

**Veterans' Day Tribute to Japanese American World War II Veterans
November 11, 2005, Meany Hall, Seattle, Washington
Presented by Denshō: The Japanese American Legacy Project**

Over 1,100 people braved the rain and wind to come to Meany Hall on the University of Washington campus in Seattle to honor nisei World War II veterans. The start of the program was simple, yet powerful, as 120 nisei veterans, including U.S. Senator Daniel K. Inouye, took their place on stage during a prolonged standing ovation from an audience that included Washington State Governor Christine Gregoire, retired Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Richard Myers, former Deputy Secretary of Defense and Senior Boeing Executive Rudy deLeon and a contingent of prominent military, government, business and community leaders. Below is the text of Senator Inouye's keynote speech.

Text of address given by Senator Daniel K. Inouye

Madam Governor, General Myers, my fellow veterans, my fellow Americans, ladies and gentlemen. Today we observe the sixtieth anniversary of the end of World War II. And during that time, nearly 25,000 Japanese Americans put on the uniform of this nation. All of us have our stories to tell. We interpret the events, the words we hear and the sights we see a little differently. And I've been asked to share with you my story.

My story begins in a little village called Yokoyama, in the district of Yame, in the prefecture of Fukuoka. In July of 1899, there was a fire in the village. Three residences were demolished, and that morning, the village elders gathered and determined that the fire began in the home of my great-grandfather. He had a choice to make. He could pay the debt, or he could sneak out of the village, or stay there and refuse to pay the debt. The only honorable way was to pay the debt. And so he summoned his first son, the eldest, my grandfather, and directed him to take his wife and his first-born, my father, to Yokohama to meet with the recruiter from a place called Hawaii, to work in the plantations. And so they traveled from Fukuoka, from the south of Japan, and nearly walked all the way to Yokohama. There he signed on for thirty days on the high seas, and arrived in Hawaii. He signed a contract to work for twelve dollars and fifty cents a month, for sixty hours a week. My grandmother, for the same work, seven dollars and fifty cents a month. That was the beginning. There were thousands of others, their grandparents, their great-grandparents, who left their villages, painfully, to travel to the mainland or to Hawaii. Their stories are also unique.

However, in 1924, the Congress of the United States and the President of the United States enacted a law to exclude Japanese from immigrating to the United States. There were no laws for the French or the British, but the Japanese were not permitted to immigrate. And furthermore, they added something, a provision that said those who were in the United States as immigrants from Japan could not be naturalized. My father was a child of three, and he spent most of his life in Hawaii, but he could not be naturalized until 1953.

Then, on December the 7th, the tragedy occurred in Pearl Harbor. Soon thereafter, the government of the United States determined that all Japanese, including citizens, were to be declared as "enemy aliens." All of us were "enemy aliens." We could not serve in the uniform of our nation; we could not be drafted; we were just "enemy aliens." And then soon thereafter, an executive order was issued, 9066, establishing ten camps. And these camps in government documents were referred to as concentration camps, to house 120,000 Japanese and Japanese Americans living on the West Coast of the United States. That is the beginning of the story.

We petitioned the government of the United States to give us an opportunity to serve, to demonstrate that we're just as good as anyone else. And finally, the President of the United States issued another executive order, in which he declared that, "Americanism is a matter of mind and heart; Americanism is not and has never been a matter of race or color," and authorized the formation of an infantry regimental combat team with the number 442. They asked for volunteers; in Hawaii, over 80% of the eligible men volunteered. I was then eighteen years old and I volunteered, to the chagrin of some of my friends, because I was the eldest son in my family.

But nevertheless, first thing that I heard from my father—and it has always been with me—was when he escorted me to the recruiting station where trucks were waiting to take us to Scofield Barracks. He didn't say a word in the streetcar until we finally got to the destination. He looked at me and he said, "This country has been good to us. Whatever you do, do not dishonor this country, and do not dishonor the family. If you must die, die with honor." Those were profound words. I have always thought to myself, "Would I be able to say that to my son?" Die with honor. But for my father, it was very important.

