

#5325

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SPEECH GIVEN BY LIEUTENANT ROGER W. SMITH, UNITED STATES ARMY



At the very outset I would like to tell you why I am standing before you tonight. Although my views are those of the War Department, I was not forced to come here. I am here at my own free will. Because I welcomed the opportunity. Let me explain to you briefly just what I mean.

When we heard of these West Coast acts of terrorism against the families of the men in our outfit while we were overseas, and the disgraceful incidents of veteran's organization refusing to accept returning veterans, we were really burned up. I asked for this job and I got it. So gentlemen, I stand before you tonight first because I have an honest conviction of the true Americanism of these men, and second, because I am convinced that these intolerances and prejudices towards race minorities present a real threat to our constitution and to the things for which we fought.

I hardly know where to start heaping praises on these men. During all the phases of our training and in combat, and in all departments of soldiering the Japanese American soldiers of the 442nd Combat Team have either stood on par with other comparable units, or stood head and shoulders above them. Verification of this statement can be found in many sources. Some of the more important of these sources are as follows. First, by examination of the efficiency and training records established while at Camp Shelby, Mississippi. Second, by examination of actual combat records in Italy and in France. And third, and probably the most important one to be reckoned with is what other combat units with whom these men fought alongside of in Europe, have to say about the Four Four Two.

It will not be necessary to dwell at too great a length on our training period. The challenge to excel was ever present from start to finish. To either a lesser or to a greater degree each man knew the Four Four Two was a segregated unit, marked for intensive observation by the War Department and by the public. Here was the opportunity to prove to a prejudiced West Coast minority, yet a minority that was a beginning to carry some weight, that the Japanese Americans were at least as good as any other group of American soldiers. And . prove it they did with flying colors, by either coming up to or by surpassing all military and physical standards of training. So much for our training period. And now we come to our combat record.

Once again the same challenge we had in training was present as we prepared to go into combat; the challenge to prove to everyone that we were as good as if not better than any other combat unit. In addition to this an added incentive to excel was present. The 100th Battalion, composed of Japanese Americans, which had preceded us some seven or eight months into combat, had achieved an outstanding record. Here was a standard for us to parallel or to surpass. The 442nd Combat Team did just that. Before the end of the first concerted effort by the combat team as a unit, the new units had learned the hard way as all new units do. By the time we reached Pisa the successes of the 442nd had paralleled those of the 100th. From that time on the two units were integrated into one fighting unit of regimental strength. Suffice it to say at this time the long hard push from Grosseta to Pisa was studded with stories of outstanding unit and individual performances.

Shortly after Pisa, higher headquarters withdrew the 442nd

from the Italian front and we were sent to eastern France in the Alsace-Lorraine region where the fighting was very heavy. Once again we had a learning process to go through, although the outfit by now could be called one of seasoned veterans. We had been fighting in rocky mountainous country. Now we had to fight in a heavily wooded country. Here once again the outfit learned and learned rapidly in what was probably the ruggedest fighting we encountered. Even though fighting through mountainous country in Italy was tough, the heavily wooded areas in France where a man could not see ten feet ahead were tougher. In addition to this we had extremely miserable weather with which to contend. It is here in France that many stories of outstanding individual and group performances are recorded. I mention only two of these group performances at this time.

The first concerns the many times told story of the rescue by the 442nd Infantry of the "Lost Battalion of World War II" -- a battalion from the 36th Texas Division. It is just merely another story of dogged determination to get the job done, to get to and rescue a battalion that had been cut off from the larger unit. Shortly before this action took place I was hit by shrapnel, so I was not actually present at the rescue. However, I do know that this rescue was effected under extremely adverse conditions of weather, loss of sleep by the men and the fact that the 442nd had been in the lines some 20 days without a rest. Needless to say in getting this job done, we suffered extremely heavy casualties. To make this a little clearer, I might add that the number of casualties we suffered was greater than the number of men we rescued.

