

# LOYAL LINGUISTS

## Nisei of World War II Learned Japanese in Minnesota

Masaharu Ano

FIFTY-ONE PEOPLE of Japanese descent lived in Minnesota in 1940, according to the census. Ten years later Minnesota had 1,049 Japanese.<sup>1</sup> This numerical jump, although impressive in terms of percentage, is nothing phenomenal in comparison with the number of Japanese — about 5,000 — who lived in Minnesota in 1944–46 during World War II and just after. These people were mainly Japanese-American (Nisei) students at the United States War Department's Military Intelligence Service Language School (MISLS) at Camp Savage and later at Fort Snelling, plus the students' brothers, sisters, sweethearts, and parents. The 1,049 figure for 1950 merely indicates the residual number who stayed in Minnesota after a greater number of Japanese had returned to the West Coast after the war or moved to other areas.

The main purpose of this article is to study the language school (where the English-speaking Nisei learned Japanese to serve with Allied forces in the Pacific) as a vehicle for some 5,500 Nisei to demonstrate their loyalty to the United States. Another, lesser, purpose is to consider the MISLS as a factor of resettlement of an Oriental ethnic group in Minnesota.

These Nisei men served in the United States military forces against Japan, from which they were removed by only one generation. Because of the secret character of the MISLS during the war, dependable primary sources available to the author are extremely limited. In order to compensate in part for the scarcity of written materials, he sent out 110 letters and questionnaires to former MISLS instructors, staff members, and students. Sixty answers were received: four from instructors, three from staff members, and fifty-three from students. In addition, some ten Issei (Japanese aliens) and Nisei residing in the Twin Cities were interviewed in person. Also, the author corresponded with Colonel Kai E. Rasmussen, school commandant, and John F. Aiso, the school's director of academic training.

When the Pacific war broke out in December, 1941, two of the groups whom anti-Japanese agitators and government authorities most suspected of being threats to United States security were those connected with local

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<sup>1</sup>United States Census, 1940, *Population*, vol. 2, part 4, p. 14, 1950, *Population*, vol. 2, part 23, p. 44.

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Japanese language schools and Kibei, children of Japanese immigrants who returned to the United States after receiving a substantial amount of education in Japan. Ironically, most of the Nisei student-soldiers in the MISLS had attended local vernacular schools or had been educated in their parents' land.

In early days, Japanese schools in large communities, mostly in western United States, functioned in two ways: to teach American-born children the use of their parents' tongue and to assist Japanese-born children in learning English so that they could attend the public schools with less handicap. With the enactment of the Immigration Act of 1924, which banned Japanese immigration, the latter function became unnecessary, and the schools became bona fide Japanese language institutions. Generally speaking, the schools were held on weekends and/or weekdays after public school hours, when most American children were playing. Many of the schools seem to have included even summer programs and excursions. School hours varied from one to two on weekdays to six on weekends. According to a survey conducted in the early 1930s, some 69 per cent of Nisei on the mainland attended local Japanese language schools for an average of 3.0 years, while Hawaiian-born cousins went for an average of 4.75 years.<sup>2</sup>

The result of the author's limited survey reveals that, among forty-three MISLS men who were not Kibei, only one did not go to the local Japanese language school. Among twenty-two respondents who stated the length of their schooling, the average was eight years, with a range from "a few years" to twelve years. Apparently the MISLS Nisei went to Japanese schools for more years than the average Nisei did. Not a few respondents to the author's questionnaires regretted that they did not utilize more fully the learning opportunities offered at the language schools. One of them, who attended a school in Los Angeles for ten years, said: "If I had to do it over again, I would have studied harder and longer. During the war, I could have been of more service to my country had I been able to read and write more Kanji [*Chinese characters used in Japanese writing*]."<sup>3</sup>

Although Japanese language schools succeeded in various secondary functions dealing with conduct and behavior, they were largely unsuccessful in their primary function - teaching the Japanese language to American-born children whose mother tongue was English. Conversational Japanese was still endurable, but written language was dishearteningly complicated. The limited accomplishment in learning Japanese should also be related to the fundamental obstacle arising from the cultural environment and the reluctance of most Nisei to use their parental tongue. Nisei received their general education in public schools where English was used, and these children of Oriental immigrants were much concerned about derogatory remarks made by their Cauca-

sian classmates and playmates. They desired, therefore, to obliterate rather than retain their ethnic and linguistic identities.

While a majority of the Nisei boys and girls attended local vernacular schools in the United States, others were sent to Japan for their education. In the days prior to the 1924 law, both the Nisei who returned to America and the Japanese-born youngsters who came to the United States were called *Yobiyose Seinen* ("young people who are summoned"). When the law prohibited the entry of Japanese immigrants, only the American-born were able to enter this country. Since that time, these young people have been characterized as *Kibei Seinen* ("young people who return to America"). In time the name was abbreviated to Kibei.<sup>4</sup>

In the prewar days it was a fairly common practice to send at least one child back to Japan. A majority of these briefly visited their grandparents there and obtained a smattering of schooling. Others lived in Japan for a longer period and got a more substantial education. Some received schooling prior to 1930 when liberal political leaders still prevailed in Japan; others went to school in the 1930s when Japanese militarism was rampant. The reasons for receiving a Japanese education varied from one person to another. Some were sent solely to learn, some went because of family circumstances like the death of the mother, some crossed the ocean with their elderly parents who would spend the rest of their lives in the country of their birth. Some doubtless were also sent to their grandparents in Japan to fulfill the psychological contiguity and nostalgia of their parents. Because of their diverse experience in Japan, the Kibei were far from a homogeneous group.<sup>5</sup>

Although no strict definition of the term Kibei exists among Japanese-Americans, United States intelligence authorities defined them as "those who had received 3 or more years of education in Japan, particularly after the age of 13." On this basis, the Kibei numbered about 9,000 among some 72,000 Nisei (approximately 12.5 per cent) who were evacuated to camps after the start of World War II.<sup>6</sup> In an older survey of Nisei in California

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<sup>2</sup>Edward K. Strong, Jr., and Reginald Bell, *Vocational Aptitudes of Second-Generation Japanese in the United States*, 116 (Stanford University, Calif., 1933).

<sup>3</sup>Mitsuo Usui, Northridge, Calif., to Masaharu Ano, May, 1975. All communications in the author's survey are in his possession.

<sup>4</sup>Tamotsu Murayama, *Amerika Nisei*, 176-177 (Tokyo, 1964).

<sup>5</sup>Masaharu Ano interview with George Ono, Minneapolis, May 15, 1975. Ono is a Kibei. Among seventeen Kibei in the author's survey of MISLS personnel, the parents of four were deceased and those of five were in Japan when the students entered the language school.

<sup>6</sup>United States Department of the Interior, War Relocation



KAI E. RASMUSSEN, school commandant

in which 10 per cent of them were interviewed, it was discovered that, of 5,000 Nisei, 665 (13.3 per cent) had studied, or were studying, in Japan. They had received an average of 7.5 years of education in Japan.<sup>7</sup> In this writer's limited survey of former MISLS members, seventeen of sixty respondents (28.3 per cent) are Kibei. The average length of their schooling is 7.4 years.

In spite of their crucial role in the war and the occupation of Japan, soon to be dealt with in this article, the

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Authority, *Myths and Facts About the Japanese Americans*, 7 (April, 1945).

<sup>7</sup>Strong and Bell, *Vocational Aptitudes*, 114.

<sup>8</sup>Kai E. Rasmussen, Largo, Fla., to Ano, March 17, 1975; *Fort Snelling Bulletin*, December 2, 1944, p. 1: "The Military Intelligence Service Language School" (1946?), 2-3. The latter, a mimeographed history of the school, is in the Minnesota Historical Society library, as are copies of the *Bulletin*.

