

My name is Ronald Iwasaki. I was born in Ontario, Oregon in July 1945. Except for the four years serving in the U.S. Air Force, I've lived in Washington County and Yamhill County.

My dad's parents and family were truck farmers, growing diverse crops that necessitated and utilized varying skills and experience that typified farm families. As a grade schooler to secondary school my chores on weekends and summers evolved from hoeing weeds to loading/securing trucks to driving to market. This was just a matter-of-fact life for the Iwasaki families in Hillsboro.

Two of my uncles - my dad's brothers served in the U.S. Army 442nd Regimental Combat Infantry Team. They were in Italy, France, and Germany during WWII. Another uncle was there too. Two other uncles were in the Military Intelligence Service. However, growing up I never recall hearing them talk about their Army experiences. It was just a period in their lives that they endured and were fortunate. . . "to return home." My knowledge of these segregated Japanese American Army units occurred primarily with the awarding of the Congressional Gold Medal in November 2011.

In October 2019, I was on a special tour that retraced the 1944-45 route of the 100th Battalion/442nd. The French villages liberated by the 442nd have annual parades and celebrations even though very few locals were alive during WWII. Their familiarity was passed down by appreciative parents, grandparents, neighbors. A few streets are named after these units and several plaques and monuments are regularly decorated. In the Epinal American (Military) Cemetery many of the 100/442 graves were and remain adopted by local families and are regularly visited.

The Japanese American families living west of Portland were primarily farmers and geographically scattered. I believe one of the benefits was that these families were not perceived as unified threats. In the East Multnomah and further to The Dalles there were many more Japanese families. Discomfort in that region was a lot higher and perhaps understandably so as the West Coast was considered very vulnerable to attack . . . or even an invasion?

In 1960 the Memorial Coliseum was built to honor servicemen and women that had lost their lives in war. In 2014 the Oregon WWII Monument was built and dedicated after citizens noticed that none existed despite recognition of WWI, The Korean War, and Vietnam. This was a "better late than never" recognition of servicemen and women of "our greatest generation". Last spring, the U.S. Postal Service issued the "Go For Broke" Forever 1st Class Stamp. It is a little introduction to the segregated Japanese American soldier unit. Passage of SB 1509 would too be a reminder and/or introduction of these accomplished local patriots.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,
Ronald Iwasaki, Commander
Oregon Nisei Veterans