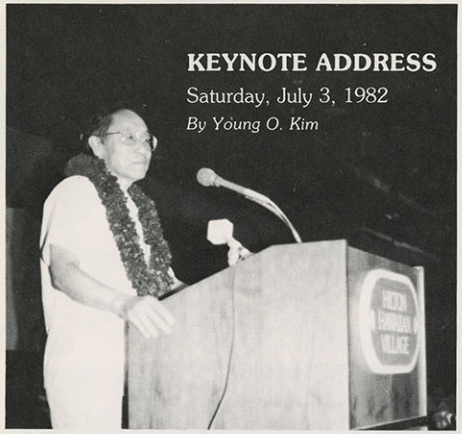


KEYNOTE ADDRESS

Saturday, July 3, 1982

By Young O. Kim

I was asked by the program committee to address the subject of the wartime exploits of the 100th. I am thus honored and flattered by their request to share with you my version of our participation in the war.

My comments are limited to personally-known facts verified by then Major Casper (Jim) Clough, Colonel Gordon Shingles, and General Charles Pence. Although these men, under the great emotional stress of combat, may have had a different version of the war, every version is true.

I share the opinion of others — General Charles Ryder, 34th Division Commander, and General Mark Clark — that from some time prior to or during the battle of Cassino in January, 1944, until the conflict at Biffontaine, France in October, 1944, the 100th became established as the best offensive battalion in World War II.

One undeniable reason for their greatness was the harrowing, often dehumanizing, climate of the wartime arena over which these men prevailed in order to stay alive. Front line combat conditions were as close to hell as can be imagined. There was continuous exposure to the elements — in any 24-hour period, it was too hot, too cold, or too wet; often it was all of these. Then, there were the endless hours of hiking, burdened by heavy weapons and ammunition. Life-sustaining comforts such as warm food, good water, and enough time for rest and sleep were non-existent. The physical discomforts, however, were endurable; but the constant fear of death or painful and disabling wounds was not. The horror of watching dear friends dying or suffering from fatal wounds and the greater horror of being unable to assist because you were pinned to the ground was the brutal reality of war which our men endured and survived.

There were other reasons for their excellence as a battalion:

1. First, and most importantly, every soldier fought not only to defend the United States against an evil government, but also to prove that Japanese were loyal Americans who deserved the respect and dignity accorded to all American citizens;

2. Second, we were upholding the honor of their families and the honor of the Japanese American community;

3. Third, every man was intelligent, regardless of rank, and thus there was no dilution of qualified personnel;

4. Fourth, there was little previous military experience so we engaged in battle without preconceived notions that might have been detrimental of how World War II should have been fought;

5. Finally, superb leadership at every level was well-represented by Japanese American officers. For example, throughout the war, Nisei officers made up 50 percent of the 100th officer complement. In addition, all the commanders of the Rifle Company were Nisei officers like Mits Fukuda, Sakae Takahashi, and Richard Mizuta. These were leaders who never issued commands that they themselves would not have followed, and, in extremely dangerous situations, they personally led their units.

Despite such fond reminiscences, there is a great reluctance among combat veterans to talk about their actual combat experiences. They are too painful to recall. But there exists a special camaraderie among wartime friends who shared so many dreadful experiences that make it possible, once in a while, to gather together, as we are doing tonight, to share reflections of days long ago.

My first realization of what the 100th was doing as a unit came in the battle of Cassino. This battle was a revelation. I witnessed, for the first time, a clashing of wills, among higher commanders, sparked by radically differing positions on how the battle should be waged. I also discovered that tactical orders were not absolute — they could be questioned and even negotiated. And some tactics and supporting weapons employed left much to be desired. On the night of our initial attack, for example, a rolling artillery barrage, like that employed in World War I, proved totally ineffective.

During the first daylight hours, our battalion observation post was initially manned by 26 soldiers from the artillery liaison team for communication and the intelligence section. By nightfall, only four remained — our battalion commander, Major Clough, and me in one location; and PFC Ginger Minami and PVT Irving Akahoshi in another, 20 yards away. Everyone else was either wounded or dead.

