



HIROSHI "HERSHEY" MIYAMURA

Hiroshi "Hershey" Miyamura began his life as the son of an immigrant coal mine worker in Gallup, New Mexico. He grew up in a family so typical for the Nisei before World War II. In 1944 Hershey entered the U.S. Army and served a short term with the Nisei 442nd Regimental Combat Team just in time to return to Washington, D.C. for the ticker tape parade down Pennsylvania Avenue.

At the outbreak of the Korea War, Hershey soon found himself in Korea with the 3rd Division all the way north to the Yalu River. The Chinese then entered the war and Hershey soon found himself pushed back to Pusan. On April 24, 1951, reversing the role and pushing the Chinese north beyond the South Korean Capital of Seoul, Hershey found himself in the thick of battle with the Chinese forces that had crossed the river below his perimeter. Outnumbered, SGT Miyamura who was the squad leader of the machine gun crew, order his men to retreat to the rear while he alone kept the enemy busy with his arsenal of machine gun, rifle, and a couple of cases of hand grenades. He, himself had to abandon his position when they began dropping phosphorous bombs on him.

By now, the Chinese soldiers had his position surrounded and Hershey found himself face-to-face with the enemy. The two Asian soldiers squared off, recognized each other as the enemy by their uniforms. Miyamura had prepared himself by fixing his bayonet onto his rifle and he attached the other soldier who had a concussion grenade. When Hershey withdrew his bayonet from the other man's body, he fell flat on his back and at the same time, the enemy grenade hit his leg. Hershey immediately kicked it away but when it exploded, a piece of shrapnel became embedded in his body. Now wounded, Hershey struggled to get away from the enemy, but he could not. He decided to play possum and laid there hoping the enemy would leave him for dead. About an hour later at daybreak, someone spoke to him in English, "Get up! You are my prisoner. We have a lenient policy for our prisoners." SGT Miyamura was now a prisoner of war.

For nearly 28 months, Hershey suffered in the prisoner of war camp coping with dysentery and malnutrition. Malnutrition caused his hair to fall out in huge clumps and night blindness was another symptom caused by lack of a proper diet. Hershey was among the last groups to be released from the camp. On August 21, 1953, his group was placed on a truck which took them to the train station for the long awaited trip to Freedom Village located in Panmunjom, Korea.

At Freedom Village, after lengthy debriefing sessions and being checked physically, Hershey was informed of his being awarded the nation's highest award for bravery, the Medal of Honor. The Pentagon had known about his brave deeds in saving his squad while single-handedly fighting off the enemy until he was forced to retreat, and knew that his retreat came only after killing more than 50 Chinese soldiers. However, they did not disclose his actions for fear of retaliation while Hershey was being held as a prisoner of war.



Upon his return to the United States, Hershey was formally present the Medal of Honor by then President Dwight David Eisenhower in October of 1953. The ceremony took place at the White House with Hershey's family, including his father, witnessing the impressive ceremony.

The Congressional Medal of Honor winner, retired in 1984 and devotes himself to visiting his four grandchildren, and fishing (he is an avid fresh water fisherman). As an avid member of the Gallup Lions Club, he visits schools and talks to students, asking them to remember the sacrifices of the men who served when duty called, especially those who never came back.

As a member of the elite Medal of Honor Society, his has been invited to Presidential inaugurations many times, and attends reunions and conventions of veterans whenever he can. We salute Hiroshi "Hershey" Miyamura for his courage, dedication and extreme valor during the War in Korea.

Hiroshi Miyamura is presented with the Medal of Honor by President Eisenhower. (Courtesy:Department of Defense)

The story of Hiroshi "Hershey" Miyamura and his extraordinary valor in combat during the Korean War are explored in the fourth episode of "Medal of Honor," an eight-part series that tells the stories of eight recipients of the nation's highest military honor. The series became available on the Netflix streaming service in early November 2018.

The docu-series "Medal of Honor," focuses on the lives of eight recipients of the nation's highest military honor for valor. The honor has been presented to fewer than 3,600 Americans since Abraham Lincoln signed it into law in 1861. Comprising interviews with family members, historians, and servicemen, along with intense recreations of events and archival footage, "Medal of Honor" showcases historical events in Italy, Germany, and France during World War II, along the 38th parallel during the Korean War, in Laos during the deadliest year of the Vietnam War, and in the mountains of Afghanistan.



VINCENT HICHIRO OKAMOTO

Vincent Hichiro Okamoto was born November 22, 1943, in Poston, Arizona, War Relocation Center, where his family was interned during World War II. He was the youngest of the ten children of Henry and Yone Okamoto.

Following the family's release in 1945 at the end of WWII, they moved to South Chicago, where his parents ran a small grocery store. The family later moved to Gardena, California, when he was twelve years old. He attended Gardena High School, where he served as senior class president. He was a three-year letterman in track and football and belonged to the Men's Honor Society.

Okamoto attended El Camino College from 1962 to 1965. From 1965 to 1967 he attended the University of Southern California receiving a Bachelor of Arts degree in International Relations in 1967. He enrolled in Reserve Officers Training Corps (ROTC) and was the first non-UCLA student to be commissioned through the UCLA ROTC program. He earned his commission as a U.S. Army 2nd Lieutenant.

Serving in the military was an Okamoto family tradition: All six of Okamoto's older brothers served in the military. Two fought in Europe during World War II with the 442nd Regimental Combat Team, and another brother served with the First Marine Division during the Korean War. This family trend of serving in the armed forces would later influence Okamoto's decision to volunteer to go to Vietnam in the late 1960s.

His first assignment was the intelligence-liaison officer for two months for the Phoenix Program while attached to Company B of the 2nd Battalion, 27th Infantry 25th Infantry Division – based at Cu Chi Chi, some 14 miles northwest of Saigon, an area honeycombed with miles of Vietcong tunnels. Following his two months with the Phoenix Program, he was assigned as a platoon leader in B Company.

Over that summer, Okamoto was wounded twice and made 22 helicopter combat assaults, four of them as commander of Bravo Company. The success or failure of a given mission was measured by enemy body count. "Field commanders were told very succinctly," Okamoto recalled. "We needed to rack up as much body count as we could. How many enemies did you kill today? A kill ratio determined whether or not you called a firefight a victory or a loss. If you kill twenty North Vietnamese or Vietcong and lost only two people, they declared it a great victory."

For his efforts during the Vietnam War, Vincent Okamoto received the Distinguished Service Cross, the U.S. Army' second highest honor. He also received a Silver Star Medal and two Bronze Star Medals for valor and several Purple Heart Medals. By the end of the war, he was the most highly decorated Japanese-American to survive the Vietnam War.

For Okamoto, the real heroes were the men who died – nineteen, 20-year-old high school dropouts. Most were draftees. They didn't have escape routes that the elite and the wealthy and the privilege had. They looked upon military service like the weather: you had to go in, and you'd do it. But to see these kids, who had the least to gain – there wasn't anything to look forward to. They weren't going to be rewarded for their service in Vietnam. And yet, their incident patients, their loyalty to each other, their courage under fire was just phenomenal. And you would ask yourself, "How does America produce young men like this?"

Following his discharge from active service in 1970, Okamoto began giving thought of going to law school. "I really did say to myself – and it sounds kind of corny – that if I am fortunate enough to live through this experience, then when I get back to the world – to America – I'd like to go through something that has rules, where people don't throw grenades at each other and shoot at each other," Okamoto said. "So I gave law school a shot."



