



Color Guards of the 100th, July 1944

*Identified are Yoshio "Ginger" Minami, left; Mitsuru Doi, center;
Sumio Ito, fourth from left*

The Legacy of the 100th

The establishment of the 100th Infantry Battalion in June 1942 was an extraordinary event. The U.S. was still reeling from a series of military strikes launched by Japan. Pearl Harbor was only one of many disasters in 1941 and 1942. On the Mainland, all residents of Japanese descent were systematically herded into assembly centers and concentration camps. In Hawai'i, authorities were involved in major debates about the fate of 160,000 Japanese Americans. Among the serious options: mass evacuation and removal to Mainland camps or internment on the island of Molokai. Cooler heads prevailed and a compromise allowed for the internment of "only" 2,000 people.

The existence of Americans of Japanese Ancestry (AJAs) who had been drafted in 1940-41 into the US Army was a separate problem for the local community, the Territory, and the U.S. military. After Pearl Harbor, AJAs were classified 4-C, "enemy aliens," and denied the right to serve in the military.

Many of these "boys," however, had been inducted and were at Schofield Barracks. Would they be trained to use weapons when their loyalty was suspect? Would the government intern them, too? Or would their weapons be confiscated and their roles limited to labor service? Ironically, they lived and trained in limbo at the same time and in the same place that 169 other AJAs were being celebrated as role models for serving in a labor battalion - the Varsity Victory Volunteers.

On June 4-6, 1942, in the Battle of Midway, the U.S. Navy destroyed Japan's ability to attack the U.S.

in any meaningful way. At precisely the same time, Hawaii's inductees were sent to Wisconsin and the 100th was activated shortly thereafter. It is difficult to know what would have happened to them if the outcome at Midway had been different.

The 100th went on to a bloody and heroic war record, thus helping to rehabilitate the image of AJAs as loyal Americans. More importantly, they returned no longer in awe of the haole; ready to help create a more democratic society than the one they had left behind.

Most important, they had left immigrant parents and - most of them - plantation towns or urban poverty, to risk their lives against a worldwide Facist threat. The legacy of the 100th must be a lasting one: of young AJAs continuing to struggle for acceptance; of community leaders visionary enough to do battle against prejudice and stereotypes; of the need to remember that eternal vigilance is the price of liberty; of the faith inherent in people for the future.

The 100th fought twin enemies - Fascism and racism. We best honor their legacy by continuing their struggle for justice in Hawai'i, America and the world.



Dr. Franklin Odo

