



Chaplain Israel Yost

Step Off the Road, and Let the Dead Pass By

The ceremony of paying homage to our honored dead has been held annually on the Sunday closest to September 29, the day that the 100th Infantry Battalion first entered combat in Italy in 1943 and suffered its first casualties. Through the years, we have been blessed with the eloquence of many distinguished speakers at these annual memorial services, but rarely has the evocative power of speech so captured our souls as the address given by Israel Yost, our frontline chaplain, at the 1947 service. That speech is reproduced below.

Comrades and friends and parents:

I regret that I am not able to address you parents of our fallen comrades in the language with which you are most familiar. If I could I would gladly speak to you in Japanese about "Stepping Off The Road To Let The Dead Pass By."

This day has been set aside lest we forget the sacrifice made by our fallen comrades of the 100th Battalion. For many of us it is not necessary that a special day be set aside for such remembering; some of us think often throughout the year of old friends or relatives who are no longer with us. In fact, at times even the nights are filled with memories of deceased comrades as we dream of the battlefields of Italy and France. Furthermore as we meet the prejudice against race and color still loud in its cry and strong in its injustice, many of us cannot but remember the brave soldiers, living and dead, who proved so nobly that in one generation real Americans can be made from any racial background. In addition, as some of us look into the faces of our own sons and daughters we are reminded of other little boys and girls who are orphaned because their fathers died both for the sake of our nation's existence and for ideals of equality for all Americans. For us who were close by blood or comradeship to those three hundred odd dead of the 100th Battalion, there is no

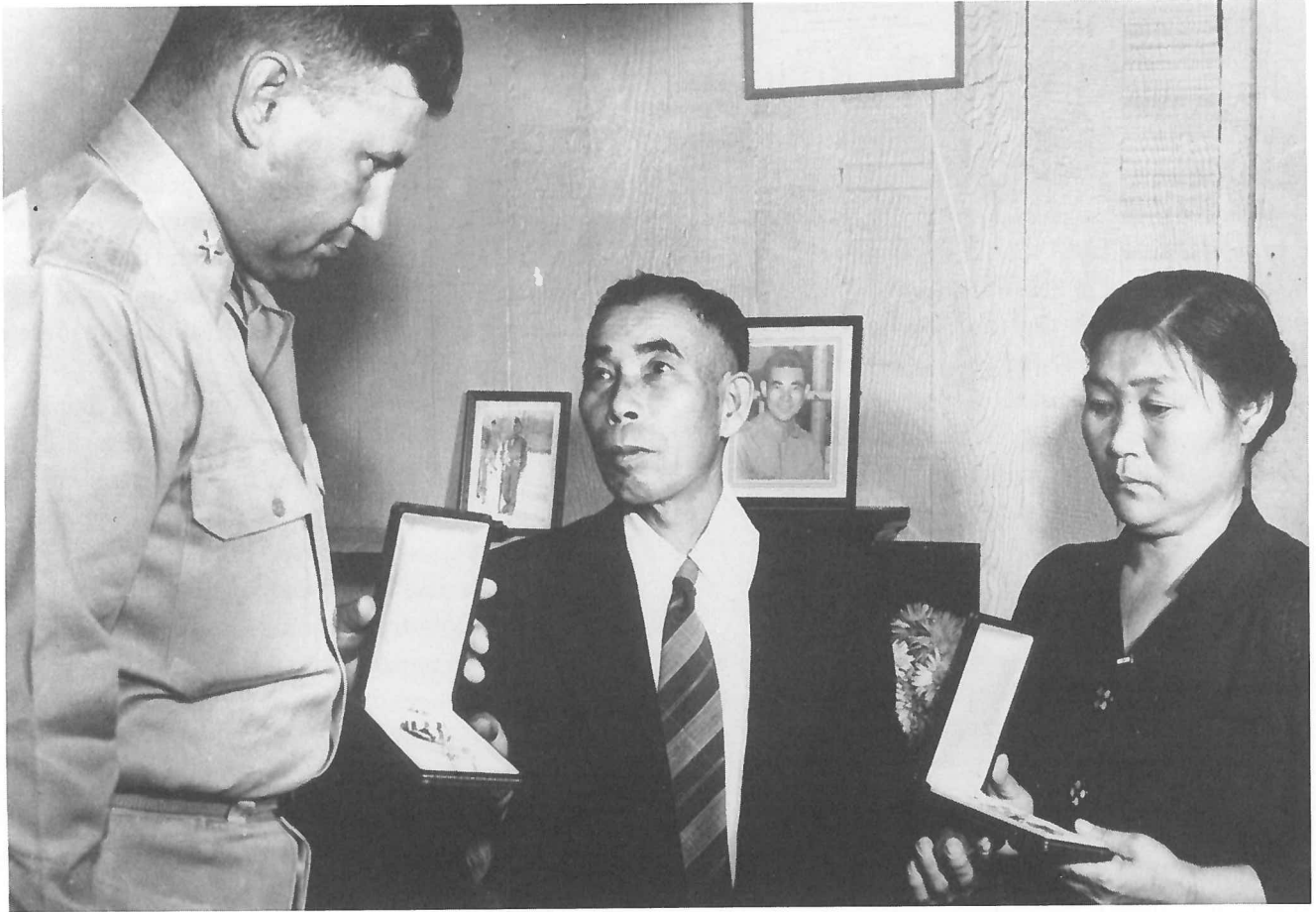
need for a special memorial day, except as such an occasion is used to strengthen us in our resolves to live in a manner worthy of the dead, and as such an occasion serves to remind the world around us of the splendid achievements of the Americans of Japanese ancestry.