There was also the issue of the disparity he felt between himself and his classmates, who were usually several years younger and had never served in the military. "It was hard for me to come back from Vietnam and then listen to some young, twenty-four-year-old prodigy out of Harvard or Yale who's talking about life experiences," Okamoto said, recalling that disconnect with his law school peers when it came to lived experiences. Though there were relatively few trial lawyers who were role models for Japanese Americans in the early 1970s, the few who were around helped the up-and-coming wave of young Japanese American attorneys.

"There were a few, and fortunately, those few worked hard, were well-thought of, so new guys like me were the beneficiaries of their positive appearances," Okamoto said. "I look back on being a deputy district attorney as some of the better times of my life."

In the mid-1970s, as a young deputy district attorney, Okamoto took part in the founding of the Japanese American Bar Association (JABA). Speaking to the reasons for his role in the formation of JABA, Okamoto emphasized the need for role models for the younger people in the community.

"At the time, I thought, in the event that more Japanese Americans become attorneys, we're going to need some kind of organization – some mentoring if you will. And that's what JABA started out to be," Okamoto said. "I think at the first or second installation dinner, we had a total turnout of forty people. And that's with families and spouses, and all that. You go to the JABA installations now, and multitudes and legions of people come out – some very, very prominent in politics, some in the legal community."

JABA installation dinners now boast attendance in the hundreds and prominent guests from the legal community. Speaking to the growing ranks of JABA and its accomplishments since its inception, Okamoto lauded the direction of the organization.

In 2002, California's Governor Gray Davis appointed Okamoto to the Los Angeles County Superior Court bench. Okamoto had submitted an application for a judgeship at the encouragement of his mentors, role models, and friends in the Japanese American legal community.

Davis personally swore Okamoto in as a judge on August 26, 2002, at the Nisei Veterans of Foreign Wars facility in Gardena. Since then, Okamoto has enjoyed his role on the Superior Court bench. "I'm a fan of trial courts, and what I'm doing now as a judge is probably the best job I ever had in the world," Okamoto said.



Okamoto's military service continues to inform his community involvement. He has served in the past as president of the Japanese American Vietnam War Veterans Memorial Committee. In the late 1980s, he led the committee to establish plans for the Japanese American Vietnam Veterans Memorial at what is now the Japanese American National War Memorial Court, located at the Japanese American Cultural and Community Center (JACCC) in Los Angeles' Little Tokyo. The black granite memorial lists the names of 117 Japanese Americans who were killed in action or are missing in action in Vietnam.

Speaking to the valor of the Japanese Americans who decided to fight for the United States during World War II, Okamoto highlighted the fierce patriotism that led them to fight for a country that had placed nearly 120,000 Japanese Americans into inland concentration camps. "Having been denied due process, having been imprisoned behind barbed wire stockades, they still felt a love of country and felt it was their duty to go serve and fight for the very country that had confined them," Okamoto said. "That's part of the Japanese American experience in this country. It's something that's unparalleled."

"I consider the Japanese American Vietnam Veterans Memorial one of my more noteworthy accomplishments," Okamoto said. "And once we did that, then the Korean War vets said, hey, we should do the same thing. So two and half years later they put up their monument. Then the World War II guys said, hey, here are these little punks from Vietnam, and our younger brothers from Korea, we should have one for our people."

With the addition of a memorial for the Japanese Americans who fought in the Korean War and in World War II, the National Japanese American Veterans Memorial Court features the name of all the Japanese Americans who were killed in the conflicts of the United States.

"To me, the significance of that is the Japanese American community, their loved ones, and friends can go there to commune with those that died in the war. But it tells America, and the public at large – hey, all Japanese Americans didn't go to pharmacy school or become dentists, or doctors, or engineers," Okamoto said. "The Japanese Americans paid with their life's blood to be able to live in mainstream American society, and if you don't believe me, go on down to the JACCC and look at the names of over twelve hundred Japanese Americans who were killed in America's wars."

Source : Diane Short



PAUL T. NAKAMURA

Operation Iraqi Freedom

Sergeant 437th Medical Company (Ambulance)
3rd Medical Command U.S. Army

August 17, 1981 – June 19, 2003

Santa Fe Springs, California

Paul Nakamura lost his life as he attempted to save another's. Nakamura grew up in the city of Santa Fe Springs, CA and was described as a boy who was outgoing, gregarious and a risk taker. His passion was being in the water and was a member of his high school's water polo and swim teams. He would also work for the city as a lifeguard and swimming instructor at the town's aquatic center.

Nakamura's patriotism led to his joining the Army Reserve in 2000 and after basic combat training he completed the Army medic course. "He was the smallest soldier in our platoon but there was nothing small about him." recalled a fellow soldier.

In support of Operation Iraqi Freedom, Nakamura was killed when his ambulance was hit by a rocket propelled grenade on a highway in Ai Iskandariyah, Iraq. Nakamura was awarded the Combat Medic Badge and the Bronze Star Medal.

In 2014, the headquarters building of the 79th Sustainment Support Command, located at Joint Forces Training Base Los Alamitos, was named the Sgt. Paul T. Nakamura Building

SADAO MUNEMORI

WWII

Private First Class

Company A, 100th Battalion

442nd Regimental Combat Team

Aug. 17, 1922 – Apr. 5, 1945

Los Angeles, California



Growing up with discrimination in the 1930's Los Angeles was painful. "NO JAPS ALLOWED" said a sign that turned young Sadao away from a public swimming pool. He was the son of Kametaro and Nawa Munemori from Hiroshima. Sadao attended Fletcher Drive Elementary School and graduated Abraham Lincoln High School in 1940.

Munemori worked as a mechanic before being inducted into the Army on February 11, 1942. Shortly after he left for the Army, his family was removed from their home and incarcerated at the Manzanar Relocation Camp in California.

After completing his infantry training, Private Munemori became a replacement soldier for the 100th Battalion and was shipped overseas to join the unit. In March of 1945, the 442nd RCT, including the 100th, was sent to break the Italian Gothic Line, a German Army defensive stronghold.



During the American assault, a fierce German attack forced Munemori and two squad members into a crater. He climbed out to attack and silence two enemy machine guns before returning to the crater. An enemy grenade bounced off his helmet and landed in the hole. With no time to grab and throw the grenade out, Munemori smothered the blast with his body. He sacrificed his life to save the lives of his fellow soldiers.

For his actions, Sadao Munemori was awarded the Medal of Honor. Two statues have been erected in his honor, one in Evergreen Cemetery, Los Angeles and the other in Piestrasanto, Italy.



FRANK HACHIYA

WWII

Technician Third Grade
Military Intelligence Service
32nd Infantry Regiment
7th Infantry Division

May 13, 1920 – Jan. 3, 1945

Odell, Oregon

Frank Hachiya was born and raised in Odell, Oregon. Because of an inherited farm in Japan the family returned to the homeland of his parents. In 1940, after four years in Japan, Frank and his father returned to Oregon while his mother and younger brother remained in Japan. Hachiya finished high school and was attending a local college when he was drafted for military service in 1941. After the attack at Pearl Harbor his father was sent to the Minidoka Relocation Camp in Idaho.

