

September 26, 2014

STORY OF MY LIFE by Jack Nakamura

To my children and grandchildren:

I was born and raised in Ewa Village, a small sugar plantation, which was also called "B Village." One day while playing kickball I heard drumbeats and somebody singing "Onward Christian Soldiers" and "Climb, Climb Up Sunshine Mountain." Later, I found out that it was Captain and Mrs. Sainsbery of the Salvation Army. This was my introduction to Christianity because I grew up in a Buddhist town and my mother and father were Buddhist. I never was a Buddhist, but I believe there are no bad religions.

Mother and father were the most important people in my life while I was growing up. One day while playing in the street I got hurt and started crying and ran to my mother. Mother came out of the house and held me in her arms and it didn't hurt anymore. Ironically, when I became a soldier and the enemy shell blew me 20-25 feet, I did not call for mother but called for God and did not find God. The second time I was wounded, I found myself calling for mom. Many other soldiers called for their moms when they were wounded or thought they were dying.

Between the ages of 12 to 17 I was in the Boy Scouts of America. However, at about age 14 I was more interested in school, especially studying English and Japanese. I earned my Boy Scouts Star and Life Scout Badges and became an Eagle Scout about the time when war broke out between the Japanese and the United States.

On December 7, 1941, a cold Sunday morning, the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor, Barbers Point, Hickam Airfield and Kaneohe Marine Base. I heard bombs falling everywhere. At first I thought it was a maneuver, but minutes later realized that the bullets were real. When some bullets ripped by my feet and our outhouse, that was when I knew we were being attacked. All the neighborhood kids ran to their own houses.

I was curious to see more of the action so I climbed up on the roof of our house. I saw a dog fight between an American plane and a Japanese plane. One plane burst into flames and dove into the ocean and the other one flew away. When the Japanese air force attacked our airplanes and ships, all of Hawaii was damaged and hurt. At that time many Japanese Americans were serving in the 298th and 299th infantry regiments of the Hawaii National Guard. As the initial shock of the attack wore off, loyalty of the Americans of Japanese ancestry (or AJA) came into question. For months Caucasian politicians and military leaders in Hawaii defended the AJAs and urged that they be given a chance to show their allegiance to America.

Finally, in May 1942 the Army ordered the Japanese Americans of the Hawaii National Guard, the Army Reserve and regular Army to be formed into a provisional battalion. It would be organized, equipped [sic] and trained for future use as an infantry combat unit. The oversized

battalion of 1,432 soldiers was designated the 100th Infantry Battalion. It did not yet belong to any regiment of a larger unit. From the beginning the 100th Battalion was distinctive because it was formed based on ethnicity. It was to serve America when the land of their ancestors was among the enemies of this country.

(The 99th Infantry Battalion of Norwegian ancestry, the 100th Battalion was Americans of Japanese ancestry and the 101st Battalion was of Austrian ancestry.)

Assigned to the 34th Red Bull Infantry Division, the 100th Battalion landed in Salerno, in southern Italy on September 22, 1943. On September 29 it suffered its first casualties when Shigeo Takata and Keichi Tanaka were killed. The 100th crossed the Volturno River attacking the Winter Line of German defenses, participated in the battle for Mount Cassino and made an amphibious landing at Anzio.

I volunteered in the Army and was placed in the 442nd Regiment, 1st Battalion. While still in training at Camp Shelby, there was a request for volunteers to join the 100th Battalion because they had lost many in combat. I volunteered along with several other members of the 442nd to replace those wounded or killed in action serving in the 100th Battalion. We were shipped to Anzio, Italy.¹ There was no action for a week, after which the Germans started shooting in our direction. One of the blasts from their artillery hit the shack that three of us were hiding in. The blast killed Yoshio², blew my buddy about 40 feet and blew me about 30 feet.

The explosion was so intense I couldn't hear, feel, or see anything for a few minutes. I thought I was dead and was in heaven. I went looking for God or Jesus Christ and I saw lots of flowers and an angel flying around. Just then one of my buddies shook me and woke me up. I was not dead! Boy was I happy. I earned my first Purple Heart from that incident.

After a bitter battle at Anzio, we had the enemy on the run. In May 1944, we made our move to Pian Marano. Under heavy enemy fire, we fought into Civitavecchia, Belvedere, Sassata, and onto Livorno just before the Arno River and the Leaning Tower of Pisa. Before we got to Leghorn, we were to have two weeks of rest and recreation but before the two weeks were up, we had an urgent call back to duty.

