

Liberty  
Lost...



Lessons in  
Loyalty

## THE WATSONVILLE-SANTA CRUZ JACL

Newsletter October 2015

### CELEBRATING MIKE'S LEGACY ...

Thursday, October 15, 2015 will be the 100<sup>th</sup> birthday of **Mike Masaru Masaoka** had he lived (1915-1991). In celebration we offer this tribute to he who remains the most important Japanese American who ever lived and who contributed so much to the present well-being of all Japanese and Japanese Americans.



**Lane Nakano** and **Van Johnson** starred in the 1951 MGM movie, "**Go For Broke**," with **Mike Masaoka** of the **442<sup>nd</sup> RCT** who served as the special consultant to the film, produced by **Dore Schary** and written and directed by **Robert Pirosh**. Please view, with younger members of the family, this 91 minute film (with captions) on youtube.com since it is now in the *public domain*.



We called upon **Terry Shima** who knew Mike Masaoka personally and who would speak with authority.



The following is a question and answer response of May 6, 2015 between the National JACL and **TSgt Terry Shima** (photo left). We are grateful to be able to share this with our readers—to those who lived through our wartime experience and unjust incarceration, to our youthful members, and to our future generations.

**Describe your first contact with Mike Masaoka.**

I first met Mike Masaoka around May 15, 1945 at the Replacement Depot in the Italian Alps, near Lake Garda, where the 442<sup>nd</sup> was bivouacked. Replacement Depot is where the incoming replacements go to be assigned to a unit. I was told Mike Masaoka will interview me. Mike entered the room, put out his hand, and said "I am Mike Masaoka. Director of 442<sup>nd</sup> Public Relations office", abbreviated as PRO. Mike spent about 10 minutes describing the work of the PRO, asked me a few questions, and asked if I wish to be assigned to PRO. I responded: "I think you have the wrong man, I don't have any public Relations training or experience, I don't have any college education, I graduated from a small high school in the Hawaii countryside, and I am poor in English. There are a number of college graduates in my group, who are better qualified." Mike said, "You'll do, we will teach you, however, the first thing we need to do is find a name for you because your name, **Teruji**, is not good for PR work. We'll call you **Terry**. Mike then said "Terry, put your bag in the jeep, I need to get back to the office to work on a couple deadlines."

When we got to Service Company and the PRO tent, where we slept and worked, Mike pointed to my bunk and introduced me to **Tak Yatabe**, UC Berkeley, about 38, who, before 442<sup>nd</sup> was an official of a wholesale florist in Berkeley and to **Shig Aratani**, also about 38, a UCLA graduate and owner of a publishing firm in Los Angeles. Tak and Shig were transferred to PRO from line companies. Mike pointed to my work space, which looked like an orange crate with a typewriter sitting on it. I learned from Tak later it was occupied by **Tooru Kanazawa**, a professional journalist before he volunteered, also about 38. Shima succeeds Kanazawa? I wondered if Mike had been overseas too long.

Mike then got me registered with the clerk of Service Company and introduced me to **1st Sgt Royal Manaka**.

Mike asked 1st Sgt Manaka to exempt me from company duties, such as KP ("kitchen police"), latrine and guard duty because my PRO work will require me to work long and odd hours. Manaka said OK. Mike also introduced me to the Mess Sergeant, **Staff Sgt Joe Itagaki**, and **Master Sgt Yoshida** of the Motor Pool. These three non-coms were key to Mike's PRO work.

## 2. What were Mike's duties in the Army during World War II?

Mike said that when he reported to **Colonel Charles Pence**, 442<sup>nd</sup> commander at Camp Shelby, Pence told him Washington wants him to publicize the heroism of the 442<sup>nd</sup> men. Mike said that while we are no longer in a combat situation "your principal mission is an extension of this directive". Within this framework, as Chief of PRO, Mike was responsible for putting out a daily Newsletter; write and send articles to 442<sup>nd</sup> soldiers' hometown newspapers with a copy going to **Pacific Citizen**; visit regimental headquarters to gather news and leads and to ensure PRO activities were in coordination with Headquarters; to talk to American journalists, who represented wire services and newspapers; cover Italian village folks' interaction with 442<sup>nd</sup> units mainly for goodwill; attend Italian officials and nobilities dinner parties, and when time was available assist the Adjutant's office, such as in writing award recommendations.