Hachiya served as a Japanese interpreter for the Military Intelligence Service (MIS) and after training was sent to the Kwajalein Islands and then to the Battle of Leyte in the Philippines. When forward units of Hachiya's regiment detained an enemy Japanese soldier, Hachiya volunteered to cross a valley to question him. When returning to his headquarters, Hachiya was shot under confusing circumstances, either by a Japanese sniper or by friendly fire. Bleeding profusely and in severe pain he made it back to his unit. While being treated for his wound he gave his report from the important interrogation.

Hachiya died a few days later on January 3, 1945 and was posthumously awarded the Silver Star. Hachiya Hall at the Defense Language Institute, Foreign Language Center, Presidio of Monterey, was named after Frank Hachiya.

ICHIRO MIYASAKI

Korean War

Private Company K, 180th Infantry Regt. 45th Infantry
Division U.S. Army
Apr. 23, 1931 – June 12, 1952

Sugar City, Idaho



Ichiro “Roy” Miyasaki was born to Kitaro and Mitsu Miyasaki and spent his childhood working on a farm with his family in Idaho. He attended the Burton and Sugar Salem Schools and Ricks College. His athleticism, integrity, dependability and modesty earned him the honor of serving as high school senior class president. Miyasaki entered U.S. Army service in August, 1951 and received infantry training at Camp Roberts, California. In April, 1952, he departed for overseas duty.

While on a mission to take an area between two hills in Tummyong-Dong, Korea, Private Miyasaki and his platoon fought through heavy mortar, artillery and automatic weapons fire. Though wounded during this action he refused evacuation or medical treatment and continued the fight with his unit until they repelled the attacking enemy.

The Americans then countered the attack until a bunker holding six enemy soldiers halted their forward advance. Miyasaki rushed the bunker with an automatic rifle and neutralized it. This position was then assaulted repeatedly by the enemy while Miyasaki gallantly defended it. He was killed during one of the attacks. For his actions that day, Ichiro “Roy” Miyasaki received the second highest medal for heroism, the Distinguished Service Cross.

JIMMY NAKAYAMA

Vietnam War

Private First Class
C Company, 8th Engineer Battalion 1st Cavalry
Division, U.S. Army

Nov. 19, 1943 – Nov. 17, 1965

Rigby, Idaho



Jimmy Nakayama grew up in the towns of Rexburg and Rigby, Idaho and was the son of a 442nd RCT veteran. As a child he made friends easily and overcame the hardships of living in towns with very few minorities. Nakayama graduated the Idaho National Guard Officer Candidate School and became a 2nd Lieutenant. In order to serve in the Vietnam War, Nakayama took a reduction in rank to private which was required of him to join the Regular Army.

Nakayama was mortally wounded in the Ia Drang Valley while serving with the 8th Engineer Battalion, 1st Cavalry Division when an F100 Super Saber dropped napalm on his position. Nakayama died from his wounds on Nov. 17, 1965. His daughter Nikki was born only days earlier on Nov. 7th.



STANLEY HAYAMI

WWII

Private Company C, 2nd Battalion
442nd Regimental Combat Team

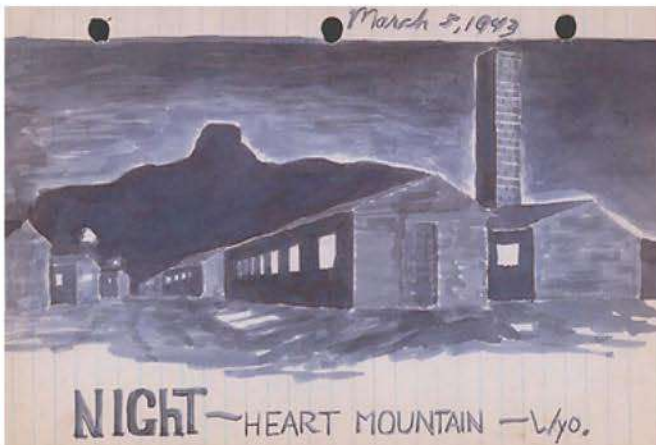
Dec. 23, 1925 – Apr. 23, 1945

San Gabriel, California

The wartime diaries of Stanley Hayami inspired the book, “Stanley Hayami, Nisei Son” and the documentary “A Flicker in Time”. His journals and illustrations are an extraordinary insight of a Japanese American teenager facing the struggles of life incarcerated at Heart Mountain, Wyoming. They also provide an in-depth personal view of war, racism, and patriotism as well as Stanley’s hopes for the future.

He was born in Los Angeles and raised in San Gabriel where his family-owned and operated the Hayami Nursery. He was a student at Mark Keppel High when he and his family were removed from their home with the enforcement of Executive Order 9066.

Stanley Hayami’s joy was writing and drawing and this led him to become the art editor of the Heart Mountain High School yearbook. He graduated in June 1944 and in August he left Heart Mountain for Army training and then to Europe where he became a replacement soldier for the 442nd RCT.



In the battle for San Terenzo, Italy, Hayami was killed when he left a protected position to render medical aid to injured soldiers. For his bravery under fire, the 19 year old Private Hayami was posthumously awarded the Bronze Star Medal.

Stanley Hayami’s diaries, illustrations, and letters are a permanent collection at the Japanese American National Museum.



KAZUO MASUDA

WWII

Staff Sergeant Company F, 2nd Battalion 442nd
Regimental Combat Team U.S. Army

Nov. 30, 1918 – Aug. 27, 1944

Fountain Valley, California

Kazuo "Kaz" Masuda was born into a large farming family in Fountain Valley, California. He and his family labored all week on the farm and attended Wintersburg Presbyterian Church on Sundays. Masuda graduated Huntington Beach High School in 1936 and was drafted into military service in 1940. While Masuda began his service with the 442nd Regimental Combat Team, his family was forced to leave their farm and sent to the Jerome Relocation Center in Arkansas.

On July 6, 1944, in Pastina, Italy, while manning an observation post forward of the main unit, Staff Sgt. Masuda and his men came under an intense enemy attack. Needing heavier fire power, he crawled 200 yards for more ammunition and a mortar tube. He and his men proceeded to repulse the enemy attack for twelve hours.

A mission on August 27 had Sgt. Masuda and two of his men perform a night patrol across the Arno river. The men came under fire and Masuda was killed while holding his position to cover his men's withdrawal. For his acts of courage, Sgt. Masuda would be posthumously awarded our country's second highest award for valor.

Back in the United States, like many other Japanese Americans returning to their homes from camps, the Masudas received threats of violence. To help reduce the negative attitudes of the public against Japanese Americans, the government sent famed General Joseph Stillwell to present, in a public ceremony, Kazuo's Distinguished Service Cross to his family. While speaking at a rally in Orange County later that day, a young Army captain, actor Ronald Reagan, stated the following.

"The blood that has soaked the sands of a beach is all of one color. America stands unique in the world; the only country not founded on race, but on a way and an ideal. ...Mr. and Mrs. Masuda, just as one member of the family of Americans, speaking to another member I want to say for what your son Kazuo did—Thanks."

Forty four years later, President Ronald Reagan signed the Civil Liberties Act of 1988 (Japanese American Redress). The redress included a national apology for the unjust actions of this country based on racial prejudice towards Japanese Americans during WWII. At the signing ceremony, the President recalled the racism that the Masuda Family had to endure, the heroism of Kazuo, and the part he played in their story.





