

Nisei Male Dilemma: To Fight or Not to Fight

• Thousands of young Japanese American men fought overseas for their country, even though relatives and friends were behind barbed wire.

By JOHN SAITO, JR.
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One of them remembered being a Boy Scout who was barred from using a public swimming pool because of his ancestry.

Another recalled that the gates to a ritzy country club in the Santa Barbara area were strictly off limits to all minorities, unless your job was pulling weeds.

Still another plainly revealed that he was a member of the California National Guard, but was told by his supervisor not come back once Pearl Harbor was bombed.

These were at least three tales from men who were asked to stand up and defend a country that was their home—a home that bucked constitutional wisdom and put them and their families into solitary confinement during World War II.

But when it was time to produce, they delivered, as did everyone else who voluntarily enlisted and became members of the vaunted 100th Battalion, 442nd Regimental Combat Team and the Military Intelligence Service.

The records have shown that these Nisei men fought in campaigns across Europe and the Pacific. In all, 18,000 wore medals for their valor and 9,500 more earned Purple Hearts. The 442nd RCT became the



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Veterans discussing their World War II experiences were, left to right, George Nishinaka, Henry Kuwabara, Hiro Takusagawa, and Henry Yoshitake.

most decorated regiment in U.S. Army history.

Their reputation as gritty and determined soldiers spread as wide as it was quick. That much was clear during last Saturday's camp experience presentation as part of the day-long events in Little Tokyo highlighting the 50th anniversary of Day of Remembrance.

Henry Yoshitake, president of the 100th/442nd, said that the Nisei who fought in World War II "were told by ex-German soliders that they were probably the most feared group."

"Wherever we went," Hiro Takusagawa, another panelist, said, "people had heard about us. Countless people came up to me—this is in Europe—and wanted to shake my hand because I was from the famous 442nd team."

After the fighting was over in southern France, Takusagawa realized that his 442nd patch became symbolic of uncommon deeds. "They didn't know what I had done. For all you know, I was cowering under a foxhole. . . , which I did, too. But I guess we all did at times. Still, the reputation of the unit was such

that people came up and wanted to shake hands with somebody who wore the patch."

Though they became known as one of America's best fighting units, the story back home didn't always have the same conclusion. Takusagawa once got a frazzled look from a stranger who asked, "What are you?"

"I said, 'I am an American, of course.' Here I am wearing an American uniform," he told the tight gathering at the Japanese American Cultural and Community Center. "Well, no, she says, 'Are you Filipino, are you Chinese or whatever.' I said, 'I think I know what you mean. My parents came from Japan, if that's what you want to know."

"But she says, 'Aren't you ashamed of that?' And I said, 'Lady, if I was ashamed of my ancestry, I couldn't even be wearing this uniform much less anything else.'"

Yoshitake only had to go back to those days right before the evacuation to realize how difficult it was being an American of Japanese ancestry. He said his father was given less than a week to sell all family

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• Heart Mountain Fair Play Committee resisted the draft on constitutional grounds. Forty-two of them were jailed for their decision to reveal the injustice of the internment.

By SOJI KASHIWAGI
RAFU CONTRIBUTOR

Fifty years later, Frank Emi says he would do it all again.

As a 27-year-old at Heart Mountain, Emi and a group of young Nisei called the Heart Mountain Fair Play Committee resisted the draft on constitutional grounds—believing that asking American citizens to serve in the U.S. Army after placing them in internment camps was so outrageous, so unbelievable—that they refused. They said "no."

Frank Emi said "no." The Fair Play Committee said "no."

They hired a lawyer, took their case to court and lost. (Their conviction was later reversed.) Emi was denied bail and thrown in federal prison for 20 months. In all, 42 men from Heart Mountain joined Emi in jail. And yes, he would do it again.

"My feelings about the resistance in camp haven't changed a bit," said Emi, 75, to a standing room only crowd at last Saturday's Day of Remembrance "Resistance in Camp" workshop held at the Japanese American Cultural and Community Center in Little Tokyo. "I was so outraged at what the government was doing to us. And it was adding salt to the wound asking the internees to serve in the U.S. Army without first asking if our rights would be restored."

The workshop, one of several on the Japanese American wartime experience included two panelists initially: Dr. Art Hansen of California State University, Fullerton's Japanese American Oral History Project, who has researched and written about the resistance in camp for the past 20 years, and Wilber Sato, a Manzanar internee at age 13, who has also done extensive research on the resistance.

Hansen began the panel by defining the term "resistance."

"What was resistance?" he asked. "You have to have oppression be-

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Heart Mountain Resisters

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fore you have resistance. What was the oppression the Japanese American community faced?"

Hansen explained that the community not only lost its rights, it lost something larger as well. "Something much greater was the whole sense of Japanese-ness, the loss of identity, the loss of culture—all those things that make you human. The government systematically stripped the Japanese American community of its ethnic identity. Those who understood what was happening took leadership roles in the resistance. A lot of people had a latent sense that this was wrong."

Notably missing from the workshop panel to talk about those feelings was the presence of the "No-No Boys" or draft resisters—the people who had first-hand experience with the resistance.

"We tried to put together a panel of 'No-No Boys,' but none of them wanted to come out," explained Sato. "These people were made to feel that (resisting) was a wrong thing. They want to forget."

But standing against the wall in the middle of the room was Frank Emi. At first, he was there as an interested observer, but when a woman from the audience asked him a question, Emi was invited up to the front of the room and became a panelist.