## 3. How did Mike carry out these duties?

Mike carried out his duties in a businesslike fashion. He told me some things, others I learned by watching him. Some of points he taught me: respond to deadlines promptly, if you can't meet it tell the person to whom you committed. Arrive for appointments on time, do your business, and take your leave. Be fully prepared for your meeting. Be courteous, don't make excuses, don't cover up and if you find you misstated a fact be sure to correct it lest that person makes a decision on flawed information. There are other points that don't emerge readily but this gives you a glimpse of Mike's operating style. He sat with me to discuss my written work, making changes in grammar and style. He was patient, and I was never more challenged and eager to learn. In other words, he was true to his word: "we will teach you". He did.

## 4. Describe Mike's traits, values, personality.

To summarize, Mike was a very intelligent, highly articulate, caring and thoughtful person.

Traits: Hard worker, a realist. Mike said Japanese Americans were a small minority and our numbers were politically inconsequential.

While on duty with JACL before he entered the army, government officials ignored Mike, talked down to him. **E.G. COL Bendetsen** told Mike "You (ethnic Japanese) have two choices: cooperate or we will do it our way".

Mike said they had the guns and the tanks, and Mike was convinced they would have used it at the slightest perceived provocation. Thus, Mike advised the Nikkei population to peacefully obey the evacuation orders, not to resort to violence, and to seek restitution after the war.

Values: Friendship, high quality work, perfection, integrity. Working with him for around a half a year, and giving me no clue, he arranged with the regimental

commander that I succeed him in rank and position. On his last visit to the Commander's office there was a small informal ceremony to bid Mike goodbye. In Mike's remarks he announced I would be his successor. I felt like a boy asked to do a man's job. Mike did one more thing for me. The following year when the regiment was ordered to return to the States for the review by **President Truman**, my regimental commander told me I did not have enough points to return with the RCT but he wanted me to return on duty status to handle Regimental public relations. I told the Commander the same thing I told Mike the year before, I did not have the PR experience, etc, so suggested that one of the officers do the PR work. The Commander said you better read this letter. It was a letter from Mike to the Commander. The Commander said in a stern voice: I am ordering you to return with the Regiment. Reply: Yes Sir.

Personality: Easy to approach, considerate, good listener, follow through on promises, makes friends easily, family oriented, little impatient at times, adjusts easily to level of person he is talking to, e.g. a soldier, Italian farmer or nobility. He was Mike to everyone, and he was treated with respect.

## 5. Why did Mike think it was important to reinstate Selective Service for Nisei?

Because when WW II began all ethnic Japanese were viewed by the people and federal officials as being disloyal and as collaborators and saboteurs of Imperial Japan. The government changed the Nisei draft classification from 1-A (eligible for military duty) to 4-C (alien, unfit for military duty). 4-C was tantamount to the government telling the Nisei, we don't want you. All Mike wanted was a return to the status quo.

**Mike was convinced that a strong performance by Nisei in combat was our strongest weapon to defeat the disloyalty issue so he encouraged the Nisei, individually and in groups, to petition the government to allow them to serve in combat.**

Washington, not familiar with the mentality of ethnic Japanese, saw something terribly sinister about the Little Tokyo and Japan Towns and felt that breaking them up and integrating them into America's main stream was the solution to the "Japanese issue". A study of **General George C. Marshall**, US Army Chief of Staff, papers reflect this view. Marshall watched the 100th closely, especially their loyalty. The 100th's training and later combat record convinced Washington to form the 442<sup>nd</sup> Regimental Combat Team, a segregated Japanese American unit. Documents at the National Archives show that many Nisei in camps were opposed to serving in a segregated Japanese American unit. They viewed this as discrimination. **Assistant Secretary of War John J. McCloy** told Mike there will be millions of Caucasian Americans in the Army and a few thousand Nisei sprinkled among them would have no visible impact. Mike quickly saw the soundness of Washington's decision for a segregated unit, endorsed it, and told McCloy he wanted to be the first to volunteer. Mike said he supported the War Department's rationale to get 2,500 volunteers from the mainland, largely from internment camps, and 1,500

from Hawaii, however, the War Department and the WRA bungled on the writing of the loyalty questionnaire, Question 27 and 28, that angered the Nisei and resulted in only 1,500 mainlanders volunteering.

