

# The 442nd as a Fighting Unit

David F. Bonner

*Editor's note: This chapter from Nisei Spirit: The Cultural Identity of the 442nd RCT tells the story of unparalleled fortitude in the face of adversity, ranging from prejudice in the rear to seemingly overwhelming odds on the front lines from the 442nd Regimental Combat Team during World War II. The 442nd RCT mainly consisted of second-generation Japanese Americans, or Nisei. Author David Bonner examines the strong cultural identity of the Nisei soldiers, paired with the task cohesion and the primary group cohesion theories, as it forms a framework for achieving a better understanding of small-unit effectiveness. To view a digital copy of Nisei Spirit, visit [https://www.armyupress.army.mil/Portals/7/combats-studies-institute/csi-books/NISEI-SPIRIT/Nisei%20Spirit%20\(WEB\).pdf](https://www.armyupress.army.mil/Portals/7/combats-studies-institute/csi-books/NISEI-SPIRIT/Nisei%20Spirit%20(WEB).pdf).*

*The best troops are called upon to do the hardest fighting. Whenever a general finds himself up against a tough proposition he sends for the best troops he has ... A man who is being shot at daily has a hard time recognizing it as a compliment when, dead tired, bruised, and battered, he is called upon to make one more effort to risk his life another time—but it is a compliment nevertheless.*

—Col. Sherwood Dixon, writing to Chaplain Masao Yamada of the 442nd RCT

## Background

The 442nd Regimental Combat Team was originally composed of the 442nd Infantry Regiment, the 232nd Combat Engineer Company, and the 522nd Field Artillery Battalion. After the arrival of an additional 2,686 Hawaiian Nisei at Camp Shelby, Mississippi on 13 April, the Nisei volunteers began their training on 10 May 1943.<sup>1</sup> At the conclusion of the war, the 442nd RCT had earned the distinction of being the most decorated combat unit in American military history for its

size and duration of service.<sup>2</sup> Some of their most noted achievements are listed in the appendix; however, this chapter will attempt to link the lessons learned by the Nisei from their time spent in the Japanese language schools, to their involvement in community organizations, and ultimately to their performance as a fighting unit. Analysis will be done using primary source materials from interviews conducted with the 442nd veterans by the Hanashi Oral History Project, and records from the Go for Broke National Education Center.

## “Kotonks” and “Buddha-heads”

Despite their shared Japanese ancestry, Nisei soldiers from Hawaii did not initially warm to their fellow Nisei from the mainland United States. The Hawaiians derisively referred to the mainland Nisei as “Kotonks,” because when a coconut with no meat inside falls to the ground, that is the sound it makes. The Hawaiians joked that if you were to hit a mainland Nisei on the side of the head, it would go “kotonk.” The mainlanders, for their part, called the Hawaiians “Buddha-heads” because they thought the Hawaiians looked more Japanese than they did; and adding insult to injury, “Buddha” sounds like *buta*, which is the Japanese word for “pig.”<sup>3</sup>

The Hawaiian Nisei had a reputation for being a care-free, gregarious group who loved to gamble. Their motto, “*Ganbare*,” or “*Go for Broke*,” a phrase commonly used in dice games meaning to “risk everything” would soon become the unit’s official motto.<sup>4</sup> The mainland Nisei on the other hand were much more reserved. Many of them were preoccupied by thoughts of their family members who had been left behind in the internment camps, as well as the hope that serving with distinction in combat would secure early releases for all internees.

There were in fact many social and cultural differences that strained relations between Hawaiians and

mainlanders. While the Hawaiians spoke a somewhat pidgin dialect—an amalgam of English, Japanese, Chinese, Filipino, Spanish, and Hawaiian—the mainland *Nisei* spoke a more “proper” English.<sup>5</sup> The Hawaiians saw the mainland *Nisei* as somewhat aloof and arrogant. According to Hawaiian 442nd veteran Tadashi Tojo, “They talked too much. They were on the defensive too, because we outnumbered them. But we felt so damned insecure and intimidated because they spoke better than we did.”<sup>6</sup> At Camp Shelby, fights between the Hawaiians and mainlanders became a common occurrence. So frequent and serious were the fights between soldiers that the Army leadership discussed the possibility of disbanding the unit altogether.

