

HAWAII AJAS

by Kenneth Okuma

Amid a cloud of doubt, speculation and disloyalty, Hawaii AJAs went about routinely to be a productive community in these stressful times. Such was the fate of this group of Americans following the bombing of Pearl Harbor on Dec. 7, 1941.

Since these men were stripped of their arms and dismissed or deprived from working in Pearl Harbor and other strategic military installations, they turned to other less combative employment to contribute to the war efforts. For example, the Varsity Victory (VVV), consisting largely of University students, offered their services to do such mundane jobs as collecting garbage, pick and shovel work, and other peaceful endeavors.

After more than a year following the Dec. 7th attacks, the War Dept. in Washington issued a directive to enlist volunteers to form an all-AJA combat team from Hawaii and the mainland. No sooner had the announcement been made in Hawaii, more than 10,000 AJAs stormed the recruitment centers on Oahu, Hawaii, Maui, Kauai, Molokai, and Lanai to sign up, hoping to be included in the request for 3,500 men needed to form a combat team.

Needless to say, the larger numbers who were not selected were deeply disappointed. It was later revealed that several cheated to get in by falsifying their birth dates.

Thus, these men who were selected ranged in ages from 17 to 30 and above. Many of them were still attending high school and after the war were given their diplomas by their respective schools. There were others who were married with dependents.

Their primary motive for volunteering was their desire to serve in combat to prove their allegiance to the US and their willingness to defend the country from all hostile nations.

Farthest from their minds was the thought that their accomplishments would benefit the future generations of AJAs. Their compelling concern was to perform in an exemplary manner and send a message to the War Department and the Nation that their loyalty to their country was unquestionable.

To speculate and infer otherwise is a disservice to veterans both living and dead. These men, like others who served in the various theaters of war, were life long civilians who were plucked and thrust into the vigors of

war in order to defend the Nation. Most of them held no philosophical perception of how their actions would affect the generations to come.

When the men of the 100th Infantry Battalion, who were fighting courageously overseas, heard of this massive recruitment for the 442nd Combat Team, they were apprehensive and fearful that more Hawaii men will lose their lives.

This scenario was compounded by the realization that their younger brothers had volunteered. They felt that one in the family is sufficient in view of the sufferings and casualties experienced by their elders as they fought their way up the boot of Italy.

Finally, many veterans are puzzled by the writings and position taken by Ms. Cindy Mackey in her recent articles to the papers. How there can be any relationship of the isolated ordeals described by her—the Kotani case, Senator Inouye's action in battle and the 522nd FA contact and befriending the Jewish prisoners—to the thoughts, reflections and actions of the present day AJAs.

The recent extensive publicity surrounding the 50th anniversary of the conclusion of the war in Europe has caught the attention of the public. The media, because of the notable exploits of the 100th and 442nd in combat, have found it newsworthy to report the variety of events and depicting the graphic experiences encountered during the war. This is not to minimize the vital roles played by other AJA and Hawaii outfits.

"A MATTER OF HONOR"

by Ted Tsukiyama

A unique and outstanding story of the 442nd Regimental Combat Team is told through the memoirs of Lt. Col. James M. Hanley, commander of the 2nd Battalion recollected in his new book, "A Matter of Honor." Aside from Maj. Orville Shirey's "Americans", this is the first personal and subjective account of "the story of the 442nd" from the viewpoint and perspective of a high ranking officer who served with this distinguished unit from beginning to the end. Through Col. Hanley's eyes and memory, the reader becomes privy to a new world of inside information and insights from a commander's panoramic view, heretofore unknown and unpublished, of the 442nd's long struggle to achieve honor, acceptance and recognition as Americans.

