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CONGRESSIONAL GOLD MEDAL DIGITAL EXHIBITION TO HIGHLIGHT NISEI SOLDIER STORIES, INCLUDING EXPLOITS OF KAZUO MASUDA, TAKEJIRO HIGA, SEN. DANIEL INOUE

TORRANCE, CA.—The stories of the World War II Nisei soldiers, including the exploits of heroes like Kazuo Masuda, Takejiro Higa and U.S. Senator Daniel Inouye, will be highlighted in the upcoming Congressional Gold Medal Digital Exhibition to be developed by the National Veterans Network (NVN) in association with the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History. The medal is on display in the museum's **Price of Freedom: Americans at War** exhibition. The digital exhibition is scheduled to launch in 2016 and a video for the digital exhibition will be on view with the medal. The digital exhibition is funded in part by the National Parks Service (NPS) and is a partnership between the NVN and the Smithsonian's Asian Pacific American Center (APAC) and the National Museum of American History.

One of the stories featured is about Kazuo Masuda, who gave his life for his country, even as his family was incarcerated in Arkansas and his father was isolated in a detention camp in Montana. Born and raised in Westminster, California, to a farming family, Kazuo enlisted in the Army before the United States entered the war. Eventually assigned to F Company of the 442nd R.C.T., Staff Sgt. Masuda saved two of his men by holding off the enemy in action near Florence, Italy, in 1944 but was killed. He was posthumously awarded the Distinguished Service Cross (DSC).

Sadly, when his family tried to resettle in Santa Ana, they were met with threats of violence and Kazuo was refused burial in the local cemetery. The Army responded by sending an official delegation to present the DSC medal to his family. One of the officials was Capt. Ronald Reagan, who thanked Kazuo's parents for their son's heroism. Decades later when the Civil Liberties Act of 1988 was passed by Congress and was sent to President Reagan, the bill's fate was uncertain. Proponents of Japanese American redress and reparations were able to share a letter from Kazuo's sister, June Masuda Goto, which reminded the President of Kazuo's sacrifice. President Reagan signed the bill into law on August 10, 1988.

Takejiro Higa was born in Waipahu, Hawaii, but went to Okinawa with his siblings and mother when he was two. Because of family circumstances, Higa remained in Okinawa until he was 16. Upon returning to Hawaii in 1939, he entered Farrington High School to improve his English. When the war began, his older brother Warren volunteered to serve.

Takejiro was uncertain because of his ties to Okinawa, but eventually volunteered and went to the Military Intelligence Service Language School.

Higa was assigned to the 96th Infantry Division and it was his intimate knowledge of Okinawa's terrain, language (different from Japanese) and customs that proved invaluable to the American invasion. Working as a translator, interpreter and interrogator, Higa provided vital intelligence during the three-month battle. Takejiro was responsible for saving lives by convincing civilians hiding in caves to surrender rather than kill themselves by speaking to them in *Uchinaguchi* (Okinawan). Takejiro Higa's story exemplifies the contributions of Japanese American MIS members.

The late Daniel Inouye is well known as Hawaii's long-time U.S. Senator, elected eight times beginning in 1962. He became President pro tempore of the Senate in 2010, placing him third in line of succession to the presidency. Born and raised in Hawaii, Inouye dreamed of being a doctor when the war began. The government prohibited him and other Japanese Americans to join the military, designating them as "enemy aliens".

When the government lifted its restrictions, Inouye and thousands of Japanese Americans volunteered. A member of E Company, Inouye rose to 2nd Lieutenant when, in 1945, his company attacked a German stronghold in San Terenzo, Italy. Inouye crawled to within five yards of a machine gun, which he neutralized, but a grenade shattered his right arm, which was amputated. Initially presented with the Distinguished Service Cross, Inouye was later recognized with the Medal of Honor along with 19 other members of the 442nd R.C.T. by President Clinton in 2000. After his passing in 2012, Senator Inouye was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom.

"These three stories are a small representative of the remarkable gallantry and dedication demonstrated by Japanese Americans in many capacities in the U.S. Armed Forces during World War II," explained Christine Sato-Yamazaki, executive director of the National Veterans Network. "This digital exhibition will ensure that the contributions of our Nisei veterans will be shared as part of our American history at the Smithsonian."

The National Veterans Network is a coalition of organizations and individuals dedicated to educating the nation on the Japanese American World War II experience. NVN led a national campaign in 2009 to award the Congressional Gold Medal to the 100th, 442nd and MIS. NVN is consulting with the Congressional Gold Medal National Academic Advisory Council, a body organized for this project, which is scheduled for completion in 2016. For more information on this exhibition, go to: <http://youtu.be/NI5HheyO7o>

NVN is still fundraising to ensure the timely completion of the Congressional Gold Medal digital exhibition. To make a year-end donation or for more information, go to www.nationalveteransnetwork.com. For more information on the National Veterans Network, email info@nationalveteransnetwork.com.

The Smithsonian Asian Pacific American Center is a national resource for discovering the consequence and complexity of the Asian Pacific American experience through collaboration, exhibitions, programs, and digital initiatives: <http://www.apa.si.edu>

The National Museum of American History

Through incomparable collections, rigorous research and dynamic public outreach, the National Museum of American History explores the infinite richness and complexity of American history. The museum helps people understand the past in order to make sense of the present and shape a more humane future. It is currently renovating its west exhibition wing, developing galleries on business, democracy and culture. For more information, location and hours, visit <http://americanhistory.si.edu>.

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