(Note from reviewer: Mr. Nakamura included two paragraphs about the battles in the Vosges Mountains of northwest France during October 1944 which included the liberation of Bruyeres and Biffontaine and the rescue of the "Lost Battalion." However, his memory of the dates and sequence of these battles are not accurate. The 100th/442nd took part in a four-day battle to rescue the 1st Battalion, 141st Infantry of the 36th "Texas" Division which had been surrounded in the forest east of Biffontaine. His story continues of his experiences after participating in these battles during which the 100th and 442nd suffered a high number of casualties.)

¹ Arrived April 4, 1944. He was in the second group of replacements from the 442nd.

² May be Albert Yoshio Nozaki

I was shocked when a Caucasian soldier we had rescued said, "I never thought I would be so happy to see Japs." The nurse was so mad to hear that she looked at me and said you should have left him there in the woods. I don't think it was meant to be discriminatory or derogatory. Everyone was well and happy.

In the course of ten weeks in 1944, people of France and Japanese Americans became very good friends. After we helped liberate Italy and France, people in both countries were very friendly toward Japanese Americans. Even if they lacked provision, they invited me to their dinner tables. It broke my heart, but I refused their food. I stole some food from our kitchen and gave it to them. They loved our chocolate. I gave them mostly through the children, but I bet the adults took some from the children.

(Note from reviewer: Mr. Nakamura wrote one paragraph that mentioned that the 100th/442nd "were battling our way to the German's last stronghold, the Gothic Line." After the rescue of the Lost Battalion, the troops were withdrawn to a rest camp at the beginning of November 1944, then to southern France for a period called the "Champagne Campaign." General Mark Clark, commander of the 5th Army, requested Allied Command for the return of the 100th/442nd to Italy to participate in the final battles in March/April 1945 to break through the Gothic Line. For its part in this campaign, the 100th received its third Presidential Unit Citation. Mr. Nakamura story continues when the battalion was back in Italy.

I don't remember what happened after that because I landed in the hospital. After about a week in the hospital I finally got to my senses and asked why I was there. I was not wounded. She smiled at me and said, "You are here because of battle fatigue." In other words I went "nuts," I said. She smiled again and said, "Look at all these guys. They are all in the same situation. All you need is some rest. You are ok."

Two days later I went back to my outfit. My first assignment on patrol was to reconnoiter [sic] the German stronghold. While on this recon patrol we were on a trail on a mountainside. As we made a turn towards the enemy location, a machine gun fire startled me and I fell about 12 feet head first down the mountain slope. I was unconscious for a few seconds, sliding down the slope. I found myself hanging on to thick grass or weeds. My buddies from above yelled, "Sargent, Sargent [sic], are you ok? I had blood all over my face but said, "Yes, I'm ok." I looked down the slope about ten feet more, then after that a sheer drop of about 300 feet. Boy, was I lucky I didn't slide further. I hung on to the grass and climbed to the ledge. My buddies lowered a rifle with a strap. I grabbed the rifle strap and hung on to the butt end and they lifted me to safe ground. I'm glad I'm still alive today. This was the incident that gave me the second Purple Heart.

On the Gothic Line, the 34th Division and Unit of British and Canadians were on the frontal attack against the German army. The 100th and 442nd circled around the mountainside and attack their right flank and surprised the Germans. Soon after that they surrendered and the war ended.

We were still on duty because we had about three months more before we could be honorably discharged. Because the American Air Force and our artillery [sic] had damaged the water main, I was assigned to German prisoners of war to repair a section of the area.

That afternoon I went over to the German dining room where they gathered to drink beer and sing. When I entered the dining room, everybody stopped singing and were quiet. They looked at me and my M1 rifle on my shoulder. I took the rifle off and leaned it against the wall and spoke to them in English. "Anyone speak English?" Two Germans said, "yah." I said, my name is Sergeant Nakamura. What is yours?" One said Erick. The other shy guy said Rudolph. I paused, then said to Erick: "Did you know me before today?" He said, "No, I don't know you." Then, I said "why are we trying to kill each other?" Erick and Rudolph said, "yah, I don't know why." I said, "Let's keep on singing and drinking." We drank and sang until almost dawn. I finally passed out. When I got up the next morning, I was on my bunk with my rifle next to me. My German war prisoners had carried me to my bunk and laid my rifle next to me. Boy, did I have a hang-over and I was dizzy.

I had the Germans working on the detail fixing the pipeline while I laid down to take a nap. All of a sudden three German prisoners came running to me, yelling, "Officer, officer, coming." I jumped to my feet, straightened my tie and stood at attention. The lieutenant said, "Everything seems ok." I said, Yes, sir." He said, "Carry on Sergeant."