All of us here present have reason to be thankful for what our dead have done. Because of such soldiers the war was kept away from America; because of these men our homes were not invaded, nor our loved ones endangered, nor our property destroyed. We who were over there have seen what war does to a country; because of the courage of our comrades, even unto death, we at home have been spared such ravages of war.

Some of us have even greater reason to be thankful for what the dead have done. A great many of us would not now be living were it not for the sacrifice of brave friends. If, for example, three men had not stayed at their forward post until enemy action killed them, many of us might never have come away alive from the Pozzilli area of Italy. There are present here today some of us who owe our very lives to the dogged determination of comrades who would not give ground, but who fought valiantly on to win security for the rest of us of the battalion. There was never any fear at the battalion aid station that the enemy would suddenly appear to threaten us; we knew that the line up front would hold or advance, and we were conscious that it would be at the cost of the lives of good friends. I, for one, want to thank, in the name of my wife and family, the parents here present whose sons were killed overseas – I want to thank them for giving their sons that I might live.

And, while speaking of giving thanks, there is something else for which I want to publicly thank the members and friends of the One Puka Puka.





The greatest sacrifice

Never once in the long months that I served as a member of the battalion did any member of the outfit discriminate against me because I was of a different color and creed and race. Americans everywhere ought to be thankful for such a living testimony of the practicability of the idea that "God hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth ..." (Acts 17:26) My experience was that of countless other Americans who had contact with the members of the 100th.

Today, we step off the busy road of life to let these our dead pass by. They bring us a message as they parade by in review, and we are proud of them – and pray God, may they be proud of us and the way we are carrying on their traditions.

Once, over there, four men came slowly up a trail along which was strewn the debris of war. Our soldiers had fallen, wounded or dead, along that path, dropping rations and arms and equipment in agony or haste. The four were carrying a dead comrade on a litter. It was not so much the weight of their burden as it was the weight of the sorrow in their hearts that made them tread so slowly on their way. Toward them came a lone soldier, of a different division and of a different race (though American). When he noticed the funeral procession he stopped, stepped off the path, removed his helmet, and stood with bowed head as the men bore the dead past him. I shall never forget how that white soldier of the 45th Division took time to honor one of our dead AJAs; in reverence he stepped off the road to let the dead pass by.

