from the ancient city 45 miles below Naples, the Hawaiians plunged into combat against crack German troops. Field Marshal Albert Kesselring defended the Gustav Line, beyond which lay Rome, a strategic, symbolic



Nisei soldiers herd a group of surrendered German troops in Italy. *National Archives and Go For Broke National Education Center*

prize, with everything at his command. The hilly terrain advantaged the defenders. The bloody stalemate continued through the winter. War correspondents dubbed the Nisei soldiers the “Purple Heart Battalion.”

U.S. forces, meantime, were advancing in the Pacific, island by island, against a do-or-die enemy. On Wake, the atoll in the center of the Pacific, Japanese troops executed 96 American POWs. Meanwhile in Japan, George Mutsuo Shiosaki, Fred’s 26-year-old brother, was in a terrible fix. The authorities had clamped down on Japanese American students, and native-born university students, previously exempt from conscription, were being drafted. Soon, boys as young as 15 would be inducted. George Shiosaki was reduced to bare-subsistence rations and threatened with being sent to an internment camp, where conditions were appalling. George went to the village office and had his name entered in his uncle’s family registry, not realizing it would compromise his U.S. citizenship. Having gained Japanese citizenship past the age of 21, “I thought I would be exempt from military service [in the Japanese Army],” George would recall in a letter to his congressman a decade later. As the war entered its third year, his parents and siblings knew nothing of his situation.

Just before the remainder of the 442nd Regimental Combat Team shipped out for Europe, Fred visited his brother Roy. After months of mowing lawns and pulling KP in Kansas, the 23-year-old draftee had been sent to the University of Minnesota to study engineering through an Army Specialized Training Program. “What a deal!” Fred ribbed his brother. A year later, Roy would be an infantryman, too—the only Japanese American in a New York National Guard unit—though the brothers never crossed paths on the outskirts of the collapsing Third Reich. Two “Zags” were a long, long way from Spokane. In a window above the laundry their mother placed a banner with two blue stars.

THE MAINLAND NISEI GI’s landed at Anzio just below Rome in the spring of 1944. Shiosaki was assigned to a weapons platoon. “I was a bazooka man for a while; later a gunner on a little 60 mm mortar. When you’re in combat you pick up a weapon and sometimes that’s it.” Nearsighted like everyone

else in his family, Fred nevertheless qualified as a marksman with the M1 rifle and .45 caliber pistol, squinting through his smudged glasses. "Being shot at in real combat gives you focus, especially the first time, which scares the hell out of you. In the beginning we were so dumb that we stuck our heads up too much. The Germans had some of the best snipers in the whole world. God, they were good shots! They'd put a bullet right in your forehead. *Pow!*"

In the dog days of that bloody Italian summer, the 442nd scampered from foxhole to foxhole, advancing yard by yard, cave by cave, hill by hill, "boldly facing murderous fire... from a numerically superior enemy," in the words of a Presidential Unit Citation. From Civitavecchia, the seaport city above Rome ("'Sonofabitchia,'" Shiosaki quips), the reunited Nisei battalions fanned out. They seized strategic hillsides and decimated a battalion of Hitler's fanatical Waffen-SS. The Germans were now engaged in a desperate effort to hold the line. It became a rearguard action.

The final 40 miles to the Arno River crossing between Pisa and Florence extracted a terrible toll from the 442nd Combat Team: 1,016 wounded, 256 dead or missing. The enemy's losses, by consolation, were far heavier. One sobering fact italicizes the price paid by the Nisei soldiers: The team's combat strength, including artillery, engineers and medics, was around 3,800. By war's end, 14,000 men had served in the 442nd. "When you lose guys for the first time it's a shock. You never forget it," Shiosaki says. Nor can old infantrymen like Fred forget the drill to give comrades some semblance of dignity in death. "Usually, you'd pull his shirt over his head, pull his helmet down and stick his rifle in the ground so the graves registration people would see there was a dead GI. Then you had to keep moving. You don't have time to mourn." Replacements arrived, wide-eyed guys who'd never fired a shot in anger or seen someone die. Then they'd be dead too.

