

In Action in the China-Burma-India Theater Introduction

MISers serving on mainland Asia were assigned primarily to the American China-Burma-India (CB I) theater, a part of a larger Allied command headed by the British, who provided most of the forces in the area. While a few Nisei served with British forces, the majority were assigned to a unique American infantry unit commanded by Brigadier General Frank D. Merrill. This was a long-range penetration force, known unofficially as "Merrill's Marauders," designed to operate deep behind Japanese lines in Burma. Formed late in 1943, the Marauders spent an arduous half-year in the mountains and jungles of northern Burma, where disease and physical exhaustion proved as tough an enemy as the Japanese.

Roy Matsumoto was one of 14 Nisei soldiers who served with Merrill's Marauders, and his actions in the two episodes he describes here amply illustrate the contributions of this small group of MISers. Hiro Nishimura was not a member of the Marauders (although he served in the CBI), but has chosen to discuss several other aspects of that unit's activities. And finally, the account by Arthur Morimitsu describes the role of his MIS team with the MARS Task Force, another long-range penetration force, and his later service with the Office of Strategic Services (OSS) in China.

With Merrill's Marauders in Burma -- Roy H. Matsumoto

My career as a Merrill's Marauders Ranger began when I, together with many other young Japanese Americans-including other future Marauders-volunteered from relocation centers where we had been interned. When the call came for service in the United States military in the fall of 1942, I volunteered from the "concentration" camp in Jerome, Arkansas, and was sent to Camp Shelby, Mississippi, to receive infantry basic training along with recruits targeted for the famed 442nd Regimental Combat Team. But I'd been sent to Japan when I reached junior high school age to live with maternal grandparents and had spent three years as a "chugakko" (middle school) student. So the Army selected me for additional training at the Military Intelligence Service Language School, Camp Savage, Minnesota.

Upon graduation, six other Japanese American mainlanders and I volunteered together with seven Nisei soldiers from Hawaii to join the 5307th Composite Unit, Provisional -- a regimental sized group trained in guerrilla tactics known popularly as "Merrill's Marauders", taking its name from its commander; Brig. Gen. Frank Dow Merrill. The fourteen Japanese American future "Marauders" sailed on the SS Lurline from Fort Mason, California, to Bombay, India.

In 1942, the Japanese 18th Division occupied almost all of Northern Burma. The mission of Merrill's Marauders was to reopen the Burma Road, the overland lifeline linking India and China through Burma.

I was assigned to the 2nd Battalion of Merrill's Marauders in the Northern Burma campaign. Setting out from Ledo, Assam, in northeastern India, in February 1944, the Marauders marched southward on foot through Burmese jungles and river crossings in the Hukawng and Mogaung valleys covering several hundred miles to capture the key city of Myitkyina in August. We had many encounters with the Japanese during this march, but I want to talk about only two: the Walawbum road block and the siege at Nhpum Ga.

The Walawbum Road Block

The headquarters of the Japanese 18th Division was in Kamaing in the Moguang valley but the majority of the 7,000 troops were scattered northward into the Hukawng valley from Maingkwan. As we came out of the jungle and reached the Kamaing road, we discovered the 18th Division's telephone lines running from headquarters to the front along the road. I climbed a tree and tapped into the line, and while eavesdropping learned about the location of an enemy ammunition dump susceptible to attack. Our company commander contacted our air support and air attacks destroyed the dump. I was up on the tree most of the time from morning to evening, and I did not even have time to dig my own foxhole. But I was able to obtain much valuable intelligence, especially orders regarding enemy troop movements revealing superior enemy forces attempting to break the Walawbum road block on the Kamaing road. We were therefore able to avoid and bypass these forces while continuing our advance without loss.

The Siege at Nhpum Ga.