Once again today, as is our custom, we step off the road to let our dead pass by. Each of us will be thinking especially about his own dear son, or husband, or brother, or relative, or friend. Look with me at some that I see passing by.

There goes a sergeant of the medical corps. He was well-known in our outfit, especially by those who fell with legs blown off or holes ripped into

their sides, for he was the liaison man of the battalion medical detachment. He saw to it that litter squads got to the wounded, and often he was the one to creep up to give encouragement until the carriers came. Then one night enemy shells interrupted his errand of mercy and he fell mortally wounded. As we watch this sergeant of the medics pass by he bids us remember that he has a son living in America, and he wants us to see to it that his boy gets a fair deal in life.

There goes another lad in the line of march. We found him alongside the road just across the Volturno River in Italy with a large picture of his son lying near his body where it had fallen from his pack or out of his hands. He, and all the others who have left orphaned children behind, are beckoning to us from the ranks of the dead not to forget their loved ones. When we feel we have no time for other people's boys and girls – no time because we need all our time and money and energies for ourselves – let's step off the road and allow our honored dead to pass, by reminding us of the debt we owe to their children and to the youth, all the youth, of America and the world.

There goes, in the ranks of the dead, one who was university-trained, adept in languages, a student of world affairs, interesting to chat with, eager to meet the future, one of whom a friend could always be proud. He had plans for his life and visions of serving his fellowmen. But one day up front a mortar shell cut off his visions, his future, his hopes; when I brought him back for burial his face was so changed that at first I did not recognize my friend. He was not cynical as are some Americans; he really believed that the American way was worth fighting for, worth dying for. When we feel like giving up our ideals, or when we grow weary of trying to arouse interest in the apathetic, when we are tempted to stop fighting for liberty and freedom and justice, let's step off the road to allow the dead such as this one to pass by reminding us to keep faith with the dead.





On American soil at Nettuno, Italy



*Veterans return to Nettuno to pay homage to Maj John A. Johnson,
Lt Lewis A. Key, Lt Edward V. Moran, Lt Neill M. Ray and
Lt Kurt E. Schemel*

Ah! there marches our major. He was a man among men, tall, broad and tough. Back home all sports-lovers knew him for his prowess. With us he was a favorite, with both officers and enlisted men. I recall how once he mercilessly lashed out with a torrent of words at an incapable officer who had a habit of endangering his men by bluffing, and how he turned, and with the same breath gently urged a private to take better care of his sore feet. Our major flowed with health and strength and that sense of fair play for which all real Americans are known. When I as the chaplain was having a difficult time evacuating the dead for burial this kindly comrade said: "If I am killed, don't go to so much trouble about me; just bury me where I fall." When an officer higher up blundered, our major calmly walked into a zone of machinegun fire in an attempt to straighten out the battalion. We did the best we could for him at the battalion aid station, for we loved him very much, but there were too many oozing bullet-holes in him, and by the morning he had died. When we forget our sense of fair play, when we try to cheat our way through life, or try to get by, by being something less than our best, when we feel we can't take being the loser, or in victory feel like lording it over the beaten, let's step off the road to let this beloved officer and others like him pass by, reminding us to keep faith with the dead.

Look intently at all the three hundred and some as they file past. Short, swarthy, Oriental warriors they, of Japanese parentage, but Americans of Americans, with lives gladly given for their country's welfare. They sought nothing for themselves, but strove instead to make this a land where free men of all colors, creeds, and origins might live at peace, an example to the world. While living they said: "We do not expect to live through this war, but we will die bravely so that our children, or wives, our parents might have a place in America." When mouthy men of godless "isms" preach to make us hate the other color, the other creed, the other race, and say that men of other lands have not souls like

unto our own, then let's step off the road to let these Japanese-Americans pass by, reminding us to keep faith with the dead.