<sup>9</sup>Reunion booklet of the MISLS, published on the occasion of the twenty-fifth anniversary meeting of graduates, November 11-13, 1966, in San Francisco. The author is grateful to Charles Tatsuda of Minneapolis for use of his copy of the booklet — hereafter cited "reunion booklet, 1966" — and for other materials.

<sup>10</sup>*Fort Snelling Bulletin*, December 2, 1944, p. 1; reunion booklet, 1966, p. 9.

<sup>11</sup>"The Military Intelligence Service Language School," p. 3-4; *MISLS Album* (1946), 8 ("acid test" quote). The album, published at Fort Snelling near the end of the school's stay there, has a good capsule history of the MISLS and presents many photographs of the school buildings, teachers, and students at various locations. The author thanks Ruth Tanbara of St. Paul for use of her copy. The St. Paul Public Library also has a copy.

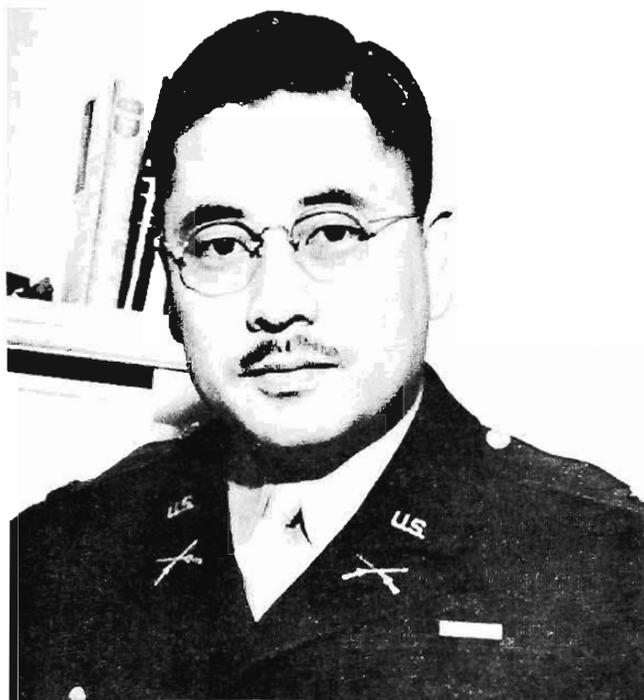
separate assignment of the Nisei linguists to various military forces and their rather veiled character and role in the actual military battles seem to have prevented them from receiving suitable recognition and publicity.

WELL BEFORE the surprise attack of December 7, 1941, on Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, a group of army officers who had served in Japan sought to establish an intelligence and language institution. Eyeing the increasingly strained relations between the United States and Japan, such army men as Lieutenant Colonel (later Brigadier General) John Weckerling and Captain (later Colonel) Kai E. Rasmussen predicted there would be a desperate need for linguists to do intelligence work once war broke out. The operational plans and orders between the Japanese mainland and military outposts would be exchanged in an utterly foreign tongue of great difficulty, especially for Caucasians. A key to successful intelligence work would be the mastery of both the spoken and written Japanese language.<sup>8</sup>

When the farsighted officers offered a rough blueprint of a military intelligence language school, it was reluctantly accepted by the still drowsy and skeptical War Department in Washington. Belatedly, permission for the school was granted, plus a nominal amount of \$2,000 to finance it. The school was made part of the Fourth Army near the latter's headquarters in San Francisco instead of being placed directly under the War Department.<sup>9</sup>

Especially active in seeking the school was Rasmussen, who became its long-time commandant (1941-46). His background qualified him to head the school. A Danish-born graduate of the United States Military Academy at West Point (1929), he served three years in the Philippines and then spent four years — 1936-40 — with the United States army in Tokyo, Japan. For six months of this time he was an official observer of the Japanese army during the war with China.<sup>10</sup>

The Japanologist officers had to create a school out of nothing. They anticipated, correctly, that Caucasians familiar with the Japanese language would be almost nonexistent, so they would have to find the essential qualified personnel among people with Japanese background, even the children of the potential enemy country. It is unknown to the author when the decision was made to recruit Nisei for this crucial military mission. The decision doubtless appeared to be sheer insanity to those who felt that "a Jap is a Jap." To many others who thought that "Nisei could not be trusted to stand the acid test of battle employment against their own race and blood," it would be a gamble. To Rasmussen and the other school officers, in contrast to Lieutenant General John E. De Witt, head of the Western Defense Command, Nisei loyalty to the United States depended upon individuals rather than their ethnic group as a whole.<sup>11</sup>



JOHN F. AISO was director of academic training at the school at both its Camp Savage and Fort Snelling locations. He later became a California superior court judge.

Officers hoped at first to find enough Nisei sufficiently qualified in their parents' tongue so that a brief brush-up of Japanese vocabulary and a cramming of military terminology and combat intelligence would fit the recruits for field duty. This plausible and optimistic plan did not materialize. During the late summer of 1941, Colonel Rasmussen personally conducted a survey to find out "if the Army had sufficient skill to satisfy our intelligence requirements." He visited various military establishments on the West Coast and screened all mainland Nisei personnel in the service to learn their Japanese language capabilities. He also interviewed Caucasians who had listed on their classification cards that they had command of the Japanese language. Of the 3,700 enlisted Nisei included in the survey, only 3 per cent were found to be "accomplished linguists" who had reached "plenary level." Another 4 per cent were "proficient," and still another 3 per cent could become of use for field duty "only after a prolonged period of training." Ironically, the survey showed that the children of Japanese immigrants had become far more Americanized than they were thought to be. It also left no doubt that a language school was needed to give Nisei intensive training in Japanese.<sup>12</sup>

As Rasmussen went about the difficult task of selecting trustworthy and qualified Nisei to man the school as instructors and students, sixty of the most promising from his screening (and who also passed background in-

vestigations) were brought to San Francisco to attend the new Fourth Army Intelligence School. Their instructors were selected by personal interviews, examinations, recommendations, or a combination of such methods.<sup>13</sup>

Iwao Shimizu, one of those who was personally approached by Rasmussen, later recalled the meeting: "The Colonel took out an infantry drill book and a cavalry drill book written in Japanese and asked me if I could read them. Eventually he made me translate the summary of these copies into English. Taking out *Shinsekai Asahi* (a newspaper in Japanese) which I edited and issued in those days, he said to me, 'Read this.' I answered him, 'I could read the newspaper which I wrote,' but I did not read it. The final question was regarding Japanese language grammar. I answered, 'In Japanese language there is nothing like grammar. If anything, probably particles such as *de*, *ni*, *o* and *wa*.' My provocative responses apparently irritated the Colonel not the least, but I was later informed of the acceptance as an instructor. The war had already started. I did not become an instructor. Instead I was moved from one camp to another with the hordes of the evacuees from the West Coast. It is uncertain whether Shimizu's refusal was an exceptional case or not."<sup>14</sup>

On another such screening tour John F. Aiso, who as a major later became director of academic training at Camp Savage and Fort Snelling, was discovered. Aiso was originally inducted into the army at Los Angeles in April, 1941, and was a buck private assigned to a truck repair outfit when interviewed by Rasmussen. Aiso was transferred to the enlisted reserve corps to accept a civil service position with the language school at San Francisco, where he started as chief instructor. After the war, Aiso became a municipal judge and then a judge of the superior court of Los Angeles — "the first Japanese American on the continental mainland to be appointed to the bench. . . ." On the same recruiting tour, Private First Class (later Lieutenant) Arthur Kaneko, who was a Sansei (third generation), was found to be a qualified linguist. Two civilian instructors, Akira Oshida and Shigeya Kihara, were also earmarked for the teaching staff. These four started to prepare textbooks and classroom exercises for the Japanese language study.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>12</sup>Rasmussen to Ano, September 4, 1975; John F. Aiso to Ano, August 8, 1975; *MISLS Album*, 8; "The Military Intelligence Service Language School," 3-4.

