

# The Reader's Digest

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The extraordinary war record of America's most persecuted minority, who should walk with honor among us

Hail Our

## JAPANESE-AMERICAN GIs!

Condensed from *The American Mercury*  
BLAKE CLARK and OLAND D. RUSSELL

ELEVEN GERMAN SOLDIERS, hands above their heads, came running out of an Italian farmhouse — and blinked in amazement to find themselves surrendering to cool, tough, Japanese-featured soldiers in U.S. Army uniforms. One prisoner asked Lieutenant Johnston, "These men — Mongolians, yes?"

"Mongolians, hell!" the lieutenant exclaimed. "Hasn't Hitler told you? Japan's surrendered; she's fighting on our side now!"

Actually, these U.S. soldiers were part of the 100th Infantry Battalion, made up almost entirely of American citizens of Japanese ancestry from Hawaii. The 100th went overseas in August 1943, and has since become probably the most decorated unit in the history of the U. S. Army. Its 1300 members have been awarded more than 1000 Purple Hearts, 73 Silver Stars, 96 Bronze Stars, 21 Distinguished Service Crosses, six Legion of Merit medals and 16 Division Citations. In 1944, the 100th was merged with the more recently formed 442nd Infantry Regiment, composed of volunteers who came largely from the ten Relocation Centers established after the Japanese evacuation from the West Coast.

These men entered the Army with-

*Before he went into the service, Oland D. Russell was telegraph editor of the New York World-Telegram, having previously spent several years in Japan as a foreign correspondent. He was public relations officer for the 442nd combat team during its training period and has followed its activities closely ever since.*

*Blake Clark, also in the armed service, was a professor of English at the University of Hawaii. He is the author of Remember Pearl Harbor! and Robinson Crusoe, USN.*

out illusions. They realized that they had not one but two big battles ahead: besides helping to smash the Axis, they had to prove that Japanese-Americans were no different in attitude or loyalty from other American citizens. Their achievements once more demonstrate that democracy is stronger than race.

The 100th Infantry Battalion — "One Puka Puka" (Hawaiian for "One Zero Zero"), as they call themselves — landed at Salerno, spearheaded the Fifth Army advance, held the front lines in Cassino 40 days, attacked at Anzio, and led the breakthrough on Rome. After a year and a half overseas with the 34th Division, which claims more days in the line than any other American division,

it fought for seven months with the 36th Division on the western front. This spring it was back with the Fifth Army in Italy; as part of the 442nd Infantry Regiment it led the American advance up the west coast.

In all three years of the battalion's existence, there has not been one desertion or even an absence of an hour without leave. The men are proud of two cases of AWOL-in-reverse — wounded soldiers who got up from their hospital beds to rejoin their unit when it moved on.

The 442nd has as regimental motto on its coat of arms a picturesque Hawaiian idiom of the crap game, "Go for Broke" — meaning "shoot the works." It sums up perfectly the all-out spirit which our Japanese-American GIs have shown. Pushing forward all the way from Tarquinia to the Arno in Italy, they never lost a foot of ground gained. More than 90 percent won Combat Infantry Badges for exemplary conduct under enemy fire. Typical of many individual exploits was the feat of Staff-Sergeant Kazuo Masuda, a former truck gardener of Santa Ana, Calif. His six-man mortar squad was halted by heavy fire from entrenched Germans. Masuda tucked a mortar tube under his right arm, grasped an extra steel helmet in his left hand, and dashed up a slope to a vantage point. Then he filled his extra helmet with dirt and anchored the mortar in it. Squatting beside his improvised emplacement, he wrapped his legs around the tube to hold it firm and opened fire. When his ammunition ran out, he went back for two more cases. He poured so many shells into the Germans that they had to withdraw.

### THE READER'S DIGEST

Handling a bazooka is a two-man job, but not to 98-pound Private Masao Awakuni. One day his company ran into a German Mark IV tank which, supported by machine-gun and sniper fire, forced the Americans to take cover. Awakuni fired at the tank with his bazooka, and it headed for his hiding place in a ditch. Coolly he waited until it was within 25 feet. Then he fired again — and the tank burst into flames. Awakuni was pinned down by enemy fire for ten hours, was wounded by a machine-gun bullet before he managed to escape. His exploit won him the DSC.

Another hero, Calvin Shimogaki, earned the Silver Star by clearing a path through a mine field holding up the battalion's advance. When enemy machine-gun bullets knocked his mine detector out of his hands, Shimogaki crawled forward on his belly, searching out mines and trip wires with his bare hands. The slightest pull on a wire might have meant death. Using the path he cleared, the battalion continued its advance without a casualty.

The Japanese-Americans resent any attempt to set them apart from their fellow soldiers. They prefer to be called Americans, or if they must be distinguished, Japanese-Americans.

Soon after their transfer from Italy to the Seventh Army in France, the Japanese-Americans were taking part in a spectacular rescue of a "lost battalion" cut off in the forests of the Vosges mountains. It was a story of flaming heroism and tragedy. Their casualties were terrific.

"Jerry fought us from tree to tree for two and a half of the damnedest

## HAIL OUR JAPANESE-AMERICAN GIs!

miles I ever hope to travel," said an officer. "He had his best defenses on a high, steep ridge. We got him out of there with a bayonet charge. When our men hit the top of the ridge, I saw the Germans break and run for the first time in my life."

The lost battalion was cut off for a week. On the seventh day a lieutenant remarked: "I'll bet the 442nd is the first to reach us. I'd give \$1000 to see one of those boys." He didn't have long to wait. That afternoon the Japanese-Americans broke through. The cut-off troops leaped out of their foxholes and embraced their rescuers. First to reach the beleaguered troops was Pfc. Mut Sakamoto. With the tremendous welcome he got, his throat clogged in sentiment and all he could say was: "Do you guys need any cigarettes?"

These veterans of the war in Europe are not the only Americans of Japanese ancestry who have proved their loyalty in the armed services. The 17,600 who have enlisted are divided among the Army, Navy and Marines. They are in the China and India-Burma theaters and on every Pacific front from Saipan to Okinawa. Here they are valuable not only as fighters but as interpreters.

Famous in the India-Burma theater is little Kenny Yasui, dubbed "Baby York" for his capture of 16 Japs. Calling out in Japanese learned at Waseda University in Tokyo,

Kenny convinced the 16, who were hiding in foxholes, that he was a Jap colonel. He lined them up for inspection, and had them stack arms. Then he marched them off with commands remembered from close order drill in Waseda ROTC.

In spite of the heroism and suffering of these young Americans, a few unreasoning individuals still attack them. In California, one honorably discharged soldier narrowly escaped death in his home when bullets fired through the window passed within six inches of his head. A member of Hollywood World War II American Legion Post 591 was refused his old job at the post office on racial grounds. In Parker, Ariz., a veteran of two years overseas with the 442nd Infantry, wearing the Purple Heart and three other decorations, and walking with a cane, was forcibly ejected from a barber shop; he had failed to notice a sign, "Japs Keep Out, You Rats!"

Yet it can safely be said that the Japanese-Americans have won their battle at home as well as abroad, for such discrimination has drawn hot censure from the public generally, and especially from service men. These Japanese-American boys have volunteered to fight for their country, and are officially rated among the best soldiers in the world. After this war they will walk with honor among their fellow Americans.