

**Honoring the  
100th Infantry Battalion,  
442nd Regimental  
Combat Team, Military  
Intelligence Service,  
and 1399th Engineer  
Construction Battalion  
and all Americans of  
Japanese Ancestry who  
served during WWII.**

## MISSION

Preserve, perpetuate and  
share the legacy of the Nisei  
Soldiers to promote good  
citizenship.

## VISION

A community in which  
we live by the universal  
values of honor, gratitude  
and patriotism upheld by  
America's Nisei Soldiers.

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[nvlchawaii.org](http://nvlchawaii.org)



Far Left:  
Minda Yamaga,  
JACL Honolulu  
President.

Left:  
Veterans and other  
memorial service  
participants.

## 2023 Nisei Soldier Memorial Service

**On Sunday, September 24, the Nisei Veterans Legacy honored Nisei soldiers with its annual memorial service at the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific at Punchbowl. The keynote speech was given by Ms. Minda Yamaga, board President of the Japanese American Citizens League Honolulu Chapter and is published here in its entirety.**

**G**ood morning to everyone, in particular the Nisei Veterans and Distinguished Guests here on this beautiful morning. I am so honored to have been invited by the Nisei Veterans Legacy to speak at this memorial service.

The gravity of this honor is not lost on me however it was quite unexpected. I will share with you a bit about my life and how this was not something I would have imagined I'd be doing even a few years ago. But given this opportunity, I am inspired to do right by the legacy of these service members that have brought us all here today.

I, unlike many of the esteemed speakers of past years, have a less established connection to the history of Hawai'i and to the heroes that we are here to honor. I'm kind of a nobody in this noble arena. I don't say this to feign humility or shy away from the spotlight in kind of stereotypical Japanese style, but instead to share with you my own experiences which somewhat demonstrate the importance of breathing life into memorials such as this and remind us to continue holding these events because not only are we here to celebrate and remember the historical heroism but also strive to inspire the next generation.

My family on my mother's side is Japanese and from Los Angeles. Being from California, they experienced the full force of America's racist and unjust actions during World War II. Growing up, I knew little of the details of my family's story. I simply knew that my mom was born in an internment camp during the war and not much else.

She was born in 1945 so she has no firsthand memory of camp. And she would tell me that shielded her from all the negative consequences. Something, I now understand with the perspective of a middle-aged woman, could not have been true. But as a youngster, I accepted it. My mom was born in Heart Mountain, Wyoming, and then she went on to be a professor of immunology at the University of Hawai'i John A Burns School of Medicine. She is quite frankly an American success story and I thought little about what all occurred between those two bookends.

This in many ways harkens to the experiences of the Nisei soldiers. These young men faced adversity including discrimination here in our island home. They saw thousands of individuals considered leaders in the local Japanese communities rounded up and interned at Honouliuli or Sand Island. They must have known or heard about the Japanese American families that lived near sensitive military installations that were forcibly removed from their homes with no notice. And yet, they heeded the call to fight for the good parts of America and defend it against fascism and a foreign country that launched an attack on our soil.

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**TO CELEBRATE  
AND  
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HAWAII STATE DIGITAL ARCHIVES

**THESE YOUNG  
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## Nisei Soldier Memorial Service

Continued from page 1.

These complexities where heroes answered the call to defend the country while that same country committed injustices against its own people, I've come to learn, are typical of life, society and humanity. We are complex and full of contradictions.

This vastly differed from the well-polished incomplete version of reality I heard as a child where I believed the war experience only minimally impacted my family because my mom shielded me from the brutality.

From time to time, I would catch wind through comments of the truth, however. For example, I learned that my grandma hated Spam and refused to eat it because they ate so much Spam in camp. Through snippets of conversations, I learned that they returned to Los Angeles in 1945 with nothing. After that, my grandma worked on an assembly line sewing sleeves onto garments and my grandfather struggled because he was injured in camp which was especially difficult as the primary work available to Japanese men returning from camp was physical labor.

Instead of dwelling on this, it was instead told as silly anecdote. The way it was openly shared was that even though grandma sewed all the clothes for her children, everything she made at home was sleeveless because she refused to sew on sleeves outside of her work. The imagery was funny, and we would all smile. Now, I can also see it for what it was – a reaction to hardship and trauma. But also, it was that determination to do what must be done to persevere and succeed.