<sup>13</sup>Aiso to Ano, March 27, 1975; Masaharu Ano interview with Steve Kumagai in Minneapolis, February 11, 1975. Kumagai was a cadre and a member of the MISLS recruiting team.

<sup>14</sup>*Hokubei Mainichi* (North American Daily), November 12, 1966. This San Francisco newspaper has English and Japanese sections. The Shimizu story was in the Japanese section.

<sup>15</sup>*Fort Snelling Bulletin*, October 21, 1944, p. 1; *Congressional Record*, 88 Congress, 1 session, 10662 (introduction to a



A SIGN identifying Camp Savage (upper right), the first Minnesota location for the school, gave traffic instructions. After the school moved to Fort Snelling, its headquarters was located in Building 57 (above), which housed the commandant's office and others. The "turkey farm" (right) at the fort consisted of substandard huts for casuals awaiting assignment.



ON NOVEMBER 1, 1941, five weeks before Pearl Harbor, the Fourth Army Intelligence School opened at the Presidio in San Francisco. The school was located almost within a stone's throw of the Fourth Army headquarters, which in 1942 became the headquarters for the Western Defense Command. The school building was an old, converted airplane hangar, half of which was allocated for classrooms and half for barracks. Equipment was so scarce at first that fruit boxes and crates substituted for chairs.<sup>16</sup>

The new school was staffed by the commandant (Rasmussen), an adjutant, and eight civilian instructors and had sixty enlisted students, of whom fifty-eight were

Nisei and the other two Caucasian. To gain entrance to the school and the enlarged ones in later days, a Nisei had to be a high school graduate and possess "reasonable" knowledge of the Japanese language. Caucasians had to have an I.Q. rating of 125 to 150 and, of course, a desire to learn Japanese. Not a few of them were Phi Beta Kappa men whom Rasmussen contacted through the national Phi Beta Kappa office. Other Caucasian students had lived in Japan and already gained a basic knowledge of Japanese.<sup>17</sup>

Studies were intensified when actual war broke out with Japan. All day and late into the night, the language students were taught "Japanese reading, writing, interrogation, translation and interpretation; analysis of captured documents; Japanese geography and map-reading; Japanese military organization and technical terms; and social, political, economic and cultural background of Japan." Fifteen students failed, but the remaining forty-five were graduated from the school half a year after it opened. Thirty-five of them were sent to the Pacific theater of operations. About half of these, in turn, were attached to a marine division destined for the Guadalcanal area, and the other half went with the Seventh division of the army to help drive Japanese raiders out

speech Judge Aiso made on June 2, 1963, as part of a commemorative service at Arlington National Cemetery, Washington, D.C., to mark the twentieth anniversary of Japanese-American military service in World War II; *MISLS Album*, 9: "Issei, Nisei, Kibei," in *Fortune*, April, 1944, p. 94.

<sup>16</sup>*MISLS Album*, 28-31; *Fort Snelling Bulletin*, October 27, 1945, p. 1, 3, 4; *Minneapolis Tribune*, October 23, 1945, p. 9. Because of wartime restrictions, this was the first comprehensive story about the school in a local newspaper.

<sup>17</sup>*Fort Snelling Bulletin*, October 27, 1945, p. 1, 4; *MISLS Album*, 9.

of the Aleutian Islands." The remaining ten graduates were added to the teaching staff for the planned enlargement and reorganization of classes.<sup>18</sup>

At that time there doubtless was much uncertainty about how these first Nisei linguists would do on the battlefields. Officers of the regular divisions doubted the loyalty of these Japanese-faced GIs. A year later, when the Nisei language specialists were highly praised by various army groups, they were given their "first stripes." The Guadalcanal campaign in the fall of 1942 and the winter of 1943 in the Solomon Islands of the southwest Pacific was the first in which the language school graduates demonstrated their ability and importance. By translating captured battle plans, they contributed to the devastating defeat of the Japanese navy off the northeast coast of the Philippines.<sup>19</sup>

IN THE EARLY months of 1942, amidst the mass hysteria on the West Coast that followed Pearl Harbor, the United States government indiscriminately herded some 112,000 Japanese-Americans (including aliens) from California, Oregon, and Washington into ten inland "relocation centers" that were really concentration camps. There were no hearings to help determine who might or might not be threats to national security. At great loss of their personal property (not to mention their rights), the Nisei and Issei remained under guard at the uncomfortable camps until 1945.<sup>20</sup> Meanwhile, Nisei soldiers attending the language school faced hostility and were confused by it. Although the school was just "a street car-ride away" from downtown San Francisco, the students rarely visited social and recreational facilities in the city. The YMCA was one of the few places where they met. Curious San Franciscans wondered why these men were still in the city in view of the fact that Japanese civilians had been sent to relocation centers and regular Nisei soldiers had been removed from the West Coast.<sup>21</sup>

Instructor John Aiso later wrote: "There were a good many members of the general public in California at the time who were enormously antagonistic to all persons of Japanese ancestry, even those in the uniform of the United States Military Service. We in the school were of the opinion that we should move elsewhere in order to minimize any possible friction with these people, especially when our soldiers would be on the public streets during the weekends." After the school sent out its first graduates in May, 1942, it was temporarily deactivated, in part because it needed "better and larger facilities." Other factors, though, were certainly the intense anti-Japanese feeling in California and the antipathy of the Western Defense Command, especially of General De Witt. A parallel circumstance that seems to underscore hostility as motivation for the move came in June, 1942, when the Navy Intelligence Language School at the well-equipped University of California was transferred to

the University of Colorado at Boulder. Here only instructors were Issei and Nisei.<sup>22</sup>

While he continued his search for urgently needed Japanese language specialists, Kai Rasmussen conducted a nationwide survey to find another area for the school. He sought "a suitable location where a community would accept oriental-faced Americans for their true worth, American soldiers fighting with their brains for their native America." After a careful investigation and a conference with Governor Harold E. Stassen (who resigned in April, 1943, to enter war service), Rasmussen decided to move the school to Camp Savage, on Minneapolis' southern outskirts, because Minnesota "not only had room physically but also had room in the people's hearts."<sup>23</sup> To many, the location must have seemed strange because the area's climate and geography were far different from those of California and, more to the point, the Pacific theater where most of the graduates would go. But doubtless of more importance to Rasmussen were such factors as the location nearby of an established army post (Fort Snelling) and of two sizable cities whose inhabitants would accept the Japanese-Americans with relatively little racial discrimination. (It is said that Minnesota was chosen "because the European background of its people stemming from many nations had resulted in the most favorable social climate in the United States.") Also, the camp could be readied for the school with but minor repairs and expansion. Located on the edge of the town of Savage in the Minnesota River Valley, the 132-acre camp originally was used by the Civilian Conservation Corps in the 1930s and later housed elderly, indigent men. The state of Minnesota leased the camp to the army for a nominal sum.<sup>24</sup>

When favorable reports came from the Pacific on the

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<sup>18</sup>Bill Hosokawa, *Nisei: The Quiet Americans*, 395-396 (New York, 1969).

<sup>19</sup>Reunion booklet, 1966, p. 12-13; *MISLS Album*, 30-31; Governor's Interracial Commission of Minnesota, *The Oriental in Minnesota*, 46-47 (n.p., 1949).

<sup>20</sup>Roger Daniels, *Concentration Camps USA: Japanese Americans and World War II*, xiii, 145-146 (New York, 1971); Donald Teruo Hata, Jr., and Nadine Ishitani Hata, *Japanese Americans and World War II*, 8-9 (St. Charles, Mo., 1974).

<sup>21</sup>*MISLS Album*, 28, 32.

