

This Day in History... April 5, 1945

“Go For Broke” Day

April 5 is known as “Go For Broke” Day, in honor of the 442nd Infantry Regiment, the most decorated unit for its size in US military history. The regiment was composed entirely of *Nisei* (children of Japanese immigrants) who volunteered to join the war effort, displaying inspiring valor and loyalty to America.

Following the attack on Pearl Harbor, distrust of Japanese Americans was widespread. More than 100,000 Americans of Japanese ancestry were relocated to internment camps in the mainland US. Around the same time, the War Department ordered all soldiers of Japanese ancestry to be removed from active service. In Hawaii, 1,300 Japanese-American members of the National Guard were permitted to continue their service.

Several discharged soldiers of the Hawaii Territorial Guard requested that they be allowed to return to service to aid in the war effort. Their request was approved, and they were designated the Varsity Victory Volunteers. However, some worried about their loyalty in the event of another Japanese attack there. So the Japanese soldiers were organized into the Hawaii Provisional

Battalion and sent to California, where they were re-designated the 100th Infantry Battalion (Separate) on June 15, 1942.

After training, the 100th went to Europe and fought in the Italian Campaign at Monte Cassino, Anzio, and Rome. They earned the nickname “Purple Heart Battalion” at Monte Cassino and quickly proved their loyalty and bravery. As a result of their exemplary service, the War Department decided to create a Japanese-American Combat Team, consisting of the 442nd Infantry Regiment, the 522nd Field Artillery Battalion, and the 232nd Engineer Combat Company. The 442nd Regimental Combat Team (RCT) was activated on February 1, 1943. The RCT had three infantry Battalions – initially the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd, but the 100th Infantry Battalion later took the place of the 1st. The RCT also had an anti-tank company, a cannon company, a service company, a medical detachment, headquarters, and the 206th Army Band.

Generally, the Nisei were not allowed to fight in the Pacific. However, about 6,000 were brought to the Military Intelligence Service to translate Japanese documents. They also went behind enemy lines to intercept Japanese orders. And in battles, they shouted conflicting commands to confuse Japanese soldiers.

Imperforate 2021 Go For Broke stamp



The 442nd RCT arrived at Anzio on May 28, 1944, and saw their first combat at Belvedere in Suvereto, Tuscany, on June 26. The 442nd fought at Hill 140 and Castellina, facing heavy resistance at every step. In September, the antitank company joined in the Southern France Campaign, launching a glider attack and then guarding the 7th Army, clearing mines, capturing enemy troops, and securing roads and tunnels.

The rest of the 442nd arrived in France in late September, fighting in the Vosges Mountains, Bruyères, and Biffontaine. In October, they were tasked with rescuing the “Lost Battalion” (1st Battalion, 141st Infantry, 36th Infantry Division) who had been surrounded by German forces. After five days of fighting the 442nd broke through the German lines, rescuing 211 men, but suffering more than 800 casualties.

In March 1945, the 522nd Field Artillery Battalion was sent to Germany. During their time there, they supported dozens of army units, traveled 1,100 miles, and completed all 52 of their assignments. In late April, they helped liberate the Dachau concentration camp. Also in March, the rest of the 522nd went to Italy, where they helped the break the Gothic Line, which had been at a stalemate for five months. This was their final action of the war.



Members of the 522nd Field Artillery Battalion helped liberate the Dachau concentration camp.



The “stamp our story” campaign worked to get a stamp honoring nisei since 2006.



Initially, only one member of the unit received the Medal of Honor. Decades later, 20 other medals were awarded.

The 442nd (whose total ranks numbered about 18,000) became the most decorated unit for its size in US military history. In less than two years, they earned over 4,000 Purple Hearts, 4,000 Bronze Stars, 560 Silver Stars, 7 Presidential Unit Citations, and 52 Distinguished Service Crosses among others. Initially, only one member received the Medal of Honor during the war. This was later reevaluated, and 20 additional medals were awarded. In 2010, the unit was awarded the Congressional Gold Medal, and in 2012, all survivors were made chevaliers (knights) of the French Legion d’Honneur for their efforts to liberate France and rescue the “Lost Battalion.”

In all, about 33,000 Nisei served, and over 800 gave their lives in the war. Today, April 5 is celebrated as “Go For Broke Day,” a reference to the 442nd RCT’s motto. April 5 was selected because it was on that date in 1945 that the unit’s first Medal of Honor recipient was killed near Seravezza, Italy.

Mystic Stamp Company • Camden, NY 13316

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