



FocusFAA

Fighting the Enemy Abroad ... and at Home

November 9, 2011 – Frank Matsuda's medals and honors continue to add up, but his latest recognition might be the most important—for his daughter, Terry.

Terry Matsuda, a human resources specialist in the Northwest Mountain Region, was in Washington, D.C., last week to witness the awarding of a Congressional Gold Medal to her 89-year-old father, Frank. Her father was a member of the fabled 442nd Regimental Combat Team during WWII.

Comprised of Japanese Americans, the unit won acclaim from all corners of the military. U.S. Army officials told the 442nd after the war that their combat performance "has not been surpassed." President Harry Truman reviewed them on the White House lawn, saying, "You fought the enemy abroad and prejudice at home, and you won."

Matsuda helped in achieving those victories, earning bronze and silver stars, and three purple hearts, before receiving this latest honorific. From the bloody beaches of Anzio, Italy, to the historic battle of the "Lost Battalion" and beyond, Matsuda and his comrades served in some of the most ferocious and deadly combat of the war.

The 442nd's performance in saving the Lost Battalion is perhaps best known. The Lost Battalion refers to the 1st Battalion, originally the Texas National Guard, which was surrounded by German forces in the Vosges Mountains in October 1944. After two failed attempts to rescue the unit, the 442nd Regimental Combat Team was called in.

In five days of battle, the 442nd broke through German defenses and rescued about 230 men. The 442nd suffered more than 800 casualties. Matsuda's unit, K Company, began with 186 men; 17 walked out.

"Some died outright," Matsuda recalled. "Some died hollering. We lost a lot of guys. All my friends," he recalled, tears in his eyes. "They were all young. They don't what married life is. Or have kids.

"I hate to talk about it."

All of this was news to Terry. "I didn't know about his medals and bravery until fairly recently," she said. "I heard stories from the other men in Company K about my dad, because Dad never talked about his wartime experiences. It's only been very recently that he has been interviewed, and there are things both my mother and I have learned that he's never even shared with her."



Frank and Terry Matsuda



House Speaker John Boehner unveils the Congressional Gold Medal.

At first, they were not allowed to serve in the military. Eventually, the government realized they could serve the country as interpreters and were allowed to volunteer. In fact, their mark as the most decorated combat unit in WWII proved they were pretty good at fighting, too.

Frank Matsuda quickly volunteered. He didn't like harvesting sugar beets and he didn't have many friends at the relocation camp. His unit fought some savage battles, and Frank ended up being wounded near Bifontaine, France. A mortar shell hit him four times, and one piece of metal is still lodged near his liver.



Scene from the Congressional Gold Medal ceremony.

Matsuda recovered and wanted to go back to fighting, but his injuries prevented him from carrying his pack or file, so he ended up guarding prisoners. The war finished, Frank Matsuda carried on with his life.

He was surprised to learn he and his comrades would be receiving the Gold Congressional Medal, like the ones given to the Navajo Code Talkers and the Tuskegee Airmen. One suspects that upon returning home, Frank Matsuda will carry on with his life in much the same way he did after the end of WWII: humbly, and with dignity.

"He is my humble hero, and I'm lucky to be his daughter," Terry said.

Donald J Peters
ATO
4 days ago

Please tell your father thank you from a greatful Nisei. It was men like your father and mine, a simple farm boy from Iowa that inspired me to sereve. To Go For Broke! It should be know to all Americans the hardships and sacrafice these brave American made to protect and save the world. Again thank you so very much!

• **Andrea Houston**
ATO
4 days ago

So true. Terry, your father is truly a wonderful man, and reading this brought tears to my eyes. I love his spirit and his story. We need to always remember to speak of this history of events often to our fellow citizen's and our children - these astounding stories of great sacrifice, tragedy, and courage - lest we all forget. Mr. Matsuda's life encompasses it all and he has a beautiful soul. Thank him for sharing his stories, and give him a deeply heartfelt thank you for his heroism. We need to remember our heroes, forever. This will definitely help me.

Kathryn Vernon
ARC
4 days ago

Terry - Please thank your father for us all - and thank you for sharing his incredible story. As you said, you are lucky to be his daughter, and we are lucky to know him through you. Kathryn

Randy Wickers
ATO
4 days ago

Frank is a supreme role model for Americans...back then, today and for the future... I can only be inspired and thankful for his courageous service to ensure the survival of our nation and also for his love of family. A national treasure!

Isnoelle Sanchez
ATO
3 days ago

Congratulations and indeed its an honor, even to know their sacrifices. As a veteran myself, their heroic achievements are a testament to the human will and adversity. It was indeed an inspiration to all of us, those who are immigrants (and Asian at that) that have served our country's military. I joined the United States Navy in 1992, recruited in Subic Naval Base, Olongapo, Philippines. Proud to have served for 9 years. As a Filipino, it is my hope that another chapter in the annals of the US Military will be reviewed, to give honor to those who fought and died in the Philippines (WWII), as the country was once the only colony of the US. Specially for the Filipinos who died serving the US in the Battle of Bataan and Corregidor. Thank you and I salute you.

Buz Massengale
AVS
2 days ago

There can never be honors great enough, nor gratitude deep enough to express the thanks due to such great heroes as your father, whose sacrifices gave our generation the gifts that it enjoys in the present day.? In addition to remembering those sacrifices made so long ago on foreign shores, as well as those made on our own soil by those fighting at home for their inalienable rights, we must endeavor to capture as much of the vanishing history as we can from the diminishing number of such heroes as Frank Matuda before it disappears completely.

My own father was an officer in the storied 442nd RCT, and I recall listening such of his stories that he felt he could tell his children who were then too young to understand the utter horrors of war that I know he witnessed while serving in Italy and Southern France.? Had he lived long enough, I'm sure I would have had a deeper understanding of and perhaps heard more of what he and the other valiant soldiers of the 442nd endured.

St. Elmo M. Massengale, III

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