

**A REMEMBRANCE OF COL. VIRGIL R. MILLER,
442nd REGIMENTAL COMBAT TEAM
by Joy Teraoka,**

Don Macaulay, nephew of Col. Virgil Miller, had one of his greatest wishes come true when he visited the 100th Infantry Battalion Veterans clubhouse on our collating day in October 2007. On that day with a number of veterans present, he was able to meet some men his beloved Uncle “Gil” spoke so glowingly of for their heroism and honor. Col. Miller was one of the commanding officers of the 100th/442nd RCT when it fought in the Vosges forest, rescued the “Lost Battalion” and made the last push against the Germans at the Gothic Line. More often than not, he retold stories to his young nephew about their amazing exploits in combat, their spirit, dedication and bravery that earned them his eternal praise, devotion, protection, and friendship.



Macaulay related to us his Uncle Gil’s interesting background and why he was selected to become an officer of the AJA fighting men.

Virgil Rasmuss Miller was born November 11, 1900, in San German, Puerto Rico. In 1915, his family moved to the Island’s capital city, San Juan, where his father, Dr. Paul G. Miller, served as Commissioner of Education until 1921. With honor and distinction, Governor Arthur Yager, appointed Virgil as one of the first from Puerto Rico, to go to the United States Military Academy at West Point in 1920. Following his graduation in 1924, Virgil married Ann McGoughran and the young couple returned to Puerto Rico where Miller was assigned to the Island’s 65th Infantry Regiment. In 1940, he was transferred to Hawaii, where he served with the 21st Infantry Brigade and the 24th Infantry Division at Schofield Barracks.

Because of his lifelong experience with people of diverse ethnicities as is evident in Puerto Rico, Hawaii and Alaska, it was believed he was particularly well suited to serve with the young AJA men from Hawaii and the mainland USA. He was sent to Camp Shelby, Mississippi, to train the *nisei* troops who won outstanding marks for their combat training skills. However it was when the troops were sent to Europe that their worth was proven to be truly exceptional.

In June 1943, Miller was named Executive Officer of the 442nd RCT, which included the 522nd Field Artillery Battalion, the 232nd Combat Engineers Company, the 206th Army Ground Forces Band and the 100th Infantry Battalion from Hawaii.

In October 1944, under personal orders from Maj. Gen. John Dahlquist, Col. Charles W. Pence (Commanding Officer of the 100th/442nd) and Lt. Col. Miller (its Executive Commander) were ordered to lead the 100th/442nd through the dark forests of the Vosges to save the “Lost Battalion” in a bloody, costly battle that resulted in over 800 casualties and deaths the *nisei* unit suffered to save 211 men of the “Lost Battalion.” When Col. Pence suffered wounds during that exhausting campaign, Col. Miller replaced him as Commanding Officer of the Regiment.

In April 1945, the 100th/442nd RCT faced its final horrendous battle against the Germans' formidable Gothic Line. After much consultation, Col. Miller, Lt. Col. Alfred A. Pursall, 3rd Battalion Commander, Lt. Col. James Conley, 100th Battalion Commander, and their staffs devised a brilliant pincer strategy to fight against the impregnable German line. The troops were required to climb the 3,000 ft. tortuous mountain trails in total darkness and silence. This daunting tactic allowed Miller's troops to get into position for their daylight assault. However, landmine explosions alerted the Germans and fierce fighting ensued. After a daylong assault, the formidable Gothic line was finally cracked leading to the downfall of the German strongholds. Again, the 100/442nd RCT suffered many losses and casualties. Heavy fighting continued as each mountain ridge was taken from the mighty German forces. Finally, on April 25, the 442nd combat team drove the German army out of the Po Valley.

From the beginning to the end of their fighting in both Italy and France under Col. Pence and Col. Miller, many deserving medals and honors were bestowed upon the men of the 100th/442nd for the heroism displayed in these battles: 21 Medals of Honor, 52 Distinguished Service Crosses (including 19 Distinguished Service Crosses which were upgraded to Medals of Honor in June 2000), 1 Distinguished Service Medal, 560 Silver Stars (plus 28 Oak Leaf Clusters for a second award) and 7 Presidential Unit Citations (5 earned in one month). The Silver Star, the Legion of Merit and the Bronze Star were conferred upon Col. Miller for his outstanding leadership, bravery and heroism during battles against the German Army.

At a memorial service held on May 6, 1945 for the men of the 442nd RCT, Col. Miller told the men:

“The sacrifice made by our comrades was great. We must not fail them in the fight that continues, in the fight that will be with us even when peace comes. Your task will be the harder and more arduous one, for it will extend over a longer time.”

With many of the AJA soldiers' families incarcerated in internment camps, and hostile prejudice against the Japanese in the U.S., Miller realized that his men would face yet another battle when they returned home. He vowed to stand up for them and educate the public about their heroism and sacrifices on the battlefields of Europe and Asia.

When Pfc. Richard H. Naito of Spokane's application for membership into the American Legion was rejected solely because of his race, Miller was aroused to action sending strong letters of protest to U.S. Interior Secretary Ickes and Assistant Secretary of War McCloy and to the commander of Post 51, asking that this grave injustice be corrected. Naito was wounded while fighting in Italy with the 5th Army.

Naito also wrote:

“Twelve months ago on a hot day I was lying in the fields near Pisa, my right leg shattered by a German bullet. . . That day I didn't know whether I would ever set foot again on American soil. Today on American soil, thousands of miles from Pisa, I have been wounded again by another weapon--hypocrisy or prejudice--call it what you will. Little did I expect that upon my return home to the people for whom I fought and suffered I would be repudiated.”

Miller's letter to Dean Helbig of the American Legion Post 51 stated:

“When supposedly reputable organizations such as yours violate the principles and ideals for which we fight, these young Japanese-Americans are not the only ones to wonder about our war aims. Millions in Europe and Asia, too, will learn of your action and question the sincerity of American policy and ideals.”

Miller continued to educate the public in speeches telling of the loyalty, valor and outstanding battle records the AJA soldiers achieved in justifying equal rights and privileges for their families and themselves as American citizens. Miller fiercely and sincerely fought against the discrimination that still plagued his beloved troops.

For Col. Miller, one of the greatest experiences in his army career was serving with the little AJA men of the 100th/442nd RCT. He looked upon them with utmost respect, honor and equality.

In 1960, Col. and Mrs. Miller flew to Hawaii where they attended a gala reunion of the 442nd RCT. “Gil,” as Miller was called, and his wife were overwhelmed with joy by the matchless Hawaiian hospitality and colorful flower lei welcome the “boys” gave them. The festivities, parties, and informal gatherings warmed their hearts. Locating Sakai, his jeep driver and dear friend during the war, was another high point that occurred during this very special occasion.

As they “talked story,” one of Miller's greatest pleasures was their “forgetting the ‘officer-soldier’ relationship, and recognizing him as just another member of the 442. They loved all the banter and exchange of anecdotes,” as Mrs. Miller wrote describing the events of the trip. It was so evident the reciprocal love and respect the men and Miller had for each other.

Even after 65 years, the strong bond of respect, honor and devotion to his troops lives on through his loving nephew Don Macaulay, friends and relatives who continue to tell his story to others.

This article is based on an earlier publication in *Puka-Puka Parade*, the January 2008 issue of the 100th Infantry Battalion Veterans Club monthly newsletter.

Sources for this article include Don Macaulay's personal collection of news clippings and letters; Internet Wikipedia; and the *Gothic Line and Po Valley Campaign Historical Information* from the Go For Broke Foundation National Education Center website.

<http://www.milhist.net/nisei/442Miller.pdf>