

## **Hawaii Guardsmen capture prisoner of war number one**

By Retired Master Sgt. Stephen M. Lum

*It was more than a year since the Hawaii Guard was mobilized (Oct. 15, 1940), as German and Japanese military forces were invading Europe and the Asian-Pacific Theatres. The United States was drawn into World War II with the bombing of Pearl Harbor.*

Hawaii National Guard Soldiers from Co. G, 298<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment were doing their pre-invasion mission of guarding the northeastern sector of Oahu on Dec. 7, 1941.

“That morning we noticed smoke rising from Kaneohe Air Base,” said Cpl. Thomas Kiyoshi “Kewpie” Tsubota, American of Japanese Ancestry Guardsman. “A plane with a red ‘hinomaru’ beneath its wings (Japanese Zeros) flew over. We thought it was just maneuvers until the machine gun firing (our gunners returning fire) strafed near Bellows Airfield. Then we knew it was for real.”

Guard Soldiers were dispatched to “nearby” Diamond Head’s Fort Ruger to secure ammunition, Bellows was not authorized to have large amounts of ammunition.

Private Quirino F. “Joe” Oligario was as at his lookout in the hills of Waimanalo in the pre-dawn hours the day after Pearl Harbor was attacked when he saw something off the shores of Bellows beach. The Waimanalo-raised Guardsman could not leave his post so he radios his Co. G headquarters. Joe died at age 82 in Hawaii in 1997. He was a staff sergeant when he was deactivated.

The incident is investigated by a jeep-load of Co. G Heavy Weapons Platoon Guardsmen led by Lt. Paul G. “Playboy” Plybon and Cpl. David M. Akui. Hawaii-born native Hawaiian Akui sees an object off shore (which turns out to be a Japanese midget sub) and then spots a body on the beach. He then grabs a M1 Garand rifle from the jeep and fires a warning shot between the legs of the body. The survivor regains consciousness, opening his eyes to the barrel of Plybon’s M1911 45 caliber pistol and Akui’s rifle. Plybon would die during the war in the South Pacific.

Japanese Imperial Navy Ensign Kazuo Sakamaki, survivor of a two-man Haramaki 19 Midget Submarine, is captured by the Guardsmen and becomes the United States’ prisoner of war number one. Sakamaki says to Guardsmen in broken English, “I am cold.” Tsubota tried to question Sakamaki who refused to answer in either English or Japanese. Tsubota becomes the first Nisei (second Japanese generation Hawaii-born) to engage in interrogation of a Japanese POW in World War II.

Sakamaki spends most of his incarceration at Camp McCoy, Wis. After the war he is released and began working at Toyota Motor Corporation. He became president of its subsidiary in Brazil in 1967. He died in Japan in 1999 at the age of 81.

The second sailor from the two-man sub was Japanese Petty Officer 2<sup>nd</sup> Class Kiyoshi Inagaki. Inagaki’s mangled body washes on the beach three days later and Tsubota used his blanket to cover the body of the dead engineer. Inagaki, whose death is attributed to injuries and drowning, is taken away and buried.

Nisei Pvts. Seisho Okuma and Takuya “Roy” Terada, and Cpl. Tsubota, are AJAs Guardsmen who were at the Bellows beach incident but not mentioned in most published and online reports. They go on to be part of the 100<sup>th</sup> Infantry Battalion that first trains at Camp McCoy, Wis.

Okuma, like many second generation Japanese, is almost mistaken for an “enemy” Japanese National because his English was very poor. He survives the battles in the European Theatre, but died in 1953, at age 36.

Terada, who had witnessed the attack on Pearl Harbor the day, before is mentioned in a Hawaii Herald article and “The Anguish of Surrender - Japanese POWs of World War II” by Ulrich A. Strauss, and became a Japanese linguist with the Military Intelligence Service.

Tsubota’s Japanese language education is noted and he is “volunteered” to be a trained interpreter/translator with the MIS and is one of 14 AJAs to volunteers to serve with the Merrill’s 5307th Composite Unit (Provisional). At the time of this article he is still alive, wrote his account and it was published in the Hawaii Herald and is available on the 100<sup>th</sup> Bn. website.

Akui also went on to be a part of Gen. Frank Merrill’s Marauders, fighting in Burma (Myanmar). After the war, Akui continued his Hawaii Guard service until 1959, when he enlisted in the in Naval Reserve. He died in 1987 at age 67.

The damaged HA-19 brought to Pearl Harbor. The sub is shipped to the U.S. mainland for intensive study by naval intelligence and later used for War Bond rallies. It is presently at the National Museum of the Pacific War, “the Nimitz Museum,” in Fredericksburg, Texas, hometown of Fleet Adm. Chester W. Nimitz.