

"America's Secret Weapon"

Much as been written about the contributions of Nisei soldiers in Europe and the Pacific during World War II, and deservedly so. However, the role of Military Intelligence Service MIS personnel during the Occupation of Japan (August 15, 1945-August 1952) also was very important in assisting the rapid recovery that helped that nation to be

industries were destroyed. Japan had been at war since 1937, and its people were bordering on starvation. Sickness and disease were rampant. All they had been told and taught was no longer a reality. Their homes were gone, their families had suffered terribly. The future looked bleak. When the Emperor announced the war's end, the people

received the news with mixed emotions. Some were glad, others relieved, but certainly all were numb. When told of the impending US military occupation, they expected the worst. It was under these conditions that the US military prepared to occupy Japan.

The initial task of the Occupation was demobilization and disarmament of the Japanese military. Some resistance was expected from organized and isolated guerrilla activities by returning soldiers and military, ultra-nationalist groups. Fortunately, outright opposition was rare, and minor incidents were quelled immediately due largely to the timely intelligence gathered by Nisei soldiers.

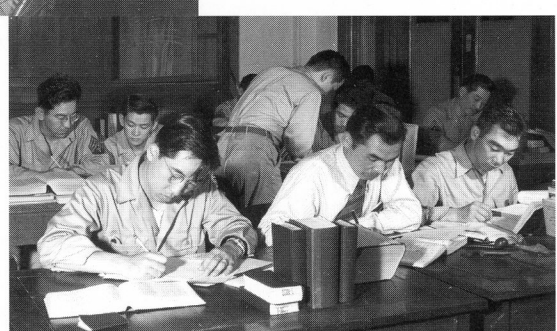


Nisei Japanese interpreters of the linguist section, Allied translator and interpreter section, General HQ, Allied Powers in the Pacific, Tokyo, Japan, attend class on Japanese characters, part of a program to enable them to more rapidly recognize Japanese characters. 9/3/46. US Army photograph.

accepted back into the family of nations. Nisei soldiers, with their language fluency and knowledge of Japanese culture and customs, bridged the gap between US forces and the Japanese government. This was one of the key elements contributing to the recovery of war-torn Japan, its people and economy. Nisei efforts also laid the groundwork for the bilateral relationship that exists today between the United States and Japan.

At the end of the war in August 1945, there were about 3,800 graduates of the Military Intelligence Service (MIS) language school at Fort Snelling, Minnesota (see p. 16), of whom 3,000 were overseas. These numbers included Caucasian and Chinese American linguists, but least 95 percent of Japanese language linguists were Nisei. These linguist soldiers were assigned everywhere, from GHQ (MacArthur's General Headquarters) to Army, Navy, Marine, and Air Force units throughout Japan.

What was it like to land in Japan in early September 1945? Most of the major cities had been bombed, and many



Team G, Nisei Japanese, of translation and scanning section, General Headquarters, Forces in the Pacific, Nye Building, Tokyo, Japan, working on translating Japanese documents required by other organizations. This team responsible for full translation letters for General Douglas MacArthur, Supreme Allied Commander, Allied Powers in front row 4 Larry L. Kazahaya of Los Angeles, CA; Dick R. Oda; Moneta, CA; Mr. Fred Um... Sacramento... 3-46. US Army photograph.

After the war, the signing of instruments of surrender on September 2, 1945, aboard the battleship USS Missouri was a momentous occasion. Three Nisei linguist soldiers were aboard to witness the occasion: Thomas Sakamoto, Noboru Yoshimura and Jiro Yukimura (see Sakamoto's account on p. 8).

Many Nisei officers were assigned as language aides to key GHQ staff officers. Among them were Shiro Omata, Kan Tagami, and Cappy Harada. Tagami served as General MacArthur's language advisor for more than four years. On MacArthur's

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by Harry Fukuhara

behalf, he met with Emperor Hirohito at the Imperial Palace in a secret unprecedented one-on-one meeting.

During the Occupation, a new constitution had to be written. This was a daunting task. MIS graduate George Koshi was intimately involved in this historic undertaking, which "forever renounced war as a sovereign right of the nation." Koshi also served as defense counsel during the war crimes investigation and trials held from December 1945 to mid-1948 in Tokyo and Yokohama. Ken Aiba was Chief Investigator and headed the Defense Investigation Section. Working with him were Takashi Matsui, Peter Nakahara and James Matsumura, among a dozen other investigators. More than 70 linguists, most of them members of MIS, served as translators and interpreters for the trials.

In October 1946, GHQ implemented a compulsory agrarian land law throughout Japan. This meant the remanding of nearly six million acres of farmland to individual farmers. Shiro Tokuno and Shigehara Takahashi were among the many Nisei who aided this effort. Another major change was Chapter 9 of the new constitution, which forbade maintenance of a Japanese military force. To maintain internal security, a National Police Reserve force was established. Raymond Aka (see p. 18) and Ken Harano were among those who helped form the reserve, which coincided with the outbreak of the Korean War in June 1950.

The Civil Censorship Detachment (CCD) could not have functioned without Nisei participation. The CCD mission was to extract civil intelligence information from various mass media. Numerous Nisei female employees and MIS graduates served in the CCD, including Kojiro Kawaguchi and Ko Sameshima, who received a special commendation for his outstanding performance from 1947 to 1949.

Another effective organization was the Counter Intelligence Corps, or CIC, with offices located in all major cities. Several hundred Nisei special agents and investiga-

tors worked throughout Japan to detect and prevent subversive activities directed against Occupation forces. They were known as "the eyes and ears" of GHQ.

Other MIS linguists were assigned to special units. These included Strategic Bombing Survey Teams; Criminal Investigations Detachment (CID) teams and other Special



Master Sgt. Taro Tsukahara, interpreter from San Francisco, CA, and second Lt. Alfred Avison of Norwalk, CT, hold an informal discussion with Japanese POWs at the camp in Queensland, Australia. US Army photograph, 1945.

Intelligence Teams. Repatriation Teams were located at all major ports of entry, such as Maizuru, where millions of Japanese repatriates were processed.

Were there problems? Certainly. During the first few years of the Occupation, the Japanese people struggled to overcome the devastation of war. Political and economic upheaval gave rise to civil disturbances. As the Japanese learned the ways of democracy, they became more demonstra-

tive and began to exercise their new rights. This gave way to labor unrest, manifested by strikes and opposition movements. In 1949, when a series of violent incidents broke out, Nisei linguists were again active in the coordination between US authorities and Japanese agencies. Their role as liaison continued to grow in importance.

Not all MIS members were necessarily fluent in Japanese, but their part in the Occupation was more than that of interpreter or translator. The ability to treat people not as an enemies but as fellow human beings was a reflection of the Nisei's upbringing. In recent years, Japanese government officials have mentioned repeatedly that the Japanese people owe a debt of gratitude to Nisei soldiers for the assistance they rendered during this difficult time in Japan's post-war history. The many roles and accomplishments of the men and women of the MIS have earned them the right to be called "America's Secret Weapon in World War II."

Harry Fukuhara is chairman of the NJAHS board.