In subsequent attacks, the 34th Division succeeded in crossing the Rapido River. Under the leadership of Jim Lovell, and later, Jim Clough, the 100th reached the walls of the castle below the monastery and the 168th reached the monastery walls. This was the closest, at that time, that any allied units had come to capturing these two key structures. Despite many assaults, it was not until five months later that these buildings were finally taken. The 100th and the 168th accomplished this mission without the employment of shell or bomb. Had we been permitted to use them, we may have been able to take them sooner. The 100th withdrew from the castle area with less than 15 to 20 men and with one officer per rifle company.

While at Anzio, with time on our hands, I decided to make a thorough record check of the men in my intelligence section. Results were surprising: every member, except two — Ginger Minami with an IQ score of 127, and I with a lesser score — tested above the 140 level, 30 points more than 110 necessary for qualification to officer candidate school. Thus, by enlisting the aid of so many bright minds, we concentrated our efforts on harvesting ripe artichokes that grew on the other side of the minefield and on luring closer a cow, tethered nearby, for some fresh beef.

The Anzio beachhead was fortified by two German defense camps — one on the flat area where the opposition gathered, and another in the surrounding hills. The 34th, one of the units committed to the front line, was ordered to take the pass through the Albino Hills near Lunivio to permit access for the 1st Armored Division to enter Rome. Two regiments of the 34th failed to take the pass and late that same afternoon, General Ryder, asserting his faith in the capacity of the 100th, issued an order to

secure the pass the next day. So, at 6:30 AM the next morning, the 100th attacked and nearly succeeded in its mission when we were thwarted by heavy "friendly" artillery fire. What appeared to be another 100th victory turned into a five-hour nightmare. Every half hour thereafter, we were assured by higher headquarters that the guilty unit had been identified so it was safe to resume attack; each time, however, the firing continued. After 1:00 PM, we refused to launch another assault. The guilty artillery unit was never discovered. But, packed into the small Anzio beachhead were seven divisions, and more than 1,000 Corps and Army artillery pieces. Finally, the pass was captured as dusk fell.

How did one lone battalion of 1,000 men succeed where two regiments of six battalions had failed? One reason is that only four of six battalions had probably been committed to attack. General Marshall, the brilliant Army historian who conducted many studies during World War II, reports that only 10 to 15 percent of the front-line soldiers actually aimed their weapons at the enemy and fired. Or, they fired weapons into the air to suggest they had been discharged. The majority, however, never fired their weapons. Over 90 percent of the men in the 100th, on the other hand, took aim and fired in the direction of the enemy. So the 100th was easily the equivalent of four battalions. Not only did our men fire, but they relentlessly advanced towards our objective.

After joining the 442nd north of Rome, the 100th truly set records. On the first day of battle together, the 100th at Belvedere earned their first Presidential Unit citation, an award comparable to a DSC earned by a GI unit. Ordinarily, a successful attacking unit needs a 3-to-1 numerical advantage. In this case, the 100th was attacking a crack SS Motorized German Battalion. The 100th suffered 11 casualties: four dead and seven wounded. But the casualties inflicted upon the enemy were extensive:

Human Losses	*Property Losses (Captured or destroyed)*
178 killed	46 vehicles
20 wounded	5 tanks
73 captured	3 artillery pieces
	1 self-propelled Howitzer
	2 anti-tank guns

Similarly, in the battle of Sassetta the next day, the 100th lost only two — Lt. Ethridge, the "C" Company Commander, was killed, and another was wounded. Over 150 Germans were killed.

Suffering extremely low casualties, the 100th then successfully completed every main objective of the 442nd, until the fall of Leghorn. It was a remarkable record.

We had finally begun to properly utilize and combine fire power and maneuver while taking full advantage of terrain and extensive general support artillery battalions. We no longer automatically put two companies forward to attack while retaining one in reserve, and battalions no longer attached weapon sections to rifle companies. We changed our weapon mix and expanded our communication and vehicle capabilities. We developed a unique and very effective way of conducting a night attack. We knew precisely where our own soliders were stationed, so, even in the dark, our weapons were directed at the enemy.

In late August, the 442nd went to Florence with II Corps, while the 100th was assigned to the IV Corps. In spearheading the IV Corps crossing of the Arno River just east of Pisa, the 100th faked the German "out of their socks" and literally crossed unopposed. It was the craziest crossing witnessed — discarded everywhere were brand new, recently issued, gas masks so poorly designed that wearing them endangered lives. The 100th soldiers were decked out in colorful Italian sports shirts, worn Hawaiian style, with numerous colorful summer parasols waving in the bright morning sunlight. Only the night before, these had been secured from abandoned factories planted in the middle of No Man's Land.