THE 442ND LANDED AT MARSEILLE in late September. The shell-shocked Mediterranean port had been liberated a month earlier in "the second D-Day" invasion of occupied France. From there, by troop truck and French cattle cars, the Nisei soldiers



Nisei soldiers board a truck as they advance north in France in 1944. *Seattle Nisei Veterans Committee*

advanced up the Rhone Valley to Alsace-Lorraine. The first objective was Bruyères, a crossroads town on the western edge of the Vosges Mountains. Just beyond Bruyères lay Saint-Dié, the gateway to three passes that led to the Rhine. Once across, the Allies would be in the Nazis' hallowed *Vaterland*.

In the Vosges—rhymes with “shows”—the 442nd Regimental Combat Team paid a heavy price for its legend. “Steep, wooded and nearly trackless, the mountains barricaded the German border so successfully that no invader had ever made it through them. There, Hitler had ordered what was left of two German armies to stand and fight,” Geoffrey C. Ward writes in *The War*, a compelling book produced to accompany Ken Burns' World War II documentary.

“We took a lot of casualties in Italy,” Shiosaki remembers, “but it was nothing like the Vosges. Sometimes it was almost hand-to-hand combat.” Daniel Inouye, a Nisei platoon sergeant from Hawaii who would become a U.S. senator 20 years later, remembered being gripped by a sudden “sense of nightmare” the first time he saw the Vosges.

THE JAPANESE AMERICAN SOLDIERS were assigned to the 36th “Texas” Division of the U.S. Seventh Army. Their new commander, Major General John E. Dahlquist, was a big Swede from Minne-

sota. “Humorless, blunt, and given to brooding,” he would win nothing but their undying enmity. The consensus of military historians is that Dahlquist was an exemplary “desk-jockey” general but in way over his head as a battlefield commander. That’s being charitable, according to Shiosaki and countless other members of the 442nd, including front-line officers. They maintain that General Dahlquist—nearly fired for foot-dragging earlier in the campaign—“violated every principal of leadership and tactics.” They say he sacrificed the Nisei soldiers to keep the brass off his back, satisfy his ego and rescue a battalion he had foolishly sent a ridge too far. “Dahlquist should have been court martialed,” Shiosaki says, eyes glistening with anger, “and if we hadn’t saved his ass he would have been!”



Major General John E. Dahlquist, who was loathed by the Nisei soldiers.
National Archives

Ignoring reconnaissance reports to the contrary, the general insisted the Germans had largely abandoned four strategic hills. When a Nisei battalion radioed it was taking heavy fire as it advanced, Dahlquist sputtered that they were “a bunch of damn liars.” Just get the lead out. “He kept insisting ‘There are no Krauts up there!’ ” Shiosaki remembers.

So off they went, charging up slippery hills under withering interlocking fire in the icy October rain. Comrades crumpled right and left, crying out for medics and their mothers as artillery shells burst through the canopy of 60-foot evergreens; machine guns chattered, mortar shells whooshed down; shrapnel and pine-tree splinters as lethal as crossbow bolts slammed into soldiers. Darting from tree to tree, some men stepped on mines or had legs crushed by booby traps in the underbrush. It was a jungle in there, especially when eerie fog smothered the slopes. As the 442nd crested one hill, medics in tow, the Germans opened fire on wounded men on stretchers. The outraged Nisei resolved they would take no more prisoners that day.

Finally, after nine days of relentless combat, the gener-

al granted the Nisei a 10-day rest break. With numb brains and aching feet, the sleep-deprived soldiers slumped into trucks and lit a smoke. “You’d been wearing the same filthy, sweat-stained clothes day after day,” Shiosaki remembers. The prospect of a hot shower and a decent meal was like heaven. Dry socks would be an incredible luxury. “The Quartermaster Corps had good heavy waterproofed boots, but they didn’t get them to us. We were wearing leather combat boots” in foxholes and slit trenches calf-deep in freezing rainwater. “Your soaked socks made your feet swell even more. My feet still ache when I go out in the cold.”