<sup>22</sup>Aiso to Ano, March 27, 1975; Ano interview with Otis Cary at Carleton College, Northfield, Minn., March 7, 1975. Cary is a graduate of the Navy Intelligence Language School, which taught the same language exclusively to Caucasians but on a smaller scale than the MISLS. See also, *MISLS Album*, 9.

<sup>23</sup>*Fort Snelling Bulletin*, October 27, 1945, p. 1 (first quote); *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, *Capital* section, December 5, 1971 (second quote); *Minneapolis Tribune*, October 23, 1945, p. 9; Shimichi Kato, *Amerika Imin Hyakunen Shi* (A Century History of Immigration to America), 3:148 (Tokyo, 1967).

<sup>24</sup>*The Oriental in Minnesota*, 46 (quote), *Minnesota Valley Sun* (Apple Valley, Eagan, Savage), April 28, 1976, p. 28.

important work being done by the first language school graduates in San Francisco, the War Department placed the school under its direct jurisdiction. On June 1, 1942, the full-fledged Military Intelligence Service Language School began its first Camp Savage class with 200 men and fifteen instructors. In spite of the larger student body in the larger new location, the first Camp Savage students received instruction in much the same subjects their predecessors had in San Francisco. Versatility was an important requisite. It was too much, however, to expect from each student that he master both general and military Japanese language in half a year of education. By the time the second Camp Savage class began in December, 1942, the school reflected its unique character as a military intelligence language center. It curtailed the teaching of general Japanese and revamped its curriculum to emphasize the military aspects of the language.<sup>25</sup>

Faculty members at Savage consisted not only of ten enlisted Nisei chosen from the first class in San Francisco but also of civilian instructors procured directly from the relocation centers where they were incarcerated. With its new status under the War Department, the MISLS apparently was able to bypass the Western Defense Command and recruit both instructors and students from behind the barbed wire.<sup>26</sup> In a personal survey conducted by the author, twenty-seven out of fifty-three respondents were trained at Camp Savage. Among them, eleven students (40 per cent) were recruited and reassigned to the MISLS from noncombatant units and the army's 442nd Combat Team, a Nisei unit that distinguished itself in European service. The other 60 per cent were volunteers or draftees from Hawaii and relocation centers. Their average age when entering the MISLS was twenty-four and a half years. The Reverend Daisuke Kitagawa said of them: "We lost a good number of Sunday school teachers, youth work leaders and [Tule Lake Relocation Center, California] Community Council

members." The MISLS recruits were already mature enough to play important roles in Japanese communities.<sup>27</sup>

THE RECRUITMENT of Nisei for the MISLS brought different, if not always antipodal, reactions from Issei and Nisei. To many Issei, who were Japanese aliens not permitted to become American citizens, such recruiting was a "dirty, crooked and cowardly" trick. They were willing to have their sons serve with American forces against Germany and Italy, but it was another matter to send Nisei sons off to fight against their own fatherland. Even if Issei parents consented, it can be imagined that they were hardly convinced psychologically. Reverend Kitagawa expressed the anxiety of the majority of Issei: "How could they face their relatives here on earth and their ancestors hereafter? This had been the one thing that they dreaded when war broke out between the United States and Japan, and that they thought they had been spared when they were herded into the camps."<sup>28</sup>

Even if many Issei were skeptical about Japan's justification of its aggression in East Asia, they showed sympathy toward the Japanese cause. Because they were Japanese nationals they were not eligible for citizenship in this country. Furthermore, they were concerned about possible private expulsion from their ethnic community. But no trouble developed in November, 1942, when thirty-five MISLS volunteers at the Tule Lake, California, camp were given a typical send-off party, with Issei parents and Nisei friends present. All were "under tension and restraint," Reverend Kitagawa remembers, but "with everybody saying the right things at the right moment, the program was carried out in perfect order." Soon after, the volunteers left the center quietly for Camp Savage.<sup>29</sup>

In the author's study, twenty-five out of fifty-seven respondents (44 per cent) were volunteers, including all four from Hawaii, where Japanese were not relocated. To those Nisei behind the barbed wire who were seeking something more positive than mere compliance with the evacuation order, the major motives of their response to recruitment were to prove their United States citizenship, to win the war for America, and to demonstrate their loyalty to their country, because Nisei were considered "untrustworthy, unloyal Americans" until they were able to prove otherwise. The MISLS appealed to these Nisei, therefore, not only as an opportunity but as a challenge. To others who were already in military service, one motive was to serve better as a qualified linguist (after Pearl Harbor, Nisei GIs were shifted inland and placed in noncombatant positions, and some were discharged). Some of them originally applied for the 442nd Combat Team just to be asked to serve through the MISLS. One of them volunteered for the school because he "did not wish to bear arms to kill."<sup>30</sup> Notwithstanding the unfair treatment by their government, the mature

<sup>25</sup>MISLS Album, 10.

<sup>26</sup>MISLS Album, 46; Daniels, *Concentration Camps USA*, 145-146. The MISLS recruited its instructors and students also from Hawaii, where the Japanese were not evacuated.

<sup>27</sup>Daisuke Kitagawa, *Issei and Nisei*, 110-111 (New York, 1967). The author of this book was a Presbyterian church pastor who was recruited from a relocation center for service at the MISLS. In addition to holding an informal chaplainship at the school, he served as a liaison between the Twin Cities resettlement committees and incoming Japanese.

<sup>28</sup>Kitagawa, *Issei and Nisei*, 31-33, 110 (last quote): Ano interview with Bill Doi, Minneapolis, May 13, 1975. Doi volunteered for MISLS service in November, 1942, while he was at the Tule Lake Relocation Center.

<sup>29</sup>Kitagawa, *Issei and Nisei*, 111; United States Department of the Interior, War Relocation Authority, *Nisei in the War Against Japan*, 11 (April, 1945); Ano interview with Bill Doi, February 25, 1975.

<sup>30</sup>Harry Kurotori, San Francisco, to Ano, May, 1975.

Nisei who volunteered for training at the MISLS felt strongly that the defeat of the Allies would be the demise of democracy.

Some cases of overt rupture between MISLS students-to-be and their parents were reported. In a few exceptional cases they were "disowned" by their parents. A few others were beaten by "pro-Japanese elements" in relocation centers. It is the opinion of the author, however, that considerable numbers of Issei were rather perplexed by the blatant militarism of Japan which particularly came to the fore after the Manchurian Incident at Mukden in September, 1931, that led to Japanese invasion of all of Manchuria. Since all the Issei had come to the United States before the Immigration Act of 1924 excluded further Japanese immigration, the Japan they knew was still a progressive and civilian-dominated country afresh as a "new Japan." Since then the Issei learned of Japan's chauvinist deviation from its democratic path from direct and indirect American mass media and even more from their Kibei children.

