

## ROY UYEHATA'S PERSONAL HISTORY

### Military Intelligence Service (MIS) Personal History

By Roy T. Uyehata

I was born in Salinas, California, on December 9, 1917. My parents were both truck farmers. Shortly after my birth, my parents started to do strawberry farming. They moved to Watsonville and later to Mountain View, then Menlo Park, San Martin, and Gilroy [all near the central California coast].

On April 2, 1941, I was drafted into the U.S. Army. I was assigned to Company A, 7th Medical Battalion, 7th Infantry Division, Fort Ord, California. There, I received basic training in how to perform many jobs, including materia medica [a branch of medical science that deals with the sources, nature, properties, and preparation of drugs], litter bearer, and ambulance driver. Our division commander was the famous Major General Joseph Stillwell.

On March 23, 1942, all of the Nisei soldiers in the 7th Medical Battalion were shipped to Camp Wolters near Mineral Wells, Texas. We were assigned to Company D, Reception Center. About ten of the one hundred Nisei soldiers were assigned to perform duties in the Reception Center but the rest of us were assigned to the very menial task of collecting garbage throughout Camp Wolters. Right before our arrival at Camp Wolters, garbage collecting and disposal duties were assigned to the stockade prisoners. But since there was so much distrust, mistrust, and non-trust of Nisei soldiers, the camp commander decided that the stockade prisoners had a higher hierarchy status level than the Nisei soldiers and the Nisei replaced the stockade prisoners as camp garbage collectors. We had a three-day work schedule: the first day we collected wet garbage (coffee grounds, potato peels, vegetable refuse, etc.); the second day we collected dry garbage (tin cans, bottles, etc); and the third day we collected paper carton boxes and wooden crates. Since there wasn't enough work on the third day to keep us busy, we spent the afternoon of the third day breaking rocks with a sledgehammer so that the rocks could be used to line the pathway of Honeymoon Hill overlooking the Reception Center. All of the garbage was brought to a modern garbage burning station for incineration. For two 130-pound Nisei soldiers, raising a 32-gallon garbage can filled with wet garbage and water onto a flatbed truck four feet off the ground was not an easy task.

In late May of 1942, approximately twenty-five of the Nisei soldiers at Camp Wolters were transferred to the Military Intelligence Service Language School in Camp Savage, Minnesota. We began our Japanese language training on June 1st. Our transfer from the "hellhole" of Texas to Camp Savage was a welcome relief for us because we hated the manner in which we had been treated at Camp Wolters, where the stockade prisoners had a higher status level than the Nisei soldiers. Camp Savage was an abandoned Homeless Men's Camp, so we had to get on our hands and knees to scrub the floors to make our sleeping quarters habitable. There was no postal exchange, barber shop, laundry, dispensary, or movie theater. We had to go to Fort Snelling for most of our necessities. Camp Savage must have been the only U.S. Army camp or station where two pot-belly stoves served as each barrack's central heating system.

On December 23, 1942, we arrived in New Caledonia (near Australia) in the South Pacific. We were assigned to Camp Barnes where the headquarters of the United States Army Forces in the

South Pacific area was located. We Nisei were heavily guarded at all times. We were never permitted to enter any of the adjoining rooms within the same building. A Marine Corps sentry was on duty at the entrance of the workroom and always accompanied us whenever we used the latrine. Due to the scarcity of MIS linguists, we worked seven days every week for the first several months until more linguists arrived from the United States. Some other Nisei and I were charged with interrogating Japanese prisoners of war (POWs), while Maxie Sakamoto and Lt. Fogg were kept busy translating captured documents.

