



**JAPANESE AMERICAN VETERANS ASSOCIATION**

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**Contact. Terry Shima 301-987-6746; [ttshima@comcast.net](mailto:ttshima@comcast.net)**

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**US Senator Akaka’s Asian Pacific American Legacies**

Capitol Hill, Washington, DC. The Japanese American Veterans Association (JAVA) joins in mourning the late US Senator Daniel K. Akaka, an American veteran, educator, and public servant whose life was devoted to making things better for others, and whose heart was filled with aloha. Akaka, who died in Honolulu on April 6, 2018, told JAVA representatives who visited his Senate office on September 27, 2012, “when I became a US Senator, I was determined to correct the injustice done to Asian Americans, who served their nation.”

Using his legislative and negotiating skills, Senator Akaka pursued this goal with single-minded diligence. He retroactively obtained for Asia Pacific American (APA) veterans awards, benefits and recognition, some of which were denied real time due to racial discrimination. He also obtained recognition for Nisei in the Military Intelligence Service (MIS), who were assigned in small numbers to any unit that needed linguists. Following are some of the Senator’s accomplishments:

- Wrote the law to create the Department of Veterans Affairs (DVA) Office of Minority Veterans that included the Center for Minority Veterans and Center for Women Veterans to ensure that VA services and benefits appropriately address the unique needs of minority and women veterans.
- Worked to establish Hawaii’s first DVA medical center (located at Tripler Army Medical Center); an associated veterans nursing home; and a statewide network of community based clinics and veterans readjustment counseling centers in the neighboring islands; the expansion of the State Veterans Cemetery system; the construction of the Pacific Center for Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and War-Related Disorders, a DVA facility in Hilo, Hawaii.

- Introduced and championed the Native Hawaiian Government Reorganization Act to provide parity through a government-to-government relationship between the Native Hawaiian people and the federal government.
- Provided key support to the passage of legislation relating to the National Japanese American Memorial to Patriotism in Washington, DC and the Civil Liberties Act of 1988 that resulted in President Ronald Reagan offering a formal apology and reparations for the incarceration of 120,000 ethnic Japanese in internment camps.
- Actively led efforts in providing veterans benefits and compensation enabling one-time payments of \$15,000 to Filipino World War II veterans who were U.S. citizens, and \$9,000 to Filipino World War II veterans who were not US citizens.
- Secured a congressionally mandated review of the Distinguished Service Cross (DSC) medals awarded to Asian Americans to determine whether they were unfairly denied the Medal of Honor (MOH), the highest military award for valor, resulting in President Bill Clinton awarding the MOH to 22 Asian Pacific Americans.
- Cosponsored legislation that resulted in the award of the Congressional Gold Medal, the highest civilian honor Congress can bestow, collectively to the 100<sup>th</sup> Infantry Battalion, the 442<sup>nd</sup> Regimental Combat Team (RCT) and the MIS.
- Requested a review that resulted in the award of the Presidential Unit Citation to the MIS' over 7,000 linguists who served during WW II.
- Arranged with the US Army to publish a 514 page history of the MIS entitled *Nisei Linguists: Japanese Americans in the Military Intelligence Service During World War II*, a comprehensive and authoritative record of the MIS. The author is Dr. James McNaughton, an Army historian and JAVA lifetime member.
- Obtained federal support for the preservation of Building 640, the original site of the first MIS Language School at the Presidio of San Francisco resulting in Building 640 being designated as the MIS Historic Learning Center, an entity of the National Japanese American Historical Society.
- Requested, individually, the review of the records of LTC Richard M. Sakakida, an Army undercover agent in wartime Manila, Philippines, that resulted in the award of the Distinguished Service Medal; Anthony Kaho'ohanohano which resulted in the upgrade of his DSC to MOH for heroism in the Korean War; and Shinyei Rocky Matayoshi, which resulted in the validation of his DSC for heroism in Italy with the 442<sup>nd</sup> RCT, and others.

- Co-sponsored legislation creating a \$38 million grant program to preserve the legacy of the Japanese American experiences during World War II.

The over-10,000 Nisei who served with the 100<sup>th</sup> Battalion and 442<sup>nd</sup> RCT in Europe were publicized; however, the over 4,000 Nisei linguists, who served in the Asia Pacific war zone collecting tactical intelligence from captured documents and prisoners, entering caves to persuade Japanese soldiers to surrender, and conducting psychological warfare (psywar), understandably, did not receive any publicity because their work was classified. It was not until the 1970s, as the result of the passage of the Freedom of Information Act, that the US Army declassified and allowed the MIS story to be publicized.

Senator Akaka sought the counsel of MIS combat veterans such as COL Harry Fukuhara and COL Phil Ishio, to plan his strategy, and John Tagami, a highly skilled staff officer, to get the job done. Tactical intelligence obtained by Nisei on the front lines proved valuable for commanders to win battles and save American lives. One Nisei crawled to the enemy bivouac area in Burma one night, eavesdropped on their battle plans, caused his battalion commander to prepare countermeasures that resulted in defeating the enemy attack the following morning. Greatly outnumbered, timely intelligence obtained by the Nisei saved his battalion from annihilation. At the end of his 36<sup>th</sup> year in the US Congress, Akaka told JAVA he was satisfied that the American public now has a better perception of Japanese American courage and patriotism. Senator Akaka's efforts have made a huge difference "to correct the injustice" sustained by Asia Pacific Americans during WWII.

Photo below.



L-R: JAVA members and Senator Akaka at his US Senate office. John Tagami; John Tobe; Bill Houston (partially hidden); LTC Kay Wakatake, USA; Col Bruce Hollywood, USAF (Ret); Senator Akaka; Gerald Yamada; LT Janelle Kuroda, USN; Calvin Ninomiya; Terry Shima; MG Tony Taguba, USA (Ret). September 27, 2012 photo by Hollywood.