Now, you who were members of the 100th, pick out from the ranks of the dead, your own beloved friend. You knew him as a lad, you played with him, and hiked and swam and schooled. He marched with you and sailed with you across the seas. He knelt with you in prayer and joined his voice with yours in praise of God. He had the same dislikes and loves as you. He showed you pictures of girl, or wife and child. He wasn't always sure the higher-ups directed right, but he believed in God and in his most sincere of hours he thrilled at all the things for which our nation stands. He planned for all the things we now enjoy, and often said he knew that we would carry on if he should not return. Oh, comrade of our honored dead – or wife, or Dad, or Mom, or sister dear, or brother – all you who are his kin or bound to him as friends –

when you begin to slide through life instead of climbing,

when you begin to harm instead of helping,

when you begin to curse at God instead of praying,

when you begin to feel that life is for the one who thinks of self alone.....

then pause a while, step off the road, and let the gold-starred soul of your beloved pass by. Then, can you break faith with the dead?

Where these dead now are they see eternal truth. Our honored dead from their side of eternity know that God is on the side of right and compassion and justice. Not all of them in life were quite so sure that God is kind and good and much concerned about his sons on earth. But now they see with eyes undimmed by human doubt. And as they pass before us all today, I believe they bid look at that dear One Who years ago was cruelly hanged upon a tree. Not all our dead were Christians, that I know; but now from





Memorial at Bruyeres

out the grave they cry that we have faith in God, the loving Father Whom we know alone through Christ. They long for us to know the God of love so clearly shown to all the world by our Lord Jesus Christ. When we lose faith in God above and doubt that love can conquer all the world, when we deny the Christ and worship things of earth, then let us step down off the road to allow our dead to pass by, reminding us that they can see that God still rules the world with love.

Those worthy soldier-dead need not our words of praise today. They need none of our gold for statues to their fame. They only ask that we keep faith with them, that we shall ne'er forget that they have died with hopes of making this old world a bit more like the place of peace God planned it for.

What if we fail, and live for self, and oft forget to champion right against the powerful wrong? What if we break the faith with these our dead? Then they would beg that we forget mistakes and try again. They know, and we know in our hearts, that it was easier to die upon the battlefield for right than to

live day in and day out according to the best within us. That's why it is good for us to hold such services year after year—to bolster up and encourage us to live up to the standards they set by their deaths. I believe they would even bid us not mourn for them, for they know that we the living have the harder task of daily fighting on for what is right and good and kind. I know they will forgive us when we fail, if only we will try again to quit ourselves like men in fighting for that for which they gave their lives.

*When soulless men our high ideals defy,
When our fond hopes and visions start to die,
When selfishness engulfs, let's, you and I,
Step off the road to let the dead pass by.
When human wrongs for right to heaven cry,
If for ideals you e'en may have to die,
To keep your aims in life clean-cut and high,
Step off the road to let the dead pass by.*

Chaplain Israel A.S. Yost's home base is Orwigsburg, PA. He returned in 1983 to address the 38th annual memorial service. Among his many stories, he told of how he came to the 100th. "As a Christian, I felt it was my duty to volunteer for service as a chaplain as a way of sharing the burdens of the young men leaving my parish. Once in the military, it was my Christian faith that prompted me to seek out the area of greatest need. I realized that it was the combat infantry chaplain most of all who could be close to the men most often in danger. When the opportunity came in North Africa for me to request the type of service I wanted, I spoke up for assignment to an infantry battalion. As a result, I was sent to the 34th Division, temporarily with its combat engineers until an infantry battalion needed a chaplain. Since Chaplain (Major) Eels, who served briefly with the 100th overseas, was too high in rank for the position, he was transferred out and I was transferred in. That's how you men got me. I knew nothing about the 100th, AJA's, or Japan. But I had a flame within me, and you men kept it burning." We welcome him back for our 50th anniversary celebration.