Among fifty respondents to the author's questionnaires, none of them remembers experiencing absolute opposition of parents. Twenty-five (50 per cent) answered that their parents were "happy," "proud," "favorable," and predominantly affirmative. Masaji G. Uratsu, who was drafted and assigned to the school before the war, said: "My parents were very happy and proud that I was selected by the Army to attend language training in San Francisco." Paul T. Ohtaki, on the other hand, attended the school only after he was drafted because his father was "very much against my volunteering because Japanese Americans were put in Relocation Camps." When he was drafted, however, his father thought that as a United States citizen his son "should serve in the service."<sup>31</sup>

The experience of Marshall M. Sumida may sum up the reaction of a majority of Issei fathers in relocation centers: "When the question of military service came up, my father told me that wars were just a short period in man's life. The question of being a Japanese or American was a difficult one to answer. What he considered important was that a man be a man — and do whatever a man must do. All he asked was . . . 'Don't lose your *kintama*' [decently translated, guts]. . . . My father told me that it was important to do one's duty for one's country."<sup>32</sup>

The answer of another respondent, Mitsuo Usui, may also have provided a common denominator of parents' feelings: "At first, my parents were against me for volunteering. They felt that evacuation was a 'kick in the pants' and 'now you are going to volunteer?' (That's like saying, 'Now polish their shoes' and you're going out just to do that to people who made your father lose everything — his business, home furnishings, etc., etc.). But, after the first Nisei were killed in Europe, I felt the change in my father's attitude — first in his letters, then when I came

back to camp on my furlough. His last words as I left camp to go overseas were, 'You, stupid son. First you volunteered, then you went into the paratroops. You're sure sticking your neck out. But as you go, I say, give them hell and come back fighting.'"<sup>33</sup> This response was one of ten in the survey in which "mixed emotion" on the part of parents was expressed. The parents of all ten were confined behind barbed wire. It could be mentioned, therefore, that they would have wholeheartedly supported their sons' cause if they had been treated like German and Italian alien residents, and much more so if they had been allowed to be naturalized in this country. Because they took for granted the Japanese concept of "A man should serve his master," they expected their sons to "stick to the end" once they had made their decision to serve.

In the summer of 1943, before the third class at Camp Savage began, the school system was considerably modified and enlarged. The classes were divided into three — "upper, middle, and lower" — according to the students' capabilities. A military research and liaison section and a translation section were newly set up. The latter was manned with some Issei who had graduated from Japanese universities and who were translating into English the documents of the Japanese general staff for the 1903-06 period.<sup>34</sup>

Students at the school were kept busy with the painstaking task of studying the Japanese language day in and day out, seven hours in the daytime (from 8:00 A.M. to 4:30 P.M., with an hour and a half for lunch break) and an additional two hours at night, from 7:00 to 9:00 P.M. After "lights out" at 11:00 P.M., many students crammed with the help of flashlights, and some found study room in the latrines. Lights out helped the MISLS men get used to some of the hampered conditions they would find later on combat intelligence duty. Wednesday afternoon was reserved for military training, which often consisted of a long, stiff cross-country march of five to ten miles. Saturday mornings were reserved for examinations. Only Saturday afternoons and Sundays were free for recreation — maybe a little football or basketball on the base, dances, a trip to downtown St. Paul or Minneapolis for a meal at Mun Hing Cafeteria on Hennepin Avenue or another restaurant, poker sessions, and the like. Restaurants — even steak houses — in the Savage-Shakopee area learned to serve steamed rice as the Nisei liked it, and townspeople nearby welcomed the wives and children of civilian instructors as they shopped in the stores on weekends.<sup>35</sup>

<sup>31</sup>Masaji G. Uratsu, San Rafael, Calif., to Ano, May, 1975; Paul Ohtaki, San Francisco, to Ano, May, 1975.

<sup>32</sup>Marshall M. Sumida, San Francisco, to Ano, May, 1975.

<sup>33</sup>Mitsuo Usui, Northridge, Calif., to Ano, May, 1975.

<sup>34</sup>Rasmussen to Ano, March 17, 1975, *MISLS Album*, 10.

<sup>35</sup>*Fort Snelling Bulletin*, October 27, 1945, p. 1; *MISLS*



**MISLS GRADUATES** *Isami Osato and George Sakanari translate Japanese civil service regulations into English in one of the classrooms at Fort Snelling.*

When the school began in San Francisco, teaching materials were scarce, and Rasmussen and others had to scurry around to mimeograph any helpful works they could lay their hands on. At Savage, however, satisfactory textbooks and other materials became more plentiful. To assist in the students' learning experience, trophies such as Japanese machine guns and a Japanese jeep arrived to bring the war closer to home.<sup>36</sup>

As part of the third group at Camp Savage, a separate class of thirty-five Caucasian officer candidates was initiated. At the same time, nine officers and seven enlisted men of the Canadian army and ten marine corps officers were enlisted as students. In January, 1944, when the fourth and last class at Camp Savage was started, the school accommodated some 100 instructors and 1,100 students. The academic system was once again modified. The former upper-middle-lower classification was now superseded by a "collegiate" division (resembling a separate college within a university), with no distinction as to student abilities. The academic term also was extended from two quarters (six months) to three quarters (nine months).<sup>37</sup>

Apparently Camp Savage was not conceived of as the

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*Album*, 48 and various pages of snapshots; "Hawaii Bud-daheads: Relocation Camp Kotonks," p. 2 (a mimeographed booklet of reminiscences of MISLS students from Hawaii, published in the 1970s).

<sup>36</sup>*MISLS Album*, 30, *Fort Snelling Bulletin*, May 26, 1945, p. 1.

<sup>37</sup>*MISLS Album*, 10-11; *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, Capital section, December 5, 1971.

<sup>38</sup>*MISLS Album*, 11 (quote), 38.

<sup>39</sup>*MISLS Album*, 62-65.

school's permanent location in spite of an active building program that saw, among many structures, a theater and gymnasium replace makeshift barns that were early utilized for some classrooms and recreation units (some of the first students at Camp Savage enjoyed dance parties in a barn where cows had just been driven out to pasture after milking). The incessant addition and enlargement of school facilities never caught up with the balloonlike expansion of the student population. The classrooms were crowded, and space for recreational and social events left much to be desired. As the school's supply and administrative functions were partially handled through Fort Snelling, it was logical and expedient for the commandant to shift the whole school to this historic and more permanent military installation. The MISLS was moved to Fort Snelling in the middle of August, 1944. What had been accomplished so far at San Francisco and Camp Savage was summed up in the *MISLS Album*: "By the fall of 1944, the MISLS was an established service school which had turned out some 1,600 enlisted graduates, 142 officer candidates, and 53 officers, who had had courses in reading, writing, and speaking Japanese; translation, interpretation, and interrogation; captured document analysis; *heigo* (Japanese military and technical terms); Japanese geography and map reading; radio monitoring; social, political, economic, and cultural background of Japan; *sosho* (cursive writing); and order of Battle of the Japanese army."<sup>38</sup>

THE BUILDINGS that housed the school at Fort Snelling were for the most part a great improvement over the crowded barracks and classrooms at Camp Savage. Classrooms, for instance, were in a tasteful line of light-colored brick buildings set amidst tall elm trees and expansive lawns along Taylor Avenue. To students conditioned to lack of space at Savage, the Snelling structures were "the very blueprints for convenience" as well as "bulwarks against Minnesota's climatic ferocity." Far from attractive, however, were substandard huts of what was called the "turkey farm" in a remote part of the fort. These housed incoming casual personnel and outgoing graduates.<sup>39</sup>

When the school shifted to Fort Snelling, not only had it "hurdled the incubation periods" but its students were aware that the war situation had improved considerably for the United States. Even though students found cramming still necessary, they also found school life less monotonous. Well-equipped recreational facilities were provided, and students competed in most sports and enjoyed dances within the post. To some, Minnesota snow and cold weather were new experiences, and they tried skiing for the first time. An Office of Special Service was also set up which assisted students in participating in recreational and cultural events

around the Twin Cities. Local organizations like the Red Cross, YMCA, YWCA, the St. Paul International Institute, and the Twin Cities USOs provided various services.<sup>40</sup>

A greater number of Nisei were sent to Fort Snelling than to Camp Savage as volunteers and draftees. The average age of twenty-six Fort Snelling students who responded to the author's questionnaire was younger at time of entrance than earlier in the war — 22.9 years. Apparently none of them was transferred from regular army units and just four persons (15 per cent) were from the 442nd Combat Team. The remaining twenty-two men voluntarily enlisted or were drafted from relocation centers or the "free zone" where they had already resettled as students.

