

Herbert Yanamura*Herbert Kiyoto Yanamura*

was born in Honaunau, South Kona, the fifth of eight children of an issei coffee farmer.

Herbert's father, Sakamatsu, emigrated from Yamaguchi prefecture and settled on the Big Island of Hawaii. His mother, the former Esther Tatsuyo Tachibana, was a Hawaii-born Nisei.

By 1940, the two eldest children, Harold and Violet, were no longer living at home, but the Yanamuras still had sons Alfred, David, Herbert, Kenneth and Franklin and daughter Bertha to help with the hard work of growing coffee.

Herbert was a Konawaena High School senior when he volunteered for the 442nd Regimental Combat Team in 1943. When he asked his father for permission, Herbert recalls, "His immediate response was, 'By all means, you must volunteer. This is your chance to show your loyalty to this country.'"

In April 1943, he was among 2,600 Hawaii volunteers who shipped out to Mississippi. A few months later, 250 volunteers, including Yanamura, whose parents had insisted on their children speaking proper Nihongo at home, were transferred to the Military Intelligence Service, which sorely needed linguists for the war against Japan.

After training, Herbert was assigned to the 314th Headquarters Intelligence Detachment, a team of 10 AJAs (Americans of Japanese Ancestry) attached to the 96th Infantry Division, which took part in the invasion of Leyte in the Philippines in October 1944. Then came April 1, 1945, the day of the invasion of Okinawa.

Although assigned to division headquarters, Herbert volunteered to get closer to the action. He was then transferred to the 381st Infantry Regiment for the final, ferocious push south against the Japanese defenders. The Battle of Okinawa cost the U.S. 50,000 in lives, both casualties and wounded personnel.

Japan lost more than 100,000 soldiers. More than 140,000 civilians, nearly one-third of Okinawa's population, died in the battle. The toll could have been worse.



On June 21, 1945, GIs were at Machira, which they referred to as Madeera. The Americans believed an enemy command post was in the village and prepared to level it with artillery. However, civilians had been seen there, and Yanamura volunteered to try to talk them into leaving.

A loudspeaker was set up, and he spent three hours urging people to come out. Major Thomas Teague, the 381st intelligence chief, wrote that enemy resistance in that sector was especially fanatical and included many infiltrators. "Knowing that a loudspeaker system would be a target of primary importance to the enemy, T/3 Yanamura nevertheless stood his post and conducted the appeal in a most superior manner."

Teague said Yanamura singlehandedly convinced hundreds to come out. "(The) 381st Infantry alone processed over 1,500 civilians and 141 prisoners of war, and many others were seen surrendering to adjacent units." He said Yanamura volunteered the next day to make another appeal that yielded hundreds more evacuees, and a few days later, braved enemy grenades to appeal to holdouts in a cave.

"These are a few of the instances that demonstrate the performance of this and other Nisei interpreters assigned to work with regimental headquarters," Teague wrote, singling out Yanamura's "untiring efforts, his superior devotion to duty, and his disregard for personal safety."

Herbert was discharged in February 1946. He attended the University of Hawaii, earning a BS in agriculture in 1950. He worked as a federal soil conservationist, and later as an agricultural land specialist for the State of Hawaii. In 1952 he married Chiyo Sasaki of Honolulu. They had a son, Jay, daughter, Amy, and four grandchildren. Chiyo passed away in 2006.



In 2013, Herbert attended a ceremony on Okinawa honoring the MIS Nisei. There he met Hatsuko Tomori, who was a 10-year-old girl when his voice on the loudspeaker saved her life. Their emotional reunion drew wide media attention and was the subject of a 2015 movie, "The Surrender Call."



Herbert said, "At that time of the war, it was very gratifying that we were able to convince the villagers to surrender and avoid the terrible loss of life that had happened elsewhere in Okinawa. But it's even more gratifying to learn that the people we helped went on to raise families and enjoy their lives, and that they appreciate what we did for them."