**Similarly, the Nisei soldiers – who were mostly from Hawai'i and returned to Hawai'i after their service – found ways to turn the spoils of war into a windfall through hard work and determination. Their efforts dramatically changed the trajectory of Japanese Americans in Hawai'i. They utilized the opportunities provided to them through education and paved the way for other Japanese Americans to hold esteemed positions in our community. I recognize for me, growing up a couple generations later, there are no shortage of Japanese American role models which allowed me to believe I could be anything and for that I am so thankful.**

In my early adulthood as I struggled through the trials and tribulations of life, I thought very little about my family's and other Japanese Americans' harrowing experiences. It was not

until 2018, that it came into focus for me. That year, our family went to the Heart Mountain Pilgrimage. **The Heart Mountain Pilgrimage is an annual event that gathers former incarcerated, descendants, and community members to learn, remember, discuss, and heal. To say the experience was life altering would be an understatement. After being literally in the same place where my mom was born behind barbed wire, I saw her in a new light, I saw my family's history differently.** Even more significant for me was the impact this experience had on my kids who were 20 and 16 at the time. Seeing them moved so dramatically inspired me to continue to learn and do more. I regretted the time I wasted not talking to my grandma who had passed a long time ago. I took stock of the proud tradition I came from.

I'd like us to recognize the impact the pilgrimage had on me, so too this event might have on one of you. We are gathered to commemorate and remember our history but hopefully to inspire some of the young people and even the not so young people here. It is especially noteworthy on this 80th anniversary of the formation of the MIS and 442nd. 80 years is approximately a lifetime which brings urgency to this mission. 80 years is also the span for three generations – grandparent, child, and grandchild. Signifying the past, present, and future. **So, on this especially symbolic anniversary, let us celebrate the past in our reverence of our service members, to become tangible today in the present, and motivate us into action in the future.**

**So, you might ask yourself how do I do this? What are the next steps? Everyone's path is different, but I can share what I did when called by the lessons of my family's history. I embarked on a journey of volunteerism and found ways to fight for the values that I care about so dearly. The values that these service men we are honoring today fought for and that my mother instilled in me when she showed me how to work hard and remain vigilant.**

Through this desire, I found the Japanese American Citizens League and I joined the organization in 2019. It was founded because of Japanese American issues but has grown to something much greater. Rooted in that history, and empowered by the Japanese American experiences, we endeavor to call out injustices, and fight for the civil rights of all people. I am proud to now be the chapter president for an organization that was the first non LGBTQ+ national organization to call for marriage

## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



Aloha All,

As I near the end of my term, I am honored to have served as your Interim President. I deeply appreciate your support. I especially want to thank Lynn Heirakuji for taking the lead again for the 2023 Nisei Soldiers Memorial Service held at the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific at Punchbowl on Sunday, September 24, 2023. As in the past, she did a wonderful job.

We will elect some new leaders for next year, assuming candidates willing to serve can be found. NVL is a member-directed Hawaii nonprofit corporation. We need members who can become directors and officers. Please consider being more involved in 2024.

Communication with members must be two-way for an organization to survive and grow. Your ideas about improving NVL are welcome, but your support to implement the suggested changes is essential. Please share your concerns and the fixes you propose by phone at (808) 255-8971 or by email at [lawrence.enomoto@gmail.com](mailto:lawrence.enomoto@gmail.com).

Mahalo,  
Larry Enomoto  
2023 Interim President

equality. Additionally, in accord with our mission we stood alongside Muslims in the aftermath of September 11, 2001, and vigorously called for the end of the family separation policies a few years ago. Our chapter has made a concerted effort to learn about issues such as Native Hawaiian self-determination and are currently starting to wade into environmental issue as we now recognize environmental rights are civil rights. This is how I chose to honor my family's history.

This new journey for me – which includes, as I stated at the beginning of this, the wildly unexpected, but great honor of speaking here today – is directly linked to the Heart Mountain Pilgrimage and I hope as we pay respects to the bravery of the Nisei soldiers today, so too will you be inspired.



