



**Commander, U.S. Pacific Fleet
National Reunion of World War II Veterans
of the Military Intelligence Service
Hale Koa Hotel
Honolulu, Hawaii
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*As delivered***

Good afternoon and konnichiwa. Thank you Barbara, for the kind introduction.

And thanks to Lawrence Enomoto and everyone here who has worked so hard to put this National Reunion together. You couldn't have picked a better venue here at the Hale Koa, the House of the Warrior.

And a heartfelt aloha to some very distinguished guests here today, including: Governor Ige, Governor Ariyoshi, Mayor Caldwell, Judge Kubo, Consul General Shigeeda of Japan, General Bramlett, and Paul Nakasone – who just popped on the Army 2-star list yesterday – congratulations Paul and a shout to your dad, Bud, who is an MIS veteran and retired Army colonel. He's visiting from Minnesota, where it's kibishii fuya.

And of course to General Ishimoto and all the other Military Intelligence Service warriors of World War II, whom we honor here today.

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, former Vice President Hubert Humphrey was known for his very long speeches. His wife Muriel once told him, "Hubert, for a speech to be immortal, it doesn't have to be eternal."

So with that in mind, I intend to keep my remarks somewhere to the left of eternal today.

Ladies and gentlemen, our battles, our victories, indeed our very way of life, are owed not to great moments or important dates. They are owed to the actions and sacrifices of individual men and women who were willing to step into the breach for their country and for the cause of freedom.

America is the country she is because of her heroes past and present. Heroes like those we honor here today, the men and women of the Military Intelligence Service, the MIS, who were instrumental in securing victory in World War II.

It's those of this, the greatest generation who donned the cloth of our nation to serve in our armed forces at the world's darkest hour who can take pride in knowing that they shaped the world we live in today.

I'm often asked what the most important event in my life is, and, honestly, without any doubt, it's World War II.

Now before anyone pulls out a calculator to do the math, no, I was born in the 1950's.

My father and four of his brothers fought in that war, enlisted men in the Navy and in the Army. So I was hearing their sea stories and foxhole stories from the moment I could form a memory 'til the day they died.

Through them, I learned of the tremendous cost and sacrifice of yours, the greatest generation, as those who fought for victory helped achieve nothing less than the survival of the free world. Through them I was inspired to serve.

It's no exaggeration for me to say that the world we live in today was born of your achievements. And it's no exaggeration when I say that for me to be where I am today, a Japanese American four-star admiral, in command of the United States Pacific Fleet – well that's because of trail blazers like the men and women of the MIS and the 100th Infantry Battalion, the 442nd Regimental Combat Team, and the 1399th Engineer Construction Battalion.

I stand on the shoulder of giants. I'm humbled to be in your presence and thankful to play a small part in your reunion today.

As I thought about what I would say here, I reflected on what heroism means, and I came upon something that Lieutenant Stephen Decatur, one of the Navy's, and our nation's greatest heroes, said in 1804 when he led a small group of hand-picked volunteers into Tripoli Harbor to burn the captured frigate Philadelphia. Libya 1.0 I guess.

On the eve of this raid, which was later called "the most daring act of the age," he rallied his warriors with these words: "We are now about to embark upon an expedition which may terminate in our sudden deaths or our immortal glory."

"Sudden death or immortal glory." That was the environment that those who served our nation during World War II were thrust into as they went to war to protect our nation and defend our freedom.

"Sudden death or immortal glory." Thousands of German and Austrian Americans and immigrants served in the Military Intelligence Service in the European Theater. Because they were trained at Camp Ritchie in Maryland, they were called the Ritchie Boys.

And on this side of the world, nearly six thousand Japanese Americans boldly stepped forward to join in the Military Intelligence Service to serve in the Pacific Theater.

These brave souls obtained actionable intelligence from the frontlines, giving us an edge of the battlefield; while still others served in clandestine units behind enemy lines, engaging in hit-and-run operations, living with the guerillas, operating with them as they would ambush the enemy, blowing up bridges and railroad tracks.

“Sudden death or immortal glory.” MIS joined the fight in New Guinea and the Philippines, and like Dick Hamada, in China, Burma and India.

In the Pacific, MIS participated in every major battle against Imperial Japanese Forces, and time and time again, they proved their mettle. MIS language teams were sent into action in the Aleutians and Guadalcanal. Commanders quickly learned that the knowledge the Nisei warriors had of the enemy’s language, of their culture and of their behavior gave them a distinct advantage in combat.

George Blunda, the commanding officer of the Southeast Asia Translator and Interrogation Center, said that "each of them was worth a company of infantry. Many allied soldiers returned safely to their homes because the Nisei lighted the darkness in front of them by interrogating prisoners and translating documents."

Here in Hawaii MIS did similar work, where they translated documents and prepared for deployments to Tarawa, Saipan, Iwo Jima, Okinawa and many other Pacific Island battlegrounds. Some were preparing for a possible invasion of the Japanese homeland.

