

GENERAL PAUL NAKASONE

REMARKS PURPLE HEART CEREMONY 10 MAY 2024

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6Qhh5hiwzD8&t=29s> (from 14:06 to 27:00)

Good morning. Before I begin my prepared remarks. I'm struck by three things. First of all, only in America, Secondly, only in Hawaii, and thirdly, OK, Chaplain Gabriel and Reverend Nakasone Sakata, you have some incredible power because every app said it was going to rain this morning. Amazing.

So aloha and good morning. Thank you so much Lawrence for that warm welcome and let me add my thanks and my welcome to our distinguished guests Brian and Sherry Eifler. Thank you so much for being here. The fact that you're the commanding general of the 11th Airborne Division, the fact that these soldiers were attached to that. Sergeant Major Daley and your wife, thank you so much for being here during the commander's conference, it really means a lot to us and I will tell you that it really comes full circle in terms of 79 years ago to today.

Today we honor five Soldiers, MIS linguists, Nisei who tragically lost their lives in a plane crash nearly 79 years ago. Along with the 26 other Soldiers who also perished, they gave their last full measure of devotion to our nation. In the aftermath of this tragic flight and the ensuing close of the war, somehow only two were awarded the Purple Heart medal, which our nation presents to those wounded or killed in battle. This morning, at our Army's direction, we begin to correct that oversight.

While the years have passed, it is a tribute to patience of the families of the fallen and the work of several here to make this day a reality. Let me begin by thanking individuals whose work, perseverance, and determination ensured this day would occur:

- **Mr. Mark Matsunaga and Mr. Dan Matthews**—sons of MIS and 11th Airborne Division Soldiers, thank you for uncovering the Army's oversight of not awarding the Purple Heart to 29 of the men who perished on this flight. It was your painstaking research that uncovered this oversight and then it was your work that ensured our Army would direct the proper recognition of the 29 heroes on this flight with their proper respect. You approached your work with a sense of purpose that mirrors the work done by all these Soldiers nearly eight decades ago.
- **Mr. Dennis Christensen**—Your efforts within the Army's Awards and Decorations Branch of Human Resources Command were invaluable. You ensured this award request received the attention it required. You were the lifeline, the inside guy within the Army's system that allowed Mark and Dan to answer the requirements, questions, or requests. Dennis, as a former Marine, you understood the importance of correcting this oversight—not only to the families, but also our Army and our Nation.

- **Jackie Conant**, please pass on our immense thanks to **Congressman Case**—thank you for providing the necessary Congressional attention, congressman, to enable the authorization of the Purple Heart medals not only to those five MIS Soldiers we honor today, but also the 24 other Soldiers who are now eligible to receive this medal.

I believe an understanding of these five men, the medal they are being posthumously awarded, and the devotion they represented are necessary for us to appreciate the importance of this day.

Though the pictures have faded, the young, innocent looks of Joseph KUWADA, Haruyuki IKEMOTO, Kazuyoshi Inouye, Wilfred MOTOKANE, and Masaru SOGI jump out at you as you stare at their faces. They shared many things in common—sons of ISSEI immigrants, who made their way to Hawaii for a better life; all spoke Japanese and English growing up—a skill in short demand at the start of World War II; they lived through the harsh times of the Depression; and they were Soldiers—trained in Minnesota, deployed to the Pacific, combat veterans. Each of these Soldiers had a family and a story worth noting—

- **Staff Sergeant Joseph KUWADA**, was a native of Honolulu and postal worker prior to enlisting; at 29, the old man of the bunch and leader of the 10-man language team; he would leave behind a wife with his passing;
- **Technician Fourth Class Haruyuki IKEMOTO**, a native of Hamakuapoko, Maui; he was from a family of nine, the eldest boy; his father served in World War One. He enlisted out of the University of Hawaii;
- **Technician Fourth Class Kazuyoshi INOUE**, a native of Lihue Plantation on Kauai; he was from a large family—his brother Stanley also volunteered for the MIS; he left a new wife, Barbara, with his passing;
- **Technician Fourth Class Wilfred MOTOKANE**, a native of Honolulu and postal worker prior to enlisting; his brother-in-law also served within MIS; he would leave behind a wife and a son with his passing;
- **Technician Fourth Class Masaru SOGI**, a native of Kona, Hawaii; successful in construction work before the war, he owned a home; of the four boys in his family, three would also serve in World War II.