#### 6. What were Mike's vision and goals for the Japanese American community?

Based on my knowledge of what Mike said, I would say his vision was to obtain equality for the ethnic Japanese -- a level playing field. Mike frequently talked of what he needed to do after he returned to the States. As noted above, we in PRO worked and slept in the same tent. After dinner, Mike, Tak and Shig would talk about evacuation, internment, and 442<sup>nd</sup> frequently late into the night. I sat with these "seniors," and I listened. During the day when Mike and I were together I would ask him questions derived from the night before and discuss issues. I was fortunate because Mike, himself, wanted to discuss the issues. Mike answered my questions fully. Mike sometimes looked worried, sometimes deep in thought, most always preoccupied and serious. I don't think I saw Mike in a happy-go-lucky party mood. Sometimes I would ask him why he looked so pensive, so worried. He said during the heat of crisis immediately after war began he made certain statements and took positions that the ethnic Japanese public accepted. Now, with the war behind us, he will be expected to deliver make the corrections he had committed to. "I made commitments and took positions, the people followed; now I must deliver." Mike said he did not know if he could deliver some things, such as jobs for college graduates, but he will have to do his utmost.

#### The issues that concerned him the most while in Italy are listed below. Let's call them goals:

"A". My most important goal is get the disloyalty stigma removed, Mike said. **President Harry Truman's** statement to the 442<sup>nd</sup> at the Ellipse on July 15, 1946 ("you fought the enemy abroad and prejudice at home and you won") is an affirmation of Nisei loyalty to their nation. Truman's affirmation was based on the combat and service record of Nisei who served in the US Army. This is the highest level effort to remove the stigma of disloyalty. Attitudes did not change immediately but they have changed over a space of time. I don't know exactly what Mike did to get President Truman to review the 442<sup>nd</sup> troops but what I do know is things don't just happen in WDC. I am convinced Mike had a hand in getting this presidential review.



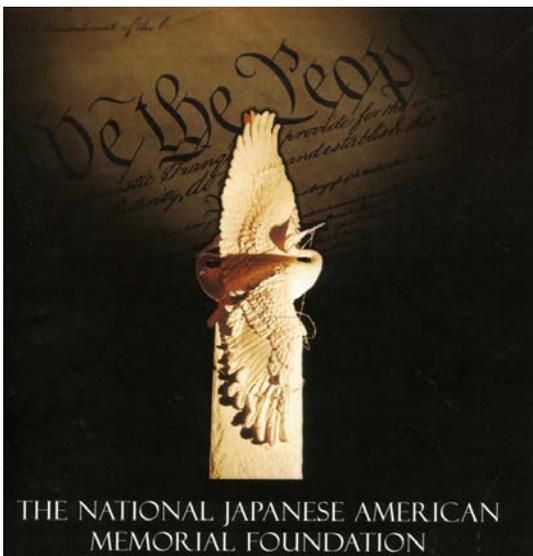
"B". Mike said he appealed to the ethnic Japanese to obey the government orders, to refrain from violence, and to seek redress after the War. Mike wondered aloud occasionally in Italy what his redress package will be. Mike may not have realized then a political evolution that would occur in America that would bring Japanese Americans in the US Congress. Thanks to Nisei political leaders such as **Congressman Norman Mineta, Senators Spark Matsunaga and Daniel Inouye** and activists such as **Grant Ujifusa**, who would become the backbone for the passage of the **Civil Liberties Act of 1988**, which contained a national apology and reparations for the internment, this goal was achieved.

"C". Mike said he owed it to our immigrant parents to obtain citizenship rights for them. This needed to be done as soon as possible because time was running out on them. He talked about his own immigrant father who was cheated in a real estate deal. Years later, **Marty Higgins**, Commander of the trapped Battalion of the 36th Texas Division, which was saved by the 442<sup>nd</sup>, said that Mike had contacted him several times to get him to persuade his senators to support the **Walter-McCarran Bill** which became law in 1952 to provide citizenship rights to Japanese (*Issei*), Korean and Chinese immigrants.



