



National Japanese American Memorial Foundation

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TEXANS REUNITED AFTER 65 YEARS TRIBUTE IN HOUSTON HONORS WWII VETERANS

40 Veterans Traveled from Around Nation for Reunion

*Former U.S. House Speaker Jim Wright,
Late Governor John Connally, Jr. of Texas Honored*

Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Admiral Mike Mullen Offers Keynote Address

Fund Raising Campaign to Build Memorial Launched

Houston, TX – November 1, 2009 – Veterans from the Texas 141st Infantry Regiment and the Japanese American 442nd Regimental Combat Team – later to become honorary Texans – were reunited at the “Homecoming for Heroes” tribute in Houston hosted by the National Japanese American Memorial Foundation (NJAMF) today, after more than 65 years. The event was co-hosted by Former Cabinet Secretary Norman Mineta and Lieutenant Governor David Dewhurst.

Admiral Mike Mullen, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs said, “I am truly humbled to be in the midst of such heroes. They were – and are – men of the noblest hearts, the utmost courage, and the keepers of a steadfast commitment to their families, their American brothers-in-arms, and their common country.”

This historic evening recalled the rescue of ‘The Lost Battalion’ on a French battlefield by the all-*Nisei* 442nd – a rescue that brought together two uniquely American communities, one of which fought in the US Armed Forces even as tens of thousands of their civilians were held forcibly in US Government internment camps.

Erwin Blonder, a veteran of the 141st, said, “It’s truly amazing we were able to get together and reconstruct the events that happened so many years ago. This historic event represents closure for many of us.”

On October 24, 1944, the 1st Battalion of the 141st Regiment of the 36th Infantry Division was surrounded by Nazi forces in the Vosges Mountains of Northern France. The 141st Regiment, originally from the Texas National Guard, had been known for its military successes in fending off the Nazis.

“After 65 years, we had a wonderful and nostalgic gathering of the Lost Battalion group of the Texas, 36th Division and members of the 141st, who participated in the rescue mission,” said **Dr. Susumu Ito, a veteran of the 442nd**. “I regret that there are now so few of our comrades

remaining, but rest assured that those who have passed away will not be forgotten. I am grateful to the National Japanese American Memorial Foundation for the organization and funding of this event.”

Dr. Ito was an artillery forward observer with the 522nd Field Artillery Battalion of the 442nd RCT, and was attached to I Company, 3rd Battalion, which made the first contact with The Lost Battalion.

In 5 days of battle, from October 26th to October 30th, the 442nd fought enemy infantry, artillery and tanks through forests and mountain ridges until it reached The Lost Battalion, breaking through Nazi defenses and rescuing about 230 men. The 442nd then pushed on for 10 more days to take the ridge which was the 141st's original objective. The 442nd suffered tremendous injuries and casualties and is the most decorated unit in United States military history for its size and length of service.

The 141st is also famous for securing locations essential to the Allies, assisting in the Attack on Cassino, and liberating Kaufering concentration camps at Dachau. Once surrounded, the 141st became known as “The Lost Battalion.”

“The soldiers who fought in the War and who were united against a common enemy weren’t the only winners 65 years ago. Many American ideals were rescued on that French battlefield,” said **Dr. Craig Uchida, Chairman of the Board of NJAMF**. “The *Nisei* in the US Army did what many others might never have been able to do. Forced to prove their loyalty to the United States, they did first by volunteering to serve and second by giving every measure of sacrifice requested.”

The 442nd was born from an American tragedy. In February of 1942, President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066, authorizing the forced relocation and internment of approximately 120,000 Japanese Americans, mostly U.S. citizens, into "War Relocation Camps" following the attack on Pearl Harbor, Hawaii by the Empire of Japan.

In 1943, the US government reversed its decision on Japanese Americans serving in the armed forces, and approved the formation of a Japanese American combat unit. As President Roosevelt then announced, “Americanism is not, and never was, a matter of race or ancestry.” Japanese Americans brought this creed to life in service of their country, the United States. Approximately 3,800 Nisei - second generation Japanese Americans born in the United States and many who had families in the internment camps - enlisted as volunteers in the U.S. Army. The 442nd was a segregated unit.

Former Speaker of the US House of Representatives Jim Wright, who was instrumental in passing the American Civil Liberties Act of 1988, offering reparations to Japanese Americans interned during World War II, received the **Award for the Preservation of Constitutional Rights** for his work improving the treatment of and opportunities available to all Americans regardless of race, religion, ethnicity or gender.

“I am honored to receive this award. Very few causes have been so firmly entrenched in my mind, ever since World War II in fact, as the painful conviction that we had betrayed our own fundamental national principles by confining American citizens in prison-like detention solely on grounds of their ancestry,” said Speaker Wright.

Members of Governor John Connally's family were on hand to receive **The Chairman's Award**, which was awarded to the Governor posthumously for his efforts to honor veterans of the 442nd and for making them "Honorary Texans" in 1963.

Proceeds from the event will be used to:

- Launch an ambitious fundraising project – replicating part of the National Japanese American Memorial to Patriotism During World War II in Washington, DC – the crane entangled in barbed wire – in select cities and at former internment camp sites in the United States. The first replica will be placed in Texas, specifically to honor the 141st and 442nd.
- Develop curriculum educating Americans about the history of The Lost Battalion and the 442nd.

For more information on this event, visit www.njamf.com.

About NJAMF:

The National Japanese American Memorial Foundation (NJAMF) is a nonprofit organization dedicated to education and public awareness about the Japanese American experience during World War II. NJAMF raised the private funds to build the Japanese American Memorial to Patriotism During World War II. The Memorial is not only a monument to the Japanese American experience, but also a reminder that we must not allow anything like this to happen to any minority community again.
www.njamf.com

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