It is important to note that at this time, hardly any of the Hawaiian *Nisei* were aware of the internment camps on the mainland. They had no idea that most of the mainlanders who arrived at basic training were coming straight from the relocation centers and had left their families behind. And unlike the mainlanders, who received warm but reluctant support from their communities, the support that the Hawaiian *Nisei* soldiers received from their hometowns and local areas was tremendous. When the 100th Battalion left Honolulu on 28 March 1943, the Honolulu Chamber of Commerce held a farewell ceremony for the 2,686 volunteers in front of the Iolani Palace. The *Honolulu Star Bulletin* commented:

No scene in Honolulu during World War II has been more striking, more significant, than that at the territorial capitol grounds on Sunday. It was not alone the size of the crowd, somewhere between 15,000 and

17,000, and said by oldtimers to be the largest that ever massed within the gateways to old Iolani Palace ... It was, most significantly, the evident pride of the families and friends of these young Americans—their pride that the youths are entrusted with the patriotic mission of fighting for their country and the Allied nations.<sup>7</sup>

In an effort to improve relations among the soldiers, one of the unit’s chaplains, Hiro Higuchi suggested to

the regimental commander, Col. Charles Pence, a weekend visit for the Hawaiians to one of the internment camps. Colonel Pence agreed and sent a group of the Hawaiians to Rohwer Internment Camp in nearby Arkansas.<sup>8</sup> During the bus ride from Mississippi to Arkansas, many of the Hawaiian soldiers were singing and strumming their ukuleles, wearing aloha shirts and joking about how they were going to dance with the mainlander’s “*wahini*” (Hawaiian slang for young girls). However, once they came into view of guard towers and barbed wire fences, their demeanor suddenly changed.<sup>9</sup>

Most of the Hawaiians, like Tadashi Tojo, were unaware of the internment camps until they arrived at Rohwer. “Even now I feel that twinge, all those barbed wire encampments.”<sup>10</sup> During the social gatherings of their visit, Tojo could not believe how cheerful and lighthearted many of the young people seemed under such living conditions. Perhaps the most impactful part of this visit was when the Hawaiians saw the camp graveyard. The thought of how many people were uprooted from their homes, brought to a strange place and had died there, was overwhelming to the Hawaiians. “That’s when I started



to think a little—how these people were American citizens just like us, but they had been treated this way.”<sup>11</sup> After the visit to Rohwer, fights between the Hawaiians and mainlanders ceased, and the regiment began functioning as a cohesive unit.

This shift in attitudes, however, should not suggest that tensions between the men suddenly disappeared or that personalities somehow changed overnight. Most of the soldiers still preferred to socialize with others from their own hometown or state. The Hawaiians remained as carefree and gregarious as before, and the mainlanders kept their typical reserved demeanor. Fundamentally, they were the same group of men as before, but instead of viewing each other with doubt or suspicion, they had finally established a sense of trust amongst themselves. They understood the task that lay before them, they identified a common purpose, and they also knew that in order to survive they would have to rely on each other.

## Training

Unlike many frontline combat units that fought in World War II, the 442nd RCT went through an extended training period before its deployment to the European theater, which contributed greatly to its success on the battlefield. The first group of *Nisei* volunteers from Hawaii who formed the 100th Battalion, which was later incorporated into the 442nd, were activated in June 1942 but did not see their first combat engagement until August 1943. The mainland *Nisei* volunteers who formed the first group of the 442nd began basic training in February 1943, and likewise did not deploy until 1944. This crucial period gave them time to build their soldiering skills, gain proficiency as a combat unit, and gain confidence in their ability to work together as a team. Intensive training, however, was only part of the formula to their operational success.

## Education and Vocational Skills

One of the greatest strengths of the 442nd was that it brought to its ranks individuals from all types of educational backgrounds. Among its members were men who were already practicing doctors, lawyers, engineers, priests, and schoolteachers. The unit also included many skilled laborers, such as mechanics, plumbers, carpenters, and welders, whose average aptitude test scores were much higher than what was required for acceptance to

the Army’s Officer Training Program.<sup>12</sup> The 442nd was likely among the most highly educated US Army units of World War II, which undoubtedly helped them adapt to changing situations on the battlefield.

## Personnel Stability

In World War II, the US Army utilized a different system of replenishing front-line divisions than the German and British Armies. In many of the protracted European wars of the nineteenth and early twentieth century, the ranks of most operational combat divisions would eventually be wiped out, but the practice was to keep the divisions on the roster even if their troop strength was only two or three companies. During World War II the German and British armies would at that point withdraw these depleted divisions from the front lines for rest, refitting, and reorganization. American troops on the other hand, once committed to combat, would remain on the line until the end of the war and would have their ranks filled by a steady stream of replacements.