Emi then explained the background of The Fair Play Committee's resistance to the draft.

"While we were at camp, the people were not against us. But the leadership of the wartime JACL was. The JACL crucified us—calling us seditionists, cowards, disloyals, wild-eyed nuts. . . there were young 18, 19 and 20-year-olds who felt strong enough about this and they fought it."

Hansen, who has interviewed numerous resisters over the years, said some people's reaction to the draft was that the whole thing was "bulls—!"

"They weren't about to be drafted. Many of them went to federal prison for two years. After the war, President Truman pardoned them, but those two years cannot be given back. But these men have a moral victory that they took a stand for what they believed in and what

they felt was right."

Emi and the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) was contacted with hopes that the organization would help them take the U.S. government to court. "But they wouldn't touch it," said Emi. "They told us we had a strong moral case, but no legal case." It wasn't until much later, he said, that they found out through Richard Drinnon's book, "Dillion Myer—Keeper of Concentration Camps" that the ACLU was working together with the JACL and the War Relocation Authority (WRA) against the resistance movement.

"The JACL was against all test cases," said Emi. "They were bending over backwards playing the accommodationist game with the U.S. government. It was almost obscene the way they were cooperating with the government."

The Fair Play Committee ended up hiring A.L. Wirin, a constitutional lawyer from the ACLU's Los Angeles branch, who took the case as private council. Their trial started in October of 1944 in the District Court of Cheyenne in Wyoming. The seven men on trial based their case on their demand for a clarification and restoration of their constitutional rights before being drafted into the U.S. Army. In other words, said Emi, "We we're saying 'How in the hell could you put us in camps and then expect us to serve in the Army?'"

The group was convicted of a "conspiracy to violate the Selective Service Law and aiding and abetting and counseling others to resist the draft." They were sentenced to four years in the Leavenworth Federal Penitentiary, where they stayed from November 1944 to March 1946, pending appeal.

In December of 1945, their case was heard at the 10th Circuit Court of Appeals, where all seven of the defendant's convictions were reversed on the conspiracy charge. After paperwork was completed, they were released in March 1946. For the seven men on trial, victory was theirs.

And in 1947, President Harry Truman pardoned the 300 draft resisters, apologizing on behalf of the country for the actions taken against them, and restored all their political

and civil rights.

Also discussed was the now infamous "Questions 27 and 28" which questioned the loyalty of the internees and asked if they would be willing to serve in the United States Military, "wherever ordered."

Sato said the questions caused a major uproar in the camps, splitting the community between "loyals" and "disloyals," breaking up friendships, and forcing the internees to make a choice that should have never been asked in the first place.

"I didn't think of myself as a Japanese American," said Emi. "I thought of myself as an American. It was a scary thing to be 17-years-old, Nisei and in a concentration camp at the time—to have to make a hard choice like that."

The WRA set up two categories, said Hansen. "There were the 'Good Japs' and the 'Bad Japs' and among the Bad Japs there was a subcategory—the trouble makers."

Hansen said the WRA took the "trouble makers and shipped them to special prison camps. "But once they realized how illegal this was, how Gestapo-like this was, they shut down the prison camps and shipped them to Tule Lake."

Once there, he said, the trouble makers were put in a prison within a prison—a place called the stock-

ade. And within the stockade, if you acted worse than a "trouble maker," you were put in the "bullpen." "And if you were really bad, you were shipped to Japan," said Hansen.

"It was a terrible thing to do to people," said Sato, referring to the segregation of "loyals" and "disloyals."

"Is 'disloyalty' against the law? Don't you have the right to free speech? Don't you have the right to speak your piece? To think, to speak, to discuss—is that illegal?" asked Sato.

On the 50th anniversary of Executive Order 9066, Frank Emi says he feels vindicated for standing up for his rights as an American. As an active member of the National Coalition for Redress and Reparations, he was vindicated again in 1988 when President Reagan signed the redress bill, where the U.S. apologized and admitted that the camps were unconstitutional, and it was now time to make up for it in cash.

"We fought the fight and we won. And we feel good about it," he said. "We don't have any feelings of guilt or shame—I've never felt that way. Why should we be ashamed? The government was at fault. For me, we won our victory in camp and we won our victory in redress."

Nisei Veterans

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belongings.

"We had people come knocking on the door, browsing through the house, wanting to buy this, wanting to buy that, for just about nothing," said Yoshitake, whose family had to unload a brand new car for \$50.

But despite all the ambivalence and bitterness, there was only one course of action: to fight in the U.S. Army.

Said Henry Kuwabara, a panelist and former MIS soldier: ". . . I was thinking, here all these Americans are on the outside, the Caucasians are going to war, they're getting killed. And here we sit in a camp unable to do anything, and one of these days this damn war's

going to be over. And when that time comes, we better have some kind of record to fall back on. We're not going to have a record sitting in this camp."

Takusagawa echoed a similar reflection. "I feel that I made the right decision. I know that my lifestyle. . . was greatly enhanced by the fact that we did what we did and were given the opportunity."

"This is an opportunity to prove that we're loyal," Yoshitake said. "Looking back 50 years, that wisdom really prevailed, that we're born here, we're American citizens and this is an opportunity to fight and prove our loyalty."

"We could have very easily said to hell with the United States. That would have been the normal thing," Yoshitake added. "But these were not normal times."