"A Matter of Honor" traces the story of the 442nd (including one chapter on the 100th Battalion) from its Camp Shelby organization and training, to its first taste of combat through the Rome-Arno campaign, through the bitter Vosges Mountain battles liberating Bruyeres and rescuing the "Lost Battalion," and to ultimate triumph after breaking through the Gothic Line of war's end. A Part II covers Col. Hanley's fascinating experiences in the Korean War. The battle chapters are sandwiched between an excellent "Prologue" to set the scene and an emotionally moving "Epilogue: The Nisei Lament," phrased in beautiful poetic verse composed by the author.

"A Matter of Honor" reveals a deep understanding of the American wartime tragedy of the evacuation and internment of Japanese in America and a warm sensitivity and empathy to the Nisei who served under his command with distinction and valor. His letter "Dear Charlie" is a classic tribute and eulogy to the 442nd Nisei who shed blood and lost life to prove their Americanism. Col. Hanley knew his Nisei "had to prove themselves, and they did it in a thousand ways."

"A Matter of Honor" will go a long way toward helping the American people to better know and understand these Americans with Japanese names and faces who made up the 442nd Regimental Combat Team, "the most decorated unit of its size and time in battle during World War II."

PATRIOTISM ON THE BATTLEFRONT

by Scott Tomokiyo

Kenneth Kenichi Oda, my grandpa, was born in Hakalau on the Big Island on June 30, 1912 and died on July 2, 1988. My grandpa was a Nisei, or a second generation Japanese. When he was a young man, the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor and this got America involved in World War II. Grandpa volunteered in the army on March, 1943 and served till 1946. My grandpa did not have to enlist since he was over the draft age, but he did it to prove his loyalty to America and because he had pride. He spent two and a half years overseas and received a good conduct medal, was in five of the eight campaigns in Europe, and was a good marksman with the rifle.

My grandpa was a Tech/5 (Technical Sergeant fifth grade) in the 442nd Regimental Combat Team, 522nd

Field Artillery Battalion, Headquarters Battery. Their motto was "Go For Broke!" It was a Pidgin English expression that meant to give everything you have. These Japanese Americans were General Mark Clark's favorites and he said, "They are the best god damn fighters. If you have anymore of them, send them over here." The 442 was the most decorated unit for its size and length of service in the history of the United States. Although my grandpa received a Bronze Star (the fourth highest award the army can give) for walking through minefields and restoring communication and helped to liberate the Jews in the concentration camp in Dachau, Germany, the story that stands out the most for me is how he was part of the rescue of the "Lost Battalion."

During October, 1944 it was very rainy with cold weather in the Vosges Forest. This part of France was also muddy and had a rugged terrain with thousands of tall trees. Little did anyone know that what was to take place there would be one of the ten most important battles in American history. The 1st Battalion of the 141st Infantry Regiment, 36th Division from Texas was surrounded and trapped by Germans because their general had pushed them too far. The Battalion had gone ahead so rapidly on a heavily wooded ridge and had gotten too far away from the supporting troops in the rear. The Germans did an old trick, and let the lead battalion get about five miles ahead of the other two battalions, and then they snapped the trap shut. The men who were isolated and caught inside tried futilely to break out while the other two battalions of the 141st Regiment tried to break in. The "Lost Battalion" was trapped for almost a week and was low on food, ammunition, and medicine. It was obvious that they would not last much longer. The battalion was hurting badly, was taking heavy casualties, and was being shelled all the time. Many Texas units with about 8,000 men tried to save them, but they failed.

Then on October 27, my grandpa and the 442nd Regimental Combat Team was ordered to reach the "Lost Battalion" at any cost. The 442 was already very weary and battle-scared after fighting in Italy. They were down one-fourth of their men too. For four days they engaged in the bloodiest and fiercest fighting ever undertaken by the 442. They were under constant fire from machine guns, tanks, and cannons. The Germans fired shells that were timed to burst in the trees and then would rain down thousands of sharp steel fragments on the many men below. There was barely any escape if

the men were caught above the ground. Even those in foxholes were hit unless they covered their shelters with logs. My grandpa and his buddies fought from tree-to-tree, against hidden machine-gun nests and tank-supported infantry of a superior German force. They crossed minefields and booby traps but never stopped in their determined drive to save the "Lost Battalion".