In early December of 1943, five other Nisei and I, accompanied by Captain William Fisher as team leader, were flown from New Caledonia to Bougainville in Papua New Guinea. We then boarded a landing ship for a short, slow boat ride to Torokina Bay, Bougainville Island, where we debarked on December 5, 1943. We were attached to XIV Corps Headquarters and were later identified as the 165th Language Detachment. My main work on Bougainville was the interrogation of POWs. The XIV Corps was able to pin an overwhelming defeat on the famous Japanese 6th Division in March of 1944. Here's how it happened:

On the morning of March 8, 1944, as I was interrogating a 1st Class Private POW in the XIV Corps POW Compound, the POW interrupted my interrogation by asking, "How can I get away from this island?" I told him that it would take about one week to complete his interrogation, three additional days to cut his prisoner transfer orders, and an additional three to five days to assemble enough POWs to warrant a plane flight to the rear area. He replied, "I guess you know that you are going to be attacked at daybreak of March 23rd." Even though I was not certain that we were alerted to this important information, I lied and told him that he was not the first POW to give me this information and continued the interrogation. I knew that the Japanese Army had a strong tradition of attacking their enemies on their holidays. March 23rd was a holiday known as *Shunki Koreisai*, a holiday on which the Japanese Emperor paid his respects to his ancestors. In my own mind I was quite certain that our military commanders were not alerted to this top secret information so after continuing the interrogation for thirty to forty-five minutes, I feigned a headache and told the POW under interrogation that I was returning to my office to take some aspirin pills. When I returned to our office, I repeated this important information to Captain Fisher who said, "A Japanese soldier would not say that." I insisted that this top secret information that was given to me was accurate and proper. I suggested that he attempt to verify this information by questioning other higher-ranking POWs. Captain Fisher sent my colleague Hiroshi Matsuda to the POW Compound to gain verification or denial of the important information I had obtained earlier.

After verifying and confirming the important warning information that I had provided to Captain Fisher with a sergeant POW, Hiroshi Matsuda returned from the POW stockade to inform Captain Fisher that the warning information that I had provided was accurate and reliable. Captain Fisher passed this top secret information up the line, and that evening (March 8th), General Griswold cancelled the showing of all scheduled movies by all Army units within the Torokina Defense Perimeter so that immediate preparations could be started to prepare for the expected Japanese attack at dawn of March 23rd.

During the period from March 8th to March 20th, there were some minor skirmishes between American and Japanese frontline units but we knew that these were probing attacks by the

Japanese units to test our preparedness. General Masatane Kanda, commander of the Japanese 6th Division, had prepared and distributed thousands of morale booster leaflets exhorting each Japanese soldier to avenge the losses the Japanese forces had suffered since the Guadalcanal defeat. Japanese artillery units had laboriously prepared gun positions near the top of each of the high hills overlooking the defense perimeter. General Kanda was so confident of defeating the American forces that he had selected a site in the U.S. 37th Division sector where the surrender ceremonies were to take place.

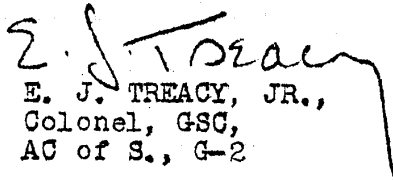
At 7:45 p.m. on March 22nd, we began our pre-emptive strike. The Division Artillery of the 37th Division, the Division Artillery of the Americal Division, elements of the 49th Coast Artillery, and Navy destroyers began one of the most devastating artillery-naval gunfire barrages in modern military history in combination with thousands of illuminating flares which brightly lit the skyline above the frontlines. When I stood in the clearing approximately two and one-half miles from the frontlines, the intensity of the combined artillery-naval gunfire barrage was so great that the ground under me shook with the rolling motion of a huge earthquake. The fluttering sound of the large shells passing overhead at few second intervals was awesome. The shelling lasted more than an hour, and according to the XIV Corps bulletin more than five thousand shells were lobbed into the enemy positions.

When casualties were counted on March 25th, the total count of Japanese casualties was more than five thousand dead soldiers and nearly four thousand wounded soldiers. The main reason for the high casualty rate was because the Japanese units were caught completely off guard without the protection of foxholes, trenches, and underground bunkers. Our casualties numbered two hundred and sixty-three. This battle action was known as the Second Battle of Bougainville. In terms of casualties, this was one of our most successful battles of World War II. In my estimation, our pre-emptive strike saved more than one thousand American lives. Hiroshi Matsuda and I received Bronze Star Medals for providing the fifteen-day warning information to our Army commanders.



