



Our Story. Your Rights.

National Japanese American Memorial Foundation

Then and Now: The Story of “The Lost Battalion” & the 442nd Regimental Combat Team

On October 24, 1944, 65 years ago, the 1st Battalion, 141st Infantry Regiment of the 36th Infantry Division was surrounded by Nazi forces during World War II in the Vosges Mountains of Northern France. The 141st Regiment, originally from The Texas National Guard, had been known for its military successes involving fending off the Nazis, 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.”

After two failed attempts to rescue the 141st by other units of the 36th Division, the 442nd Regimental Combat Team, a unit comprised mostly of Japanese Americans, and attached to the 36th, was ordered to liberate the Texas regiment trapped nearly 9 miles away.

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 that was the 141st's original objective. From Bruyeres through the Vosges, the 442nd combat team suffered tremendous losses of more than 400 men, more than half its original strength. I Company went to battle with 185 men, only 8 left the battlefield uninjured. K Company began with 186 men, only 17 were uninjured.

The 442nd is the most decorated unit in U.S. military history for its size and length of service, with its component 100th Infantry Battalion earning the nickname “The Purple Heart Battalion.”

The 442nd had been born of an American tragedy that did not end entirely for another 45 years. In February of 1942, President Franklin 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 U.S. 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.



Soldiers from the 442nd receiving medals



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By any measure, the 442nd was among the bravest American fighting forces in the Second World War - and the battle to reach and rescue the Lost Battalion was one of the bloodiest. The 442nd never hesitated, went for broke, and won a great victory for the United States and the cause of freedom. Four decades later, when the historic Civil Liberties Act of 1988 proposed to apologize for the internment and offer redress to survivors, it was those same veterans of the 442nd and other Japanese American veterans of the War who offered powerful testimony of their sacrifice and offered a proud legacy to our posterity.



Soldiers from the 141st Battalion



The crane sculpture at the Memorial in Washington, DC

The 442nd and the 141st Together Again

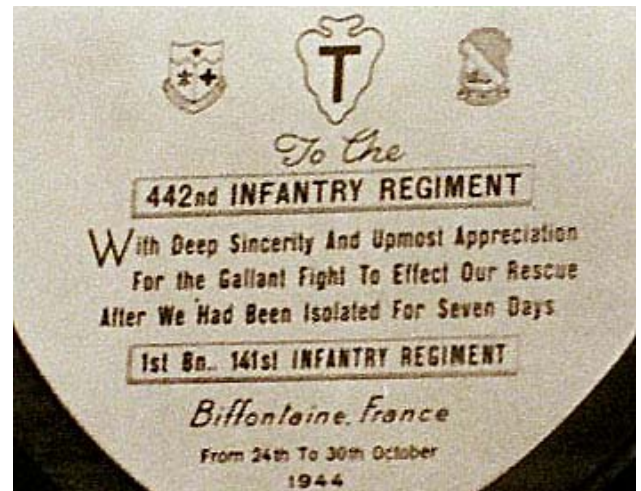
Today, 65 years after the battle, surviving veterans of the 141st and the 442nd embody the heroism and patriotism of all American service men and women during the Second World War. Still, the 141st and the 442nd offer something else: a reminder of the promise of America, and how fragile that promise can be if racism, wartime hysteria and failing leadership are left unchallenged.

Together, the 141st and the 442nd leave an unforgettable legacy for America. The **National Japanese American Memorial to Patriotism During World War II** in Washington, DC was dedicated in 2000 to remind everyone about the sacrifices made to ensure America's freedom and the rights of all Americans to equal justice under law.

The "Homecoming for Heroes Gala"

On November 1, 2009 members of the 141st and the 442nd will be reunited once again for the 65th anniversary of the rescue of the "Lost Battalion" at the "Homecoming for Heroes Gala" in Houston, Texas. The purposes will be many:

- To honor American heroes.
- To educate Americans about their history - *our* history.
- To create educational curriculum about the "Lost Battalion" and the 442nd.
- To launch an ambitious fundraising project: replicating part of the Memorial - the crane entangled in the barbed wire - in select cities and at former internment camp sites around the United States. The first replica is proposed to be placed in Texas, specifically to honor the 141st and the 442nd.



A plaque honoring the 442nd Battalion