Well, on the day of the departure, something strange happened. We were hoping that we could march down the boulevard to the ship proudly, heads up high, but for some reason, the military insisted that those of us who volunteered would have to carry our bags. And our parents were lined up along the highway to say goodbye to us, and a whole string of military police between us. And you could hear in the distance parents calling their sons: "Masao," "Takashi." And every so often, some old lady or old man would try to dash across the street to say goodbye, then the MPs would push them away. I always thought of that scene. It was demeaning, and somehow not right, because we looked like a bunch of POWs, when we should have left Hawaii in grand style, because many of them never got back.

Well, we got on the ship, and like all men, we were looking forward with some anxiety. But we had no idea where we were headed for. When we landed in Oakland, the word filtered to us that we were headed for Mississippi. The only thing that many of us could think of was, "Mississippi? That's where they lynch

people." Well, they put us on trains, and because we looked like POWs, the train never stopped during the day. All of the stopping was done at night, to stretch our legs. But when we got to Mississippi, we had the surprise of our lifetime. We were greeted by Red Cross ladies, and all were white women. In Hawaii, I can't think of a single restaurant that had a white waitress. All the service was done by Chinese, or Japanese, or Filipinos. And to have a white woman serve you coffee, it was a special treat. And then they opened their doors to us, opened their farms. But then we received a letter from the governor of Mississippi, and the company commanders of the regiment were directed and ordered to read that letter to the men. So on one Saturday, all the men of the regiment assembled at their company areas, and the letter was read by the company commanders. And it said, "Welcome to Mississippi. While you are here, we are pleased to tell you that we will treat you as white men. Conduct yourself accordingly." That meant we could not sit in the last three rows of the bus. And as you can imagine, after a busy night at the bar in Mississippi, you get a bit tired, and so you sit in the last three rows, and the bus driver would stop his bus, and not move forward. That's when we saw the cruel aspect of discrimination.

And there was another scene that I can never forget. I'm an old YMCA man, Young Men's Christian Association. I have a life membership, and so I decided to visit the YMCA to do a little swimming. And I noticed that there were no African Americans. And so I innocently inquired, I said, "Where are the Negroes?" And this fellow looked at me and said, "Are you a troublemaker?" Then I realized that the letter "C" meant very little. It meant something other than "Christian."

Well, training was what one might expect. We trained very hard. But as alluded to by one of the films here, the Hawaiians had their own language, and the mainlanders were fair of skin, they spoke the king's language, and they were very polite. And they would sometimes laugh and snicker when they heard us speak our language. And that led, unfortunately, to fistfights. It got so bad that our senior officers of the regiment at that point seriously decided to disband the regiment. Their argument was, "How can they go to war if they can't even relate to each other?" They tried everything. I recall going to discussion groups, social hours, nothing worked. Until one day, each company received ten invitations from a place called Rohwer and a place called Jerome. And we didn't sense it at that moment, but the invitations were issued only to the Hawaii soldiers. And we thought they were Japanese communities in Jerome, Arkansas, and Rohwer, Arkansas. I was one of those selected by the company commander to go to Rohwer. I recall that morning, we got out and showered and shaved and put on our aftershave lotion, took out our ukuleles, because we were looking forward to a grand weekend with "kotonk" girls. And I recall just about every moment of the trip was joy and singing, until we got to Rohwer. It's in a valley, and looking out there, we could see row after row of barracks. And we thought there was an army camp there, until the convoy turned in. And then we saw, to our horror, that the inmate prisoners looked like us. And we were ordered to get off the trucks, by armed men in American uniforms. Well, I can tell you that it wasn't a happy

weekend. But when we got back to Camp Shelby, we assembled our squads and our platoons, and we told them of this experience. And to this day, I ask myself the question: would I have volunteered if I were in that camp? And when you think that these men volunteered from behind barbed wires, that's an extraordinary thing. I don't think this has ever occurred in the history of the United States. It didn't take much courage for us in Hawaii to sign up, because it was the thing to do. But to be in a camp, that was something else. That morning, the regiment was formed, and we became brothers. And the rest is history.