KENYU SHIMABUKURO

Vietnam War

Gunnery Sergeant
MACV ADV Team 2, USMC ADV Unit
U.S. Marine Corps

Dec. 30, 1934 – Aug. 22, 1968

Hilo, Hawaii

Kenyu Shimabukuro was very sickly as a child. "He wanted to prove to himself that he was strong and able to physically handle being in the military," a relative stated. Shimabukuro graduated from Hilo High School in 1951, attended vocational technical school and enlisted in the Army National Guard. In 1954 he joined the Marines to make a career in the military. He was described as a quiet person who kept to himself. He enjoyed tinkering with cars and going fishing.

During his service in Vietnam he became a member of an advisory team to the Vietnamese military. On Aug. 12, 1968, Shimabukuro was fatally wounded in the Quang Ngai Province when his armored vehicle came under artillery fire.



Matsuei

AJITOMI BROTHERS

WWII
Company C
100th Bn/442nd RCT
U.S. Army
Lahaina, Hawaii

Matsuei Ajitomi
March 4, 1915 - Oct. 23, 1943

Tokio Ajitomi
Jan. 9, 1917 - Oct. 17 1944



Tokio

On the black granite walls of the Japanese American National War Memorial Court are listed the names of those who made the highest sacrifice for this country. On these walls one can see multiples of identical last names, but few of these sets contain the names of brothers, such as the case for Matsuei and Tokio Ajitomi.

Matsuei, Tokio and their youngest brother Yoshio were born in the town of Lahaina, Maui. As youngsters they accompanied their parents to Okinawa, Japan and there their sister Haruko was born. As teenagers they returned to Lahaina and as young men were inducted into the Hawaii Army National Guard. When WWII began, Japanese Americans in the Hawaii Army National Guard were transferred to the 100th Infantry Battalion of the U.S Army.

The 100th Battalion was the first all Japanese American U.S. Army unit. Its exemplary performance fighting in southern Italy would open the door for the formation of a much larger unit, a regiment, also to be comprised fully of Japanese American enlisted men. This regiment would become the 442nd Regimental Combat Team.

In September 1943, the 100th Battalion, with the Ajitomi brothers' Company C, became part of an American force that began pushing the German Army out of the southern part of Italy. A veteran of Company C stated that the two Ajitomi brothers were quiet men and always together. They also were described as good soldiers, disciplined and dependable. It was in a battle, in a town called Alife, Italy, that Matsuei lost his life after receiving a severe wound to the head. Tokio was said to have been filled with overwhelming grief for the loss of his older brother.

After the successful Italian campaign, the 100th Battalion, now a unit within the 442nd RCT, was moved north to France in October 1944. The regiment became situated outside the town of Bruyeres, located in the northeastern part of France. To take control of the area from the enemy, the 442nd was required to seize four hills. It was during this assault that Tokio was killed by German machine gunfire.

For the freedoms we are privileged to have as Americans, we are greatly indebted not only to the heroes who gave up their lives but also to their families, such as the Ajitomis.

Many thanks to Robert Ajitomi for providing these photos of his uncles. Gratitude and acknowledgment also go to Karleen Chinen for her inspiring article about the brothers from which some information was obtained for this short biography.

RODNEY YANO

Vietnam War Sergeant First Class

Air Cavalry Troop,
11th Armored Cavalry Regiment U.S. Army

Dec. 19, 1943 – Jan. 1, 1969

Kealahou, Hawaii



Known affectionately as 'Pineapple,' Yano was born along the Kona Coast of Hawaii in the town of Kealahou. In 1961, Yano left school early to join the Army. Known as a fun-loving guy with a serious side, Yano rose to the rank of Sergeant First Class. Yano's colleagues were not surprised that he died putting others before himself. During his second tour in Vietnam, Yano was served as a crew chief in the Air Cavalry Troop, 11th Armored Cavalry, the famed Blackhorse Regiment.

On that day in Bien Hoa, Vietnam, Yano performed his duties of crew chief aboard the command and control helicopter. Yano and his crew were returning suppressive fire to an entrenched enemy in a dense jungle. While marking enemy positions with smoke and white phosphorous grenades for field artillery units, a grenade went off prematurely inside of the helicopter, covering Yano with burning phosphorous and leaving him severely wounded. Ammunition and other supplies began to ignite, and white smoke began filling the helicopter. Although partially blind and unable to use one of his arms, Yano displayed extreme bravery by hurling blazing ammunition from the helicopter. In taking such action, Yano inflicted additional wounds upon himself to protect his crew from further injury and avert any deaths. Yano persisted until his helicopter was rendered safe. The additional wounds inflicted upon Yano resulted in his death later that day.

The Citation for the Congressional Medal of Honor reads: "By his conspicuous gallantry at the cost of his life, in the highest traditions of the military service, SFC Yano has reflected great credit on himself, his unit, and the U.S. Army."



MARK YAMANE

**Operation Urgent Fury, Grenada
Specialist
1st Ranger Battalion
75th Infantry Regiment
U.S. Army
Nov. 24, 1962 – Oct. 25, 1983
Shoreline, Washington**

Born November 24, 1962 in Seattle, Washington to George and Charlotte Yamane. Attended Meridian Elementary School, Cordell Hull Junior High School and Shoreline High School.

Entered military service in 1981 and trained as a Ranger at Fort Benning, Georgia. Mark was assigned to the 1st Ranger Battalion, 75th Infantry and was killed in action October 25, 1983 on the Island of Grenada. While taking intense fire from Cuban soldiers, Yamane and fellow 1st Battalion Rangers parachuted onto an airfield with the mission of capturing the airport. He was shot on the tarmac while laying down machine gun fire.

Yamane received the Combat Infantryman's Badge, Bronze Star with V Device, Purple Heart, Parachutist Badge, Army Service Ribbon and Overseas Service Ribbon.

Courtesy of Francis Mas Fukuhara – Seattle, Washington



Kirk Fuchigami Jr.

**War In Afghanistan
Chief Warrant Officer 2
1st Battalion, 227th Aviation Regiment
1st Air Cavalry Brigade, 1st Cavalry Division
U.S. Army
July 14, 1994 – November 20, 2019
Henderson, Nevada**

For an American infantryman waging battle against insurmountable odds, there is no sweeter sound than U.S. aircraft flying in to join the fight. One such aircraft is the AH-64 Apache attack helicopter.

The main role of the Apache is to support ground troops with aerial firepower. Apache pilots protect soldiers on the ground and help them accomplish their combat mission. And they do this while they themselves are under threat of enemy fire.

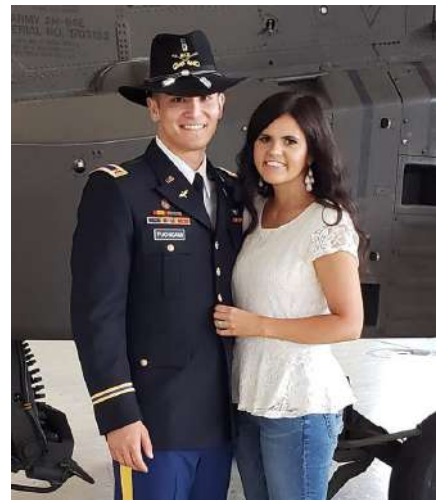
Chief Warrant Officer 2 Kirk Takeshi Fuchigami Jr. was an Apache pilot who lost his life while supporting U.S. ground troops in the Logar Province in Afghanistan on November 20, 2019.

