A Connecticut Yankee in Nisei King Company’s Court:
With the Japanese American 442nd RCT in World War II

By Robert Hutchinson Foote J. G. Schurman Professor Emeritus Department of Animal Science Cornell University

©2005 by Robert H. Foote

Published by
The Internet-First University Press

This manuscript is among the initial offerings being published as part of a new approach to scholarly publishing. The manuscript is freely available from the Internet-First University Press repository within DSpace at Cornell University at

http://dspace.library.cornell.edu/handle/1813/62

The online version of this work is available on an open access basis, without fees or restrictions on personal use. A professionally printed and bound version may be purchased through Cornell Business Services by contacting:

digital@cornell.edu

All mass reproduction, even for educational or not-for-profit use, requires permission and license. We will provide a downloadable version of this document from the Internet-First University Press. For more information, please contact dcaps@cornell.edu.

Ithaca, N.Y. February 2005
A Connecticut Yankee in Nisei King Company’s Court: With the Japanese-American 442nd RCT in World War II

Robert Hutchinson Foote
Professor Emeritus
Cornell University,
Ithaca, New York
(Formerly, 1st Lt., Company K, 442)
CONTENTS

Dedication 3

Preface 4

Chapter 1. The Nisei and the Author 6

Who Were the Nisei of the 442nd RCT?
Where Did the Nisei Come From to Form this Army Unit?
Where Did the Author Come From?
Foote, You’re in the Army Now

Chapter 2. The 442nd Goes Into Battle 11

The Rome-Arno Campaign
The Rhineland Campaign (I Will Never Forget)
The Champagne Campaign (I Was in the Hospital)
Going Home? No! Cracking the Gothic Line

Chapter 3. What Now? 18

The End and the Beginning
When the War Was Over in Europe
Starting a New Life Back Home

Appendix 22

Famous Quotations that Aptly Reflect the Spirit and Legacy
of the Men of the 442
A Poem by the Author
Dedication

To all *Buddaheads* and *kotonks* in the 442nd RCT and attached Nisei units, and all medical staff at all levels who saved so many lives, this memoir is dedicated. Sir Winston Churchill’s famous statement, “Never in the field of human conflict was so much owed by so many to so few,” aptly applies to these men and women.
Preface

The history for this memoir has been a long time in the making, going back to my own roots 77 years ago and my ancestral roots in the United States of America 369 years ago. For many years I convinced myself, and I think rightly so, that my wartime experiences were something to forget. One must live life forward. I didn’t want my growing sons or my wife to have nightmares about war; I hoped that would never happen again in their lifetime. Of course, that was an idealistic, even naive assumption. My oldest son served in the Vietnam War, although not in the infantry. As Lt. Young Oak Kim, (a Korean-American in the 442nd) said in an interview with Thelma Chang, author of the book I Can Never Forget: “War is as close to hell on earth as man can create, and why people fight them, if you've ever been in one, you never understand.”

For many years after the war Americans generally knew little about the exploits of these heroic Americans who were of Japanese ancestry. The Nisei and a few Sansei veterans (respectively, second and third generations of Japanese-Americans) said little after the war about the fierce battles they fought, as they gently helped parents to resettle, and raised their own families--those who could return home. A movie made in the 1950s carried the 442nd “Go For Broke” insignia as its title. But that was a Hollywood version, not a war documentary. Also, only recently has it been generally known that Nisei in the United States Military Intelligence Service played an important role in winning the war in the Pacific. However, that is not a part of our story.

Eventually, several superb books were written, documenting the unjust uprooting of all mainland USA Japanese families after the Pearl Harbor attack. These books detail the volunteering, formation, training and the remarkable wartime performance of these young Americans of Japanese ancestry, usually referred to as Japanese-Americans. Few books were written by the soldiers themselves, who slogged through the mud and fought the battles, and none that I am aware of were written by a haole (a Caucasian mainland) frontline officer. The viewpoint and intensity of feeling are different from the foxhole than from the seat by the fireplace.

From the title of the memoir it is obvious that I am a haole. In the waning years of my life I have felt compelled to relate this account. It was important to do it quickly, or it never would have been done. Besides I was rapidly running out of boxes of Kleenex after I started to write it. Most of the officers were haoles, except those from the Hawaiian Guard. Many could have told a similar story and written it better, but most didn’t. A poem I wrote in 1992, reflecting some of these sentiments is appended.