Army Chief of Staff, Gen. George C. Marshall, made the decision to keep American infantry divisions at full troop strength levels by regularly augmenting them with replacements, not in groups of companies, platoons, or squads, but as individuals.<sup>13</sup> The system seemed very promising, as it would allow American divisions to stay on the line continuously while they brought in fresh soldiers. The idea was also that new troops would join veterans who would integrate them into the unit and teach them the tactics of survival in combat. Unfortunately, this did not always work out as hoped. Many of the Army units did not function properly after absorbing new recruits. Due to their inexperience and occasional lack of discipline, the veterans who were ordered to train them often saw new recruits as a liability.

One of the most notable examples of a unit that experienced this was the famed “Band of Brothers” E-Company of the 101st Airborne Division. “For one thing the new guys tended to draw fire, because they bunched up, talked too much, or lit cigarettes at night. For another, veterans just didn’t want to make friends with guys whom they expected to die soon.”<sup>14</sup>

The 442nd RCT however, as a segregated unit, was not subject to the same troop replacement policies as the rest of the US Army. The replacements who joined the ranks of the 442nd RCT were all *Nisei* who came

from the same stock and upbringing as the veteran soldiers, and most were coming directly from the same internment camps. When a *Nisei* soldier finished basic training, he already knew exactly to which unit he would be assigned, and very likely had friends or relatives who were already serving. Also, unlike other conventional US Army units, the replacements of the 442nd RCT trained together as a unit before they were deployed, rather than being shipped off on an individual basis. When they arrived and were assigned to their operational companies, fresh recruits were usually met warmly by the senior NCOs who took them under their wing.<sup>15</sup>

## Rebuilding Trust and Combating Prejudice

By the time the men of the 100th and 442nd completed training and were preparing to deploy to the

European Theater, they were rapidly developing a strong sense of confidence in themselves as individual soldiers, as well as a sense of trust in the group's own collective abilities. But no matter how much confidence they had in themselves, no combat unit can function properly if it does not trust its leadership and the legitimacy of its mission. The question therefore remained, could they trust their own Army leadership? Could they entrust their lives to a group of officers who may have viewed them with a sense of suspicion and racial prejudice, to say nothing of trusting a government that had fundamentally violated their civil liberties and was still holding many

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of their family members captive in internment camps without trial or due process? How could they be sure that they weren't simply viewed as expendable grunts whose lives would be wasted in this war? The two leaders who deserve the most credit in re-establishing trust between the *Nisei* Soldiers and the US military are Lieut. Col. Farrant Turner, Commander of the 100th Infantry Battalion, and Col. Charles Pence, Commander of the 442nd Regimental Combat Team. Their personal examples and combat leadership not only gained them the respect of their men, but also demonstrated to their superiors that the 442nd could be relied upon for any mission.

Farrant L. Turner was well into his forties when he took command of the 100th Battalion and was affectionately called the "Old Man" of the unit. A native of Hilo, Hawaii, Turner immediately joined the Army after graduating from Wesleyan University in 1917 and served nine months in France as part of the 66th Regiment during World War I. After his first discharge from active duty, Turner returned to Hawaii and found employment in supplies distribution, while continuing to serve in the Hawaii National Guard.<sup>16</sup> Following the attack on Pearl Harbor, Turner was assigned command of the Hawaiian Provisional Infantry Battalion, which consisted of Japanese Americans from the 298th and 299th Infantry Regiments before they were merged into the 100th Battalion. Upon taking command of the 100th Battalion, Turner made what would later become a fateful decision by appointing Maj. James Lovell as his executive officer. A Nebraska native, but a member of the Hawaii National Guard since 1931, Lovell had spent many years working with Japanese Americans, and like his commanding officer he was very protective of them and shared a dedication to their training needs.<sup>17</sup>

