

Arthur Ishimoto

MIS National Reunion

March 28, 2015

Hale Koa Hotel

Fellow veterans, welcome and aloha.

I see a few of my MIS friends here from WWII. We are at the twilight of our lives and our numbers are becoming few.

Members of the MIS participated in every major campaign in the Pacific and in China Burma India. We were the first in combat on the islands of Guadalcanal in October 1942.

The MIS was classified as a secret organization and some members participated in top-secret operations. When we were discharged, we signed an oath not to divulge information of our wartime activities. Our lips were sealed for 27 long years until declassified. We were prohibited to say anything to the public or to our families. We were truly the Shadow Warriors and known only as interpreters.

Oh, yes, we heard the sounds of war. We heard the spitting sounds of bullets, the chatter of machine guns, the distinct whishing sounds of mortars raining down on us.

Contrary to public opinion, we made beach assault landings, parachuted behind enemy lines, flushed enemies out of caves, went on scouting mission to capture and interrogated prisoners. My classmate from Camp Savage was a spy in China. Many of us were combat soldiers and not interpreters.

Many stories were written about Kenny Yasui, Roy Matsumoto, Frank Hachiya and Hoichi Kubo and rightly so. But, none were about the late SSG Dick Hamada. He was a member of Detachment 101 OSS, a clandestine unit that operated behind enemy lines. This unit was the forerunner of the CIA.

OSS battalions were manned mostly by native Kachin Warriors. Dick Hamada lived and fought with them in a smaller size unit for many months. They blew up bridges, railroad tracks and ammunition dumps. They ambushed the enemy and planted booby traps. Their supplies were all air dropped.

Hamada endured the misery of the Burmese jungle. He was twice sent to field hospitals with malaria and dysentery.

In early 1945, he was assigned as platoon leader of the 1st battalion, Detachment 101 OSS. His platoon was manned by freshly assigned Chinese troops. Hamada did not speak Chinese and neither did the Chinese speak English. He needed to train them for battle and be able to command and control them. So, what did he do? He used kanji character, which had a different

pronunciation in Japanese than Chinese, but had the same meaning. He pointed to the kanji and repeated in Japanese. He taught them few essential words, they learned quickly. This played a crucial role in an operation to come.

In April 1945, His battalion was ordered to attack and take the village of Ke Hsi Mansam. The Japanese fought fiercely and casualties mounted on the Kachin's side. The Kachins began to retreat and desert -- reducing the battalion strength to nearly one quarter of its original strength. On the third night of the battle, the enemy launched an all-out attack on the left flank guarded by Hamada's platoon. Outnumbered, his platoon fought intensely and courageously. Casualties mounted. The Chinese began to falter. Realizing the gravity of the situation, Hamada left the safety of his foxhole, exposing himself to deadly enemy fire, and went from foxhole to foxhole, up and down the line he went, urging his troops to keep firing. He even manned a machine gun. He kept shouting in Japanese, UTE, UTE, UTE, shoot, shoot, shoot, GAMBARE, hang in there. He repeated those words. His troops understood, responded and kept fighting. Hamada also faced the danger of being shot by his own troops because he looked like the enemy. The enemy casualties mounted, they withdrew and finally vacated the village of Ke Hsi Mansam.

In the citation for the Bronze Star Medal, his commanding officer, Captain Barnwell credited Hamada for saving the entire battalion from complete defeat. He saved the entire battalion of several hundred men, from annihilation, wipe out. The Japanese in Burma usually did not take prisoners. If captured, the battalion would have been massacred. I have never read nor heard of an infantryman saving hundreds of men in battle.

I initiated action to upgrade his Bronze Star Medal and was strongly endorsed by Congresswoman Tulsi Gabbard. Hopefully, our collective effort will be successful.

The Japanese at one time, placed a \$20,000 bounty on Hamada and four other nisei, and the nisei of Detachment 101 OSS were told to save one bullet for themselves in the event of capture. If that happened, the Kempeitai, the secret police, would use the extreme method of torture and eventually would decapitate them. They considered the nisei traitors, because they were Japanese. Most of us in the MIS on the front lines were warned of this consequence.

Two days after the end of war, Hamada parachuted into Peking, currently called Beijing, with six OSS members to rescue allies in Fengtai Prison, who faced possible execution. This was at great risk, because many enemy forces were not aware the war ended. Snipers were active. They rescued four Tokyo Doolittle raiders and 600-plus prisoners. This was Operation Magpie, a top-secret operation. For this effort, he received the Soldiers Medal at a ceremony in Washington, D.C., and a Breast Order award from the President of the Republic of China, Chiang Kai Shek. He also received a personal note from President Truman.