So this is my story. It is not a historical document. The only dates I am sure are correct are those supplied to me by my US Army 201 file, giving dates relative to my joining the 442nd, being wounded, and rejoining the unit, I have woven these into the military campaigns of the fighting 442nd RCT.

It is unfortunate that unnecessary tragedies seem to be necessary to bring forth our compassion for the innocent dying person, no matter what shape of helmet he wore. As you read this short memoir, let your mind ponder and your heart vibrate, recognizing that there is great potential for good in each of us. This potential is the human mind and spirit; it has nothing to do with size, shape or any superficial characteristic often used to judge a stranger until he or she becomes our friend. The innocent children now and of future generations deserve to inherit this legacy.
Certainly I owe a great debt of gratitude to many people. They are too numerous to mention individually, but I give thanks to all who made my life and this brief memoir possible.

If readers have any constructive comments or questions they wish to relay, they could be sent by e-mail to rhf4@Cornell.edu, or to the author’s mail address at 204 Morrison Hall, Cornell University, Ithaca, NY 14853.
Chapter 1. The Nisei and the Author

Who Were the Nisei of the 442nd RCT?

As mentioned in the Preface, several books now have been written about the first generation of Japanese (Issei) who came to Hawaii and the western part of the United States. However, a short overview here will help to put the events of this memoir in perspective. It was mostly the next generation (Nisei), and a few second generation (Sansei) boys born in Hawaii and the mainland USA who served in the 442nd Regimental Combat Team (RCT). The parents or grandparents of these American-born sons had come to this country seeking a better life. The kids had grown up in caring, loving families, with typical Asian self-discipline and respect for others; they were as American as apple pie. They put tremendous emphasis on the work ethic and on education. There was no excuse for failure! As I will tell you later, these were the same principles that governed my family too, except 11 generations separated me from my pioneering ancestor, Nathaniel Foote.

Where Did the Nisei Come From to Form this Army Unit?

It was a cruel and tortuous journey that these peace-loving American families went through en route to establishing the 442nd RCT. It all began with the attack on Pearl Harbor, December 7, 1941. The 160,000 Japanese-Americans in Hawaii were viewed with suspicion, but were not relocated. However, the 110,000 or more persons of Japanese ancestry on the mainland, including 70,000 in that group who were native-born American citizens, were disenfranchised. The adults were mostly hard-working farmers and small shopkeepers, and the children ranged from new babies to college graduates. In the Spring of 1942 they were summarily removed to 10 hastily, poorly constructed concentration camps. They had only 7 to 10 days to dispose of the property that they had worked all their lives to obtain. Camps had little privacy, sanitation or medical care.

There was no basis for issuing the evacuation order, except fear, as no Japanese-American was ever found to commit any act of espionage or sabotage. General Dewitt, who issued the evacuation order, was obviously biased as he said: “A Jap’s a Jap,” regardless of citizenship.

All first-generation Japanese (Issei) were designated aliens. How could they be American citizens, as federal law denied them the right to apply for citizenship? They did the best they could in camps with limited facilities to continue the education of the children and to provide a variety of positive activities. An example of the stupidity or unreasonableness of the authorities was not allowing kids to take baseball bats to the camps because these were “dangerous weapons.” Friends of the kids pointed out that these bats were only used by the kids to “keep their eye on the ball.”

Back in Hawaii already there were the Hawaiian Territorial Guard and National Guard units containing many Nisei soldiers. The first gut reaction was to order all these men of Japanese ancestry discharged. How could officials do this when the men had displayed unswerving devotion to the United States? Eventually cooler heads prevailed and the order was rescinded. These men formed the famed 100th Battalion that eventually became the 1st Battalion of the 442nd RCT. They were sent (1300 men and 29 officers) to Camp McCoy, Wisconsin for further training on June 5, 1942. There they
trained for seven months. Gradually they were accepted by the natives of Wisconsin, based on their model behavior off the post and rescuing several residents from drowning in a frozen lake. The unit was moved to Camp Shelby, Mississippi in February, 1943.

Because of the excellent training record of the 100th Battalion and the constant request of young men in the camps (supported by prominent Caucasians) to serve their country, President Roosevelt opened the opportunity for these men to volunteer for service. He said: “No loyal citizen should be denied the democratic right to exercise the responsibilities of his citizenship, regardless of ancestry. The principle on which this country was founded and by which it has always been governed is that Americanism is a matter of the mind and heart; Americanism is not, and never was, a matter of race or ancestry.” Unfortunately, this had not been the spirit behind the mass movement by government order in 1942. However, on February 1, 1943, the 442nd Regimental Combat Team was formed with 1,500 volunteers from the mainland and 3,000 from Hawaii.

