



By Kathryn Bender, Star-Bulletin
Japanese-American Military Intelligence Service veterans received long-overdue medals yesterday.

WWII Japanese-American linguists honored

Some believe they prevented a million American casualties

By Harold Morse
Star-Bulletin



Edwin Kawahara remembers studying the Japanese language in Minnesota more than a half century ago, when the cold winter chill was broken by the heat from a coal-burning pot-bellied stove.

Kawahara was going through training at Camp Savage, learning to be a soldier linguist for the U.S. military, studying Japanese history, geography and military tactics.

Back then, during World War II, the soldiers didn't have to be Japanese scholars to become linguists. They had to know enough to do their jobs.

"The idea was to keep things simple," Kawahara said.

Yesterday, Military Intelligence Service veterans received recognition for the work they did during the war.

Some authorities say these linguists, operating secretly, saved a million other Americans from being hurt or killed in the war and shortened that conflict by two years. Two were recognized for service in the Korean War.

Gov. Ben Cayetano told the 700 people at yesterday's ceremony that he never knew about the Military Intelligence Service veterans until he researched the 100th Battalion and 442nd Regimental Combat Team. "Truly they have been unsung heroes over the last 50 years," he said.

"Our country is a country of immigrants," said Lt. Gen. Joseph DeFrancisco, deputy commander-in-chief, Pacific. "Immigrants have come from the five continents and islands of the seven seas around the world." Japanese immigrants are a success story, and Japanese-American veterans are a part of that story, he said.

"We owe them much more than just thanks for their experiences in war, because what they did helped not only to win a war but to win a peace," he said.

Dr. Henry Yokoyama said the Military Intelligence Service translated documents, interrogated prisoners and wrote leaflets encouraging Japanese troops to surrender. "Some of us were involved with intercepting radio messages of both the ground and air," he said. "A bunch of us went to Iwo Jima, and another bunch went to Okinawa."

Some entered caves, where Japanese troops sought shelter from American forces, and tried to persuade the enemy soldiers to surrender. Yokoyama said the veterans need to brag a little, or their experiences will be lost forever.

Raymond Harada, a Legion of Merit winner for his Okinawa service, said his family was happy that he applied for recognition. The Legion of Merit is given for exceptionally meritorious service. Its three other winners were Tadashi Yajima, Kazuo Yamane and Ralph Yempuku.

Sam Isokane received a Bronze Star — awarded for heroism or meritorious achievement during military operations — for his part in the surrender of Japanese forces on Truk — said he and family are thrilled with the belated recognition, but regret it came too late for some.

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