On October 30, nearly half of 442 had become casualties. Finally only one hill stood in the way, but at the top were fifty crack Nazi marksmen with tanks that pinned down the 442. Then suddenly the colonel received new orders to charge up the hill. The 442 stood up and started to move forward on their Bonzai charge and shouted, "Bonzai! Bonzai!" This made the Germans very afraid and had a psychological effect on them. As they got closer, my grandpa and his friends fought the Germans in a bitter hand-to-hand combat till the enemy finally was defeated.

On October 27, the 442 had marched into the Vosges Forest with 2,900 men and one month later came out with only 700 men. More than 800 men of the 442 were dead or wounded just to save 211 men of the "Lost Battalion". This meant that four 442 soldiers were lost to one from the "Lost Battalion." Usually when on the offense, you could expect to lose two to one, but never four to one. No one told my grandpa and the others to stop, slow down, or back away. This was the turning point for the Japanese American soldiers. When they finally broke through and saved the "Lost Battalion," they proved themselves to America.

After this brutal battle General Dahlquist of the 36th asked the men of the 442 to attend a special ceremony, so he could thank them personally. When my grandpa and only a few hundred men showed up out of the usual regimental number of 4,500, he asked the commander, "Colonel, where are the rest of the men?" The commander tearfully replied, "You're looking at the entire regiment...that's all that's left." My grandpa and the men of the 442 followed the soldier's code of conduct which states "never leave a comrade behind."

My grandpa and his buddies fought bravely and hard during the war. Why did my grandpa and the other Japanese American soldiers fight so hard? I believe that they were doing this to prove their loyalty to America. My grandpa and his friends helped America win World War II and also helped to lessen racial discrimination against Japanese. I am thankful for his patriotism and proud to be his grandson.

NATIONAL HISTORY DAY - 100/442nd

by Ted Tsukiyama, Historical Committee

The 1996 annual National History Day which will convene on June 10, 1996 at College Park, Maryland will feature three winning exhibits on the subject of the Nisei soldier of World War II and highlighting the battle records of the 100th Battalion and the 100/442nd Regimental Combat Team. Participants are junior and senior high students from across the nation who were respective winners of their state History Fair competition.

Meg Boylan, who solicited questionnaire responses from 442nd veterans, won first place in the senior individual project category from the State of Maryland with her project exhibit on the 442nd. Tara Ervin and Renee Kelly prepared a video on the 442nd RCT and MIS which won first place in the high school competition in Alaska and will present their video exhibit in the Senior Group Media category at the National History Day competition.

Travis Fischer, a 13-year old from Baytown, Texas won first place in the Junior Division Individual Project of the Texas State History Fair with his exhibit "Nisei Take Stands in World War II: Honor, Loyalty, Sacrifice." Travis will represent the state of Texas at the National History Day with his exhibit on the Nisei soldier of World War II, which was thoroughly researched and included interviews with 442nd and MIS veterans. The introductory text to his Exhibit reads:

Nisei Take Stands in World War II: Honor, Loyalty, Sacrifice

During the 1800s, Japanese immigrants came to Hawaii and the western United States. The Issei (first generation immigrants) and their children, Nisei, were denied land, jobs, and citizenship. After the bombing of Pearl Harbor, Anglos feared sabotage from their Japanese American neighbors. The government reacted by classifying every person of Japanese ancestry as 4-C, enemy alien, and moving them to internment camps. The Nisei reeled in shock. First, their ancestral country launched an unprovoked attack against the country of their birth. Then, their birth country declared them enemy aliens and imprisoned them.

At the beginning of World War II the Nisei took three heroic stands. First, they took a stand to regain

personal and family honor which was lost by the attack on Pearl Harbor. The Nisei took a second stand to prove their loyalty by volunteering for the Army resulting in the formation of the 100th/442nd Regimental Combat Team in 1943. Third, the Nisei distinguished themselves by making the stand of sacrifice by giving their lives in battle.

