

Comments about the MIS Unit and Individual Awards

The "MIS Unit and Individual Awards" is based on a canvas of about 800 of some 5000 Japanese linguists who served in the Asia Pacific Theater as part of the Military Intelligence Service. War Department officials expected the Nisei to be assigned to Regimental headquarters or higher for their safety and because their loyalty was questioned. Realities of combat, however, put a large number of Nisei in the combat zone. They entered caves to persuade Japanese soldiers to surrender, translated documents, interrogated prisoners, monitored communications to pass real time intelligence information to combat commanders. 33 Nisei linguists died in line of duty.

Caucasian soldiers initially viewed Nisei with the same contempt they had for Imperial Japanese soldiers. Early in the war in Guadalcanal the following exchange was heard between two Caucasian soldiers: "What are those 2 goddam Japs, [meaning Shigeru Yamashita and Isao Kuroda], doing here?" "Shoot them." Another said "they're good Japs, they're working for us." "Shoot them anyway." Nisei linguists were challenged to change this mindset, which they did by producing intelligence information in real-time which saved American lives and won battles. When the war ended, these Caucasian soldiers became Nisei's strongest supporters to place Japanese Americans in America's mainstream.

Nisei had two goals: to help win the war and to prove their loyalty. The MIS, as an organization, was not structured to maintain records of awards like their brethren in the 442nd Regimental Combat Team. Publicity about the MIS, the US Army's "secret weapon," was not allowed until the 1970s.

The list of MIS individual awards, although incomplete, 1) illustrates the large number of Nisei who were engaged in front line duties; 2) demonstrates Nisei willingness to fight soldiers of their parent's homeland, the acid test of loyalty to their nation; and 3) reflects Caucasian soldiers' change of attitude from hate to total support of Nisei.

This list is drawn from various sources, including Army records, books, publications, some veterans' organizations as well as some veterans and their families. It is hoped that one day an organization can build on this "MIS Unit and Individual Awards" to achieve maximum coverage. This MIS Unit and Individual Awards, a work-in-progress, is a tribute to the men and women who served as Japanese linguists during WW II.

--JAVA Research Team, March 31, 2016. For questions, please contact Terry Shima (ttshima@comcast.net).