"D". Mike felt it was his duty to build a **monument** to memorialize the Nisei who died in line of duty. He spoke frequently of his brother who was killed in combat and the others he encouraged to volunteer for combat duty. Mike encouraged Nisei to volunteer for combat because he was convinced that was our strongest weapon to defeat the disloyalty issue. He envisaged a monument built in the nation's capital alongside the other war memorials. Mike died before the **National Japanese American Memorial to Patriotism** during WW II was finished near the US Capitol Building where Mike spent a good deal of his time.





“E”. Remove discriminatory state and federal laws. While Mike noted this as one of his post war goals and Mike, Tak and Shig discussed at length discriminatory laws that affected them, I do not recall Mike’s discussions. Also, I am not familiar with the role Mike played in causing the repeal of these laws. Federal and state, but the process began relatively soon after the war and continues to today.

“F”. Mike was seized with the issue of lack of job opportunities for Japanese American college graduates. He worried how to correct this anomaly. The solution to Mike’s dilemma came from a totally separate unanticipated source. It came from the 442<sup>nd</sup> Mike helped create. The 442<sup>nd</sup> and Tuskegee Airmen combat records contributed to the post war climate for reforms which created a level playing field for minorities to compete for any job and rank. Japanese Americans competed well in the military, government, US Congress, academia, business, and space. Three Japanese Americans reached the highest rank in the armed forces – four stars. One Nisei US Senator served in a position that put him third in line for the US Presidency, two ethnic Japanese became astronauts.

**7. Please discuss the relationship between Mike and Etsu.**

Mike spoke dearly and constantly about Etsu. I wonder what Etsu is doing now; he would muse during an idle moment between deadlines. He wrote a letter daily to Etsu and when he did not get one he would go the mail clerk to check if her letter was stuck in the mail bag. When an Italian nobility told him about Richard Ginori dinnerware and that it was sold in the US exclusively by Tiffany in New York City, Mike went to the factory in Florence, which was close to our campsite, to have a set made and shipped to Etsu. When I was first introduced to Etsu in 1946 following my discharge and return to WDC, I told Etsu I feel I had known her for a long time. She told me that is the same impression she had about me.

**8. How should Mike be remembered, what is his legacy?**

Mike Masaoka should be remembered for his wisdom, vision, courage and steadfastness during the darkest period in Japanese American history when he advocated the precept that a strong performance by Nisei in combat

was our best weapon to defeat racism and the disloyalty issue and to place Japanese Americans in America’s mainstream. He encouraged the Nisei, individually and in groups, to petition the government to allow them to serve in combat to prove their loyalty.

Another precept Mike got JACL to adopt was the announcement to all persons of Japanese ancestry on the Pacific coast to obey the government’s evacuation orders, however distasteful, and to seek restitution after the war. To the ethnic Japanese’s credit, there was no violence and no blood was shed in the evacuation. And, to Washington’s credit they reviewed the petitions and activated the 442<sup>nd</sup> combat team whose performance the Army said was unsurpassed and which, in turn, along with the **Tuskegee Airmen** contributed to the climate for post WW II reforms thereby leveling the playing field for minorities to compete for any job and rank.

The acid test of Mike’s work is seen today. During the past 70 years, Japanese Americans, operating on a level playing field and competing with the best of the best, have achieved ranking positions in the public and private sectors and they have contributed to the Greatness of America. From the very beginning of the catastrophe, December 7, 1941, Mike diligently endeavored to make the Constitution work like the Founders of our nation had intended it to work. *A Man of Destiny*, Mike Masaoka’s legacy will impact our lives forever.



**Terry Shima** of Japanese American Veterans Association (JAVA) spoke at the dedication of the MIS Learning Center, Presidio of San Francisco, Nov. 11, 2014. He continues to be an advocate for all Americans of Japanese ancestry. We are grateful that he honored our W-SC JACL with his living memories of Mike M. Masaoka. **Hashimoto**, Editor