The Nisei pledged to “go for broke” or give their all in battle. They fought valiantly in both theaters of war illustrating their stands for honor, loyalty and sacrifice. Their accomplishments included:

- liberating Bruyeres, France where grateful people still speak of the Hawaiians who saved them.
- rescuing the First Battalion, 141st Infantry, 36th Division (Lost Battalion) from behind German lines saving 275 Texans while suffering 814 Nisei casualties
- liberating Dachau sub-camps near Munich, Germany, while the Nisei soldiers’ families were still confined in U.S. camps
- serving in the Pacific as military intelligence (MIS) translators and interpreters risking death if captured since the Japanese regarded them as traitors.

The stands taken by the Nisei are historically significant. Their pursuit of honor and display of loyalty weakened prejudice against Asian Americans. The Nisei MIS are credited with shortening the Pacific war by two years and saving one million lives. Further, the 100/442nd is the most decorated unit in military history. With their earned respect and recognition, they entered politics fighting prejudice legislatively. The heroics of the 442nd showed Asian-Americans as “model citizens” helping Hawaii win statehood.

I developed my project using numerous primary and secondary sources including interviews with 442nd veterans. From interviews with Herbert Sasaki, I learned of the 442nd’s battles while George Oiye shared the pain of witnessing Dachau’s liberation. Harry Akune and Ted Tsukiyama taught me about the MIS role in the Pacific. From my interview with Brigadier General Armin Puck and reading declassified documents, I gained insight on the rescue of the “Lost Battalion.” Secondary sources provided information on the politics of the 100/442nd’s creation and a historical overview of my topic.

My research into the 100/442 Regimental Combat Team shows the historical significance of the stands

taken by young Nisei. Willing to sacrifice their lives to save their family honor and prove their loyalty, they represent the best of America.



A COUNTRY STOLEN: THE STORY OF THE VVV

by Bill Thompson

It was about 3:00 a.m. in the morning. A shout went through the barracks at the shooting range for the men to wake up and assemble outside. The soldiers sleepily fell into line to hear the orders. What emergency had taken place for the men to get up at this un-

godly hour? The orders were then read. The men were shocked! Disbelief ran through the minds of the assembled personnel. The orders bluntly stated that all men of Japanese ancestry, the Nisei, were immediately dismissed from the Hawaii Territorial Guard!

Short hours after the bombing of Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941. The University of Hawaii ROTC had been called to duty. Later that day, they were mobilized into the Hawaii Territorial Guard (HTG) by orders of the Governor of Hawaii. For six weeks these young University students, now soldiers, guarded installations throughout Honolulu. Then came the bomb-shell on that early morning hour dismissing them from service; they were booted out merely for being of Japanese ancestry. This was, of course, part of the hysteria that followed the bombing of Pearl Harbor. In describing the humiliation inflicted upon the Nisei, Nolle Smith, former UH sports star and a commanding officer in the HTG, would say 50 years later at a UH banquet honoring the VVV: "We all cried when we heard those orders."

A few days later, some of those discharged from the HTG gathered on the University campus under the shade of a shower tree near University Avenue discussing their plight. Classes were well underway and it was too late for many to return and finish their semester. From across the street in Atherton House, Hung Wai Ching, the YMCA secretary, saw the group. He walked over to talk to these former ex-ROTC cadets and, now, ex-HTG soldiers. In essence, what he told the dejected Nisei was simply that they could continue to feel sorry for themselves or to do something about it.

This spurred the former students to call a meeting under the guidance of Shigeo Yoshida, educator, at the downtown YMCA for those who had been dismissed from the HTG as well as other interested Nisei. The up-shot of this was a letter to the military commander. This letter was a "manifesto" that represented the feelings of the young, Nisei. Part of that letter stated: "We know but one loyalty and that is to the Stars and Stripes. We wish to do our part as loyal Americans ..."