During the initial training phase, many of the men in the 100th Battalion noted that Turner's leadership was essential in building a climate of acceptance for his unit. Growing up in Hawaii, Turner had personally witnessed the unfair and sometimes harsh treatment that the *Nisei* endured in their daily lives.<sup>18</sup> He empathized greatly with his men and understood the enormous societal pressure they felt to prove their worthiness as loyal Americans. Knowing this, Turner consistently lobbied for the 100th Battalion to be given a combat role, rather than serving in support positions, as had originally been intended by

the 34th Division commander.<sup>19</sup> Turner was also well known for supporting his men in public and would not tolerate any prejudicial language or any overt discrimination in their presence. In one instance, Turner even confronted a superior officer for referring to one of his men as a “Jap.”<sup>20</sup> Turner also refused to join the officers club at Camp McCoy since it barred the entry of Japanese American officers. Realizing that Turner’s actions not only put him at odds with certain senior officers, but also threatened his social standing, the men of the 100th Battalion knew that he had their best interests in mind with every decision.<sup>21</sup>

A native of Warren County, Pennsylvania, Col. Charles Pence was a burly, athletic individual and a star football player while studying at DePauw University. Pence volunteered for the Army during World War I, and because of his high academic class standing, was awarded his degree a year early in 1917. He gained a reputation as a quiet, steady, capable tactician and was well regarded by his fellow infantrymen.<sup>22</sup> Although Pence did not have the years of experience interacting with Japanese Americans that Turner had in Hawaii, he had been stationed in China during the Japanese occupation of Manchuria. The Army regarded him as an expert on both the Chinese and the Japanese, and for that reason seemed the obvious choice to command the 442nd Regiment.<sup>23</sup> He made great efforts to get to know his men, and before long he began to observe the growing tensions between the Hawaiians and the mainlanders. One of the many challenges that Pence faced as regimental commander was integrating the 100th and 442nd into a combined unit and managing the social differences between the Hawaiians and mainland Japanese. Pence could see that various subcultures were beginning to form within the unit, which threatened good order and discipline. One of the crucial ways he was able to bring his *Nisei* soldiers together and build on their commonalities was the example mentioned earlier when he arranged for members of the 100th Battalion to visit the internment camps at Rohwer and Jerome. This single act showed the men that they each shared a common purpose when they volunteered.

Pence was equally dedicated to his men on the battlefield, always taking the lead in dangerous missions. During the rescue mission of the “Lost Battalion,” Pence maintained the morale of his men by forcing them to concentrate on re-establishing contact with the soldiers

of the 1st Battalion (141st Texas Infantry), rather than dwelling on their mistrust for division commander, Maj. Gen. John Dahlquist, whose orders they viewed as reckless.<sup>24</sup> Tragically, Pence was seriously wounded during the Battle of the Lost Battalion and was forced to relinquish command of the 442nd to his deputy, Col. Virgil Miller. The absence of Pence was a major loss for the men of the 442nd, but for years after the war, veterans of the 442nd praised Pence’s leadership and acknowledged that it was his influence that held the unit together during those critical early days.<sup>25</sup>

## The 442nd Under Fire

Any assessment of the 442nd RCT’s combat effectiveness or unit cohesion must include a brief overview of the role it played in the Vosges Mountains Campaign of 1944; specifically, the rescue of “The Lost Battalion.” In September of 1944, after a grueling campaign in northern Italy, the 442nd was re-deployed to France, where it would be attached to the 36th Infantry Division. Upon arriving in Marseille on the 29th of September, the unit received 675 fresh replacements from the States and then traveled 500 miles by train through the Rhone Valley to the German held town of Bruyeres.<sup>26</sup> The German Army placed a heavily fortified garrison in the town because of its strategic location, only 50 miles from the German border. The mission of the 442nd was to retake Bruyeres and open up the railroad and highway hub for the Seventh Army on its way to St. Die.<sup>27</sup>

The assault on Bruyeres began on the 15th of October and lasted for nine unrelenting days. Once the firing stopped, the townspeople emerged from their homes and shelters to greet their liberators but were stunned by what they saw. Private Stanley Akita said, “They didn’t believe we were American soldiers. I don’t think they knew what a Japanese looked like!”<sup>28</sup> But the ceasefire did not last long. The Germans launched a counterattack from a hill overlooking the east side of the town. Company H charged up the hill and ended up in a brutal hand-to-hand confrontation that lasted nearly 30 minutes.<sup>29</sup>

The 442nd was then ordered to capture the town of Biffontaine, located six miles to the east of Bruyeres and protected by four steep hills. After another eight days of house-to-house fighting, the 442nd secured the town and was finally pulled off the line for a much-needed rest in the town of Belmont. However, after only two days,

the 442nd was called back for what would prove to be their most difficult mission yet. They were ordered to rescue the 1st Battalion of the Texas 141st Regiment; a unit that had been cut off behind enemy lines and whose position was in imminent danger of being overrun.

