



*Shugeko Okumura remembering
brother, Toyokazu*

Remembering Brother

She could not forget. So in April 1992, the woman, now in her 80s and aided by a walker, traveled thousands of miles from Hawaii to Italy, fulfilling a lifelong mission. She had to see the place where her only brother, a member of the 100th Infantry Battalion, made the ultimate sacrifice nearly 50 years before. Among the stops, her tour group visited Cassino, where the 100th became known as the "Purple Heart Battalion" during World War II. The visitors came upon a hilly, grassy area where golden wildflowers swayed in the wind.

Decades before, the area had been soaked with the blood of soldiers. Back then, a heavily armed enemy waited in the hills for the 100th and other American units. Back then, rain, bitter cold and lakes of mud sucked soldiers and their machines deeply into the earth.

The woman stood near a monument erected several years ago by an admiring Frenchman, Jean Bianchetti. Members of the 100th's tour group paused at the monument, placed flowers and took pictures. The woman, carrying her brother's photograph, quietly waited her turn. Then she knelt slowly, her hands laced with prayer beads. She offered some incense and murmured ever so softly in Buddhist prayer, tears streaming down her face. Members of her group - veterans, friends and relatives - were visibly moved, awestruck. Dr. Kenneth Otagaki remembered her words to him. "She said, 'Now I can die in peace ...'"

The woman is Shigeko Okumura. Her brother was Toyokazu Okumura, D Company. Out of 11 children, Toyokazu was the only son. He died at Cassino in early 1944.

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