

On Friday, June 5, 1942, the USAT Maui slipped quietly out of Honolulu harbor with 1432 Japanese American men of the 100<sup>th</sup> Infantry Battalion. For most, this was their first experience away from home and the Islands. Very little information had been given, as to their destination or their future. Some even feared that they may be going to some detention camp.

A week later they arrived in San Francisco, greeted by armed troops and quickly dispersed to waiting trains. One of the first orders was to keep the blinds down for people might panic upon seeing Asian soldiers on troop trains. Until a day before arrival, they were finally told their destination, Camp McCoy, Wisconsin.

Stationed in the Mid-West where many had never seen or met an Asian person, made this a challenge. But the area newspaper, The Milwaukee Sentinel headlined on June 20, 1942: "Good Spenders, Those Japanese-Americans. They eat the most expensive food; drink the most expensive drink...."

On June 22, 1942, the Sparta Herald headlined "Hawaiian soldiers like Sparta, and Sparta people like them."

Military training was the primary objective and many vied for excellence in marksmanship and testing of skills. "Doc" Kometani, the Morales Officer was in charge of conduct and behavior. Passes were earned by traits of good behavior, neatness, etc. Protecting the image of the Battalion was imperative.

On July 1<sup>st</sup>, 250 men were selected and introduced to the people of Madison. Lt. Kometani described this outing as printed in the Honolulu Star-Bulletin. "We were met nine miles outside the city by the Chief of Police and County Judge Fred Evans, and escorted by them into town...This was later followed by a huge Victory Rally in the field house of the University of Wisconsin which was attended by 10,000 people. They played a baseball game in the afternoon which they lost to Madison 3-1, and in the evening a big reception was held in the Legion Hall".

The baseball team did so well that as many as 2000 people attended. In scheduling a rematch against the Wisconsin Rapids White Sox, a two-columned ad offered a lei for everyone in attendance along with pre-game entertainment provided by the Hawaiian Serenaders.

The Hawaiian Serenaders, led by Fred Matsuo, and accompanied with Cpl. James Kaholokula, Cpls. Edward and Dan Kaholokula, 1<sup>st</sup> Sgt. Charlie Diamond, Pvt. Robert Kapuniai, and Pvt. Edward Enomoto. This group was so popular that a complaint, printed in the Real McCoy News, stated that the Serenaders should have more members because "they get all the fun, all the girls, and the royal treatment". Everyone loved them so whenever it was possible they were booked to perform.

The Hawaiian hospitality won over the Wisconsin people. On one occasion the unit threw a huge party for the people of Sparta. They broiled 85 pounds of meat, teriyaki style, provide entertainment and showed them how to enjoy Hawaiian style.

On December 19<sup>th</sup>, Major General Hill of the 11<sup>th</sup> Corp commended the outfit for its courage, willingness, cheerfulness, and organization at a showdown inspection. All were pleased to hear this high

praise and commendation. It was no surprise that this unit would go down as one of the most decorated units of WWII.

Just at this time, a Washington D.C. paper carried the pictures of six of the boys on furlough. The worried hotel keeper immediately notified the FBI, but news had spread of the soldiers from Camp McCoy. The following day the FBI men came to take the boys sightseeing.

From Hawaii, families and friends collected \$7,663.50 for the men as a Christmas gift which was used to purchase sweaters, socks, mufflers, and shirts for every man in camp. This was the kind of support that helped to boost the spirit of the men.

At the beginning of the year, the men were moved to Camp Shelby, Mississippi before being shipped overseas. But they left their mark of Hawaiian hospitality in Wisconsin. The towns around McCoy knew that the Japanese American troops were as loyal and American as any other doughboy. In fact, during this training period, at least 100 men acquired Wisconsin brides.

*Norothy Kometani*