The next outstanding unit action concerns two platoons

assigned to do a special job and gives me an opportunity to throw out my chest, since I was the platoon leader of one of these two platoons. The place was near Bruyeres, France. The situation was as follows -- the two forward companies of our 2nd Battalion had gone so fast that they had by-passed quite a few elements of Germans. This left what is know as a "pocket of resistance", that was causing considerable trouble with the supply lines and with the reserve elements of the 2nd Battalion. At this time the reserve company of the 2nd Battalion, F Company, had its' hands full and could only spare one platoon to clean out this pocket. This was not enough men to do the job. So a platoon from the 3rd Battalion was borrowed to assist in the clean up, the 2nd Platoon of Company L, my platoon. It would be quite difficult for me to paint you a picture of the action that ensued, so to use a baseball expression, I'll just give you the box score. A conservative estimate of one hundred Germans killed, wounded or captured, and the majority of these one hundred Germans WERE NOT captured. Our losses -- three casualties between the two platoons, no one killed. At this time each of our platoons consisted of about 25 men. Of course I realize the grace of God must have been with us and that the coordination with Lieutenant Brown's F Company platoon worked out remarkably well. But the thing that made this action so successful was the aggressiveness of the men, the determination to close with the enemy and get the job done. I I would hardly know where to pay any individual tribute for that day's work. Every man was in the fight giving his all.

Earlier in my talk I said that the men in the 442nd either stood on par with or stood head and shoulders above other comparabl

combat units. To substantiate this I have described briefly our training and our combat records. If you will recall, I spoke of the appraisals of the Japanese American soldiers by other units whom we fought alongside of, as being probably the most important thing to be reckoned with. Let me clarify this statement simply by saying -- ask any old soldier or officer of the 34th, 36th, 3rd, 45th Divisions, or any other outfit that we have fought alongside of in France or in Italy, what they think of the Japanese American soldiers. Their praises and high regard for the Four Four Two never cease. This to me in the last analysis is the real criterion as to the Americanism of the Japanese American soldier, the high appraisal by the other units of Caucasian soldiers with whom they fought. A word to the wise I believe would be in order at this time. It wouldn't seem advisable to make any remark to the effect that, "a Jap is a Jap" regardless of where he is born. You might just be talking to a veteran who fought alongside the Four Four Two in Italy or in France. To use the quotes of another, "It's Not the Slant of a Man's Eyes That Count, But the Slant of the Heart."

And now, I bring you to what is probably the most amazing thing regarding these men's performance in combat. It is the way they have gone forth into battle and gotten the job done, while at the same time overcoming a terrific mental stress and strain imposed upon them, that no other group of soldiers has had to contend with. I refer to the anti-Japanese American sentiment, the internment and intimidation of their families, the thought of "What are we fighting for and what do we have to come home to?", the refusal to accept returning veterans into veterans organizations and many other things of this nature. Gentlemen, this is not Americanism.

This is not what we've been fighting for. We must take our hats off to these men who fought so gallantly under such a psychological handicap.

At this time, I would like to mention a few personal names and incidents that happened within my company and within my platoon. And at the same time I want to make apologies for omitting many outstanding personal exploits. I am sure you realize that due to the haziness of many incidents, regarding the time and the place and in view of the numerous outstanding performances I could not mention them all. Starting closest to home and working back I mention my platoon sergeant, Technical Sergeant Dick Otsubo. Throughout training and throughout combat he continually displayed the highest qualities of a soldier and of a leader. This was particularly true when he had charge of the platoon during my two week period of hospitalization in eastern France. On the strength of the fine and courageous leadership he displayed during that period he was recommended for a field commission. Two days before he was to have received this commission he was killed near Sospel, France, by an artillery shell as we were moving up to relieve another unit. The next man I'd like to tell you about was Sergeant Otsubo's successor, Technical Sergeant Albert Nakama, a man that was always grinning even in the face of death. Sergeant Nakama started out as my platoon runner but it was apparent from the start that he was capable of a more responsible job of leadership. However, don't get the idea that a platoon runner's job is not one of responsibility. A man who can convey messages accurately and who can find his way around in the heat of battle, is a mighty wonderful person to have, and I had just such a man in Staff