Kirk was born on the island of Hawaii and moved at an early age to Henderson, Nevada. He attended Rancho High in Las Vegas and through a special high school aviation program Kirk was able to obtain a pilot's license. He told friends he wanted to become an Apache helicopter pilot. At Rancho High he was also a member of the Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps, taking steps to enter a career in the military.

In 2016, Kirk enlisted in the U.S. Army and after basic combat training went on to flight school. He graduated high in his class, giving him a choice of aircraft to pilot. He chose the Apache. After completing attack helicopter training, Kirk was assigned to 1st Battalion, 227th Aviation Regiment, 1st Air Cavalry Brigade, 1st Cavalry Division.

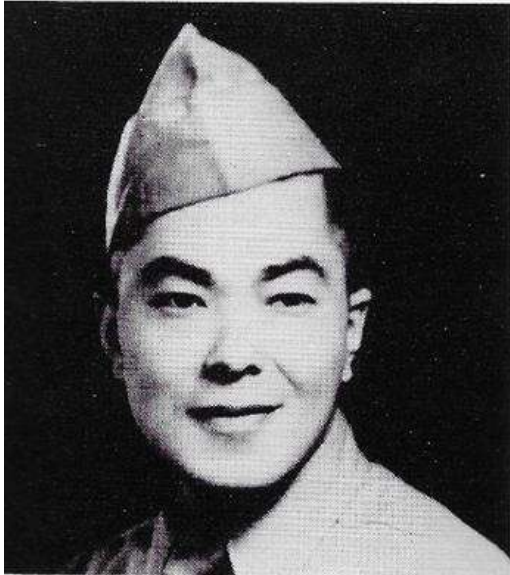
As well as enjoying flying, Kirk's hobbies were shooting, fishing, martial arts and building things with his hands. Kirk fell in love with a young lady, McKenzie Norman, and in 2019, months before his deployment to Afghanistan, they were married. Family and friends described him as kind, brilliant, and a jack of all trades who knew how to do everything from fixing a car to playing the ukulele.

Chief Warrant Officer 2 Fuchigami's awards include the Army Aviator Badge, Bronze Star Medal, Air Medal and the National Defense Service Medal.



ELMER J. YOSHIHARA

**Korean War
U.S. Army
September 12, 1915 – 1950
Olympia, Washington**



Born September 12, 1915 in Olympia, Washington to George and Hisano Yoshihara. Husband of Toyoko and brother of James. Attended elementary school in Olympia and graduated from Shelton High School. Employed in the family-owned business of producing, packing and shipping Olympic and Pacific oysters.

Received training at Fort Knox, Kentucky and Fort Snelling, Minnesota. Killed in Korea in 1950. Recipient of Purple Heart and Silver Star for gallantry. Yoshihara also served in WWII in the Military Intelligence Service.

Reid Nishizuka

Operation Enduring Freedom – Afghanistan
Captain
427th Reconnaissance Squadron
U.S. Air Force
January 29, 1983 – April 27, 2013
Kailua, Hawaii



Reid Nishizuka desired to be a pilot in childhood and that dream would be fulfilled as an officer in the U.S. Air Force. Reid grew up in the town of Kailua on the Windward side of Oahu. He attended and graduated Kailua High School where he excelled academically and trained as a cadet in the school's Air Force Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps (JROTC). He was accepted to the prestigious University of Notre Dame and left Hawaii for Indiana to study aeronautical engineering and further his training as a cadet in the university's Air Force ROTC. Upon graduation from the university, Nishizuka was commissioned a Second Lieutenant in the U.S. Air Force.

2nd Lt. Nishizuka went on to complete pilot training. He would eventually be assigned to the 427th Reconnaissance Squadron which would deploy to Afghanistan. This squadron provided intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance in the support of U.S. ground troops.



Nishizuka would fly more than 200 combat missions. On April 27, 2013, Captain Nishizuka's MC-12 Liberty aircraft crashed, killing him and 3 other crew members.

Nishizuka's military awards included pilot wings, 10 Air Medals, two Air Force Commendation Medals and two Air Force Achievement Medals.

Reid Nishizuka's father stated in a tribute to his son, "In Reid's short 30 years, in his life, he accomplished a lifetime of achievements that most people would love to achieve, including his dad. His life has touched so many friends and family that his memory will live in our hearts forever and will always be our hero."

KAY KAZU KIMURA

Vietnam

First Lieutenant

Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 263

U.S. Marine Corps

Nov. 1, 1943 – Mar. 7, 1970

Nampa, Idaho



Born November 1, 1943 in the War Relocation Authority Center at Poston, Arizona to Tom and Harue Kimura. Brother of Hitoshi, Tadashi, Fred, Frank, Dick, Ted, Teruko Honda, Lilly Kiyokawa, Frances Kaneshige, Jane Wing and Blanch Fujii. Husband of Naomi Nagai Kimura.

Attended Nampa and Caldwell Elementary Schools and Nampa High School in Idaho and Idaho State University. Entered the United States Marine Corps in November 19, 1968. Attended Officers Candidate School at Quantico, Virginia.

First Lieutenant Kimura served as copilot of CH-46 transport helicopters in Vietnam and received the Republic of Vietnam Service, Vietnam Campaign Service and National Defense Medals.

Lt. Kimura was killed in action on March 7, 1970 in Thua Thien Province, Republic of Vietnam. For meritorious service, he was posthumously awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross, Navy Commendation Medal with Combat V and Air Medal – 4 Strike/Flight Awards.

Mike Sonoda Jr.

Operation Iraqi Freedom

Sergeant

A Company, 1st Battalion

184th Infantry Regiment, 40th Infantry Division

U.S. Army/Army National Guard

July 1, 1971 – Sept. 22, 2006

Fallbrook, California



Most who have served in the active duty military, leave after they have completed their first enlistment to pursue goals they envisioned for themselves in the civilian world. Out of those, a small percent serve again on a part-time basis by joining the Reserves or the National Guard. They do so for the adventure, patriotism and because they miss the camaraderie that only exists between those who have put on a military uniform. This is what Mike Takeshi Sonoda Jr. chose to do.

Mike was born and raised in the San Diego County town of Fallbrook. He was the grandson of San Joaquin Valley tomato and strawberry farmers whose families were forced into Japanese American concentration camps during WWII. As a teenager Mike enjoyed video games, science fiction, anime and manga. He attended Fallbrook High School and graduated in 1989. His younger sister Irene described him as “very caring and generous, inquisitive and dedicated.”

Mike joined the U.S. Army in 1995 and served as a parachute rigger and a paratrooper in the 325th Parachute Infantry Regiment stationed in Vicenza, Italy. A rigger’s job is to precisely pack and prepare parachutes for airborne personnel and equipment. The responsibility is tremendous.

After completion of his enlistment and returning to civilian life, Mike became a hazardous material specialist for the U.S. Postal Service. His desire to return to military service on a part-time basis led him to join a National Guard unit, A Company, 1st Battalion, 184th Infantry Regiment, 40th Infantry Division, headquartered in Fullerton, CA. The unit was activated for full-time service and deployed to Iraq in January, 2005. A major in the 184th Infantry said of Mike, “Sonoda often was the first to volunteer for patrols. He was the kind of guy the younger soldiers would look up to and the older sergeants could rely on. He was a real spirit of the platoon.”

