

A Father's Experience as a Japanese-American During WWII

As they put their father's papers in order after his death, Tad Tsutsumi's children found a tattered yellow legal pad covered in their dad's distinctive handwriting. The words, "never in my life did I think of myself as anything other than American," caught their attention.

Throughout the years, their father had rarely spoken about his experiences as a young Japanese-American during World War II. They were grateful to discover that just a few months before he died, Tad had written about those experiences to help a young friend with a history paper. In helping that friend, Tad gave his children an insight into his life.

"It meant a lot," said Tad's son, "to see how Dad wrote without bitterness about the hardships his family faced after Pearl Harbor. Reading his words, we felt his great sense of pride in being an American and serving his country."

Tad addressed many of the difficult issues faced by Japanese-Americans of that era. He wrote, "I was not in the segregated Japanese-American 442nd Regimental Combat Unit during the war, although an older brother was an original volunteer for that unit from the Heart Mountain, Wyoming camp."

He explained, "Heart Mountain was one of several internment camps set up for Americans of Japanese ancestry by the United States government after Pearl Harbor. Our family was sent there in 1942 and remained there throughout the war."

Tad went on to note the dilemma about military service that was faced within his community. "It wasn't always an easy decision for young men to volunteer for the segregated unit in the United States military while their families remained imprisoned in the camps."

Despite their imprisonment, however, Tad found a strong feeling of loyalty to America within his family and many others. "We had the willingness to serve not only for ourselves but for America."

After the war ended, Tad served with pride in the United States Army's occupation forces in Germany. "I was one of only a few Japanese-Americans in my

regiment, but I didn't feel the prejudice in Europe I'd felt in the United States. I was just one soldier of many in a peacetime army."

Finally, Tad wrote simply, "On reflecting back, one must conclude that our story was a success story – we were finally accepted as Americans."

Cindy Tsutsumi
November, 2001