



Many Nisei volunteered for the U.S. Army from the 10 War Relocation Camps after long soul searching hours before making that final decision to VOLUNTARILY ENLIST. This enlistment action has also raised many controversial questions and had polarized the internees into various factions. Former Lt. Col. Ray Takai explains it best and he writes . . .

I would initially like to explain how and why we were evacuated to Poston II. Before World War II, our family lived at 65th and Folsom Blvd., which at that time was the easternmost limit of the city of Sacramento. My step-mother, Mutsu, was a Japanese language school teacher on a daily basis in Brighton and on Saturdays at Perkins. My parents held Sunday School classes in Brighton every Sunday. We lived right across the street on the county side. My father owned a furniture store in downtown Sacramento. He had already been incarcerated in a Justice Department Detention Center in Bismark, North Dakota. We had a choice of evacuating with the Sacramentans to Tule Lake or to Poston II with people from Brighton, Perkins, Mayhew, etc. It was my step-mother's wish to be with her students so we were evacuated to Pinedale in early May, 1942, and to Poston II in July, 1942.

Since I enlisted in the U.S. Army in November, 1942, my incarceration was about six months and I have only a few hazy memories of camp life. For example, I recall working as a reporter for the Poston Chronicle. When the need came for some one to supervise the laying of linoleum in the messhalls, somebody remembered that I used to help my father lay linoleum and carpets. They made me the foreman. I vaguely recall receiving some criticism that I favored Block 229 where I lived because it was one of the first blocks to receive linoleum. No one was aware that Mr. Putterbaugh, the construction supervisor, had instructed me to start with the lowest numbered block first and then go the highest numbered block and to continue the process alternately. I guess Block 229 was the second block to receive the linoleum because it was the highest numbered block in Poston II.

Five or six years ago, my wife, Mary, and I were at a party where a Nisei lady considerably younger than we expounded on the stupidity of Nisei, who while being incarcerated in a concentration camp here in the United States, had volunteered for the Armed Forces of the United States, especially to fight against Japan. Mary quietly advised her that Roy, her husband, was one of those stupid Nisei.

The question has been asked many times, "Why did you volunteer for the U.S. Armed Forces when the U.S. Government incarcerated you without due process?"

Before World War II, while growing up in Sacramento, my father virtually forced me to take up the martial art of KENDO (Japanese Fencing). The instructor of this martial art, which embodies the very essence of BUSHIDO (the Way of the Samurai), was a first generation Japanese resident (ISSEI) who could not become an American citizen because of the discriminatory immigration laws against Asians in effect at that time. During those KENDO sessions, this instructor always set aside a block of time to

discuss the various facets of BUSHIDO (The Way of the Samurai) as it impacted upon our daily lives. He told us that it was inevitable that one day the United States and Japan would be at war and added that we Nisei would be faced with the traumatic experience of having to bear arms against the country of our parents. He continually admonished us that we Nisei should always remember that we were citizens of the United States and that no matter what adversities occurred, we must be prepared to fight for our country, even against Japan. It was, therefore, a relatively easy decision for me to make when the U.S. Army sought volunteers who could speak, read and write Japanese for the Military Intelligence Service in the war against Japan, even though I was incarcerated at Poston II at that time.

How ironic! Here we have a first generation Japanese who could not become an American citizen but who through BUSHIDO (The Way of the Samurai) taught us Nisei to faithfully fulfill our duties and obligations as American citizens. On the other hand, we have a Nisei, a citizen of this country, who years later, could only decry the stupidity of Nisei who chose to bear arms for the United States which at that time had seemingly turned against them. Ironic further still is the fact that this Issei instructor belonged to the NIPPON BUTTOKU KAI, an organization listed as subversive on the U.S. Attorney General's List!!

There is one incident which occurred at Poston II subsequent to my enlistment which saddened me very much and hurt my step-mother very badly. I received a letter from Reverend Clifford Nakadegawa, a friend of the family, who lived in Poston III, but who visited us often. He related that one morning my step-mother found a bone on her doorstep. A bone in Japanese signifies INU (dog) spy or traitor. He assured me that steps had been taken to protect my step-mother from physical harm through the internee police staff, i.e., Paul and George Kuwabara. George Yamada, etc. I wrote to Clifford and asked him to tell my step-mother "to forgive them, for they know not what they do." I further asked Clifford to console her. While I had attributed this act to some misguided person and understood the tenor of the times under which the act was performed, I have no perception of how much it hurt my step-mother for she never spoke of the incident to her dying day.

The decision to voluntarily enlist into the U.S. Army knowing that I would be assigned to the area where our country was at war with Japan was entirely my own. No one forced me into making that decision. On the other hand, I have the utmost respect for those Nisei who were subjected to the draft while being incarcerated and refused to comply and spent time at the army prison at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. It equally shows that these men were strong in their convic-





tion that the government had no right to force them to the draft when that same government incarcerated them without due process of law and treated them as enemy aliens. In my case, I had freedom of choice, in their cases, they had no choice, it was either be drafted or pay the consequence if they refused.

Some 45 years have elapsed, memories have become dimmed and reunions provide the impetus to rekindle some of the old memories. I shall regret missing you all at this reunion.

Since you are honoring veterans, and this may in all likelihood be one of the last Poston II reunions, I truly wanted to attend it. You see, I am among the first three Nisei from Poston II to have volunteered for the Military Intelligence Service Language School, Camp Savage, Minnesota in November, 1942. The others were: (a) Nick Juichi Nishi formerly of Monterey, who passed away about 7 years ago from a heart attack and (b) Tom Tsuyuki.

As you can see by the date of our enlistment, this was months before the formation of the 442nd Regimental Combat Team, the Nisei unit which fought so well in Europe.

Among the three of us, I believe that I am the only one that made the army a career, serving for some 23½ years, and retiring as a Lieutenant Colonel. During World War II, I served primarily with the British Indian Forces in Burma and India as a military intelligence specialist for about 2½ years. I have had many assignments in the United States including Washington D.C., Indianapolis, Monterey, (CA), Baltimore, Maryland, fort Monroe, Virginia. I also had three tours of duty in Japan totalling some 13½ years in Tokyo, Yokohama, Nagoya, Maizuru, (Kyoto Prefecture), Osaka, etc. After retiring from the army on April 1, 1966, I took a civilian federal government position in September, 1966, and served for about 15 additional years. The majority of the time I was an Assistant Appeals officer conducting hearings and adjudicating cases where federal employees were terminated for cause, reduced in grade, suspended for over thirty days, became involved in reduction-in-force, desired to go on disability retirement, etc. We also conducted hearings and adjudicated cases where federal employees alleged discrimination on the basis of race, national origin, color, sex, age, religion or physical disability. I completely retired in September, 1986. As far as gainful employment is concerned, however, I am still involved in volunteer work for the National Japanese American Historical Society, formerly known as "Go For Broke".

Nick Juichi Nishi



Nick translating  
at Brisbane, Australia



Roy Takai on board the Wanda Lee  
in Maizuru Harbor, 1946