After 70 years, SSG Dick Hamada will be finally recognized for his gallantry and performance above and beyond the call of duty. He will be inducted into the Military Intelligence Corps Hall of Fame in June at Fort Huachuca, Arizona. His wife Irene, daughter Peggy and son Luke will attend and they are here with us today.

I was notified on or about August 7 or 8, 1945, that I would be flying to Okinawa from Luzon to lead a team of specialist in preparation for the occupation of Japan. However, a few days before departure, I was replaced by my friend, Joe Kuwada. All of them perished at Naha, Okinawa, when the last kamikaze attack of the war caused the airfield to be smoke screened and the pilot could not see the airfield. He made a turn around and slammed into a hillside. It was August 13, 1945, two days before the end of war.

I was on a troopship in Tokyo Bay waiting to enter the land of my parents. It was an overcast day. We were given permission to land after the 11th Airborne Division cleared the area of possible dissidents. Fuel in Japanese aircraft was emptied and propellers removed to prevent possible kamikaze attack.

When I finally set foot on land, I had mixed feelings. I had pleasant thoughts about my parents and their home in Yamaguchi Prefecture. I often heard them reminisce of the calm Seto Naikai with a backdrop of hills and valleys. It gave me a sense of peace and relaxation -- a place I would like to visit. Then I had ugly thoughts of the brutal Japanese army decapitating prisoners because of their ingrained Bushido spirit. It bothered me. It really did. I wondered, how will the people receive us -- friendly or hostile? I felt uneasy.

I later learned that had we invaded Japan, there were 28 million civilians in an organization called the National Volunteer Combat Force composed of men and women ages 15 to 50 determined to protect their homeland and save the Emperor.

In July 1943, Professor Buchanan from the Office of Strategic Services in Washington, D.C., went to Camp Shelby to recruit nisei in the 442nd, who could read, write and speak Japanese. He warned that this was a dangerous mission and a one-way street, do not expect to return alive. Despite that, 150 volunteered, 23 were chosen and 14 finally made it. Hamada was one of them.

That one-way street warning nearly became a reality. Plans were already made to have the nisei members parachute into Japan for hit-and-run operations prior to the invasion. They were trained for it. It was really a suicide mission. This plan ended when they dropped the A bomb. This story was told to me by the late Lt. Ralph Yempuku, when I met him in Tokyo in 1945. He was selected for this mission. Like Hamada, Yempuku deserves to be inducted into the Military Intelligence Corps Hall of Fame and an upgrade of his medal. I read some of his combat experiences. He is a hero.

Having lost the war, economically and psychologically, Japan was in the pits. I felt their feelings of gloom and doom. I saw the devastation from Yokohama to Kawasaki to Tokyo. Kawasaki was completely destroyed. I saw a barren landscape nearly void of humans. I felt deeply sorry for the people. Not many survived the incendiary bombing of March 10, 1945; 100,000 were killed and another 100,000 injured. Many died from suffocation.

My initial concern of how the people would react towards us quickly vanished. Their problem was survival. People were raiding the garbage can for leftover food from our mess hall. A sad sight to see. It is always the women and children who suffer the most. My heart went out to them. Many GIs were handing out candies and cookies to the children. The Japanese attitude

towards Americans as monsters disappeared. By November 1945, I saw great improvements. Most of the debris was gone, people looked healthier and cleaner. Business shops began sprouting all over. Nightclubs opened. Japan was on its way to recovery.

I was appointed to establish and to conduct a translator school at the NYK building in Tokyo. I had 150 students. I was the principal and instructor rolled into one. To become a translator meant a good paying job and they had great incentive to succeed.

One of my students reported to class an hour late. He was very remorseful and almost in tears. He came to my desk, got down on his hands and knees and started to apologize to me in Japanese. I stopped him and said, "Get up, don't do that, just explain to me in English, in writing." This is what he wrote, "On my way to class, I had a problem with my bicycle. The atmosphere in my tire escaped and I had it repaired." I told him you had a flat tire and it is an idiom that you need to learn to become a translator. He became a good translator.

On another day, I was interrupted in class by a receptionist who said, "There is a Japanese gentleman here to see you. He mentioned your name." I said, "Mention my name? I don't know any Japanese." Curiously I went to see him. He looked familiar, but I could not place him. He bowed low and said in a very polite Japanese, "Orei ni maerimashita," meaning I came to pay my respect and to thank you. I recognized his voice. By golly, he was the prisoner I interrogated in Luzon. INCREDIBLE!

Today, our former enemy is our friend and strong ally.

My experience in Japan has been an emotional Yin Yang. It will be forever etched in my memory.

Unfortunately, time will not permit to tell you more touching and interesting things I saw.

The story of my interrogation is an interesting one to tell, but I will save it for another time.

Thank you.