After their arrival at the fort, students enjoyed the *Fort Snelling Bulletin*, a weekly newspaper usually issued in four pages. The third page was devoted to MISLS news and announcements, such as informal reports by school graduates overseas, invitations to dance parties, sports results and comments, news of the school choir, and the like. One brief but welcome schedule change was instituted at the fort: Students were sent out to the playground at 3:30 P.M., apparently to help keep them alert both mentally and physically. And every Thursday afternoon an army orientation program was presented. Qualified speakers sought to stimulate discussion on topics "of worldwide and national moment." Reasonably enough, the most concentrated question was, "Why are we fighting?"<sup>41</sup>

After the defeat of Germany in the spring of 1945, the United States increased military pressure on Japan in the Pacific. Acceleration of operations in the Far East meant that even more linguists were needed. In order to prepare the maximum number of men and send them out as fast as humanly possible, the MISLS at Fort Snelling — the only source of linguists — made

some revisions. The school training period was now divided into six- and nine-month courses, depending on the ability of each student. In some sections, and in exceptional cases, the school term was drastically shortened "from six to eight weeks." Not only were regular class hours maintained on weekdays and evenings, but Saturday mornings, which traditionally had been reserved for examinations, were now utilized for additional instruction.<sup>42</sup>

Practical training was provided by using actual documents sent to the MISLS from the battle fronts and by interpreting and translating Japanese messages actually intercepted by a short-wave radio station at the MISLS. This was constantly beamed on Tokyo and picked up all broadcasts from the Japanese capital. In addition to its vital role as a training source, the radio shack functioned as a direct source of information about the enemy. Messages broadcast by Tokyo were intercepted, recorded, translated, and forwarded to Washington, D.C., within a matter of hours. This proved an advantage, since some other stations had to turn intercepted messages over to translators elsewhere, thus taking up several days before the information was finally received in Washington. One message received and translated at MISLS and sent on to Washington revealed "the commanding officer of Japanese forces in Attu, their approximate strength, and what part of Japan they were from."<sup>43</sup>

As increased numbers of Japanese prisoners of war were brought in and military victory in the Far East became only a matter of time, more and more

<sup>40</sup> *MISLS Album*, 74, 80–83; Eloise M. Tamm to Toru Matsumoto, December 15, 1944, in St. Paul Resettlement Committee Papers, Minnesota Historical Society.

<sup>41</sup> *MISLS Album*, 69.

<sup>42</sup> *MISLS Album*, 12.

<sup>43</sup> *Fort Snelling Bulletin*, June 21, 1946, p. 6.



*RECREATION* for MISLS personnel was much the same as for other GIs. A favorite indoor pastime (along with poker) is shown at far left. One outdoor sport was skiing (left), a novelty for some Nisei not used to cold weather.

oral linguists were needed. To meet this new situation and its demands, an oral language course was organized at Fort Snelling. This was a radical departure from the original MISLS policy of placing primary emphasis on written Japanese.<sup>44</sup>

The official surrender of Japan on September 2, 1945, did not mean the end of the Fort Snelling school. On the contrary, linguists continued to be needed for the United States occupation of Japan and to replace earlier graduates from the school who were now eligible for discharge. But again there were drastic changes in the traditional curriculum. The school at Fort Snelling now dropped the teaching of military Japanese and emphasized conversational "everyday Japanese." Military courses such as "military reading, field service regulations, applied tactics, captured documents, military interpretation and PW interrogation" were now superseded by civilian courses such as "Civil Affairs terms and Japanese Government and Administration." The task of "winning the war" was supplanted by the task of "winning the peace." At its peak, which came at the beginning of 1946, the MISLS accommodated some 160 instructors and 3,000 students in more than 125 classrooms at Fort Snelling.<sup>45</sup>

Alert to the kaleidoscopic situation in the Far East, the MISLS organized a Chinese language division in early February, 1945, and added a Korean language class the following October. It was another group, however, that created quite a stir at the almost exclusively male base. In November, 1944, some members of the Women's Army Corps (WACs) made their debut at the school. Their curriculum was identical with that of the men except for oral language subjects (they were not used as interpreters or interrogators). By February, 1946, when the WAC detachment was deactivated, a total of fifty-one women linguists had been trained at Fort Snelling as translators. Of these, three were Caucasians, one an American-Chinese, and the rest Nisei.<sup>46</sup>

Meanwhile, the school kept producing male graduates at regular intervals and shipped them to Pacific areas. After the school sent out 307 students at the final commencement at Fort Snelling in June, 1946, the MISLS was temporarily closed and moved again to California - - to the Presidio of Monterey. By then some 6,000 men and women, roughly 85 per cent of whom were Nisei, had been trained at the school. And for



A DIRECT LINK with Tokyo during the war was this short-wave radio section at Fort Snelling. Robert Shiraga and Tatsuo Tanaka study enemy reports received.

the most part these strangers to Minnesota and the people of this area got along very well. At a farewell tea dance sponsored by five Japanese-American societies in Minneapolis, Colonel Rasmussen paid tribute to Twin Cities residents: "Without the guidance afforded us by this community, it would have been impossible to carry out a successful program such as we think we have had here." He also thanked the area's Issei in particular for their co-operation with the school. The *Minneapolis Tribune* commented: "This is heady praise for a community which has had relatively little experience in harmonizing relations between citizens of oriental and caucasian ancestry." The paper warned, though, that "the concrete test of our sincerity is yet to come" when Nisei families settle in this area permanently. Since significant numbers did stay here after the war, Minnesotans in general must have passed that test.<sup>47</sup>

THESE JAPANESE language specialists, numbering almost as many as the Nisei who fought in combat units in Europe, made an important contribution to the military intelligence service throughout the entire Pacific theater after their training in Minnesota or California. Let us follow the experiences of some of them. After graduation in San Francisco in June, 1942, the first group of linguists to be attached to a combat zone went to an Alaskan base, Adak, off the Aleutian Islands and to Guadalcanal in the south Pacific. While the latter group was involved in open battles a couple of months later, the

<sup>44</sup>MISLS Album, 13.

<sup>45</sup>MISLS Album, 13 (quotes), *Fort Snelling Bulletin*, October 27, 1945, p. 1.

<sup>46</sup>Reunion booklet, 1966, p. 16-17, *MISLS Album*, 12, 90-91.

<sup>47</sup>*The Oriental in Minnesota*, 46; *Fort Snelling Bulletin*, June 21, 1946, p. 6; *Minneapolis Tribune*, May 27, 1946, p. 8 (Rasmussen quote); *Minneapolis Tribune*, June 8, 1946, p. 4 (other quotes).

Alaskan teams, which eventually consisted of nearly fifty MISLS graduates, did not see action until the next spring. During the lengthy period spent in Alaska before action took place, these natives of California and Hawaii weathered the discomforts of the bleak, damp, and cold Aleutians. In May, 1943, combat intelligence work started for them with the offensive on Attu Island, which Japanese soldiers had occupied since June, 1942. Fog-bound Attu was the scene of the first major offensive launched by United States forces in the northern Pacific area. Although most of the language specialists went in with the second wave, they were subjected to the worst of combat conditions. The frequent changes in the front lines made their work doubly dangerous, nevertheless they made spot translations of captured documents and conducted interrogations which aided immensely in formulating an offensive plan and bringing the campaign to a quick ending with a total annihilation of some 2,500 Japanese enemies. Much of the information collected by the linguists on Attu was directly responsible for the next offensive — the invasion of Kiska Island. Although this campaign turned out to be abortive because of the early retreat of Japanese forces, the information and documents which the language teams obtained on Attu and Kiska were instrumental in the future strategic bombing of the Japanese northern islands.<sup>48</sup>

It was proved in the northern theater, which receives little attention in the annals of World War II, that language specialists were essential to the successful prosecution of the war against the Japanese. Pacific field commanders, suspicious at first of the reliability and usefulness of the Nisei, saw how the latter performed during the battle tests in the north, and began clamoring for

*KOREAN AMERICANS, part of a class opened at the fort in late 1945, go over a volume with an MISLS officer, Lieutenant Colonel Lachlan Sinclair.*



language teams. Headed oftentimes by a Caucasian officer, one team usually consisted of ten Nisei linguists. Termination of the Fort Snelling school in 1946 found at least 5,000 MISLS graduates overseas, attached to about 130 different units of the various armed forces. Some of them were also lent to Allied armies fighting Japan.<sup>49</sup>

One of the first published letters from an MISLS graduate overseas was sent by Cosma Sakamoto on August 12, 1944, from Saipan and was run two and a half months later in the *Fort Snelling Bulletin*. It briefly reported the situation on Saipan a month after the United States occupation of the island: "Perhaps this is the first time that an interpreter team had so much work with the civilians.