The rest break was canceled less than two days later. The general was in a jam.

DAHLQUIST HAD ONCE AGAIN ignored the advice of battle-savvy subordinates. He ordered the 1st Battalion of the Texans’ 141st Infantry Regiment to advance deeper into the Vosges. The crafty Germans—the ones the general maintained weren’t there—sprang a trap. They encircled a company of 275 soldiers on a narrow ridge, felling huge trees to block escape routes. A “gantlet of machine guns and anti-tank weapons” twice repelled rescuers from the



Nisei soldiers scramble up a hillside in the Vosges.
PBS, The War

141st. Dahlquist called in the Nisei. Without them, “The Lost Battalion” might have met its Alamo in the primeval mountains along the French-German border. The Texans, who had been in combat for 70 consecutive days, were running low on food, water, plasma, ammunition and hope.

Shiosaki remembers being roused out at 3 a.m. “Within the hour we



Members of the 442nd prepare to move out from a command post near Saint-Dié, France, in the winter of 1944. *U.S. Signal Corps/National Archives, 442nd Regimental Combat Team Website*

were on the move. It was absolutely pitch dark—so dark that we hung onto the backpack of the guy in front, moving in single file.” GI’s in other platoons stuck strips of white toilet paper onto their backpacks. Company K—Fred’s outfit—made its way “up a corduroy road that seemed interminable. When the road finally ended, the mud began. Someone would fall down up ahead and you’d hear them curse; then you’d stop a moment before moving on again, little by little. Finally when it broke light there was small arms fire. And then came the artillery!” The fog was so dense there was no hope of air support or supply drops; the roads were too narrow for tanks to traverse. “We’d move about a hundred yards, losing men with every yard. We did that for about four days. Every morning the general would come in and jab us. I’d see him up there arguing with our battalion commander, Lieutenant Colonel Pursall. He’d be yelling, ‘There’s a battalion about to die up there!’ I thought it was going to end up in fisticuffs because our colonel was saying, ‘We cannot move until you give us more artillery support!’ ”

Alfred Pursall, a blunt Midwesterner, stood 6-5 and weighed at least 250. The colonel had a pair of ivory-handled

.45's, à la General Patton, but he was no peacock. When the men of the 3rd Battalion say "our" colonel, it's a mark of respect. Pursall was a fighter. He revered his Nisei soldiers for their courage. When General Dahlquist gave him a ration of crap once too often, Pursall was having none of it. Company K, though outnumbered at least four to one, had just repulsed a German counterattack. Dahlquist nevertheless demanded to know why they hadn't rescued his Texans, still trapped some three miles to the east. "Order your men to fix bayonets and charge!" the general bellowed at Pursall when he discovered elements of the 3rd Battalion regrouping at a crossroads. "Those are my boys you're trying to kill!" the colonel shot back, grabbing the general by his lapels. "I won't let you kill my boys. If there's any orders to be given for my boys to attack, I'll give the orders personally and I'll lead them." A few minutes later, an alert Nisei battalion warned field artillery that a barrage ordered by the general would have landed right in the middle of the Lost Battalion.

Say this for the general: If his judgment was suspect, he was no coward. Awarded the Silver Star for leading an earlier



A Nisei soldier makes his way up a foreboding hillside in the Vosges as the 442nd sets out to rescue "The Lost Battalion." *National Archives and Go For Broke National Education Center*



“Go for Broke!” a painting in the collection of the Army Center of Military History, depicts the 442nd Regimental Combat Team assaulting German siege forces in the rescue of “The Lost Battalion.” *U.S. Army Photo*

attack, Dahlquist traipsed the front lines, studying maps and barking orders.