But there are certain things that occurred during the time in combat that has always had an impact upon me. Well, when we landed in Naples, what I saw was just rubble and devastation. But then we were shipped off to a place called Civitavecchia, and there we set up tents, and it was my job to look after the camp. Most of the company fellows had gone off to Naples, but I stayed back with a squad to guard the premises. I noticed that up on a hill, a group of men and women always looking down at us, so I summoned them. And they came down, and they all had cans, a gallon can. And the one who could speak English came up and said, "We'd like to work for you. We'll do anything: do your laundry, we'll clean the place." And, you know, I'm a GI. If I can get along without working, that's what I'm gonna do. And so my first question was, "Quanto costa?" "How much?" And he said, "All we want is that garbage." Well, I assumed that they were farmers and they wanted the garbage to feed their pigs, so I said, "Go ahead." They rushed to the can and began eating. And I have never seen starvation like that. That was my first real experience with war, where innocent people are involved. Then the next day, my squad and I were given the opportunity to go to the city. And the first human being to greet me was a little boy. And he says, "Come. My sister." He was selling his sister. Some were selling their mothers. I have a sister, I have two brothers, and I could never imagine my brother selling my sister. But that was war; they were starving. That was my introduction to war.

But then we had our first battle, and I recall early that morning, before we crossed the line of departure to get into the attack, I was then an assistant squad leader. I inquired of all the men, "What were you thinking about last night?" Knowing that this was our first battle, and some of us may be killed, some may be injured. All eleven of them gave the same answer, in a different way: "I hope I don't dishonor the family." "I hope I don't turn out to become a coward." "I hope I don't bring shame to the family, or to the nation." I was amazed. I thought my father was the only one who talked like that. But here they were, speaking of honor. Well, on that first battle, we lost Ralph Ensminger, a captain, who was our first company commander. And I lost my best friend who wanted to be a physician. See, I was in pre-med when I signed up. We had already planned our clinic; I'm going to be an orthopedic surgeon, and he was going to be a pediatrician. All the plans were made. But then on the first battle, he was nearly sliced in half. I must confess that I was filled with anger and a feeling of revenge. And I must have been rather cold, because from that moment on, until 1953, I could not cry. It's a strange thing. I

would go to a funeral, I can't cry. Go to a movie, sad movie, I can't cry. My wife, at one point, suggested, "Maybe you should see a psychiatrist." But I felt that this was the price of war.

Well, battle after battle, Hill 140 and all these other battles, until I was involved in a small battle to take over a farming village. As we approached the farmhouse, there was a machine gun on the second story, and that machine gun kept on firing at us, and we could not advance. So by then I was a squad leader. I summoned the bazooka man, I said, "Bring the bazooka over here," and I fired it right through the window. Heard a big blast, I rushed into the house, rushed up to the second floor, two Germans were dead, and one was sitting on the floor, his legs were shattered. He put up his arm, "kamerad, kamerad," and I approached him slowly. And suddenly, he thrust his hand into his jacket. My instinct told me immediately that he was going for a gun, and so I slammed my rifle butt to his face, and that was his end. But then his hand flew out, and in his hand were photographs. Photographs of his wife and kids. I didn't understand German. He wanted to tell me that he was a married man and he had a wife and kids. Well, from that moment on, I looked upon every enemy as being either a son, or a father, or an uncle, or a lover, or a brother. He was no longer the enemy, he was a human being. So I went to the chaplain and I said, "I don't think I can kill anymore." He replied, "Well, God will forgive you because these people are out to destroy us and we have our responsibilities." So I kept up with my work until we got to France.

Someone spoke of the "Lost Battalion." That battle took about two weeks. Those two weeks included the attempts by the 36th Division to rescue their own men. When they failed, they called upon us to do the job, and we knew that we were called upon because we were expendable. But yet we welcomed this opportunity, because up until then there were numerous battles after battles, but nothing to grab the imagination of people. We felt this was the opportunity. A battalion of Texans surrounded by troops equivalent to a division, and they were calling upon us to bust through that line. Well, in five days, our casualties numbered 800, and over 250 of them were dead. And I recall the retreat parade that was held two days later, when General Dahlquist wanted to personally acknowledge our valor and to thank us for heroism and for rescuing his fellow Texans. When I looked on, I was then a lieutenant, I Company had eight men. And when you consider a company has 197 officers and men, the company commander was a staff sergeant. Eight men. K Company had eighteen men, and the company commander was a buck sergeant. The rest were all injured or dead. And E Company, the company I served in, had the largest number, forty-two. And we sort of slinked back because we felt that maybe we didn't do our part, we survived so well. The band that usually has about thirty-six men had about fifteen left. It was a strange band, with one trombone player, one trumpet player, two drummers, one bass, but the music was glorious. It was then that General Dahlquist turned to our colonel and said, "I ordered you to have the men assemble. You decided to disregard my order." Well, I can understand that, when he sees forty-two in E Company, has the largest

contingent, the band with fifteen men. Well, he was supposed to have given us a plaque, and given a speech, but when he learned that this was the regiment, he found that he could not utter a word.