Specialist Mike Sonoda Jr. died in Baghdad, Iraq of injuries sustained when an improvised explosive device detonated near his armored personnel carrier on September 21, 2005. He was posthumously promoted to the rank of Sergeant.

Sergeant Sonoda’s awards include the Parachute Badge, Parachute Rigger Badge, Italian Parachute Badge, Bronze Star Medal and Purple Heart Medal.

ROBERT ENDO

WWII
Private First Class
Company K
442nd Regimental Combat Team
U.S. Army
June 3, 1921 – Nov. 2, 1944
Seattle, Washington



Born June 3, 1921 in Seattle, Washington to Noichi and Kameko Endo. Brother of Jean, William and Watson Endo. Attended Washington Elementary School and graduated in 1939 from Garfield High School. Volunteered for military service in March 1943 from the Minidoka Relocation Center.

Pfc. Endo served in Co. K, 442nd RCT. Killed in action on November 2, 1944 in the rescue of the Lost Battalion. Awarded the Combat Infantryman's Badge, Victory Medal, American Theater Service Medal, European-African-Middle Eastern Service Medal, Purple Heart and Bronze Star.

Courtesy of Francis Mas Fukuhara – Seattle, Washington

Nine Japanese Nationals were serving on the USS Maine when it was destroyed. Two survived, seven perished.

From JAVA Research Team (JRT) / JAVA June 2020 newsletter

At 9:40 PM on February 15, 1898, five tons of powder charges exploded in the forward section of the battleship USS Maine as she lay at anchor in the harbor of Havana, Cuba. The explosion obliterated that part of the ship where the enlisted crew had their quarters and were retiring for the night. Of the 355-member crew (26 officers, 290 enlisted seamen and 39 Marines), 261 men died or were declared missing and presumed dead. Ninety-four men survived and, of this number, 16 were not injured. Though largely American, the crew also included citizens of Canada, Great Britain, Russia, Japan, China, and the Philippines.

Of the USS Maine's 261 known or missing/presumed dead, 231 have gravesites at Arlington National Cemetery and 27 at the USS Maine Plot in the Key West, Florida, City Cemetery. The remains of three men were returned to their families. The identities of 63 men interred in Arlington National Cemetery are known and 168 gravesites are dedicated to those whose bodies were never found and who were declared missing/presumed dead. The USS Maine Plot, dedicated on December 11, 1898, and administered by the City of Key West and the U.S. Navy, contains nine gravesites of identified crewmen and 18 dedicated to those missing/presumed dead.

Nine Japanese nationals were serving as U.S. Navy seamen aboard the USS Maine when it was destroyed. One had completed 14 years of sea duty; three had completed their first three-year enlistments and were on their second three-year enlistments; and five were in their first three-year enlistment. Two of the nine men survived; one was wounded, the other uninjured. Kashitara Suzuki's body was recovered from the Maine on March 24, 1898, one week before recovery activity stopped with 75 bodies still in the vessel. His tombstone (Figure 1) is at Spot 47 in the USS Maine Plot of the Key West City Cemetery. It is likely that the unidentified remains of the six Japanese seamen declared missing/presumed dead are also interred in the City Cemetery. In Key West their graves are marked by individual tombstones bearing the inscription, "One Unknown. U.S. Battleship Maine. Killed in Havana Harbor, February 15, 1898," (Figure 2). It is not known how many of the Asian nationals risked their lives to gain U.S. citizenship that was not otherwise possible as the U.S. Naturalization Act of 1790 prohibited Asians from becoming U.S. citizens.



Figure 1. Inscription on tombstone: "Kashitara Suzuki, Mess Attendant. USS Battleship "Maine." Killed in Havana Harbor, February 15, 1898." City Cemetery, Key West. Photo by Russell Brittain.



Figure 2. The inscription reads: "One Unknown. USS Battleship Maine. Killed in Havana Harbor. February 15, 1898." Photo by Russell Brittain.

Key West residents honored the USS Maine casualties by erecting a statue in the Maine section of City Cemetery of an American sailor dressed in Spanish American War period uniform, (Figure 3). The well-groomed cemetery is a testimony to the dignity and respect accorded to deceased seaman, U.S. and foreign, irrespective of race, nationality and rank, and whether the burial occurred one year ago or over a hundred years ago.



Figure 3. USS Maine Cemetery, Key West, FL. Photo from Russell Brittain

The seven Japanese seamen who lost their lives on the USS Maine are also honored at various other locations. Their names are inscribed at the base of the USS Maine Mast Memorial (Figure 4) and the six missing are also listed at the Tomb of the Unknown, both located at Arlington National Cemetery. Their names are also inscribed on the Heroes Wall of the Japanese American National War Memorial Court (JANWMC) located in Little Tokyo, Los Angeles. The JANWMC, constructed by southern California Nisei veterans, is the only location in the United States where ethnic Japanese killed in all wars, from the Spanish American War to the current Gulf Wars, are memorialized. During a ceremony at the JANWMC on June 15, 2009, after paying his respects to the Japanese Americans and Japanese nationals killed in wars and whose names are etched on the granite wall, Japan Ambassador Ichiro Fujisaki said he was deeply touched by the powerful cultural message conveyed by the inclusion of Japanese nationals in the Memorial Court.



Figure 4. USS Maine Mast Memorial. Arlington National Cemetery, VA.

Two Japanese nationals survived the Maine explosion: Katsusaburo Kushida, one of only 16 USS Maine crew who were uninjured, and Fusanoin Awo, who was wounded. According to U.S. Navy records at the National Personnel Records Center (NPRC), St. Louis, Missouri, Kushida was born in Hiroshima City on March 3, 1873. He enlisted in the U.S. Navy on April 4, 1894, and gave his father, Josko Kushida, as his next of kin. He completed his three-year enlistment on April 5, 1897 and reenlisted on May 4, 1897 for another three years. He was in the ninth month of his second three-year enlistment when the USS Maine was destroyed. He was then reassigned to the USS Vermont as a warrant officers' cook and subsequently promoted to wardroom steward on the USS Mayflower. Foreign nationals serving as U.S. seamen were bound by the same administrative, medical, and security requirements as the U.S. seamen. During his four years in the U.S. Navy, Kushida's job performance and conduct were evaluated as "Very Good" and his health was evaluated consistently as "excellent." His pay was \$37 per month.

A letter from the Secretary of the U.S. Navy to the U.S. Secretary of State, dated May 12, 1898, lists personal items found in the USS Maine for Katsusaburo Kushida and Isa Sugisaki, one of the men who was killed. The letter asked if the U.S. State Department "would ascertain if the Japanese Legation will receive these articles for distribution to the proper heirs." The personal items included banking information, gold coins, cash, silver items, letters in Japanese. Kushida was still serving in the Navy when the letter was sent but he left on October 10, 1898. He may have resided for a time in Boston, Massachusetts, where on June 9, 1904, someone with a similar name signed a petition before the clerk of the Boston District Court to become a U.S. citizen. The match is not perfect. For example, the handwritten name on the affidavit could be read as "Katsusa Kashida" or "Katsusa Kushida." Also, the date of birth Kushida gave the court is May 1, 1877, however, the U.S. Navy records said his date of birth is March 3, 1873. Additionally, Kushida's date of arrival in Seattle, Washington, is recorded as November 21, 1899, while the U.S. Navy documents state he enlisted on April 4, 1894, perhaps while a U.S. vessel was calling at a foreign port. Nonetheless, the similarity of the names, the place of birth as Hiroshima City, and his occupation as "Officers Steward" together with the known vagaries of spellings and dates in such documents suggest that the applicant may have been Katsusaburo Kushida from the USS Maine. Unfortunately, except for this legal petition for U.S. citizenship, no other U.S. public record has been found for Kushida. Additional research is underway to determine his activities following his service in the U.S. Navy.

