

S/Sgt Itsumu Sasaoka

May 18, 1916 – January 31, 1945



Itsumu Sasaoka was born in Aiea, Oahu, on May 18, 1916. He was the son of Takichi and Chiyono (Hanamoto) Sasaoka. Before entering the service, he was a yardman.

Sasaoka (SN 30101548) was inducted into the Army at Schofield Barracks, Oahu on June 30, 1941. He took basic training at Schofield Barracks, Oahu and subsequently advance combat training at Camp McCoy, Wisconsin and Camp Shelby, Mississippi.

Sasaoka served with the 298th Infantry Regiment in Hawaii and later transferred to Company A, 100th Infantry Battalion during advance combat training in the continental United States. He was then dispatched overseas to Algeria, Africa and participated in

the landing at Salerno, Italy.

He was awarded the Distinguish Service Cross, Purple Heart, 2 Bronze Oak Leaf Cluster to the Purple Heart, Distinguished Unit Badge, 1 Bronze Oak Leaf Cluster to Distinguished Unit Badge, Asiatic-Pacific Campaign Medal, American Campaign Medal, European-African-Middle Eastern Campaign Medal, and the World War II Victory Medal.

S/Sgt. Itsumu Sasaoka was killed at Stalag III, Germany on January 31, 1945 and his remains were not recovered.

S/Sgt Itsumu Sasaoka was wounded on October 23, 1943 in Italy and a year later wounded in France on October 22, 1944 and taken prisoner. S/Sgt Michael M. Tokunaga, who was in the German prison camp with Sasaoka relates how the column of 2,000 prisoners were marching near Stalag III, the German prison camp when they were fired upon by the Russian army mistaking the prisoners for Hungarians who were fighting on the side of the Nazis. The defenseless prisoners scattered in panic, being fired upon by the Russians and German prison guards. Sgt Tokunaga never saw Sasaoka again. Sasaoka was originally listed as Missing in Action.

AWARD OF THE DISTINGUISHED SERVICE CROSS (GO 30, HQ SEVENTH ARMY, 3 FEB 45 ITSUMU SASAOKA, 30101548, Staff Sergeant, 100th Battalion, 442nd Regimental Combat Team (Missing in Action) FOR EXTRAORDINARY HEROISM IN ACTION.

On 22 October 1944, near Belmont, France, Sergeant Sasaoka was assigned as a machine gunner on the last tank of a task force during the execution of a daring thrust through enemy-held terrain in an effort to relieve a friendly unit which had been surrounded and cut off by the enemy. As the task force advanced over a mountain trail, the enemy opened fire from well dug-in positions on both sides of the trail. Although seriously wounded by the first burst of hostile fire, Sergeant Sasaoka, displaying a disdain for personal safety seldom surpassed, clung to his machine gun and directed a hail of bullets into the enemy positions in a last desperate attempt to prevent the other members of the platoon from being subjected to the lethal enemy crossfire. Finally unable to hang on any longer due to his weakened condition, Sergeant Sasaoka fell from the lurching tank. His magnificent courage and devotion to duty were in large measure responsible for the successful accomplishment of his platoon's mission and for saving the lives of many of his comrades. Next of Kin: Mr. Masaru Sasaoka, (Brother), Waipahu, Oahu, Territory of Hawaii.

Excerpts taken from *In Freedom's Cause: A Record of the Men of Hawaii Who Died in the Second World War* (1949) with permission from The University of Hawaii Press.
Russell K. Shoho