On October 29, 1944, the third day of the Nisei rescue mission, the general visited a makeshift command post, his aide de camp in tow. The young lieutenant was Wells Lewis, son of the Nobel Prize-winning novelist, Sinclair Lewis. As Lewis stood to retrieve a map, a German machine gun nest picked him off. The general caught Lewis in his arms as he slumped dead. Shio-saki remembers Dahlquist walking past Company K, face ashen, one hand covered in blood. The general revealed his inner turmoil in a letter to his wife: “It astounds me how these men are able to stand the physical and mental strain under which they are constantly living. It is almost beyond comprehension that the human being can stand so much.”*

Company K, together with two others, was now within a mile of the Texans. Some 700 Germans, armed with mortars

* Franz Steidl, author of *Lost Battalions*, is one historian who maintains that Dahlquist drove his Caucasian regiments no less hard than the Nisei.

and machine guns and buttressed by tanks, were dug in along a narrow, heavily mined ridge “with steep drop-offs on either side.” As they advanced, the Nisei continued to absorb heavy casualties. Seventy-one years later, it’s all still so vivid for Fred Shiosaki—the sights, sounds and smells of what came to be called “Suicide Hill.”

During a momentary lull in the fighting, “Our colonel stood up. Here’s this big white guy exhorting the little Buddha-heads. He’s shouting, ‘Come on you guys! Let’s go! Let’s go!’ Waving his pistol. And I thought, ‘You crazy bastard, they’re going to shoot you!’ But he didn’t flinch.

“We were all charging up the ridge when all of sudden something hit me right in the ribs—like being hit by a baseball bat. I went down. Oh Jesus it hurt! They pulled up my shirt and here was a great big piece of shrapnel sitting on my ribs. Just broke the skin and cracked a rib.” One of the medics stopped to look at the wound, which was barely bleeding. Shiosaki believes it was probably Jim Okubo from Bellingham. “He had more guts than a burglar,” Shiosaki says, and often used his body to protect a wounded soldier. “All the medics in the 442nd were amazing.”*

Shiosaki struggled to his feet and rejoined his wild-eyed platoon. “We didn’t care anymore; we were like a bunch of savages,” one of his comrades said. A painting at the Pentagon depicts their intrepidity. With “fearless courage and complete disregard for personal safety,” the 3rd Battalion kept charging up the slope, “shouting at the enemy and firing from their hips, while the enemy fired point-blank into their ranks,” U.S. Army historians wrote. “Completely unnerved by the vicious bayonet charge, the enemy fled in confusion after making a desperate stand.”

Pursall was alongside his men all the way, Shiosaki says. “And as we pushed across off that hill I thought, ‘God, colonel I’ll kiss your hand!’ I consider Colonel Pursall to be one of the real heroes of the war. He was a real soldier’s soldier.”

When the shooting suddenly stops, “it’s so quiet it’s a roar,” Shiosaki remembers. “The silence is deafening.” As he

* James K. Okubo, whose family was incarcerated back home, went on to become a dentist in Detroit, only to be killed in an auto accident in 1967. “He saved more lives than anybody else in that outfit,” Shiosaki says. “A really good guy. We got together after the war. Then he gets killed in an auto accident. I couldn’t believe it. Talk about irony!”

crested the hill, he heard someone crying. “There’s this kid—a German kid, and he’s wounded. Just a teenager. I thought, ‘You sonofabitch!’ I could easily have shot him, but I didn’t. I just kept on going, even though I’d just lost most of my platoon. I hope he had a long life. I remember that so vividly. People ask what it’s like to have to kill someone in combat. I had no self-doubts. It was either me or them. There was never any question when I drew a bead on somebody. It had to be one of us. Except that one time. That German kid looked like he was 14 years old—like my younger brother.”

After the combat team’s artillery chased away the last clump of Germans, the 442nd reached the Texans on the afternoon of October 30. “Patrol from 442nd here,” they radioed. “Tell them that we love them!”

“It was the happiest day of my life,” one of the rescued GI’s said. When he spotted a Japanese soldier cresting the ridge, wearing a helmet that looked “several sizes too big,” race no longer mattered. “Here was a brother of mine coming up to save my life.” Another remarked: “It was really ironical that we were so glad to see Japanese, but, boy, they are real Americans.” They shared a pack of real American cigarettes.

