



HISTORY

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100th INFANTRY BATTALION

"Remember Pearl Harbor" - that was the motto of the 100th Infantry Battalion. The men were there on that day of infamy, when Japan bombed their city, harbor, country and home. At the time, the men were loyally serving in the Hawaii National Guard. They guarded the shores, cleared the rubble, donated their blood, and aided the wounded.

Three days after the attack, their rifles were taken away and they were guarded at gunpoint even when they went to the latrine. Why? Their parents came from the country that attacked America. They were Nisei - American-born sons of Japanese immigrants. The next day the men were given back their rifles and resumed their duties, but the atmosphere of fear, hatred and suspicion continued.

In 1940, the Japanese were the largest ethnic group, representing more than 37 percent of the islands' population, and almost half of its vital workforce. False rumors accusing Japanese-Americans of sabotage and espionage were circulated. Some wanted to move Oahu's entire Japanese-American community (158,000) to Molokai - a place known for its leper colony. Fortunately, many respected civic and military leaders interceded, and all the Japanese-Americans were not interned, like they were on the mainland.

Many military officials were horrified that half of Hawaii's defense force looked like the enemy, especially given the impending Japanese attack on Midway, an island about 1,500 miles northwest of Oahu. They planned to discharge the Nisei soldiers in the Hawaii National Guard as soon as white replacements arrived. Again the civic leaders interceded. They pointed to the exemplary behavior of the [Varsity Victory Volunteers](#) who were former college students and ROTC cadets. These patriotic Nisei performed backbreaking work in spite of being dismissed from military service and declared enemy aliens. They convinced the War Department to form a special unit of Japanese-American soldiers.

On June 5, 1942, at midnight, about 1,400 Nisei from the Hawaii National Guard boarded a ship. Most of the men didn't get to say goodbye to their families, and didn't know where they were going. Five days later they landed in California. To ensure that no mainlanders would see them, the army hustled the soldiers onto waiting trains and hid them behind drawn window blinds. Some soldiers thought they were going to a U.S. concentration camp, but instead, they went to Camp McCoy in Wisconsin. From June to December they trained there.

About 25 of the Japanese American soldiers were sent to a secret



100th at Anzio beachhead marching toward Luneuvio, Italy, where the 100th spearheaded the breakthrough of the German defensive line.

training mission on a small island near the mouth of the Mississippi River . Some top military officers thought that the "Jap" soldiers smelled differently, and that the Nisei soldiers would give off a similar scent. So for three months these 25 Nisei were ordered to train attack dogs to "smell Japs." Of course the training didn't work.

Dog training, and even the unit's name - the 100th Battalion - were signs of the War Department's uncertainty on how to use the Japanese-American soldiers. Typically battalions are called first, second and third, and are part of a regiment. But the 100th Battalion was an orphan, with no regiment. In February 1943, the 100th was transferred to Camp Shelby, Mississippi. They had been training for nine months, but still had no assignment.

In May, the 100th participated in war maneuvers and impressed the top brass, including the chief of army ground forces. The excellent training record of the 100th, and a steady stream of petitions from prominent civilian and military personnel helped convince President Roosevelt and the War Department to re-open military service to Nisei volunteers. These volunteers would later become the 442nd Regimental Combat Team.

Upon hearing of the 100th's performance, George Marshall, Chief of Staff offered the battalion to his generals. Marshall later wrote:

“ . . . So we sent messages to commanders in Europe and, as I recall. . . Eisenhower's staff people declined them. Then I offered them to General Clark and his reply was, "We will take anybody that will fight." So I sent this battalion over to him. . . I will say [this] about the Japanese fighting in these units. . . they were superb!. . . They took terrific casualties. They showed rare courage and tremendous fighting spirit. Not too much can be said of the performance of those battalions in Europe and everybody wanted them. . . We used them quite dramatically in the great advance in Italy. . . ”