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## **FAMILY MEMBERS CONNECT SECRETARY MINETA, KRISTI YAMAGUCHI TO SMITHSONIAN’S CONGRESSIONAL GOLD MEDAL DIGITAL EXHIBITION BROADER MILITARY STORY**

TORRANCE, CA.—When some people first hear about the Congressional Gold Medal Digital Exhibition being developed by the National Veterans Network (NVN) and the Smithsonian for launching in 2016, they understandably believe the story will concentrate on the exploits of the famed Japanese American 100<sup>th</sup> Infantry Battalion, 442<sup>nd</sup> Regimental Combat Team and members of the Military Intelligence Service (MIS). But this exhibition is also based on the military service of nearly 31,000 Japanese Americans who served in many capacities during World War II. As individuals like Olympic Gold Medalist Kristi Yamaguchi and former Secretary of Transportation Norman Mineta know, their family members’ stories represent a diverse experience.

Yamaguchi’s grandfather, George A. Doi, made an outstanding contribution as an individual. Born in San Diego in 1915, George worked as an auto mechanic when he was drafted into the Army in September of 1941 before Pearl Harbor. While George’s family was incarcerated, first at Heart Mountain, Wyoming, and then Amache, Colorado, Doi was assigned to the Quartermaster Company of the 100<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, a non-segregated unit. A graduate of the University of Southern California with an electrical engineering degree, Doi was promoted three times in a year, holding the rank of Staff Sergeant in 1943.

His ability to locate supplies not available through regular channels during combat, especially tools and parts to keep army vehicles running, was cited in his discharge papers. It was crucial as the 100<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division attacked the Germans in the Vosges Mountains in France and fought off enemy advances during the Battle of the Bulge. Doi served as a platoon commander and earned the Bronze Star for “meritorious service in support of combat operations from November 1, 1944, to April 8, 1945.”

A field promotion elevated Doi to the rank of Second Lieutenant, an event recorded in both the *New York Times* and the *San Diego Union* in 1945. Lauded for his leadership, his promotion papers stated, “George A. Doi has handled men in his platoon under trying conditions without benefit of officer supervision and has constantly been an inspiration to men under his command.” Capt. James Dougherty added, “He is unquestionably the company’s best soldier.”

Doi returned to the United States at the end of 1945 and settled in Gardena. He and his wife Kathleen had three children, including Carole, Gary and Nancy. Carole Doi married Jim Yamaguchi and started their family, including Lori, Brett and Kristi. Kristi rose to fame as a figure skater, winning two World Championships and the 1992 Olympic Gold Medal. In 2008, she became the celebrity champion of the ABC television show, “Dancing with the Stars.”

Norm Mineta’s older brother Albert is an example of another important Japanese American story: the occupation of Japan. The Mineta family was forced from their home in San Jose to eventually live in the Heart Mountain, Wyoming camp. Norm was only 10 when the war began, but Albert was 18 and tried to enlist. According to Norm, Japanese Americans were considered enemy aliens after the war began and Albert’s enlistment was denied. It was, Norm recalled, “the first time I ever saw my brother cry.”

Eventually, the government lifted its restrictions and Albert, who was allowed to attend college outside of camp, was sent to the Military Intelligence Service Language School (MISLS) at Fort Snelling, Minnesota, in early 1945. By the time he graduated, the war was over, but the occupation of Japan had just begun. Assigned to serve in Tokyo, Albert had the rare opportunity as a Japanese American to check on the status of his father’s family. Borrowing a bicycle and wearing his Army uniform, Albert pedaled to the suburbs where he searched for hours for his grandfather’s house.

Knocking on the door, Albert could hear voices, but no one would speak to him. After 40 minutes, a young boy was sent out and Albert announced in Japanese, “I am Albert Mineta, the first son of Kunisaku Mineta and I am here to pay my respects to my grandfather.” After another long wait, Albert was allowed to enter. His grandfather appeared and Albert repeated his greeting. His grandfather replied, “Long have I dreamed of visiting my grandchildren in America. But never did I imagine that one would come here, in uniform of the enemy.” His grandfather then left Albert alone in the room.

Albert returned to his base, but went back every week or so, bicycling the two hours to his grandfather’s house with food and other items like sugar, salt and cigarettes. His grandfather refused to speak to Albert until, after many months, he emerged and revealed, “I like the tobacco with the Rising Sun on it.” Albert’s grandfather was referencing the design of the Lucky Strikes cigarette packaging, which had a red target logo on a white background. Lucky Strikes were included in Army C rations and proved to be a bridge for the Mineta family after the war.

Both of these stories represent the scope of what the Congressional Gold Medal Digital Exhibition hopes to capture. NVN led a national campaign in 2009 to award the Congressional Gold Medal to the 100<sup>th</sup>, 442<sup>nd</sup> and MIS. The medal is on display as part of

the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History's **Price of Freedom: Americans at War** exhibition. The CGM digital exhibition will launch in 2016 and a video for the digital exhibition will be on view with the medal. The digital exhibition is funded in part a grant from the U.S. Dept. of the Interior, National Parks Service (NPS), Japanese American Confinement Sites Grant Program. It is a partnership between the NVN and the Smithsonian's Asian Pacific American Center (APAC) and the National Museum of American History.

Secretary Mineta and Kristi Yamaguchi are supporting the creation of the digital exhibition through their participation in the Congressional Gold Medal Dinner set for the Fairmont Hotel in San Jose on Friday, June 12, beginning at 6 p.m. Space is limited. The dinner will also feature a special "thank you" to former Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric Shinseki, who will also be the keynote speaker. Secretary Shinseki has his own family connection to the Japanese American World War II military experience: three of his uncles served with the 442<sup>nd</sup> R.C.T. For more information on the dinner, contact Reiko Iwanaga at [riwanaga@ecopiafarms.com](mailto:riwanaga@ecopiafarms.com).

**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 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>. For more information on NVN or how to support the digital exhibition, e-mail [info@nationalveteransnetwork.com](mailto:info@nationalveteransnetwork.com).

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