The 1st Battalion was situated on a hilltop east of Biffontaine. They were under constant enemy bombardment and quickly running low on supplies. The highest-ranking officer that remained in the unit, Lieut. Marty Higgins, made a desperate plea to the 36th HQ over the radio: "Send us medical supplies," "We need rations," "My wounded need plasma."<sup>30</sup> Major General Dahlquist ordered the 442nd to rescue the 1st Battalion at all costs.

On 29 October, the 3rd and 100th Battalions of the 442nd moved through the narrow ridge to the 1st Battalion's position, but there was no room to maneuver and the only option was a frontal assault. Heavy rain and slippery ground slowed their advance; the hill was also covered with booby-traps and hidden machine gun nests. After two days of fighting and almost no gains on the ground, Lt. Col. Alfred Pursall (3rd Battalion Commander) leaped out and shouted, "Okay boys, let's go!" Brandishing his .45-caliber pistol, Pursall charged up the hill directly into enemy fire. Eventually, every man in the 1st Platoon was following behind him.<sup>31</sup> This action later became known as the famous "Banzai Charge," but contrary to popular belief, the men of the 442nd did not actually yell the word *Banzai* as they charged. It was in fact a mix of screams and curse words until they reached the German lines.<sup>32</sup>

On the 30th of October, Company I of the 442nd finally reached the 1st Battalion and rescued its remaining 211 men. The rescue of the Lost Battalion was indeed an historic moment for the *Nisei* soldiers, but it came with a heavy price. The 442nd suffered



Bruyères Sector, France, 12 November 1944. The color guard of the 442nd RCT stands at attention while citations are read. This was the recognition ceremony ordered by Gen. John Dahlquist. (Photo courtesy of the author; United States Army Signal Corps)

nearly 800 casualties during this mission. When the 442nd began the Vosges Mountains Campaign a month earlier, its troop strength level was 2,943 men.<sup>33</sup> By the time they were taken off the line on 9 November they had suffered 161 killed in action (including 13 medics), 43 missing in action, and roughly 2,000 were seriously wounded. Their troop levels stood at less than one third of the unit's authorized strength.<sup>34</sup> Immediately following the Vosges Mountains Campaign, in light of the horrifying casualty rates suffered by the 442nd, accusations were made against Major General Dahlquist for negligence of command. Surprisingly, none of the protests came from the surviving *Nisei* soldiers, but rather from the non-Japanese American officers. The complaints reached the attention of Maj. Gen. Lucian Truscott, commander of the VI Corps, who considered relieving Dahlquist of his duties, but there is no official account as to why he ultimately decided against it.<sup>35</sup>

Although the *Nisei* soldiers pressed on for the duration of the war and continued to serve without

any protest, the grief felt by so many after the Lost Battalion mission did raise doubts in some of their minds as to why they were being pressed so hard, and for the first time, their stoic nature of *gaman* was shaken. On October 30th, Chaplain Masao Yamada wrote a long letter to his friend Col. Sherwood Dixon, who had commanded the 3rd Battalion while the 442nd was training at Camp Shelby, Mississippi:

The major general is quite concerned and has commanded the 442nd to push. It is quite a strain to go forward, regardless of machine gun nests and their well-prepared defense ... The cost has been high. I admire the courage and the discipline of our loyal men ... But I am spiritually low for once. My heart weeps for our men, especially for those who gave all. Never had combat affected me so deeply as has this emergency mission. I am probably getting soft but the price is too costly for our men. I feel this way more because the burden is laid on the combat team when the rest of the 141st is not forced to take the same responsibility.<sup>36</sup>

Colonel Dixon was moved by the letter from his friend and was deeply concerned by the loss of so many men in his unit. In his response dated 22 November, Dixon tried to console Chaplain Yamada, and at the same time allay some of his suspicions as to why so much had been asked of his men:

The best troops are called upon to do the hardest fighting. Whenever a general finds himself up against a tough proposition he sends for the best troops he has ... A man who is being shot at daily has a hard time recognizing it as a compliment when, dead tired, bruised, and battered, he is called upon to make one more effort to risk his life another time—but it is a compliment nevertheless.<sup>37</sup>