There were many complications. The mainland soldiers came from a somewhat different culture than the soldiers from Hawaii. Camp Shelby was a mess, and weather was terrible in February. Clothing was a misfit, because small sizes were needed almost universally. At one point the army, to supply small sizes, shipped in WAC clothing, including women’s undies, which were, as you could imagine, rejected. Fortunately, much was improved at the Camp by April when the 4,500 men arrived and started training in May.

The 100th Battalion by now was a combat-ready unit. They left for North Africa in August, 1943. It was nine months later before the 442nd was ready to join them. By that time the 100th Battalion, attached to the 34th Division, had established a remarkable fighting record. General Mark Clark, commander of the 5th Army, sent a message to Chief of Staff General Marshall stating “They ... performed magnificently on the field of battle. I never had such fine soldiers. Send me all you got.” They gained terrific respect among the rest of the soldiers of the 34th Division, and eventually some Caucasian folks back home began to get the right idea. These Americans were fighting for democracy against a common enemy. They were demonstrating their loyalty at the same time.

**Where Did the Author Come From?**

As I mentioned earlier, I was one of the 11th generation of Footes in the New World. Nathaniel Foote (the First) had come from England about 1630 with a group that followed the Mayflower by a decade. With him came his wife, and probably six children, including a baby about one year old. Imagine traveling for weeks on the restless ocean, no electricity, no washers or driers, no radios, no flush toilets, nor most of the material goods we consider as essential, and certainly no luxuries. But they had the pioneering spirit and love of God. Were they exiled dissidents, or were they seeking freedom, or both?

Nathaniel is found in the first records among those who left Massachusetts and settled in Connecticut by 1635. There are no surviving records of their travels, but we can imagine what it must have been like to push through the wilderness. Weeks of wandering through forests and meadows, rain and muck, across unbridged streams, over rough steep hills, surrounded by wild beasts and, understandably, native Americans that were not always friendly, did not deter a band of about 60 people. They were
determined that nothing short of the will of God would stop them. In a few years these settlers in Wethersfield, near the Connecticut River, were framing the new orders of their adopted home. They were committed “to maintain and preserve the liberty and purity of the Gospel of our Lord Jesus ... and be governed and guided by such laws, rules, orders and decrees as shall be made, ordained and declared” by the General Court. The Court was to be appointed by the Freemen of the Commonwealth. This was the beginning of the Commonwealth of Connecticut.

Life was tough, but I doubt that they regarded it as tough in the same way that sometimes leads us to succumb to minor challenges. They were agricultural laborers, and “jack-of-all-trades,” using their muscles and mental agility to fell trees, clear forests, build houses, till the soil, plant crops, attend to family problems, and care for multiple illnesses. Despite the frequent loss of loved ones, they never turned back.

Through the years generations have worked the land and served their country in many capacities. Of course, there were infusions by other immigrants (mostly from Europe in my home town). Over the USA these hardy people from East and West added great strength to the diversity that characterizes our country today.

On August 20, 1922, I became the fourth child born to parents Robert E. and Annie Hutchinson Foote. I had an older brother and two older sisters. I, Robert (Bob) Hutchinson Foote, grew up on the same farm where I was born. My parents also grew up on farms, and despite the rigorous requirements of farm life they were the first farm kids in Gilead, Connecticut to go to college. My mother was well-trained in English, Latin and French, and my dad in mathematics, chemistry and physics.

Why have I traced my roots? Because these roots, as well as wartime service, played a major role in molding both my early and adult life. I went to a one-room school with eight grades. I revere my grammar school teachers, but mom and dad were my greatest teachers, though unrecognized as such by me as a kid. When I came to a strange word mother would help me dissect it, breaking it into components derived from Latin roots. My father began asking me questions about how old would Mary be in 10 years without telling me how old she was now. How could I figure that out? He gave me a bit more information, and for me this was the beginning of the concepts of algebra. With this kind of environment and encouragement, years later I realized that I was supported and encouraged by my family and teachers to do whatever I possibly was capable of doing. I was much more fortunate than many others!