About a month later; when we encountered superior enemy forces in the Hukawng valley, we were ordered to move up to a hilltop hamlet called Nhpum Ga. The enemy surrounded us and the siege of Nhpum Ga began. One night, crawling over our lines and through our perimeter, I infiltrated behind enemy lines in an attempt to pick up intelligence and overheard enemy plans to attack Lt. Edward McLogan's area at dawn. I returned and reported what I had overheard to our commanding officer who ordered the relocation of our positions further up the hill and the booby trapping of our empty foxholes.

As expected, the enemy made an all out assault up the hill at dawn. We held our fire until the enemy charged into the line of foxholes. We then opened with some fifty automatic weapons -- heavy and light machine guns, BARs, Thompson sub-machine guns, and M4 rifles-as well as carbines and hand grenades. The second wave of the enemy troops hesitated in confusion. At that moment, I stood up and gave the order to attack in Japanese. The troops obeyed my order and they were mowed down.* And so we were able to break the siege, defeat an enemy superior in numbers, and survive until the 1st and 3rd Battalions joined us.

Therefore, I was able to contribute to saving the 2nd Battalion twice. As a result, we were able to march down to Myitkyina air strip and capture it. By doing so, we attained our final objective of providing a link to a reopened Burma Road.

Mission accomplished.

Editors' note: Sgt. Warren T. Ventura of Moreno Valley, California writes: "It was my experience on the morning of April 5, 1944, to witness a most extraordinary act of bravery by a fellow soldier in combat at Nhpum Ga...In the pitched battle...one sergeant of Japanese ancestry made the all important outstanding contribution which I am convinced saved the lives of every man who survived the long tenacious defense of Nhpum Ga..."

Roy Matsumoto stood up in the midst of the Japanese assault on our perimeter and fully exposed himself calling out to the Japanese as if he were a Japanese officer and ordered them to an all-out Bonzai attack on our position. As the attack continued, Sgt. Matsumoto stood fully exposed to the enemy and they had to have seen that he was continually shooting at them with his pea-shooter carbine. No other man in our battalion (of 600 men) exposed himself. We were all in holes in the ground firing from ground level. Sgt. Matsumoto was fully exposed and most certainly drawing attention of the enemy to himself. That he survived was and is a miracle.

(When I asked our Commanding Officer, Lt Col George McGee why this man was not recommended for the Medal of Honor, he told me that 'He was only an enlisted man doing his duty. Enlisted men do not get medals for this'.) [Source: May 1990 issue of The Burman News (Official publication of Merrill's Marauders Association, Inc.)]

The Unsung Heroes - Hiro Nishimura

Underscoring the theme of "unknown stories" that characterizes the experience of MISers during World War II is the tale of the fourteen Nisei of Merrill's Marauders who fought in the China-Burma-India theater. It is true that these Nisei were highly praised in scattered mentions in Charlton Ogburn, Jr.'s *The Marauders* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1956); that Bill Hosokawa's article in the July 1964 issue of the *American Legion* magazine did bring the exploits of the fourteen to national attention; and that the late Akiji Yoshimura did add his first hand account in the telling of the story in his "14 Nisei and the Marauders" in the book entitled *John Aiso and the MIS* edited by Tad Ichinokuchi (Los Angeles: The Military Intelligence Service Club of Southern California, 1988). Despite these accounts, I am sadly certain that the full story of their extreme ordeals and supreme contributions has remained virtually unknown to the public and even to MISers to this day.

Although I served in Burma with the Allied forces, I was not one of the select fourteen, and rather than discuss my own experiences, I should like to focus on the Marauders and dedicate my remarks to them-especially to Roy Matsumoto from the MIS Association, NorCal, and Grant Hirabayashi from the Japanese American Veterans Association of Washington, D.C., both of whom are present at this reunion.