Not only were the Nisei kicked out of the HTG, other Nisei serving in the 298th and 299th Hawaii National Guard regiments were stripped of their weapons. New regulations prevented the Nisei from enlisting as they were now classified: Class C - Enemy Alien. Enemy aliens? ***Their country had been stolen from them!*** Their birthright as Americans was denied them!

Lt. Gen. Delos C. Emmons, military governor of Hawaii, was influenced in his humane treatment of the Japanese community by prominent local figures such as Charles R. Hemenway, Leslie Hicks, McKinley High Principal Miles Carey, UH President Gregg Sinclair, and Hung Wai Ching - to name just a few. Further, the FBI headed by Robert Shivers and the Army intelligence unit under Colonel Kendall J. Fielder had found no evidence of disloyalty among the local Nisei. In accepting the plea by the Nisei, the General was guided by existing military orders: no weapons could be issued to the Nisei, nor could they be placed in any position that could be considered militarily sensitive. Thus, the Nisei were only permitted to enlist as laborers, 169 of them, in a paramilitary unit that February of 1942.

Hung Wai Ching tells the story of Colonel Albert Kualii Brickwood Lyman, in charge of military engineering, when asked if he could use the Nisei responded: "Only 169—? Bring more and I'll use them all." A few months later, Lyman was promoted to Brigadier General, the first local person to attain that rank.

The young Nisei were stationed at Schofield Barracks and called themselves the VARSITY VICTORY VOLUNTEERS. They built barracks, put up barbed wire fencing, smashed rocks at the quarry in Waianae Mountain range and performed other menial tasks for nearly a year. The staunch character of these young Nisei could be seen in such persons as Akira Otani and Walter Iwasa, who had been seniors at the UH. Their fathers had been "arrested" and interned; but their loyalty remained firm and was never in doubt.

It was in January 1943, when Secretary of War Henry L. Stimson, after lengthy study, announced plans to accept Nisei volunteers for an all-Nisei special combat team. He stated: "It is the inherent right of every faithful citizen, regardless of ancestry, to bear arms in the national defense... Loyalty to country is a voice that must be heard..." These words echoed the message contained in the "manifesto" issued by the ex-ROTC students a year earlier.

In February 1943, President Franklin D. Roosevelt approved the orders creating an all-Nisei army unit, the 442nd Regimental Combat Team. The hysteria and near panic generated by the bombing of Pearl Harbor had softened by this time. The Varsity Victory Volunteers, who went under the abbreviated title of "VVV", were allowed to disband. Many enlisted in the 442nd. Others were eagerly sought by the Military Intelligence Ser-

vice for their linguistic talents.

The following stories concern seven VVV—those who did not march home with the others.

It was June 26, 1944 when the 442nd Regimental Combat Team first went into battle near the small village of Suvereto in the Appenines of central Italy as part of the 34th Division. The battle-hardened 100th Infantry Battalion took the part of the 1st Battalion of the combat team. The 2nd and 3rd battalions encountered stiff enemy opposition that day and the attack was stalled. The 100th Bn, which was in reserve, was ordered to carry on the attack. In a brilliant maneuver, they slipped in between the 2nd and 3rd battalions and smashed a surprised enemy and routed them at Belvedere. Enemy losses were heavy and the 100th won its first coveted Presidential Unit Citation for this feat. It was during this action that S/Sgt Grover K. Nagaji (Waipahu), Company B, 100th Infantry, lost his life when his squad destroyed a German tank. The explosion of the tank caused his death according to his buddies.

Nagaji had been a student at the UH enrolled in Teachers College. His classmates and VVV compatriots included persons such as former Intermediate Court of Appeals Judge Harry T. Tanaka, former Circuit Court Judge Masato Doi, and Claude Y. Takekawa. As a VVV member at Schofield Barracks, he was known as a “darn good” carpenter. Later, he trained at Camp Shelby as a volunteer with the 442nd. The 100th Bn which had been fighting in Italy for months saw their casualty list grow alarmingly; this called for replacements. Nagaji was one of the 442nd replacements to the 100th. He became the first VVV to fall in battle.