Well, I was then a fresh lieutenant, so my regimental commander called me in and said, "We will now go to the south of France to have limited combat duty to replenish our forces. But you'll be the convoy commander." "Convoy commander, sir?" "Yes, you'll sit in the first truck, and at certain intervals, you will stop the convoy so that the men can go out and relieve themselves." After all, they can't ride for eight hours on a stretch without stopping. And so I took my job seriously. And when I thought that we were outside the cities, I would call out, and the call was, "Piss call!" See, they know what I'm talking about. And the trucks would all stop, and the men would rush out and go to the trees, the forest. But then a jeep came speeding down, and that was a colonel. "What the hell are you doing?" I said, "Sir, this is piss call." He says, "I know that. Half the regiment's pissing in town." First lesson.

In southern France, we were stationed in a place called Nice, a lovely place. We called that the Champagne Campaign. Yes, we did have casualties, but it wasn't too bad. Then we were called back to Italy. This was the Gothic Line. The Germans had a breathing time of five months to set up fortifications. The divisions there tried for five months to break the line, but couldn't do it. And I remember when we got there, our regimental commander assembled all the officers and said, "Now, I want you to reconnoiter this area, and you find out where the weak spots are, and tell me how long it will take to break the line." So we all went out on our reconnaissance patrols, gave our reports. Couple of days later, the general assembled us, the head of the 92nd Division. It was like a scene in the movie *Patton*. Huge stage, the flag in the back, the general standing in the middle. "Gentlemen, welcome to Italy. We have been here for five months trying to break this line. Your reputation precedes you, and so we are asking you to lead the attack. We hope you can break the line in two weeks." And so the colonel goes up to respond, and he says, "General, Sir, would it mess up your schedule if we did it in twenty-four hours?" Well, we did it in less than twelve hours, because instead of a frontal assault, we went from the side on sheer cliffs. But I still recall the night before, when we were told, "This is not going to be easy, but if you should slip and fall, don't scream." Now, that's a strange order to give. One man did fall, and he did not scream. All you could hear was the thump when it hit the bottom. Well, the attack began at nine o'clock in the evening, we were up on the top by five o'clock in the morning, and we waited and the Germans came out lining up for breakfast. And the word was passed on, the captain will fire the first round, and after that, happy hunting. Well, that company of Germans got demolished, and we broke the line.

Then a few days later—this was in April of '45—you should keep in mind that just prior to this battle, all of the officers were gathered at each company headquarters. And for the first time, our company commander said, "I want you to

take an oath of secrecy." I didn't know what an oath of secrecy was, but we did. And his message was, "I'm going to tell you something, and you're not going to share it with anyone. You're just going to keep it to yourself, and conduct yourself accordingly. The war is over. The Germans are now negotiating and discussing, but we must maintain the pressure. And if you tell your men that the war is over, there will be no pressure, so keep it up." That was a terrible order, knowing that the war will be over and knowing that all of us wanted to go home.

Well, on April 21st, that was my final battle. On that day, I was wounded and sent to the hospital. But something happened in the hospital that has always been part of my life. The 92nd Division had a policy in their field hospital that whenever they gave a blood transfusion, and in those days, the blood came in bottles instead of plastic bags. On each bottle was a taped tag: name, rank, serial number, unit. I had seventeen transfusions. In fact, the chaplain thought I was ready for confession and I said, "No, I'm not quite ready yet." But seventeen transfusions, all from the 92nd Division. And the 92nd Division was made up of African Americans. So when the civil rights legislation came up, I believe I was the only African American in the Senate. So I could speak with some, well, reality, that I had some African blood in me. But thanks to them, I'm here today, and I'm always grateful to them.