DURING A BRIEF REST BREAK, the 442nd finally got winter uniforms and better boots before setting off again in pursuit of the Germans. “I got my boots off and, jeeze, my feet were pretty,” Fred remembers. “They were purple and red, but I couldn’t stand on them. Then we were ordered out by General Dahlquist to pass in review so he could ‘thank’ us. I could hardly walk, my feet hurt so bad. But they made us show up. The general reprimanded the colonel: ‘I said I wanted *everyone* to pass in review! Where are all your men?’ There were only 17 of us from K Company out of the 186 guys we’d had at the beginning of the battle and eight from I Company. And the colonel says, ‘Sir, these are all the men I have left!’ That’s all we had. Barely a battalion left out of the whole 442nd. We looked like we’d gone through a sieve.” The chaplain said it was the first time he’d seen the colonel cry.

Eyes flashing, Shiosaki shakes his head: “Big old general! If I’d had a pistol I would have shot the son of a bitch! You

talk about angry! When you think of all the friends we'd lost. Goddamn, I'm still mad about that!"

A day after the dress review, "Dahlquist called out the ravaged 2nd and 3rd Battalions for patrolling and reconnaissance duty, in case the enemy mounted a counterattack," wrote Lyn Crost, the war correspondent who covered the 442nd. "So the tired, tattered Nisei soldiers, still mourning their dead and wounded, trudged back onto the line."

The 442nd was finally relieved of duty in the Vosges in mid-November, happy to be transferred to another command. Shiosaki spent the remainder of the European war in the Maritime Alps between southern France and Italy. "It

was the so-called 'Champagne Campaign,' but don't let them BS you," Fred says. "It was cold and rainy—not the Riviera, but better than being shot at all the time."

In the 1950s at Fort Bragg, when Dahlquist was a four-star general, he bumped into the former commander of the Hawaiians' 100th Battalion. "Let bygones be bygones. It's all water under the bridge, isn't it?" the general said, offering his hand. The colonel saluted and stared straight ahead.

WHILE THE HEROISM OF THE 442ND had been featured in articles and newsreels, Japanese American soldiers returned home to indifference at best, outright hostility at worst; no confetti or keys to the city. The Spokane VFW post refused membership to a Nisei vet. When Fred Shiosaki took a pretty teenager named Lily Nakai to the skating rink on one of their first dates he was accosted by a drunk who hated "dirty rotten Japs." If the man had had an ounce of sober civility, he might have discovered that Fred was a decorated combat veteran who fully agreed with Harry Truman's decision to unleash history's first



Lt. Col. Pursall is swathed in leis at an event in Hawaii after the war. *University of Hawaii at Manoa Library*

atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. “We did what was necessary to end the war,” Fred says. “I wouldn’t have wanted any more American boys to die going in there. In fact, I would have liked [the bomb] to have been used against Germany.”

In Hood River, Oregon, a year earlier, the American Legion post had removed the names of 16 Nisei servicemen from its “roll of honor.” All along the West Coast, as Japanese Americans straggled out of the camps, many found themselves with no place to go. They’d lost most of their worldly possessions; their farms and orchards—never really their own property—were being cultivated by the land owners or new tenants. Bucolic Hood River was far from the only place to publicly declare the Japanese would not be welcomed back. The postwar housing shortage forced many former internees into trailer parks, old barracks and “shoddy new government facilities.” Thousands of younger Nisei moved elsewhere in America.

Through second-hand sources late in the war, the Shiosakis had learned George was alive, if not well, in Japan. When Floyd, the youngest of the four Shiosaki brothers, arrived there in 1946 as a member of General MacArthur’s Army of Occupation, he heard George might be working at the same military depot. “It was quite a shock to all of a sudden see your brother for the first time in five years,” Floyd remembers. He learned that George had been drafted into the Japanese Army late in the war. By then, however, he was so malnourished that he was hospitalized for months. Now an interpreter, George was conflicted about leaving Japan and worried about his U.S. citizenship.