A week later, having crossed the Cecina River, the 2nd Bn again engaged the enemy in a fierce fight on July 4. This battle would gain the sobriquet “Hill 140.” The ferocity of the fighting would cause some to call this “Little Cassino” in comparison to the Cassino monastery siege near Anzio. Companies E and G led the initial attack. Under sunny skies, the battle raged for four days before the enemy was pushed back. This Hill 140 area had been prepared for the German troops by the Todt Labor Construction to withstand bombardment which was the reason for the slow advance by the 2nd Bn rifle companies. Losses were heavy on both sides, especially from artillery and mortar fire.

On that July 4th, Sgt Howard M. Urabe (Kapaa, Kauai) of Company G was cited for gallantry in action. According to his citation: “... Sgt Urabe crawled 25 yards

through sparse undergrowth to reach a position in front of an enemy machine gun. Timing his movements... Sgt Urabe suddenly stood up and fired a rifle grenade into the nest, killing the machine gunner and destroying the gun. When the other two members of the gun crew started to run, Sgt Urabe killed both of them with his M-1 rifle. When another machine gun fired upon him, Sgt Urabe fired another grenade and knocked out the second gun...” Urabe was killed by a sniper as he was preparing for another assault. His bravery on Hill 140 earned him a Silver Star, posthumously.

Urabe’s comrades say that he planned to make his career in social work or, perhaps, take up teaching.

The battle for Hill 140 near Molino A Venatoabbato continued as both sides hammered each other. The main objective of the 34th Division was the distant seaport of Leghorn (Livorno), the third largest in Italy. However, the Germans controlled the Appenine Mountain range which looked down on the coastal road. To reach Leghorn, the enemy had to be dislodged from his fortified mountain strongholds. The immediate objectives were the villages of Castellina and Rosignano. Company E, 2nd Bn, continued the attack on July 5 resulting in heavy casualties. The rifle platoon led by T/Sgt Terry Ihara (he would receive a battlefield commission two months later) was subjected to heavy fire. One of those who fell was Sgt Jenhatsu Chinen (Ewa), a casualty most likely from artillery fire.

Chinen enjoyed music and played the guitar for the boys during rest periods. He carried that guitar with him from Hawaii to Camp Shelby and, then, overseas. He was an assistant squad leader like his close buddy, Daniel K. Inouye (who would later receive a battlefield commission and, years later, become a U.S. Senator). His goal at the University was take up medicine. He and Inouye had dreams of establishing a medical clinic after the war with Inouye as surgeon and he as internist.

By July 8, Hill 140 fell to the 442nd and the Combat Team pressed on heading toward new objectives. Some were small rural villages, some just clusters of farm dwellings. Many of the names—Rotini, Pgio Casale, Pastina, Pgio Collelugolli, Fondone—won’t be found on travel maps. A deserted farmhouse which stood in the middle of a large field played a significant part in one battle. It was used as an observation post (OP) and later, as a command post (CP) and the veterans of the 2nd Bn remember it vividly. It was painted a light pink and, hence, was referred to as the “Pink OP”. It was

near this area that Pfc Akio Nishikawa (Paia, Maui), a medic for Company E, 2nd Bn, won a Silver Star medal. Sgt Don K. Masuda recalls that despite the shelling, Nishikawa went to help a wounded comrade. His citation reads in part: "... Nishikawa ran for a distance of a 100 yards through concentrated 88mm artillery and mortar shellings to render first aid. Although advised by others in the platoon to wait until the enemy ceased shelling, he paid no heed to their warnings and proceeded to rescue the man with the words, 'Gotta go!' ..." Nishikawa was mortally wounded by shrapnel during this action. Earlier, on July 4th during the Hill 140 battle, Nishikawa had been cited for heroic achievement in going to the aid of the wounded despite artillery fire. He won a Bronze Star for this feat. His medals were awarded posthumously.