*Roy Uyhata receiving a congratulatory handshake*

Several weeks after the termination of the Second Battle of Bougainville, Colonel Kai Rasmussen, Commandant of the Military Intelligence Service Language School, at Camp Savage, Minnesota, came to Bougainville to congratulate Hiroshi Matsuda and myself for generating top secret information in the service of the U.S. Army Military Intelligence Service. We were the only MISers to be so honored by Colonel Rasmussen during World War II. Captain Fisher sent his parents to Poston Relocation Center near Parker, Arizona to tell my parents that I had made a very important contribution to the war effort.

HEADQUARTERS XIV CORPS Office of the A. C. of S., G-2	
21 January 1945	
This will identify	<u>T/3 Roy T. UYEHATA</u>
ASN <u>59006764</u> , of the G-2 Section, Headquarters XIV Corps,	
who is authorized to enter PRISONER of WAR STOCKADES, JAILS	
and INTERNMENT CAMPS for the purpose of interviewing enemy	
military and civilian personnel.	
 E. J. TREACY, JR., Colonel, GSC, AC of S., G-2	

*Authorization pass*

Concurrently, Signal Intelligence in Washington, D.C. sent a Signal Corps Captain to the XIV Corps POW Compound in an effort to break the Japanese four-digit code, which stood for designated units and personnel within the Japanese military command in Rabaul [New Britain, Papua New Guinea], keystone of the Japanese conquests in the South Pacific. When the Signal Corps Captain interrogated a Japanese signal unit POW, I served as the interpreter of the dialogue between the Captain and the POW. Until this time our Signal Intelligence had been unable to completely break the Japanese four digit code because captured codebooks didn't identify the personalities and units that were assigned to the code numbers from 9000 to 9020. The Japanese signal operators had committed to memory the identification of the twenty-one code numbers. When the Signal Intelligence Captain asked, "What does 9013 stand for?" The POW replied, "9013 was assigned to Eighth Area Army Headquarters Commander, General Hitoshi Imamura, stationed in Rabaul." He then identified every code number from 9000 to 9020. The Signal Corps Captain received a high decoration for breaking the Japanese four digit code after he returned to Washington, D.C., but I received not even a letter of commendation from the Captain.

The war ended on August 14, 1945 so I returned to the United States from Manila in mid-September. I arrived at Long Beach Harbor (California) on September 23rd and received my separation papers at Fort Bliss, Texas on November 1, 1945. I was unable to return to my former hometown, Gilroy, so I found a new home in Hollister, California. I attended Heald Engineering College in San Francisco, California, from February 1947 to July 1949 and graduated with a Bachelor of Science degree in electrical engineering. A year later, I married Kiyoko Yasuhira in the San Jose Buddhist Church on June 11, 1950.

## MILITARY INTELLIGENCE SERVICE ACTIVITIES

Choose one of the following activities to complete on your own:

1. Write a letter of inquiry to Roy Uyeahata, Military Intelligence Service (MIS) officer. In your letter, consider the following:

- What did Roy Uyeahata's recollections teach you about civil rights?
- What questions do you have about Roy Uyeahata's experiences working with the military intelligence in the Pacific War?
- What sections of Roy Uyeahata's story did you find particularly interesting and why?
- Do you have any comments or specific questions for Roy Uyeahata regarding how he felt working for the U.S. Army in World War II?

2. Make a list of ways in which the work of MIS members may have saved American lives in World War II.

3. During his work in the Pacific War, Roy Uyeahata found a diary of a deceased Japanese soldier. In the 1990s, he located the family of the deceased soldier and returned the diary to the deceased soldier's daughter. She is shown below in a photograph with Roy Uyeahata. Write a diary entry that you feel the Japanese soldier might have written.