All the growing years before college, the dairy farm required feeding calves and cows, as well as milking cows seven days a week. There were always other jobs, such as repairing equipment and buildings, preparing the soil, planting and fertilizing crops, hoeing out the weeds and harvesting the crops. Sunday morning was especially busy in order to get the chores finished quickly, clean up, eat a good breakfast and get to the church on time every Sunday.

Our luxuries on the farm were few. But we were well-fed, and spiritually nourished with unbounded love. Space does not permit the recounting of the tender loving care all the children received, combined at the same time with a fair and firm demand that we
perform many tasks on time according to the best of our ability. These were the days of the Great Depression! Planning, self-discipline and hard work were essential ingredients of family and economic survival.

Life and the spirit in my family probably were similar in many ways to the life of the young Nisei men who became the famous soldiers of World War II. Of course, some of them may have faced discrimination in school by classmates from biased families. I never faced that situation; my family was part of the establishment.

After High School it was on to the University of Connecticut, spending summers helping on the home farm. During the college years, 1939 to 1943, some of my classmates were drafted. As commencement approached, many of us were thankful that the Armed Services allowed us to graduate. I had been inducted into the Army, with others, on March 4, 1943, but put on inactive status until graduation. The glorious day of commencement arrived, with all its pomp and ceremony. Each recipient of a degree was given a handshake by the University of Connecticut president and the governor of Connecticut. It was a day of great euphoria as well as sadness, as we bid farewell. Those of us going immediately into the infantry branch of the Army held no illusions about the fact that some of us would never see each other again, at least on this Earth.

**Foote, You’re in the Army Now**

The marching orders came. Private Foote was ordered to report to Ft. Devens, Massachusetts on June 14, 1943. I was 20 years old. There I did KP (Kitchen Police) duty at 4 a.m. for a few days. This was easy for me after having arisen early to milk cows at home and open the University of Connecticut dairy processing plant at 5 a.m. during my student days.

Then it was on to Togus, Maine for basic training. However, soon I was given an opportunity to go to Officer Candidate School (OCS). After a 2- or 3-day slow, hot ride in an old train I arrived at Ft. Benning, Georgia, home of the U.S. Army Infantry School. On July 7, 1943 I began the OCS course, and on November 11, I became a “90-day wonder,” a 2nd lieutenant. Training at OCS was thorough and tough. I won’t bore or excite you with details. One incident, however, had a great impact on my life. It also illustrates the spirit and good discipline that the armed services provide.

Every officer candidate had to go before the “old man” (colonel, commandant) or a special blitz board at least once during the course. As the course neared completion I had never had that “honor.” The last exercise was a mock battle that lasted 39 hours, crossing a river in the dark, with no sleep, and OCS staff monitoring our every move. When the mock battle was over I returned to the barracks and fell sound asleep on my bunk. Suddenly a messenger from the commandant’s office shook me and said “The old man wants to see you right away.” I dashed into the washroom, threw lots of cold water on my face, combed my hair, and straightened out my messy fatigue clothes and my fatigued self.

I reported to the colonel, saluted, and he gave me the routine command of “At ease.” He held the morning newspaper in his hands and said, “I have been reading in the paper about a battle waged by the American Army. What do you think about the strategy they used?” I replied “I don’t know, Sir; I haven’t read the article.” He quipped
“Any excuse?” I replied “No Sir,” and he answered “That is All!” I snapped to attention, saluted, executed an “About face” maneuver and walked out. What was my fate? Well, I graduated. What would you have said? Think about this. You are an officer. You are responsible for the lives of the men in your unit. If one is killed, there is an explanation, but there is no excuse! Such are the multiple horrors of war for the families on both sides of the firing line!

After OCS I received antitank training and was certified as an anti-tank company commander. Following additional infantry maneuvers, I shipped overseas as a replacement officer, joining a pool in Italy. Casualties among infantry lieutenants were high, so we were in demand, almost as an expendable item.

We were told that the 442nd Regimental Combat Team, made up entirely of American soldiers of Japanese ancestry, and mostly Caucasian officers, needed a new supply of officers. During my life in the secluded farmlands of rural Connecticut I had never seen a Nisei. I thought “Why not serve with them rather than some other unit unknown to me.” So I elected to do this, and was assigned to Company K, 3rd battalion, 442nd Regimental Combat Team. I soon appreciated, respected and admired the spirit, the dedication, the commitment, the courage and the ability of these Nisei guys. Their names were strange to me at first, but there were no strangers among us. We were all one determined family. They were loyal Americans prepared to fight for democracy against a common enemy. Also, I was a loyal American, but I never had to pass a litmus test.
Chapter 2. The 442nd Goes into Battle