“Sudden death or immortal glory.” On Saipan, Hoichi Kubo earned the Distinguished Service Cross for entering a cave, unarmed, to talk a group of Imperial Japanese soldiers into freeing more than 100 civilians they were threatening to kill. And on Okinawa, Herbert Yanamura convinced hundreds of local residents to evacuate their village before it was leveled by an artillery barrage.

By the end of the war, Japanese Americans were just about everywhere, including MIS warrior Don Okubo, who negotiated the surrender of Imperial Japanese garrisons across Asia and the Pacific.

And Jiro Yukimura, who’s here today, was onboard the USS Missouri when the surrender documents were signed on September 2, 1945. I just met his daughter, the former mayor of Kauai.

With the war’s end, thousands of MIS, including many of you here today – along with a contingent of Women’s Army Corps volunteers – or WACs, converged on Japan to play a crucial role in forging peace.

As cultural ambassadors, the MIS were a vital bridge between two nations that had just spent four years locked in a savage war. Whether it was translating for General Douglas MacArthur’s meeting with the Emperor, or teaching Japanese workers how to use a Western benjo (toilet), Nisei were on the forefront of building trust to replace the hatred.

MacArthur once said, “The Japanese people since the war have undergone the greatest reformation recorded in modern history.”

Today, Japan has the world's third largest economy. Today, Japan is one of our staunchest allies and closest trading partners. Today, the United States military is forward deployed in Japan and working closely with the Japan Self-Defense Forces to maintain regional security, prosperity and peace. Today, a once bitter enemy is now one of our closest friends. Ours is a true great power relationship and that's a legacy of which those who served in the MIS should be proud.

Seneca once said that, "Fire is the test of gold, adversity is the test of men." Not only were the men and women of the MIS tested on the battle front, they were tested on the home front, where their loyalty to our nation was suspect. Yet, they proved time and time again that their dedication and devotion to America was without limit.

When Japanese Americans went to war, they left a segregated nation to fight and defend America's freedom, with no guarantee that their own freedom would be defended in return.

Now I've heard it said that the three great levelers are discipline, time, and patience. Great nations have been made greater, often by the hands of men and women of diversity, who stood out as an example of an ideal, resolutely working to effect change. The Japanese Americans of yours, the greatest generation, used all three of these levelers to effect great change in our nation. And the stellar wartime record of Japanese Americans helped trigger the desegregation of the military not long after the war.

My predecessor Fleet Admiral Chester Nimitz once said, "Before World War II, I entertained some doubt as to the loyalty of American citizens of Japanese ancestry in the event of war with Japan. From my observations during World War II, I no longer have that doubt."

Ladies and gentlemen, we've come so far. We're still making great strides and there's work to be done.

For decades after the war, the service of MIS Japanese Americans was kept secret and as their important contributions were declassified, and noted by historians, the records of their service were often incomplete, or missing entirely.

In typical humility, many of these veterans just shrugged it off saying "shikata ga nai." "It can't be helped."

And what a shame, for their contribution to the world as we know it today deserves a special chapter in the annals of history. They helped shorten the war and they saved countless lives. It's important that we honor them as we do today. We simply can't say "thank you" enough.

In 2000, the work of the MIS soldiers was finally recognized with a Presidential Unit Citation. And I was honored to attend the awarding of the Congressional Gold Medal to the World War II Nisei soldiers four years ago, where the MIS shared in that honor.

Today I'm glad to hear of General Ishimoto's efforts to appropriately recognize Dick Hamada's wartime service. And it's good to see that more of the MIS story is coming out with books and movies and now a new exhibit next door at the Army Museum. I know that some of the volunteers who helped with that exhibit are here today, including Mark Matsunaga on my staff. Thank you to everyone involved in keeping this memory alive for future generations. Ladies and gentlemen, I realize I've been up here for a while. I had an opportunity to speak at an event several days ago and when it was over I asked my wife Bruni how I did.

She quickly replied, "Harry, you did great, except you missed several good opportunities to sit down."

Well, I don't want to miss the opportunity to sit down now, so let me close with the following thought.

While the thundering sound of the guns of World War II ceased nearly 70 years ago this year, our nation still draws her strength from those courageous men and women who fought for freedom in that war, like those here today.

And our nation continues to draw strength from those who are serving in our Armed Forces today, and will continue to draw strength from those who will serve in the future, an unbroken chain, linking Americans generation to generation.

Our strength as a nation also comes from loyal citizens like each of you in the audience today, Americans who are aware of our history and heritage, who are aware of our challenges and the dangers we face and who are aware of the opportunities available to those bold enough to reach for them.

Those of us who serve in uniform are grateful for patriots like you, who help make us what we are today, the greatest nation on earth.

May God bless those who served in the MIS, to defend freedom and liberty.

May God bless each and every one of our Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, Marines and Coastguardsmen, past and present who courageously defends our nation.

May God bless this beautiful state of Hawaii, and may God bless the United States of America.

Thank you.