Even though these words must have brought little comfort to Chaplain Yamada at the time, Dixon was indeed right in his observation and many senior officers regarded the 442nd as the “go to” unit for difficult missions. What greater testament to the combat effectiveness of the *Nisei* soldiers than the fact that while in Italy, both Gen. Charles Ryder (commander of the 34th Division) and Gen. Mark Clark (commander of the 5th Army) both specifically requested the 442nd for difficult combat missions, including the assault on the

Gothic Line. The 442nd solidified its reputation there and General Clark acknowledged it, “They demonstrated conclusively the loyalty and valor of our American citizens of Japanese ancestry in combat.”<sup>38</sup>

## The Flaw of Primary-Group-Cohesion

There are many elements to the primary group cohesion thesis that would seem to lend it credibility and also make it a fitting description for the 442nd RCT. Since combat histories were first recorded, numerous first-hand accounts from soldiers on the battlefield have been passed down that echo the same sentiment; the idea that they fight primarily for their comrades. It is an intuitively satisfying notion and there is an undeniable emotional appeal to it, one that has been powerfully captured in many works of history and literature. In William Shakespeare’s epic *Henry V*, the young king Henry is found in Act IV rallying his troops on the eve of battle and addresses them as a “band of brothers,” who are united by their shared experiences in combat. The famed Civil War commander, Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain, even wrote in his memoirs that it was for “love, or bond of comradeship,” that drove the men under his command in battle after battle.<sup>39</sup> Powerful testimonials such as these, along with the analytical structure given by historians such as S.L.A. Marshall and Samuel Stouffer would seem to reinforce the narrative.

Despite its pervasiveness, there are some questions that the primary group cohesion hypothesis cannot answer. For example, what factor or combination of factors has enabled soldiers to overcome their fears in combat, even in the face of sustaining overwhelming casualties within their units? In the case of the 442nd RCT, its casualty ratio during World War II was 250 percent. Its highest troop strength level ever was 4,000 men, and by the end of the war nearly 14,000 had passed through its ranks.<sup>40</sup> During the Battle of Bruyeres and the subsequent rescue of the “Lost Battalion,” the 442nd suffered 800 casualties in a three day period in order to save 211 men of the Texas 1st Battalion. What kept the unit together and functional under such extreme conditions? And finally, how would soldiers with such strong emotional ties to their comrades maintain focus on military objectives if for example a friend suddenly suffers a combat wound? What is to keep overall unit cohesion from breaking down because of soldiers mourning for their fallen comrades?

## Combat Motivations of the Nisei Soldiers

Trying to identify the specific reasons why any group of soldiers choose to fight is a daunting task. Even with detailed interviews, oral histories, letters and memoirs from the soldiers themselves, we are still only getting anecdotal answers from a relatively small sample of participants in each campaign. The reasons for fighting are often as varied as each man, and very situational, given the nature of the conflict. However, by utilizing historical methods to examine particular groups of soldiers within the social and cultural framework of their development, it is often possible to construct a reliable understanding of their motivations. In the case of the Nisei soldiers of the 442nd RCT, it is indeed possible to construct such a framework.

When listening to the oral histories of the Nisei soldiers, it is easy to recognize the vast social differences between some of the men from different parts of the country. If not for their shared ethnicity, one might begin to doubt that some of these men had much in common at all with each other. But after listening closely, a shared culture begins to emerge, as do several common themes about why they joined the army, and what motivated them to fight for their country. Each individual's life story is unique, but they all seem to draw their inspiration from the same place. Only a few reference it specifically, but all express ideas from the Meiji era values that were passed on to them by their Issei parents and schoolteachers. These values were the foundational strength that the men of the 442nd RCT relied on when they charged into battle.

The loyalty of Japanese Americans was certainly a concern for the US government from the outset of the war, but for the Nisei it was never even an issue. Yoshiaki Fujitani (442nd, MIS) said the following about an event that happened in his home state of Hawaii a year before the attack on Pearl Harbor:

As a young man, I remember the visit of the Japanese plenipotentiary, Mr. Yosuke Yamamoto, Japan's delegate to the League of Nations prior to World War II. In his speech in Hawaii, he emphasized that the Nisei were Americans, they should be loyal to America. This sentiment was echoed repeatedly by our religious leaders, Japanese schoolteachers, and

our parents. A good Nisei, therefore, was first, a good, loyal American.<sup>41</sup>

Ted Tsukiyama (442nd RCT, 522nd Field Artillery) recalled the message that many Issei parents imparted to their sons as they left for induction into the army, "*Kuni no tame ni*" (for the sake of our country). "There was never any doubt what that meant to us. The only country we ever knew was America."<sup>42</sup> The Nisei soldiers all had unique ways of expressing their devotion to their country and to their home communities, but all can be traced back in some form to one of the "Twelve Virtues" of *Kyōiku Chokugo*, namely "*giyu*" (Should emergency arise, offer yourselves courageously to the State).