The Nisei volunteers were described as "our prime asset" by Lt. Ogburn, who fought with them and who wrote the book cited above (*The Marauders*, p.42). They were members of an all-volunteer combat team, an infantry regiment later designated as the 5307th Composite Unit (Provisional) under Brig. Gen. Frank Merrill, who in turn served under General Joseph W Stilwell, commander of U.S. Army forces in the CBI theater. The rigorous demands placed on this task force of 3,000 men were the same as those placed on General Stilwell whose mission General George C. Marshall characterized as "one of the most difficult of the war" (*The Marauders*, p.27). The War Department's advance estimate of casualties was 85 percent (John Aiso, p.89) during the assumed "one major operation of approximately three months duration" planned for the provisional unit. Moreover; according to a telegram from General Marshall to General Stilwell of September 30, 1943, "the termination of this operation may result in physical and mental fatigue of survivors necessitating three months hospitalization and rest with probably well-deserved furloughs in the U.S. for some personnel...." (*The Marauders*, p.271)

The promise of a maximum of three months of combat followed by hospitalization, rest and furlough was broken when a last-minute month-long mission was ordered by General Stilwell -- with men taken out of hospital for combat against doctor's orders. This aroused bitterness and anger against their commander in chief among the troops and doctors and prompted a "letter of observation" from deputy commander Col. Hunter to Gen. Stilwell stating that "the troops had been abused and neglected and were useless as a fighting force." "Cracked up", said *The New York Times* of the tough outfit of 3,000 volunteers-including 950 from South Pacific campaigns and 55 from Gen. MacArthur, who had been directed to furnish 274 battle-tested troops meeting the regiment's stringent requirements involving fighting behind enemy lines. And Hunter's letter about the "almost complete breakdown of morale" of the unit known popularly in the press as Merrill's Marauders precipitated an investigation by the Inspector General and a Congressional hearing and led to the finding that after the campaign only 200 of the 3,000 were sufficiently combat-fit to be assigned to another task force.

Lt. Ogburn wrote of the Nisei "as illustrations of surpassing achievement" and of "the heroism, moral as well as physical, of those Nisei, Matsumoto of the 2nd Battalion, and in the 3rd, Edward Mitsukado and Grant J. Hirabayashi, decorated for-among other services -- their persistent volunteering to go forward to intercept the commands of the enemy when lead units were engaged by trailblocks. What was unspeakably hard for the others can only have been harder still for them. Some had close relatives living in Japan, all had acquaintances if not relatives held in concentration camps in the United States... Most of the citizens of the nation for which they were fighting the country of their origin would have considered them enemy aliens, as they well knew. What were their thoughts in the solitude of soul that jungle warfare enforces? I have no way of knowing." (*The Marauders*, pp.205-206).

The Marauders were literally fighting a war of nerves where "the major enemy was not the enemies themselves, but all the conditions which added to their nervous strain of apprehensions of being always in the enemy's territory -- the suspense of running into the enemy from one moment to the next -- which was by far the worst part of it."

For sustaining enormous casualties, pain and suffering -- above and beyond the promised three months of combat -- the Nisei and the Marauders were awarded the Combat Infantry Badge, the Presidential Unit Citation, and recognition in the March 1949 issue of The Infantry Journal in an article by James H. Stone as "the most aggressive, toughest and bravest outfit to fight in the Far East in WWII" (as cited by Yoshimura in John Aiso and the M.I.S, pp.92-93). But the highest tribute came from their own General Stilwell, who was quoted during the 1944 battle of Okinawa after his transfer from Burma in the October 11, 1945 issue of the USAF newspaper, CBI ROUNDUP, as stating: "I am convinced that man for man, equipment for equipment, there is no body of troops in the world who did more for their country than those who fought in CBI."

The fourteen unsung MIS heroes who served in Merrill's Marauders and their hometowns are:

Edward Mitsukado, Honolulu, Hawaii
Thomas K. Tsubota, Honolulu, Hawaii
Herbert Yoshio Miyasaki, Pauuilo, Hawaii (Deceased)
Robert Y. Honda, Wahiawa, Oahu, Hawaii (Deceased)
Roy K. Nakada, Honolulu, Hawaii
Roy H. Matsumoto, Los Angeles, California
Ben Sugeta, Los Angeles, California (Deceased)
Grant Hirabayashi, Kent, Washington
Jimmy Yamaguchi, Los Angeles, California
Russell Kono, Hilo, Hawaii
Henry Goshu, Seattle, Washington
Calvin Kobata, Sacramento, California
Howard Furumoto, Hilo, Hawaii
Akiji Yoshimura, Colusa, California (Deceased).