UNDER THE GI BILL, Fred returned to Gonzaga. He was a chemistry major, mulling pre-med while also picking up credits for a teaching certificate. Living at home and working part time at the laundry was often tedious. He was a grown man now. For the first year, he found it hard to concentrate on his studies. In the middle of a lecture, memories about the war would pop into his head. Loud noises could startle him. The university had a slew of veterans, but still only a few Asians. One day in English Lit, the professor—a Jesuit priest no less—made an offhand crack about “a bunch of Japs.” Fred remembers feeling “so

rummy” that he just kept his head down. Sometimes in the middle of the night his mother would shake him awake, saying, “You were screaming again.” Slowly things got better, though he still didn’t want to talk about the war. When his brother Roy got back from Europe, he was that way too. Most of their buddies had the same baggage. “Today we can talk about it, even kid about it. But not back then,” Fred says. “It was part of your psyche. After a while,

I learned it was an exercise in futility to get in fights. I learned to recognize the source and just walk away.”

When *Go For Broke!*, a movie about the 442nd—starring Van Johnson as a Texan who lost his bigotry in the Vosges—opened in Spokane, Fred was invited to attend in his uniform. The movie was steeped in “Hollywood BS,” Shiosaki says. But he didn’t say so then.

Fred graduated from Gonzaga in 1949. His adviser urged him to pursue a master’s degree in chemistry at the University of Washington. By then, however, he and Lily were serious. “I’m in Seattle; she’s in Spokane. It was just an impossible situation. I couldn’t study!” Ed Foubert, a mentor and friend from the biology department at Gonzaga, got him a job at Hollister-Stier Laboratories, a pharmaceutical company in Spokane. That was followed by a short stint at Kaiser Aluminum. Shiosaki finally landed a solid job as a chemist with the City of Spokane’s Health Department.



Pulitzer Prize-winning cartoonist Bill Mauldin, whose cartoons made him a hero to dogface GIs, drew this one to satirize prejudice at war’s end.
National Archives



MGM Archives

ates “Philadelphia.” Mrs. Shiosaki would say something like “Hooloodaupiya” as her sons practically rolled on the floor. Kisaburo and Tori Shiosaki passed the tests and proudly became official Americans. Fred felt then, and even more so now, that what the Nisei soldiers proved in combat played an important role in changing the law. “By god, Fred,” he said to himself, “you had a piece of this one.”

FRED AND LILY GOT MARRIED. Having inherited some of their Issei parents’ conservatism, they had waited until he had a steady job. His duties with the city were expanding to assist the police and fire departments. He was involved in clubs and other civic activities. All this made his father proud, yet there was a hole in Kisaburo Shiosaki’s heart.

In 1958, the patriarch was dying of cancer. He desper-

In 1952, when first-generation Japanese immigrants were finally allowed to apply for naturalized citizenship, Fred and Roy began coaching their parents for the tests. “My mother was just hilarious,” Fred remembered in a 2006 interview with Tom Ikeda, executive director of Densho, the rich repository of Japanese American experiences during World War II. The boys would ask their mom, “Where was the Constitution signed?” Unfortunately, nothing in the Japanese language approximates

ately wanted to see his firstborn son. George Shiosaki, now 41, had married a lovely Japanese girl. He was working as a proof-reader for an English-language newspaper in Tokyo. The pay was paltry, and the couple now had a child. His sister Blanche was active in the Japanese American Citizens League, which helped him secure an emergency visa. He came home with his wife and daughter and desperately wanted to stay to help run the laundry. "I have always felt that America is my country," George wrote to Congressman Walt Horan, an energetic Republican from Wenatchee. George explained how he had been coerced into the Japanese Army. Horan introduced a resolution to overturn Shiosaki's expatriation. George's attorneys filed a parallel action in federal district court. Two months after his father's death, the State Department reversed itself and affirmed George Shiosaki's U.S. citizenship.

FRED AND LILY BECAME PARENTS in 1959. First came Nancy, then Michael, two years later. In 1967, Fred became the founding director of the Spokane Air Pollution Control Authority. He soon emerged as a regional pacesetter in the growing environmental movement. More opportunities came his way.