Based on information collected from NPRC and other sources, Fusanoin Awo was born December 15, 1873, in Aichi Prefecture and immigrated to America in 1896. On July 22, 1897, he enlisted in the US Navy at Fishers Island, New York, and was assigned to the USS Maine as steerage cook. He gave his mother, Ei Awo, as his next of kin residing at Haguri, Yamanaka Mura, Kikata Gori, Mikawa, Aichi Prefecture. An indication of Awo's interest in America was a list of items he claimed to have lost when the USS Maine sank: a Japanese-English dictionary, books on grammar and geography, and a book on Commodore Perry. After surviving the sinking of the USS Maine, Awo served on the USS Vermont, USS Saturn, USS Franklin, USS Vulcan, USS Yosemite, USS Brutus, and USS Colombia. He consistently received a rating of "Very Good" in the categories of job performance and conduct, and his pay was \$37 per month. He was promoted to cabin steward in 1898 and left the Navy October 25, 1901.

Following his naval service, Awo apparently settled at 110 Bower Street in Boston, Massachusetts. On November 26, 1903 he married Mary Goodrich in that city. His occupation at the time was club house keeper. Nine years later, on November 3, 1912, listing himself as a widower and an auctioneer and merchant, Awo married Mary A. Bowen, also of Boston. In 1914 he and his wife moved to Jacksonville, Florida where they resided at 529 West Church, listing his occupation as a chef. Subsequently, Awo visited Japan and returned to Seattle, Washington, aboard the Manila Maru on October 17, 1916. The vessel's manifest listed his nationality as Japanese, and his destination as Tacoma, Washington

The seven Japanese nationals who perished when the USS Maine was destroyed are:

Kashitara Suzuki of Hachioji, Tokyo, a mess attendant whose body was recovered, enlisted in New York on January 8, 1895 for three years. In early 1898 he reenlisted for a second three-year stint, but was killed shortly after. Suzuki's tombstone is shown in Figure 1.

Suke Chingi of Kagoshima Prefecture, a mess attendant, enlisted on September 26, 1895 in New York for three years. He had six months of naval duty prior to his assignment on the USS Maine shortly after it was commissioned. Missing/presumed dead.

Otogiro Ishida of Yokohama, Kanagawa Prefecture, a steerage cook, enlisted on September 25, 1895 in New York for three years. He had one year of naval experience prior to his assignment on the USS Maine. Missing/presumed dead.

Yukichi Kitagata of Kobe, Hyogo Prefecture, a warrant officers cook, enlisted on August 12, 1896 at Norfolk, Virginia, for three years. Missing/presumed dead.

Tomekichi Nagamine, a mess attendant, enlisted in New York for three years on December 10, 1896. Missing/presumed dead.

Isa Sugisaki of Odawara, Kanagawa Prefecture, a wardroom steward, enlisted in New York for three years on September 16, 1895. Declared Missing/presumed dead. On July 11, 1898, Wakichi Nishimiya of 227 W 25th, New York City, reported that Sugisaki had died in the US without relatives and filed a petition at Kings County Surrogate's Court to settle his estate.

Sugisaki had served in the U.S. Navy since 1885, making him the first ethnic Japanese to serve in the U.S. military. He was recognized in New York's Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper, April 28, 1898. The article said "he was only a [U.S. Navy] steward, but Isa Sugisaki, who died on the ill-fated Maine, will long be remembered by his grateful countrymen. Some years ago out of his hard-earned savings he established a home and clubhouse at 164 Sands Street, Brooklyn, for Japanese who were out of employment. It was named the Sugisaki Club in his honor, and is now in a very flourishing and prosperous condition. At least a dozen Japanese societies have their headquarters at the "Sugisaki." The most prominent organization which meets there is the "Dai Nippon Jin," or the Great Japanese Society. It is primarily a mutual-benefit society, and was founded for the purpose of helping young men. It meets twice a year. Another society which meets at the "Sugisaki" is the "Shio bu Kai," which means literary and social club. At its meetings Japanese literature, history and current events are debated and discussed. A fencing gymnasium which was recently established in the backyard is open to the members of the various clubs. It consists of an open pavilion profusely decorated with Japanese lanterns." A photo of Sugisaki appeared with the article, (Figure 5).



Figure 5. Isa Sugisaki, Photo from Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper, April 28, 1899

Referring to the Issei on the USS Maine in 1898, retired Army historian Dr. James McNaughton, author of *Nisei Linguists: Japanese Americans in the Military Intelligence Service During WW II*, commented: "When thousands of Nisei joined the U.S. Army in World War II, few of them knew that they followed in the footsteps of some ancestors that history nearly forgot. In the nineteenth century, many Japanese men signed up to serve on U.S. Navy warships, often as cooks or mess attendants. When the USS Maine exploded, seven men tragically became the first known persons of Japanese origin to die under the flag of the United States. These men may be silent in the historical record, but are not forgotten. Over time their footsteps were but the first of many on the long path of proud service in the armed forces of the United States that continues to this day."

JRT Comment. As Dr. McNaughton noted, Japanese nationals also served on other U.S. war ships. One such person is a Nisei, Nobuteru Harry Sumida, born in New York City in 1872 of a Japanese father and Caucasian mother. He enlisted in 1891 and served as a gunner on the USS Indiana in the Battle of Santiago, Cuba, where he received a shrapnel wound in his right leg. During WW II he was forcibly interned at the Manzanar internment camp. During the early phase of our research we could not find any published data on the nine Japanese nationals. The JAVA Research Team hopes this article sparks an interest in a researcher, probably collaborating with a Japanese scholar, to write a more comprehensive paper. While the content and presentation is ours, our appreciation for collecting and assisting in the various phases of our research is gratefully extended to Dean DeRosa, Arlington National Cemetery; Russell Brittain, City Cemetery, Key West; Ambassador (Admiral, USN Retired) Harry Harris, JAVA Member; RADM Samuel Cox, USN Retired, and Mark Mollan, Naval History and Heritage Command; Ellen Nakashima, JAVA member; Theresa Fitzgerald and David Hardin, National Personnel Records Center; Adebo Adetono, NARA; William Elsbury, Library of Congress; Erika Moritsugu, Esq, JAVA member; US Senator Tammy Duckworth and Benjamin Rhodesside; Douglas Haynes, US Census Bureau; John Tobe, JAVA Member; Edson Mori; Dr. Thomas and Catherine Yoshikawa (financial); Jeffrey and Yoko Morita, JRT researchers; and Dr. James McIlwain, Professor Emeritus, Neuroscience, Brown University, JRT editor.