My closing remarks are of my hospitalization. As I told General Myers, there's one thing I regret. I find myself going to Walter Reed Hospital because that hospital has become the amputee center for army troops. And whenever I get there, we have a good time chatting. And it never fails, somebody will ask me the question, "Where were you hospitalized?" And I will tell them Battle Creek, Michigan, and New Jersey, Atlantic City. "How long were you hospitalized?" "Twenty-three months." Today, a person with similar injury would be out on the street in about seven months. His prosthetic appliance would be state-of-the-art, the finest that mankind can produce. His medical and surgical treatment is the best in the land. But in Battle Creek, Michigan, I spent my time in rehabilitation. That is what is lacking with the men today. So it saddens me when I go to Walter Reed and these men look at me and say, "I think we got short-changed." I hope we can change that policy. And just to briefly tell you what rehab meant, I had to learn to drive. I never drove a car because of the strict rules in my household. I had to drive and get a license that permitted me to drive in forty-eight states and all the territories. Then I had to learn how to do carpentry. Can you pound a nail with one hand? See, they teach you these things. Electrical work, plumbing, learn to play sports, I did basketball and swimming. I was a failure in golf; first three holes, ninety-two. So they looked at me and says, "We know you're trying, but don't pursue this." Then I was required to take up a musical instrument. I'm a life member of the union, because I played in a dance band. But I played the saxophone, and you can't play a saxophone one-handed. And in order to qualify, you had to do it without a drum or harmonica. And so the instructor said, "Why don't you take up the piano?" You know, I passed the test. All these things were done. In fact, as some of the men here know, we had one session on how to make

love. Just think about it. Most of you would laugh and chuckle about this, but the lesson that I got from that professor: "Some of you have never had a woman in your life, some since your injury. When you do, make certain that she sleeps on your bad side." My bad side? Because it's human nature to try not to expose your disability and your ugly scars to your loved one, so the tendency is to put your loved one on your good side. And as the professor said, "If you put your arm around your loved one, you better have educated toes." That's serious discussion.

But, like the one of the fellows on the film said, on my way home to Hawaii, I had to go through Oakland. I wanted to be presentable to my folks, so I thought I'd get a haircut. I was in full dress uniform, with a hook where my right hand was, with four rows of ribbons. When I opened the door and walked in, there were four empty chairs. And the barber approached me and he said, "Are you a Jap?" I said, "No, I'm an American, but my father was born in Japan." "We don't cut Jap hair." Well, you know, I was tempted to slice him, and I could have done that. But I decided that after all of this, why waste my time. And so I said, "I feel sorry for you." But when I got back in Hawaii, the so-called "racial paradise," I was invited to lunch at a very fancy restaurant. And here I am, I'm also in uniform because I was still in the service, and this maitre d' had much difficulty telling me they can't serve me.

Well, after having said that, one would think that I ended my career in bitterness. But I want you to know that this is a great country. Yes, we do make mistakes. But as a great country we acknowledge making mistakes. And when my country apologized, just think about it. How many nations would apologize? This country did. The redress wasn't that important, as far as I was concerned, the monetary compensation. But the apology and the acknowledgement, that was something. Well, I served in a great country, I'm proud to do so.

And today I want to thank all the veterans, not just World War II, but all those who have served us—and General Myers, that includes you. Because if it weren't for the veterans, I don't think this nation would be as great as it is today. So to all of you, thank you very much, God bless America.

Order the DVD and Booklet of the Program

Denshō created a 2-hour DVD of the program if you would like to view Senator Inouye's address. The DVD also includes a special tribute speech by General Richard Myers, recently retired Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and a multimedia historical presentation by Tom Ikeda, Executive Director of Denshō. You can order the DVD and the program booklet with the order form below.



VETERANS DAY TRIBUTE TO WWII NISEI VETERANS DVD & Commemorative Booklet Order Form

"The Densho Veterans' Day program was absolutely one of the best I've ever attended."
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On Veterans' Day, Denshō hosted an event, Tribute to World War II Nisei Veterans, at Meany Hall on the University of Washington campus. The program honored the Japanese Americans who served in the military during the Second World War. U.S. Senator Daniel K. Inouye, a Congressional Medal of Honor recipient, was the keynote speaker.

In conjunction with the event, Denshō created a commemorative DVD of the program and a 56-page booklet which includes over 100 historic photographs. The DVD/Booklet set is available for \$15. We can also mail DVD/Booklet sets to your friends and loved ones as gifts. Please see the Gift Sets section.

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