The fighting in Northern France was radically different. It was the coldest European winter in 40 years, and it rained constantly. The hills were covered with thick pine forests and the ground was thick with heavy underbrush. This limited visibility to 10 to 15 feet. We were subjected to constant artillery shelling which burst at tree-top level, raining down shrapnel. German MG positions were impossible to locate. Thus, we incorporated tanks into our attack.

In preparations for the last successful assault on Hill "A", we cut off all communications to everyone at higher headquarters. Hill "A" had to fall before Bruyeres could be liberated. In taking the hill, over 100 Germans were captured and more than a hundred automatics were recovered, while we suffered only two wounded. Using our own strategy, our own time schedule, we claimed victory.

That night, while sheltered in Bruyeres after being promised two days rest, we were ordered, at midnight, to attack Hill "C" at 9:00 the next morning. We planned and worked at a feverish pace till 0900. Five minutes before 9:00, the Germans attacked the 100th's positions from a point where our own attack was to be launched. This required major last-minute changes, but the attack against Hill "C" began on time. Five minutes after 9:00, the enemy positions on Hill "C" were breached and 50 Germans were captured. The hill from where we had launched the attack was abandoned to the Germans. The 100th completed taking Hill "C"; however, this brilliant effort was negated when, against our wishes, we were ordered to leave Hill "C" later that afternoon. Once again, it had to be taken by the 3rd Division, but this time, at far greater costs.

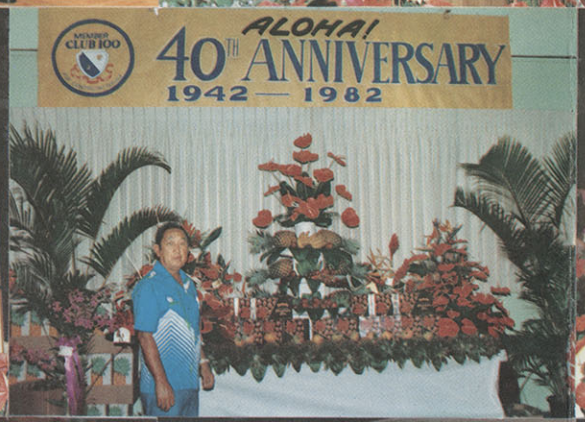
Two days later, the capture of Biffontaine, 7 miles behind the German lines, placed the 100th in an untenable position. The 100th was forced to abandon the commanding heights it had captured 5 miles behind the German lines and, instead, capture Biffontaine. We objected vigorously, for this venture would leave us beyond the range of friendly artillery support and beyond the range of all radio communications — all for a worthless tactical objective. The attack was finally made on Biffontaine. But when we later had to fight our way back from Biffontaine, we suffered heavy casualties because in one day of fighting, we were extremely low on ammunition and in three days of fighting, we were without food and in desperate need of medical supplies. We had entered Biffontaine as the best unit in Europe; we emerged with only one officer per rifle company and heavily depleted ranks.

From a tactical standpoint, a lost Battalion was inevitable. The 100th/442nd had to rescue the 1st Battalion, 141st Regiment, while suffering four times the casualties than the number of men we had rescued.

In the face of the determined enemy at Cassino, Anzio, and in France, the men of the 100th performed magnificently. There was never a question of whether the 100th could take an objective. There was only the question of time in executing the objective. The more time available to the 100th, the fewer would have been the casualties among our own men.

I salute those veterans who are here. You have every reason to be proud of yourselves. I hope these grim stories from the past spur you to rekindle those promises of how we would improve the quality of life for our community made to our lost comrades and to ourselves over 35 years ago. We owe them and ourselves this.

Thank you for allowing me to share with you war stories that evolved from a yesteryear but that belong, really, to our life today. ☆



The solemn and happy moments of the 40th Anniversary Reunion are captured on these two pages and other pages in this album for the enjoyment of the club members and their families. The photo team responsible for the many photos are: Max Imai, Sumio Ito, William Komoda, Sonsei Nakamura, Kenji Nikaido and Richard Yamamoto.