The Purple Heart holds profound significance as one of the most respected military decorations in the United States. Awarded in the name of the President to those wounded or killed while serving with the U.S. military, this honor embodies the sacrifice and valor that is determined of all those who have served. Its recipients are recognized for their bravery in the face of enemy forces, acknowledging both the physical and emotional scars borne in service to their country. The medal not only honors individual courage, it also serves as symbol of gratitude from the nation, recognizing the sacrifices made by its service members and the heavy price of freedom.

The origin of the Purple Heart dates back to General George Washington. The original badge was made of purple cloth and shaped like a heart, was intended to recognize “any singularly

meritorious action” and was awarded to Soldiers of any rank, which was quite revolutionary at the time as military awards were typically reserved for officers.

Perhaps an important question is, why does it matter that the Army and our nation, nearly 79 years later, recognize these five Soldiers today and the 26 others who lost their lives in that tragic plane crash? I believe it’s for three reasons:

- **First, Recognition of Service:** The Purple Heart honors the sacrifice and bravery of Soldiers who have been wounded or killed in combat. It acknowledges their service and the physical and emotional toll they endure in defense of our country;
- **Historical Continuity** is the second reason. Continuously awarding Purple Hearts maintains a link to the past, honoring the traditions and sacrifices of those who has served previously; and
- **Finally, Respect and Remembrance:** Awarding Purple Hearts demonstrates respect for those who have suffered injuries or lost their lives in service to our country. It also ensures that their sacrifices are remembered and honored by future generations.

Perhaps the question should be better phrased, “why would we not award Purple Hearts to those deserving even after the passage of nearly eight decades?” It’s a way to uphold the values of service, sacrifice, and duty that are essential to the military and our nation as a whole.

The five Soldiers we honor today are part of the 806 men Hawaii lost during World War II. These Nisei linguists represent an incredible contribution, sometimes forgotten, from what was then a territory and now our 50th state. Their devotion was marked as members of the Military Intelligence Service, an extraordinary chapter in American military history, showcasing the profound impact of linguistic skills and cultural knowledge in international conflict.

Complimenting the MIS were the 100th Infantry Battalion and the 442nd Regimental Combat Team. The former being the “Purple Heart Battalion” given the large numbers of its Soldiers who were injured or fell in battle. The latter, the famed “Go for Broke” unit, that, together with the 100th, was the most decorated fighting force of its size in the history of the U.S. Army. When the initial calls for volunteers were made in Hawaii for 1,000 men, more than 9,600 volunteered.

Hawaii also responded with contributions closer to home. Hundreds of UH ROTC cadets were called to arms on December 7, 1941. Those of Japanese ancestry were abruptly dismissed a few weeks later. But 170 of them, insisted on helping the nation, forming the Varsity Victory Volunteers to provide labor for military construction projects and other efforts critical to the war effort in Hawaii. Finally, Home Front Support—Japanese Americans in Hawaii engaged in war bond drives, Red Cross activities, and other support roles, contributions to the morale and economic support necessary for sustaining the war effort.

You know, it’s not hard to draw a line from the devotion and dedication by those at home to combat units to understand the foundations for what these five Nisei linguists provided to our nation.

This state's contributions during World War II are a testament to the dedication and loyalty of its people to the United States, despite the prevailing suspicions and racial prejudices of that era. The sacrifices of those like Kuwada, Ikemoto, Inouye, Motokane, and Sogi and so many others helped pave the way to greater understanding and integration of Japanese Americans into American society post-war. Without the services and sacrifices of these Nisei, the opportunities that were opened more broadly for Japanese Americans would have been limited and specifically for those with Japanese heritage—General Eric Shinseki, General John Campbell, Admiral Harry Harris, and me—would likely never materialized.

Though the years have passed, Gold Star families never forget the loss of their loved one. Today, we recall, we reflect, and remember. Recall — whether from being present at the time or through the sharing of stories the devastating news of the loss of these five Nisei and the entire flight; Reflect — taking time to consider the service and sacrifices of these Soldiers; and Remember — keeping alive the essence of these linguists by offering a thought or prayer or simply a kind gesture to the families here who have borne the loss of their loved one for all these years.

Thank you for attending today's ceremony. As the son of an MI linguist, former intelligence officer, retired general officer and senior Army leader, this has been the honor of my career. May we all remember the men who lost their lives, the medal they are being awarded, and the devotion displayed by these five Military Intelligence Service linguists, their fellow Nisei, and our Soldiers during World War II.

Mahalo.