While four Nisei were evacuated to the States, all were hospitalized, re-assigned, and eventually returned home. Their team leader, Lt. William Laffin (Savage, class of June 1943), was killed in action when he took a direct hit from a mortar shell.

Delayed Recognition in the CBI Theater: A Common Problem? - Arthur T. Morimitsu

After speaking with several fellow veterans, I decided to include in my account of service in the China-Burma-India theater references to MISers who served

overseas while detached to various units and who, consequently, were denied awards and promotions given to GIs who served in the same campaigns. Our 15-member MIS team was attached around August 1944 to the 124th Cavalry Regiment of Texas at the Ramgarh Training Center in India. The 124th combined with the 475th Infantry Regiment, which included remnants of a battalion of Merrill's Marauders, to form the Mars Task Force, a commando organization whose mission it was to infiltrate behind enemy lines along the Burma Road in order to cut off their supplies and reinforcements. Operating in North Burma, we started in January 1945 with a month-long forced march from Camp Landis near Myitkina, Burma, and forced the enemy to retreat south to Rangoon. After the campaign was successfully completed our MIS team was ordered back to India. Kan Tagami, our team leader, had taken over after our language officer had been flown back to base hospital part way through the forced march. Tagami and I were ordered to deliver a Japanese POW to MP headquarters in Calcutta. When we reached the headquarters compound, all three of us clad in GI uniforms, an MP who saw us asked, "Which one is the POW?" I recall being glad that I had not been born in Japan.

After we reached New Delhi, I was assigned to OSS Detachment 303 where I headed a team of three Nisei charged with interrogating Japanese POWs held at the Red Fort in Old Delhi. Other Nisei units did the same. All this was in preparation for the invasion of Japan. One day OSS Capt. Joe Coolidge wanted me to go with him to visit some Japanese nurses who had been captured and were at a British hospital. After speaking with the nurses for a while, Capt. Coolidge wanted me to ask the nurses if they wanted to go to the U.S. They all said, "Yes". He then told me to say that they had to marry a Nisei first. They all then said, "No." I knew that Japanese soldiers were told by their family members that if they were ever captured they were never to come home again. Evidently the women felt the same way.

Toward war's end, Tagami and I were both up for field commissions, but before I was able to complete the course before the examining board, our MIS team was ordered to Kunming, China, and so I went with them. Tagami was able to stay behind and receive his commission. He later was assigned to Tokyo where he became General MacArthur's personal interpreter. He was well qualified having served as an instructor at Camp Savage.

Japan surrendered when I was in Kunming, and the Chinese went mad with joy. One day I came across Colonel Loren Pegg, our 124th Cavalry Regiment commander, and so I told him that after the Burma campaign was over; all the Texans got the Combat Infantryman's Badge and the \$10 extra per month but that the brass in India said our MIS team was not part of the Texas regiment and so we were disqualified. Col. Pegg said this was wrong and wrote out a directive from the China theater and so we got the CIB and the \$10 per month retroactively.

From Kunming I was sent to Shanghai where I was assigned to a special team which was to travel to T'aiyuan, Shansi Province, in North China, to observe the surrender ceremony of 60,000 Japanese troops under Gen. Shimada. I was the lone MISer in our detachment commanded by Major Richard Irby and 1st Lt. Jeffrey Smith. There were two Chinese Army officers in our group.

After reaching T'ai-yuan, a walled city which had been under Japanese command for over eight years, we saw Japanese civilians getting ready to return to Japan. Japanese soldiers were still marching around, fully armed. Our detachment visited various Japanese installations-hospitals, etc. We commandeered a Chinese hotel and were in T'ai-yuan nearly a month.