Bryan Thomas Mukai

**Vietnam War
Private First Class
Company D, 1st Battalion
502nd Infantry Regiment, 101st Airborne Division
U.S. Army
November 29, 1949 – April 10, 1968
Spokane, Washington**

Bryan was born on November 29, 1949 in Spokane, Washington to Tom and Shigeko Mukai. He had one brother, Larry. Bryan was a member of the Lewis and Clark High School Band and also participated in the school's mathematics and chess clubs.

Bryan was drafted into the Army and joined Delta Company, 1st Battalion, 502nd Infantry Regiment, 101st Airborne Division. His unit was sent overseas to Vietnam and deployed between Khe Sahn and Hue.

Private First Class Mukai was killed on April 10, 1968 from grenade fragments inflicted by enemy action. His military decorations include the Combat Infantryman's Badge, Parachutist Badge and the Purple Heart Medal.

Courtesy of Francis Mas Fukuhara – Seattle, Washington

Isaac Furukawa

**Korean War
Sergeant
Company C, 8th Cavalry, 1st Cavalry Division
U.S. Army**

**WWII
442nd Regimental Combat Team
U.S. Army**

**April 11, 1926 – July 25, 1950
Sunnyside, Washington**



Isaac Furukawa served with valor in WWII with the Japanese American 442nd Regimental Combat Team. He then went to war again, five years later, in Korea with the 1st Cavalry Division.

Born April 11, 1926 in Sunnyside, Washington to Kashiro and Kazuko Furukawa. Brother of John, Fred and Marie. Attended Sunnyside Elementary and high schools in Sunnyside and Heart Mountain Relocation Center, Wyoming.

Isaac was attending his first year of college when he was drafted into the U.S. Army. He served in the 442nd Regimental Combat Team in Italy. He served again in the Korean War as a member of Company C, Eighth Cavalry Regiment, 1st Cavalry Division.

Sergeant Furukawa was killed in action in Korea on July 25, 1950. He was the recipient of the Silver Star, Bronze Star, Purple Heart and Combat Infantryman's Badge.

Courtesy of Francis Mas Fukuhara – Seattle, Washington



Edwin Yukio Fukui

**WWII
Technician 3rd Grade
Military Intelligence Service
77th Infantry Division
U.S. Army
November 27, 1922 – April 2, 1945
Tacoma, Washington**

Edwin was born to Shuichi and Kikuyo Fukui in Tacoma, Washington. His father, Shuichi, was one of the few Japanese American Issei that served in the U.S. Army during WWI. Edwin's siblings were Alyce, Lillian, Lucy, Herbert and Abraham. Herbert was also killed in military service in 1948.

Edwin attended Central Elementary School, McCarver Junior High School and Lincoln High School in Tacoma. He was enrolled at Washington State University in Pullman from September, 1940 to January, 1942. In 1942, because of Executive Order 9066, the Fukui Family were sent to Tule Lake Relocation Center in California.

In November, 1942, Edwin became one of the first Nisei to enlist from Tule Lake. He trained for the Military Intelligence Service at Camp Savage, Minnesota and became a Japanese linguist. After completing his training, Edwin served in the Pacific Campaign in Guam, Leyte, Philippine Islands, and Okinawa.

Edwin was killed along with 48 other American soldiers and sailors when a Japanese kamikaze, suicide aircraft, crashed into their transport ship. The ship, the USS Henrico, was offshore of the Kerama Islands near Okinawa.

Technician 3rd Grade Edwin Fukui was a recipient of the Combat Infantryman's Badge, Purple Heart and the Bronze Star.

Eiichi Fred Haita

**WWII
Corporal
442nd Regimental Combat Team
3rd Battalion, I Company
U.S. Army
October 14, 1915 – April 21, 1945
Havre, Montana**



Eiichi Fred Haita was the son of Bunsaku and Hana Haita. He had one brother, Haruyuki. He received his elementary and high school education in Japan as well as the United States. The U.S. high school he attended was Seattle's Garfield High. Eiichi's parents and brother returned to Japan but his desire was to stay in the U.S.

His pre-World War II employment was with the Northern Pacific Railroad and as a lumber laborer in Snoqualmie, Washington.

Eiichi served in the Army at Fort Riley, Kansas and ultimately with Company I, 442nd RCT during action in Italy and France. Eiichi was killed in action on April 21, 1945 in Fosdinovo, Italy.

Corporal Eiichi Haita's awards include the Combat Infantryman's Badge, Bronze Star, Victory Medal, European-African-Middle Eastern Theatre Medal and the Purple Heart.

After the war, from Japan, Eiichi's parents made a request to the U.S. government that his remains be sent to them in Kumamoto. The U.S. granted that request.

Courtesy of Francis Mas Fukuhara – Seattle, Washington

MASARU TAIRA

WWII

Private

Company L, 3rd Battalion

442nd Regimental Combat Team

U.S. Army

Dec. 28, 1924 – July 4, 1944

Honolulu, Hawaii



Private Masaru Taira was the second son of Kame and Kamado Taira of Honolulu, Hawaii. The Tairas – from Oroku, Okinawa -- owned Pacific Bakery alongside a small store with a soda fountain on King Street in Honolulu. After Pearl Harbor was bombed, Masaru and his four brothers and six sisters helped their parents in continuing to operate the bakery amid daily blackouts and restrictions.

By early 1943, Masaru was a senior at Farrington High School when he learned of the U.S. Army's call for volunteers for the 442nd. He hurried home over the lunch period to consult Edith, one of his older sisters. Knowing that the family's eldest son, Wilfred, had already planned to enlist, Edith tried to dissuade Masaru. But Masaru made up his mind to sign up for the Army too.

Masaru and Wilfred were sent, with other Nisei, to basic training in Camp Shelby, Miss., but once there the two brothers rarely were able to see one another. As training ended in 1944, Masaru reached out to Masako, another one of his sisters. With a hint of the coming deployment to the frontlines in Europe, he tucked in his Social Security card and other documents along with his class ring. "It fits perfectly and I would like to keep it but I think it's better if I send it home," he mused. "You might not understand why, but I hope you will put it away till it's all over." Shortly afterwards, Masaru tried to paint an optimistic picture as the troop-laden ship neared Italy: "We will be in our foxholes sometime in the near future. This boat ride is a cinch, the only thing is it's too long. Tell Mom not to worry too much. I am in good health and as I always say, 'I never felt better in my life.'"

Masaru knew of the perils ahead. So did his brother Wilfred, now a 442nd medic. Assigned to the 3rd Battalion, Company L, Masaru and his fellow 442nd soldiers were joined with the 100th Battalion in the Allied campaign that would take them from Rome to the Arno River. On July 4th, during the grinding battle to capture Hill 140 -- a strategic point leading to the key port city of Livorno -- Company L was shelled by German artillery fire. Masaru was killed in the barrage. He was just 19 years old.

(Photo: Wilfred at his brother Masaru's temporary grave in Follonica, Italy; inset is a photo of Masaru. His remains were later sent home for burial in Honolulu.)

Wilfred, who would go on to be awarded the Silver Star and Bronze Star Medals for bravery in combat, never talked about what happened to his younger brother. In the book "Silent Valor: the Story of the 442nd Medics," Wilfred would say only that he and Masaru had joined the 442nd to "prove their loyalty."



This biography, by Masaru's niece Linda Taira, is adapted from an essay she wrote that was published by USA Today on Independence Day in 2021.