

JAPANESE AMERICAN SOLDIERS IN WORLD WAR II

Purpose and scope: This postal history exhibit presents mail of World War II Japanese American (Nisei) soldiers who served in the European and Mediterranean Theaters of Operation, as translators and POW interrogators with the Military Intelligence Service (MIS) in the Pacific Theater, and as intelligence operators on the U.S. mainland. This presentation includes incoming and outgoing mail generated from 1941-1947 and covers all aspects of the Nisei soldier experience, highlighting the units in which they served.



"Go for Broke"
442nd RCT Logo

Background: The 442nd Regimental Combat Team (RCT) was an all-Nisei infantry unit that participated in six campaigns in Europe. In the Pacific Theater Nisei linguists were assigned to both Army and Marine units and also loaned out to other Allied countries desperate for soldiers proficient in Japanese. There they translated captured documents, interrogated POWs, and served with the occupation forces in Japan. Both volunteer and conscript Niseis from Hawaii and the mainland participated. Most mainlanders were drafted out of government relocation centers, incarcerated there on the basis of their race along with their families, prewar friends, and neighbors. The significant efforts of these highly decorated soldiers helped subdue negative attitudes toward Americans of Japanese ancestry, thereby enabling them to enter the nation's mainstream in the years and decades after the war.

Plan of the Exhibit

- 1 Antecedents
- 2 Stateside Training
- 3 Combat in Europe
- 4 Military Intelligence Service
- 5 Occupation of Japan
- 6 Conclusion

Importance: To my knowledge this is the first exhibit on the subject. It is based upon historical underpinnings and personal study of the units in which the soldiers served, as well as their activities and accomplishments.

Difficulty of acquisition: Although more than 18,000 Niseis served, surviving correspondence seldom comes on the philatelic market. Families tend to hold on to it, and much of what does appear often goes unnoticed in dealers' stock. As a result, it took nearly 30 years to acquire the material shown in this presentation.

Important items: Items of historical or postal importance are bordered and annotated in bold.