During the xenophobic 1930s, Washington Water Power Company "felt it necessary to assure its customers it employed no Japanese workers." Now it wanted the son of an immigrant laundryman to become one of its top managers. WWP made several runs at Shiosaki. In 1978, he finally agreed to oversee its environmental program. "They were building a new coal-fired plant. I think they hired me because I was harassing the hell out of them!" Fred says, laughing. Shiosaki went on to serve as chairman of the Washington State Ecological Commission for seven years. Rogers High School named him to its Walk of Fame.

Governor Gary Locke appointed Shiosaki, a passionate fly-fisherman, to the Washington Fish and Wildlife Commission in 1999. "In some of those high-pressure jobs I had, I'd go home at night and spend an hour down in the basement tying flies. That would kind of smooth things down." As a commissioner, Shiosaki rubbed some lawmakers and user groups the wrong way. Never a table-pounder, he nevertheless spoke his



Michael Shiosaki with his parents at their Seattle apartment. *Wells Fargo Stories*

mind. “In all of the jobs I had over the years, I always felt that you gotta rile somebody or you’re probably not facing up to the tough decisions.” During his eight years on the commission, Shiosaki championed youth programs. “Many kids today have never been fishing in their lives, especially underprivileged kids. Our ‘Fishing Kids’ program is one of the highlights of all the stuff I’ve been involved with.” He was also instrumental in securing funding for a new Fish and Wildlife Department regional headquarters in Spokane Valley, including a \$1.9 million laboratory. The facility was renamed to honor Shiosaki.

AMERICA WAS NOW RIGHTING half a century of wrongs against Japanese Americans. In 1988, President Ronald Reagan signed legislation formally apologizing for the wartime concentration camps and allocating redress. Each surviving victim was to receive \$20,000; in all, 82,219 victims were compensated.

Twenty combat decorations awarded to Nisei soldiers during World War II were upgraded to Medals of Honor in 2000 during a White House ceremony. Senator Inouye, who lost his right arm fighting fascism and gave his heart to seeking justice for his comrades, received the Medal of Honor. So did the fearless medic, Jim Okubo—posthumously, 56 years late. “Rarely has a nation been so well served by a people it has so ill-treated,” said President Bill Clinton. “They risked their lives, above and beyond the call of duty. And in so doing, they did more than defend America; in the face of painful prejudice, they helped to define America at its best.”

In 2011, Fred Shiosaki and other Nisei World War II veter-

ans from around the nation were awarded the Congressional Gold Medal, one of America’s highest civilian honors. By then, however, the majority of the 19,000 one-time “enemy aliens” who served their country with such valor were gone. At least not forgotten.

Staff Sergeant Shiosaki, who somehow survived one of the bloodiest battles in U.S. Army history, is now 92. His cheeks are still rosy; his sense of whimsy is intact. Daughter Nancy is teaching English in Japan; son Michael is the director of planning and development for Seattle Parks and Recreation. Michael is also married to the mayor—and “bossy,” Fred deadpans. A couple of years ago, Michael moved his aging



Fred proudly wears his World War II tunic during a Gonzaga event saluting veterans. *Gonzaga University*

parents to a comfortable senior-citizen apartment complex in Seattle. Lily, the love of Fred’s life, died on the Fourth of July in 2016. Self-effacing and modest, she also possessed great resilience and was devoted to Fred and their children. He misses her. And Spokane too. It’s a good thing every Gonzaga Bulldog basketball game is on TV.

It’s hard to fathom, but Fred says some stupid geezer actually called him a “Jap” the other day. He shrugged it off. More worrisome, Fred says, is that even after all the apologies, belated medals, books and documentaries, “a lot of people—especially young people—don’t know enough about what happened to Japanese Americans during the war. People forget what democracy is all about—that the least of us are supposed to be protected. But it doesn’t always happen. It’s a lesson of history that bears repeating.”

Otherwise, it might happen again.

John C. Hughes



The 442nd hikes down a muddy road in the Vosges in late 1944. *U.S. Army*

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