# ANNOUNCEMENTS



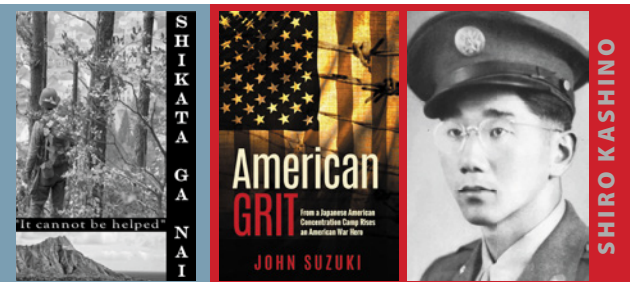
BOB TAKAO RETIRES



WAHIAWA REMEMBERS



MIS 80TH ANNIVERSARY



DR. AYUMI MASUTA



YAJIMA, YAMASHITA, SAKODA & HAYASHI

## LTC ROBERT TAKAO RETIRES

Longtime Punahou JROTC leader Lieutenant Colonel (USA Retired) Bob Takao has retired, and we wish him and his wife Bobbie the best for their future. Bob organized the JROTC cadet participation in the annual NSMS and we greatly appreciate his support over the years.

## 6TH ANNUAL WAHIAWA WAR MEMORIAL CEREMONY

VP Yamashita and Director Micah Benevitz attended the memorial ceremony at the Wahiawa War Memorial Pool on Saturday, August 12, 2023. The ceremony recognized the 21 soldiers from Wahiawa who were killed during World War II, most of them Nisei. Upon returning after the war, the Nisei veterans of Wahiawa raised funds, constructed the swimming pool with assistance from the US Army and dedicated it to the City and County of Honolulu. Benevitz participated in the reading of the biographies of the slain men.

## MIS VETERANS 80TH ANNIVERSARY BANQUET

The MIS Educational Society of Hawaii sponsored the 80th Anniversary Banquet at the Japanese Cultural Center of Hawaii on August 20, 2023. The event was very well attended by a multi-generational group of veterans and family members.

## "SHIKATA GA NAI" FILM

The NVL is helping to defray the production costs of Eric Nemoto's production of "Shikata Ga Nai", a film addressing a Nisei veteran's PTSD several decades after the end of World War II. The film finished filming earlier in the year and is in post-production; completion is expected around the end of the year. We look forward to its release next year.

## "AMERICAN GRIT"

"American Grit: From a Japanese American Concentration Camp Rises an American War Hero" is a new book by John Suzuki. It chronicles the life of Shiro "Kash" Kashino who volunteered from the Minidoka Internment Camp for the 442nd Regimental Combat Team. He fought in the "Rescue of the Lost Battalion" and was one of the most highly decorated soldiers of the 442nd RCT.

## NEW CHILDREN'S BOOK ON NISEI SOLDIERS

"Heroes - The Nisei Soldiers of World War II" is a new children's book being published by the *Hawaii Houchi*. It covers the background and story of the soldiers of the 100th Infantry Battalion, 442nd Regimental Combat Team and Military Intelligence Service in a format geared towards the upper elementary/middle school level.

## BUILDING BRIDGES TO JAPAN

As part of our emphasis on improving relations between Japan and Hawaii in the spirit of the Nisei soldiers, we continued to support the efforts by Japanese scholars to research Japanese American history and culture.

Director Lynn Heirakuji recently supported Dr. Ayumi Masuta, Professor of International Politics, Nagoya Gakuin University, Japan, on her research about Japanese Americans in Hawaii. Dr. Masuta is interested in understanding the roles played by Nisei veterans in AJA social and political activities and how the battle for civil liberties continues. She observed Lynn's July 24, 2023, Nisei soldier presentation to a UH Manoa class and interviewed Lynn, Brendan Burns (grandson of Governor John Burns), and author Tom Coffman, among others.

VP Yamashita hosted Japanese graduate student Maho Yajima in September for a week of meetings and archives visits to support her research on Hawaii Nikkei history including the Nisei soldiers. She visited the 100th Infantry Battalion clubhouse and met with President Jan Sakoda and Treasurer Kathi Hayashi.

## CHANGE OF NVL LEADERSHIP

Interim President Larry Enomoto will be stepping down at the end of the year. VP Byrnes Yamashita will become the Interim President until formal board action is taken on a permanent replacement. We are grateful to Larry for filling in as Interim President.