Another cultural value that was equally important in the minds of the Nisei soldiers was "*haji*" (shame). The Issei taught the generations of Japanese Americans that followed not only the importance of character and hard work in their daily lives, but also the concept of shame and protecting the family's honor. Most of the men in other army units came from different parts of the country, and once the war ended many of them would return home and never see their buddies again. But the Nisei soldiers, especially those from Hawaii, would return to the same tight knit communities as before. They, along with their parents, brothers, sisters, and close friends would return to the same towns, plantations, churches, and community centers. If they "shamed" themselves on the battlefield, it would mean "shame" for their families for the rest of their lives.

Most of the 442nd veterans who were asked to reflect on their battlefield experiences discussed this concept in one form or another. Lieutenant Daniel Inouye of the 100th Battalion (later US Senator from Hawaii) recalled the story of talking to his men on the morning of their first battle in Italy:

I asked every one of them, "what were they thinking about, last night?" Everyone gave me the same answer in a different way: "I hope I don't dishonor my family," "I hope I don't bring shame," "I hope that my father is not ashamed of me." The thought of bringing shame to the family was unbearable!<sup>43</sup>

Many of the Issei parents were terrified to watch their sons go off to war, but once their minds were made up, the parents often admonished them not to forget their traditions and values. Nelson Akagi



(442nd, 522nd Field Artillery) remembered his father's parting words ... "Shikari shinasai (Be a man) and "Kamei ni kizu tsukeru bekarazu" (never bring dishonor to the family). I never thought I'd hear my father tell me that!"<sup>44</sup>

One of the most poignant stories of family obligation came from a letter to Hiromi Suehiro of the 100th Battalion while he was serving in Italy:

I remembered a letter from my mother so I took the letter out. It doesn't get dark in Italy. At that time, I think it was around 8:00, I could still read it. You know, the letter started out with the usual salutations, everybody's fine, how are you. You know, so don't worry about us. She said, "soon you will be fighting the enemy. My son, do not be a coward. Be brave for your father and your family." And I think that my mother loved my father that much. She knew from the day I volunteered that some day she would have to say the words that she said to me in her letter. "Don't disgrace my husband and your family." And I said to myself, how can I hurt her by being a coward. So I made a silent vow to her.<sup>45</sup>

The *Nisei* were inculcated with the ethical values that their *Issei* parents brought with them from Japan. In a story for the Saturday Evening Post, reporter Magner White wrote that the *Issei* were "more Japanese than the Japanese themselves because they were anchored by the traditional mores without being aware of the transformations in modern Japan."<sup>46</sup> The rigorous nature of the Meiji education system enabled Japanese to maintain their unique cultural identity, even while living in other countries. Its cultural essence was passed on to the *Nisei*

soldiers and provided them the necessary strength and sense of duty to accomplish their combat objectives.

## Conclusion

The argument of primary group cohesion alone is not sufficient to explain the combat motivations of soldiers. This is not to say that it is either an unimportant or invalid element of overall unit cohesion. Indeed, social cohesion can contribute greatly to boosting morale within any unit, but to re-emphasize the key point from Siebold, "Mere friendship or comradeship is not the essence of cohesion." But when soldiers have confidence in each other, confidence in their leadership, and a firm understanding in their war fighting capabilities, they will invariably outperform groups that do not have the same commitment to one another.

The men of the 442nd RCT shared a common sense of purpose in their mission, which was also reinforced by other social factors. The period of extended training they received before deploying to Europe gave them the opportunity to develop greater proficiency as a unit, and to establish a deep sense of confidence in each other's abilities. The leadership examples set by commanders, Colonel Turner and Colonel Pence, also instilled a deep sense of trust between the men and assured them of the validity of their mission. When they set foot on the battlefield, they embraced their duties with a sense of loyalty and obligation that was nearly unheard of within other army units. This, combined with their upbringing, rooted in the values of the Meiji era education system, and the deep sense of commitment to avoid bringing "shame" to their families and communities, is ultimately what motivated them to put themselves in harm's way in service to their country. ■

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