

# Nisei Linguists

Japanese Americans in the  
Military Intelligence Service  
during World War II



James C. McNaughton

At the start of World War II the U.S. Army turned to Americans of Japanese ancestry, the Nisei, to provide vital intelligence against Japanese forces in the Pacific. This new book, *Nisei Linguists: Japanese Americans in the Military Intelligence Service during World War II*, tells the story of these soldiers, how the Military Intelligence Service (MIS) recruited and trained them, and how they served in every battle and campaign in the war against Japan. During the war their work remained a closely guarded secret. Even after the war, their contributions were often overlooked. This book fills this gap in our historical understanding.

Months before Pearl Harbor, Western Defense Command selected sixty Nisei soldiers for Japanese language training at Crissy Field on the Presidio of San Francisco. In 1942 the Military Intelligence Service Language School moved to Minnesota, where it grew rapidly, first at Camp Savage and then Fort Snelling. When Western Defense Command forcibly removed over 100,000 persons of Japanese ancestry from the West Coast to "relocation" camps, the MIS continued to recruit Nisei from the camps and later from Hawaii. Over the next four years the school graduated nearly six thousand military linguists, including dozens of Nisei women and hundreds of Caucasian language officers.

Nisei linguists served with Army and Marine units from regiment to corps and above from Guadalcanal to the Philippines, Iwo Jima, and Okinawa. Their duties included translation, interrogation, radio monitoring, and psychological warfare. They staffed theater-level intelligence centers such as the Allied Trans-

lator and Interpreter Section in the Southwest Pacific Area under Gen. Douglas MacArthur. In China, Burma, and India they served with the Office of Strategic Services, Merrill's Marauders, and Commonwealth forces. Others served with the Army Air Forces or within the continental United States. Commanders came to rely on the timely and accurate intelligence they provided. Dozens were decorated for valor, while several were killed or wounded in action.

At war's end the Nisei help arrange local surrenders of Japanese forces, and then fanned out across Japan to begin the occupation. Working in military government, war crimes trials, censorship, and counterintelligence, the MIS Nisei contributed to the occupation's ultimate success. They served as a bridge between America and Japan and helped cement the alliance that has lasted until today. The school later moved to the Presidio of Monterey, California, where it evolved into today's Defense Language Institute Foreign Language Center.

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