# FOCUS ON THE YOUTH

The NVL continues our focus on passing on the story of the Nisei Soldiers to the younger generations. This emphasis shapes all our educational efforts including presentations, website, exhibits, articles and communications. Director Micah Benevitz, a Mililani High School teacher, participated in two educational programs over the Summer.

## NATIONAL HISTORY DAY COMPETITION IN WASHINGTON, D.C.

National History Day is a yearly competition between students from across the nation and world. This year 2,648 students competed on June 13 and 14 in Washington, D.C. There were 58 students who competed from various schools on Kauai, Molokai, Hawaii Island (Big Island), Maui, and Oahu. The students competed in various categories such as Documentary, Website, Performance, Exhibit, and Research Paper. The competition was divided into two groups: Junior (grades 6-8) and Senior (grades 9-12) divisions. Students also had the opportunity to win various awards and scholarships.



Allie Juan receiving award for her documentary.

Allie "Allie" Juan a Mililani High School student originally from Seattle, Washington, completed a documentary on the "Military Intelligence Service: A Frontier to Fighting Prejudice." Allie, a 10th grader at Mililani High School, focused her topic on the history of the MIS and the barriers they broke during and after World War II. The MIS played a crucial role in the Pacific Theater to gather intelligence through decoding messages, interrogating prisoners, and their knowledge of the geography, language and culture of Japan.

Post 9/11, there were individuals who believed the U.S. government should intern Muslim Americans due to national security considerations. Her documentary concluded with the unfair internment of the Japanese community during World War II and how we should be aware of the dangers of incarcerating a group of people based solely on their cultural/racial background.

Allie won an award for outstanding entry for her project. The National History Day program allows students to learn research, writing, and analytical skills. It also allows students to learn a historical topic they picked more in-depth. Furthermore, it provides them the opportunity to meet fellow students from across the world.

The students also had the opportunity to visit various historical sites and meet Hawaii's Senators and Representatives in Congress. The students from Mililani High School visited the Smithsonian Air and Space Museum, the National Art Gallery, National American Indian Museum, the African American Museum, National Culture of America Museum, and the Holocaust Museum. The students had the opportunity to see and touch history and learn about various topics in-depth.

NVL's Micah Benevitz, far right, with National History Day contest participants.



Sacrifice for Freedom Program participants at the JCCH.

## SACRIFICE FOR FREEDOM PROGRAM

"National History Day Sacrifice for Freedom: World War II in the Pacific" is a program that selects students and teachers across the nation to research a person buried at the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific at Punchbowl. The participants learned about World War II from January-June. Each student and teacher applied in November 2022, and 16 pairs were chosen. NVL board member Micah Benevitz was the teacher representing Hawaii.

The students and teachers were from American Samoa, Arkansas, Arizona, Guam, Hawaii, Illinois, Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, New Hampshire, New Jersey, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, and Wisconsin. The program took the participants to visit various historical sites on Oahu which provided a detailed perspective of the history of Hawaii during World War II. They visited Diamond Head Sate Monument, Hickam Airfield, Arizona Memorial, USS Battleship Missouri Memorial, USS Bowfin, Pacific Fleet Submarine Museum at Pearl Harbor, Ford Island, Pearl Harbor Aviation Museum, Japanese Cultural Center of Hawaii (JCCH), and Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency (DPAA).

Each pair chose a person from their state who is buried at Punchbowl Cemetery to write a eulogy that was then read in a ceremony at the cemetery. The eulogy reading was a sobering experience as well as an opportunity to learn more about the events of World War II.

Participating teachers are thinking about ways to incorporate this information into the classroom. The JCCH shared not just the history, but also lesson plans that teachers can implement into the classroom.

This new program is very impactful not just for the participants, but also the family members of the individuals selected for the eulogies. The biographies the groups wrote shined a light on the individual's life so that their sacrifice will not be forgotten.

The NVL gave each participant a copy of Tom Coffman's book, "Inclusion" which describes the events during World War II that shaped modern day Hawaii.

## PRESENTATIONS

Director Lynn Heirakuji made another presentation to a UHM Japanese culture class, and VP Bynes Yamashita made another presentation to Usa City, Japan, students over the Summer.



NVL's Lynn Heirakuji with UHM students.



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