This place is quite similar to that of the Hawaiian Islands except that there are no towns or villages now — and that we do not have a PX as yet — so, no coca-colas or beer — even plain cold drinking water is hard to get." This tiny island in the Marianas had been under the mandatory rule of Japan before World War II, and, in addition to Japanese soldiers, a substantial number of Japanese civilians were to be found there.<sup>50</sup>

Upon graduation some of the linguists remained at school for further training, waiting for their assignment. Once their task was determined, travel to their destination could be swift. Charles Tatsuda, a native of Alaska and a graduate of Camp Savage who practices law in Minneapolis today, depicted his island-hopping trip to the south Pacific: "Left Frisco at midnight and arrived in Honolulu in time for lunch — we received a three-hour pass which enabled the men to go home, eat and say goodbye. As soon as we got back to the airfield the plane took off and that nite about midnite we stopped at Canton Island and had a bite to eat. The next morning about six we had breakfast on the Fiji Islands. . . . For lunch we dropped in at New Caledonia, and by dusk of that day we arrived in Brisbane, Australia, and had supper.

"In Brisbane we met a lot of men from [Camp] Savage. . . . We were there about 10 days looking on and observing what we could of their methods.

"From Brisbane we flew to New Guinea and joined our present organization. . . ." Tatsuda's letter was mailed November 2, 1944, "Somewhere in the Philippines," but it took several weeks before it appeared in the *Fort Snelling Bulletin*. Since letters took less time to appear later in the war, the communication system between overseas outposts and the United States mainland improved as American forces got closer to Japan.<sup>51</sup>

Although the soldier students' capabilities were repeatedly tested at the MISLS, it was on the combat

<sup>48</sup>*MISLS Album*, 14: Shigeru Hayashi, *Nippon no Rekishi* (A History of Japan), 25:340-342 (Tokyo, 1967).

<sup>49</sup>*MISLS Album*, 14: An interview with Charles Tatsuda, Minneapolis, February 18, 1975.

<sup>50</sup>*Fort Snelling Bulletin*, November 4, 1944, p. 3.

<sup>51</sup>*Fort Snelling Bulletin*, December 16, 1944, p. 3.

READY TO BOARD a plane for Japan are members of the first group of WACs dispatched for overseas duty from the MISLS. All but two of the women are Nisei.



fronts overseas, of course, that they were actually challenged as “interrogators, interpreters, translators, radio announcers, propaganda writers, and cave flushers.” One of them was James T. Kai, who wrote: “We landed on Angaur Island which is part of the Palau Group [east of the Philippines] on the 17th and have had a lot of experiences. This island is known for their phosphate and it certainly is hard to dig a fox hole. It is just like trying to dig in cement. The rainfall is about 16 inches a month so it really pours and when the sun is out, it really is hot. There are lots of ants, crabs and worms always crawling all over us and we spend half the night knocking them off of us. All in all I enjoy this life because for the first time since getting in the Army, I feel as if I’m doing anything.

“We have had 5 prisoners so far and hell-uv-a-lot of papers and documents. . .

“The first day we landed, I talked [stalked?] in a cave where they thought there were some enemies. I finally got one out and he said all the rest were dead. I crept and crawled . . . in the cave and sure enough there were about 20 all dead. Some had held grenades to their belly, etc. so it was quite a mess and it stunk. The prisoner was a Cpl which incidentally is the highest ranked prisoner we have. He was wounded so we couldn’t get too much out of him. We captured a Japanese food dump

. . . and ‘takenoko’ [bamboo shoots], beef, ‘gobo’ [burdock], and rice are common everyday food for us.”<sup>52</sup>

In the crucial battles of the Pacific, the Japanese apparently did not notice that they were confronted by American sons of their compatriots who already had much detailed information about the Japanese plans for attack and defense. They had lulled themselves into a complacent sense of security. They thought that the complexities of the Japanese language in which their plans were written and communicated would be unfathomable to the Americans. According to a postwar Associated Press report from Tokyo in October, 1945, language specialists scrutinized every document seized in combat and brought in by regular GIs and others, from periodicals and diaries to maps and notes on scratch paper. The linguists operated so skillfully that they knew “not only the location of many Japanese units, but also their officers by name and experience and the rosters of the companies down to the lowest private.” Often, too, they knew even “the telephone numbers of Japanese billets.”<sup>53</sup>

MISLS graduates are also reported to have contributed to the severe defeat of the Japanese navy in the Philippines in the fall of 1944 by translating a set of Japanese battle plans. These documents were captured with a Japanese admiral when the plane in which he was hurrying to join his fleet made a forced landing in the Philippines. Likewise, Japanese plans for the defense of the Philippine Islands were made known through the work of language specialists from the school long before United States forces landed on the island of Leyte in early action that led to the capture of the Philippines.<sup>54</sup>

But the land battles for the Philippines were hard going, as Charles Tatsuda (already quoted from in an earlier letter) testified to in a letter of December 30, 1944, from the Philippines and published weeks later in the *Fort Snelling Bulletin*: “The fighting has been tough . . . close combat, picking off a great toll of the enemy

<sup>52</sup> *Fort Snelling Bulletin*, November 25, 1944, p. 3.

<sup>53</sup> Quoted in *Fort Snelling Bulletin*, October 20, 1945, p. 3.

<sup>54</sup> “Nisei Linguists — Eyes and Ears of Allied Pacific Forces” (1945?), p. 2, in MHS library. This document says that the commander-in-chief of the combined Japanese fleets was “Admiral Koga.” In April, 1943, Admiral Mineichi Koga succeeded Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto, commander-in-chief of the combined Japanese fleets at the time of Pearl Harbor, who died when his plane was ambushed by United States fighting planes. The fact of the forced landing of Admiral Koga’s plane may not be known in Japan. Hayashi’s *A History of Japan* (25:349) reports the admiral’s plane “has become missing.”

## The Japanese-American Creed

(by Mike M. Masaoka, Salt Lake City) from *Congressional Record*, May 9, 1941, and June 11, 1963

I am proud that I am an American citizen of Japanese ancestry for my very background makes me appreciate more fully the wonderful advantages of this Nation.

I believe in her institutions, ideals, and traditions; I glory in her heritage; I boast of her history; I trust in her future. She has granted me liberties and opportunities such as no individual enjoys in this world today. She has given me an education befitting kings. She has entrusted me with the responsibilities of the franchise. She has permitted me to build a home, to earn a livelihood, to worship, think, speak, and act as I please — as a free man equal to every other man.

Although some individuals may discriminate against me, I shall never become bitter or lose faith for I know that such persons are not representative of the majority of the American people.

True, I shall do all in my power to discourage such

practices, but I shall do it in the American way; aboveboard, in the open, through courts of law, by education, by proving myself to be worthy of equal treatment and consideration. I am firm in my belief that American sportsmanship and attitude of fair play will judge citizenship and patriotism on the basis of action and achievement, and not on the basis of physical characteristics.