One night one of our Chinese officers said his informants had told him that the Japanese were destroying documents at their headquarters. We had eleven Americans at T'ai-yuan, including a number of OSS officers and men. They decided to raid the Japanese headquarters one night, so we went there and I was ordered to tell the Japanese, who were in a fort-like building, to open up the gate. Our Americans were behind me with their submachine guns and pistols. After the gate was opened, we saw one officer, whom we pushed aside, and we then proceeded to search the headquarters office thoroughly. Photographs were taken but nothing of value was found I was glad that the Japanese knew that the Emperor had ordered them to surrender since there were only eleven of us surrounded by 60,000 Japanese and an untold number of Chinese soldiers who had grown chummy with the Japanese military. We met with the last remaining warlord in China, Marshal Yen Hsi-shan, at his headquarters. He had his Chinese interpreter, who had been educated at a Japanese university, while I'd had four to five months at Camp Savage. Fortunately, nothing difficult was discussed. We also met later with Gen. Shimada but again nothing vital was discussed. Soon we heard that the warlord's army was already fighting the Red Chinese. After nearly a month, our Chinese officers said the local newspaper controlled by the warlord had written that the Americans would be leaving shortly. This was news to us but as it turned out we left T'aiyuan soon thereafter without observing the surrender ceremony.

Some 35 years later I read in the 124th Cavalry Association Newsletter that the Jeff Smith I had known in China was now Lt. Gen. Jeffrey Smith, commander of the 1st Army at Ft Meade, Maryland. I wrote to Gen. Smith and he wrote right back a very warm letter reminiscing about our one month stay in T'ai-yuan. In 1986 Shig Kihara asked me to be the midwest representative of the San Francisco Go for Broke organization at the dedication of the Yankee Samurai photo exhibit at the MacArthur Memorial in Norfolk, Virginia. I wrote to Gen. Smith and wondered if we could meet there. He called me one morning and said that if I would go he also would go. I flew down to Norfolk and met Gen. Smith, who had driven five hours from his home in Alexandria, Virginia, with his wife. We attended the dedication ceremony where Judge William Marutani and Key

Kobayashi (both later founding members of the Japanese American Veterans Association) spoke with Mrs. Douglas MacArthur as special guest.

At lunch to which Gen. Smith had invited me, I mentioned the fact that MISers had often been left out when awards were handed out. He told me that if I could vouch for someone like that, he would try to do something about it. A few years later, I read about Harry Akune, who had parachuted down to Corregidor, and who had not received recognition for his heroics -- not even the Combat Infantry Badge. I wrote to James Oda, a member of the MIS Club of Southern California who had served as an enlisted instructor at Camp Savage and who was a friend of Akune. He in turn referred me to Jack Herzig, who had been with Akune and was trying to help him get his award. I received various documents from Herzig and asked Gen. Smith if he could help out. Gen. Smith contacted Army authorities and even wrote to Lt. Gen. Allen Ono, who was at the Pentagon as chief of personnel. I saw Ono's letter in which he said that if Akune's recommendation came to him, he would okay it. Unfortunately the Army is apparently very rigid and so Akune never got his Combat Infantry Badge.

Postscript

Following my presentation at the National Capital Reunion, Jack Herzig, who was in attendance, told me he was glad that I had spoken up about Akune. I also talked to MISers like Sam Isokane, who was with the Marines and never received recognition for his work. Eleven MISers with the Army on Guadalcanal who, early in the war, demonstrated conclusively the loyalty and value of Japanese American servicemen, never got due recognition although the Army decided to recruit more MISers and also instituted the formation of the 442nd RCT because of the record established by these Nikkei.

Gen. Smith (Ret.) is a member of the Go For Broke Nisei Veterans Association Honorary Committee, along with Gen. Ono and James H. Mukoyama, Jr., Major General, USAR.