Nishikawa's actions truly reflected his calling, for at the University his plans were to pursue a medical career.

The next day, July 12, as the 2nd Bn moved forward, Company F riflemen sought shelter in the two-story farmhouse, or as the records state, the "Pink OP." A shell had already punctured a hole in the wall but the farmhouse still appeared sturdy. Together with the Company F riflemen was a detail from Bn Hqs. The front-line troops of Company F were experiencing enemy fire. Suddenly the forward troops saw an explosion as a shell struck the Pink OP in the rear of them. The soldiers, huddled in the farmhouse, were sitting on the floor with their backs against the walls when an 88mm shell came with a sudden "whoosh", smashing into the building. A blast, a flash of light— then silence. Two Company F riflemen, Sgt Kiyoshi Iguchi and Pfc Hiroichi Tomita, were instantly killed. The two were covered with dust, their heads slumped forward. Motionless, they looked like broken statues. A third soldier was wounded, he sustained a gash on his left temple. Cpl Richard "Sus" Yamamoto, a VVV himself, and two others of the Bn Hqs detail who were seated opposite the Company F riflemen, moved to stop the bleeding and bandaged the wounded GI. On the second floor of the Pink OP was Sgt George K. Oka, another VVV, from the I&R staff of the 2nd Bn.

Tomita (Wailuku, Maui) was a runner for his platoon; his task was to relay messages between the front and the rear command post. On this trip, he had a whole batch of canteens which he had refilled for his buddies on the frontline. Later, returning from the front, his buddies would sadly note the canteens scattered in front

of the farmhouse.

At the University, Tomita, a whiz in mathematics, would probably have taken up engineering. Tomita came from a family of nine children. He had a brother in the 442nd - T/4 Richard T. Tomita, Battery A, 522nd Field Artillery Battalion.

By July 18, the seaport of Leghorn (Livorno) had fallen to the U.S. 5th Army. In less than a month of fighting, the enemy had been pushed back 50 miles to the Arno River beyond which lay the heavily fortified Gothic Line. From the captured town of Luciana above Leghorn, one could see the Leaning Tower of Pisa in the distance. In early August, the Combat Team was pulled back from the frontlines. Recreation was afforded the men. At the same time, the Combat Team was refitted and training resumed. Unknown to the troops, they were being readied for their next assignment—France.

It was on August 2, 1944, during one of the training sessions, an accident of horrible proportions occurred. The staff from the 109th Engineering Battalion, 34th Division, assisted by the 232 Engineers of the 442nd, were demonstrating the characteristics of German mines to the 3rd Bn of the 442nd. The demonstration ended and the mines were stored on a truck. Suddenly a tremendous explosion rocked the truck, the carnage was terrible. No one is sure what caused the explosion—it might have been that the detonators were loaded with the mines and that one of the igniting devices of the detonators may not been uncocked. Nearly a ton of explosives went off! The claim is that the Germans explosives were nearly twice as powerful as ours. Official Combat Team records state that ten men died instantly, one died later of injuries from the blast. Two men from Company M, 3rd Bn, were killed. They were S/Sgt Katsuhiko Kanemitsu and Pfc Chikao Nishi. The 232nd Engineers lost Sgt Daniel D. Betsui and Pfc Masao Iha.

Betsui (Hanapepe, Kauai) was pursuing a career in medicine at the University when the bombing of Pearl Harbor interrupted his education. He joined the VVV, and later, the 442nd where he was with the Engineers. His platoon leader, 1st Lt Walter T. Matsumoto, and his buddies remember him for his good nature and the songs he composed for them; a special song for the 232nd Engineers, and before that at Schofield Barracks, even a song for the VVV!

In September 1944, the Combat Team was sent to