Because I believe in America, and I trust she believes in me, and because I have received innumerable benefits from her, I pledge myself to do honor to her at all times and in all places; to support her constitution; to obey her laws; to respect her flag; to defend her against all her enemies, foreign and domestic; to actively assume my duties and obligations as a citizen, cheerfully and without any reservations whatsoever, in the hope that I may become a better American in a greater America.

with rifles and not with big guns. Up and down impassable mountains thru muddy trails in which the men often had to be dug out in order to proceed." Several sentences further on, he mentioned work of linguists: "A good scanner is a most important person in the makeup of a language team. Much time can be saved by a man who can scan quickly documents and classify them."<sup>55</sup>

After the Allies captured the Philippines in 1945, Nisei linguists faced an unexpected racial problem with the Filipino natives. The latter, obviously unaware of the important tasks performed by the Nisei, would stare at them and insult them with shouts of "Happon!" (Jap). Upset by the hostile attitude of natives they helped to liberate, some sixty Nisei officers and men expressed a desire to be transferred from Manila. They were promised that the role of the Japanese-Americans would be publicized to aid in "educating the Filipino."<sup>56</sup>

In addition to battling the Japanese and difficulties with natives, the Nisei linguists, like other GIs, encountered hostile climate, insects, and disease. Not a few were struck down by tropical epidemics. And one way that they were hampered in doing their special work was a result of the souvenir-hunting tendencies of most American soldiers. They were reluctant to turn in what they got from Japanese soldiers. To meet this problem, one language team set up a "grab bag" holding "all captured documents and equipment" that they found useless for their purpose. Whenever a GI turned in a document that the team retained, he was entitled to take

anything he chose from the grab bag. In this way the team "got a lot more results."<sup>57</sup>

In April, 1945, in response to a request for special intelligence servicemen for the impending Okinawa campaign, eleven men whose parents had emigrated from Okinawa were selected by the MISLS. This was one of many thoughtful case-by-case selections for which Colonel Rasmussen was responsible. Seven of the eleven had resided on their parents' native island for some years as Kibei, and some still had their parents there. Among them was Frank S. Higashi, who met his father for the first time in eight years at Nago after the invasion of Okinawa.<sup>58</sup> The Okinawa linguists knew the geography of the island as well as the Okinawan dialect, which held little resemblance to standard Japanese. They were amazed, however, and of course disappointed, to discover the tremendous effect that Japanese propaganda and brainwashing had had upon Okinawa civilians as well as military personnel. The United States army dropped more than 5,000,000 leaflets on the island, "but this did not dispel the fear of death and torture that the Japanese had implanted in their minds."<sup>59</sup>

In November, 1945, Thomas Ige, a veteran of the Okinawa campaign, returned to Fort Snelling on convalescent furlough and was interviewed by a *Fort Snelling*

<sup>55</sup>*Fort Snelling Bulletin*, February 10, 1945, p. 3.

<sup>56</sup>*Fort Snelling Bulletin*, February 1, 1946, p. 3.

<sup>57</sup>*Fort Snelling Bulletin*, July 21, 1945, p. 3.

<sup>58</sup>*Minneapolis Tribune*, July 6, 1945, p. 1.

<sup>59</sup>*Fort Snelling Bulletin*, November 10, 1945, p. 1.

*Bulletin* reporter. Ige was a November, 1944, graduate of the school and was one of the eleven whom Rasmussen chose to serve in the Okinawa campaign. He told of a captured Japanese army nurse who was seriously wounded on Okinawa and then surprised by the kind treatment the Americans gave her. In tears, she told how only a few out of 250 Japanese nurses survived, most of the others having committed suicide rather than face capture.

Ige said the linguists were "instrumental in saving over half of the civilian population" of Okinawa by broadcasting over loudspeakers that the people should move north to avoid the military confrontation in the southern part of the island. Apparently many Okinawans who were historically influenced by the prejudice and discrimination of mainland Japanese responded generously to the fair approach of the Japanese-speaking Americans. Often the natives willingly located the enemy positions in camouflaged hills and caves that were ubiquitous in southern Okinawa. Also, not a few Japanese prisoners of war were impressed with their humane treatment, Ige said, and were "more than willing to go into their own lines to persuade their own men to surrender." Ige related his experience with one prisoner: "At night [Ige] would take the POW to the island where he knew there were Japs hiding, have the Jap POW swim to shore, and meet him at a pre-designated rendezvous the next morning. The largest group that surrendered to the sergeant [Ige] was 60 men; however, he reported that [among all the operating linguists] the largest group to surrender numbered over 400."<sup>60</sup>

The official surrender of Japan on September 2, 1945, by no means ended the need for Nisei linguists or for the language school at Fort Snelling. Just as they found the help of the noncommissioned Nisei essential in conducting peace negotiations, the admirals and generals also needed them more than ever in occupying Japan. Speaking at Fort Snelling in August, 1945, at commencement exercises for the fourteenth class of Nisei to be graduated from the MISLS, Major General Clayton Bissell, head of military intelligence, emphasized the new mission of the graduates. He said: "Just as the former graduates served as the vital connecting link between Allied soldiers and the Japanese in combat, the Nisei will

now serve as the language bridge between the Allied occupation forces and the 80,000,000 people of Japan."<sup>61</sup>

The language specialists' share in the task of peace in Japan was immense. After the United States occupation forces landed in Japan, the Nisei veterans worked, with the aid of a greater number of Fort Snelling graduates, at war crimes trials as translators and interrogators. After questioning thousands of war prisoners, they linked a number of atrocities to individual Japanese by the captured diaries and letters, written during wartime, that the linguists had studied. The linguists gathered vital statistics for the Atomic Bomb Survey conducted by the Morale Division of the army. In the Civil Affairs branch, their indispensable work was censorship — screening the press, inspecting the postal system, watching communications of all kinds, and helping to find out what "has gone on in Japan these many years." These linguists classified approximately 2,000,000 Japanese documents according to tactical, strategic, or long-range value. In all, they translated some 20,000,000 pages.<sup>62</sup>

TO SUM UP, the roles of the language specialists were not those of headliners. There existed few war heroes among them, although several won citations. In general, what they accomplished was neither exciting nor sensational. Their weapons were language, skill, and intelligence, not bayonets and machine guns. Their tactic was persuasion rather than destruction. Their role in Japanese demilitarization and reconstruction was no less important than their distinguished accomplishment in warfare. Their contribution to "win the peace" in Japan should be remembered as much as that to "win the war" for the United States.

Since the Oriental ethnic identity is so visually evident and their cultural traces so foreign, the Nisei have made every effort to discard rather than retain their Japanese background. By doing so, they have tried to prove that they are "100 per cent Americans." The experience of attending the MISLS was both a challenge and a chance for the Nisei, in particular for the most "unwanted children" who had gone to local vernacular schools and who had been educated in Japan. It proves that to judge an ethnic group as a whole is totally misleading and irrelevant, no matter how convenient it is in a critical moment. It also indicates that acquaintance and affiliation of immigrants' children with their parents' culture do not serve as yardsticks to measure their loyalty to the country of their birth. By gallantly fighting in the nation's battles, and by wholeheartedly serving in occupied Japan, they proved their loyalty to their native land, the United States. The history of the MISLS and its expansion tells the extent of the Nisei's accomplishment and recognition. Among many sad stories of exclusion and discrimination toward Japanese-Americans, this is one of trust and confidence.

<sup>60</sup> *Fort Snelling Bulletin*, November 10, 1945, p. 1.

<sup>61</sup> *Minneapolis Tribune*, August 19, 1945, local news sec., p. 1; *Fort Snelling Bulletin*, August 25, 1945, p. 1 (quote).

<sup>62</sup> *MISLS Album*, 15; *Fort Snelling Bulletin*, August 25, 1945, p. 1 (quote), October 20, 1945, p. 3.

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