Sergeant Masa Okamura who is probably now Technical Sergeant Okamura, having taken over Sergeant Nakama's job when he was sent home under Army's discharge point system. I would like also to pay tribute to Staff Sergeant Ray Murata who acted as a scout and an outstanding one throughout most of the Italian and French campaigns. You might be interested to know just what the duties of a scout are in combat. A scout probably has the most dangerous and disagreeable job in the infantry. By this I mean he is always out in the front of his unit, sometimes creeping, sometimes crawling but always searching for the enemy. Naturally he is going to be the first man to be fired upon. Aggressiveness and plenty of guts at all times are the pre-requisites of a good scout. Quite often it is the sole job of a scout to draw enemy fire thereby making him disclose his position. I repeat Sergeant Murata did an outstanding job as a scout throughout most of the French and Italian campaigns. I could go on indefinitely telling you stories such as this.

Up to this point I have spoken only of the Japanese-American soldiers in the European theater of operations. This is because my experiences have been with them. Let me now give you a few facts regarding the Japanese-American soldiers in the South Pacific. And you may rest assured that what I have to say is authoritative. There have been from three to five thousand Japanese-American soldiers in the South Pacific, scattered throughout various outfits and doing various jobs, most of which were very hazardous. For reasons of military security, it has not been possible for the War Department to release many stories on their activities, such as these stories on the 442nd. Nevertheless the work they have done in getting enemy information and in persuading large numbers of

Japanese to surrender, has shortened the Pacific war immeasurably. In addition to this, they have continually been subjected to the possibility of being shot by our own men.

I would now like to read you at this time some excerpts from a talk by Major-General Bissell, Assistant Chief of Staff, given at Fort Snelling, Minnesota where Japanese-Americans are trained in Army intelligence work:

"In outlining the work of the graduates in the past, General Bissell told on his recent tours to the battle fronts throughout the world and of his conversations with such leaders as General MacArthur who testified to the 'indispensability of the Nisei under combat conditions in the Pacific.'

'From captured Jap documents they have gleaned valuable information that permitted our forces to go on to victory with the saving of many hundreds of lives,' General Bissell reported field commanders as saying.

'They have gone into caves to persuade hiding Japs to come out and they brought out a great many captives. But some of these School graduates never came out. And others followed them knowing that they too might be killed.'

General Bissell declared that 'the record of all Nisei in American armed forces is 'a record of which every American can be proud .' He told the School's students that if anyone ever questioned their loyalty to America they shouldn't even bother to answer them back.

'All America will soon know of the intense loyalty of the Japanese-American soldiers who are serving and will serve their country in the defeat of her enemies and the establishment of world peace,' General Bissell emphasized.

And here is one last item which is indeed very interesting:

'The Nisei of this school will be absolutely essential to the successful occupation of Japan and to the winning of the peace,' General Bissell said emphatically. 'just as the former graduates served as the vital connecting link between Allied soldiers and the Japanese in combat,' General Bissell explained, 'the Nisei will serve as the language bridge between the Allied occupation forces and the 80,000,000 people of Japan.'

We thought we closed a deal when we finished the war on both fronts, but this is rather debatable when some of the things for which we fought are being attacked back here at home. If we permit



these intolerances and prejudices to continue towards our race minorities, we are establishing a precedent which is a real threat to our Constitution and to the Bill of Rights. Because remember this, we are all a member of one minority group or another. In other words, then no one will be exempt from oppression by the majority.

In conclusion let my words be simple and short -- With This Magnificent Record the Japanese-American Soldiers Have Made, Who Can Say These Men Are Not Americans? If These Men Can Do What They Did In Winning the Peace, How Can There Be Prejudice Against Them? Gentlemen, Here Is A Challenge of Americanism Directed Towards You. It Is Not Enough For You To Merely Accept This Situation Mentally, But Rather To Go Forth And Preach The Gospel. In Other Words, It Is Up To You To Carry The Ball From Here On In. This Is The Real Challenge Of Democracy.