The Rome-Arno Campaign

The 2nd and 3rd battalions learned many tricks of the craft of war from the 100th Battalion that already had blazed a trail of skill, dogged determination and heartache as they drove the Germans up the boot of Italy from Salerno to Rome. On June 15, 1944, at Civitavecchia, about 40 miles northwest of Rome, the three infantry battalions became one regiment, as the 2nd and 3rd battalions joined the 100th (now the 1st battalion). The 442nd RCT included the three infantry battalions, a medical detachment, service company and the headquarters company. The 522nd Field Artillery Battalion, the 232nd Combat Engineer Company, and the 206th Army Band were attached.

On June 26, 1944 the 442nd RCT, attached to the 34th Division, was committed with Belvedere as the objective. The 442nd captured and killed many Germans in the drive to take Belvedere. During bitter fighting, in capturing Hill 140 (little Cassino), they suffered many casualties in all ranks. At this point I joined Company K as the 3rd platoon leader. We immediately were a family with a common objective: Fight the best fight and get the war finished. Of course, it wasn't that easy and this kodomo (Japanese for young kid) had much to learn. The platoon sergeant, George Masakazu Nishi, was a terrific young leader, as were all the squad leaders. I won't mention more names, as the list would be long. There were no "goof-offs" or "f—ups" among the Nisei guys in the whole regiment. Occasionally a Caucasian officer was assigned who didn't fit or didn't have the necessary stomach for the orders of the day. They were quickly kicked back to some rear area supply unit.

Our next objective was to capture several intermediate towns, especially Luciana and the surrounding high ground controlling the port city of Livorno (Leghorn). The Germans were not going to give this up easily. The engineers helped us to get through mine fields by blasting a path with bangalore torpedoes (pipes hooked together and filled with TNT). Also, credit must go to the Italian underground who helped guide us past mine fields. From their defensive positions the Germans could see us coming, although we utilized as much protection as possible, moving up in gullies and avoiding booby-trapped trails. Nevertheless, the Germans were able to shower us with artillery shells from their 88-mm guns, along with mortars. One learned quickly to distinguish the sound and estimate the trajectory of the 88's and screaming meemies, to the point that one could almost learn to duck quickly at times. The German machine guns were strategically located to rake columns of soldiers that advanced along likely trails. Their machine guns fired a little faster than ours and had a different sound. The mortar shells were silent until they exploded upon hitting the ground.

We tried to hit hard and keep the Jerries on the run. That way they had less chance to dig in and organize defenses. Also the 88 gunners didn’t want to aim their artillery at their own troops, and if we were close to the Jerries most of their shells would land behind us. This was my introduction to the real world of battle, as the Germans fought mostly rear-guard action in retreat to their next position at Luciana.

As we approached Luciana the Germans had every frontal sector well covered. Company K made a frontal attack on the town on July 16. We kept off the well-worn
paths. The local Italian underground had warned us that many of the approaches were mined with the bouncing Bettys (I believe we called them.) They would bounce a few feet into the air and explode, shredding the person who was so unfortunate as to set one off. They also had shoe mines. Our guys were very good at skirting these. That is a time when having small feet helps.

Our guys were quick on the trigger and shifty in providing moving targets with as low a silhouette as possible. Nevertheless, there was much Nisei soldier blood spilled on the ground when the Jerries dumped mortar and artillery shells on areas they had pretested for precision targeting as we crossed these areas. We blasted away with the help of our cannon company, and other artillery support. By nightfall we did get a toehold on the ground along the edge of Luciana. I was very thankful that I carried a Thompson submachine gun, as on one occasion I heard the safety click off on a German machine gun just the other side of a hedge. My radio operator to my left shouted “I see them.” By that time I had expended my 15-clip of .45 caliber slugs into the area where the sound came from. A dead silence followed. After the war I never hunted again.

In the meantime our engineers and others from the 34th division were clearing mines so supplies could reach us. We carried a short supply of lightweight K rations, but after a couple of days of tough hiking, crawling and maneuvering, both a resupply of these, plus water and ammunition were essential. In tough fire fights the supply of ammunition for a whole day could be expended to eliminate the defenders in protected positions, as we advanced semiexposed.

We did carry halizon tablets, so if there was no GI water we could scoop some out of a hopefully clean stream and let the heavy dose of chlorine purify it a bit before drinking it. One time when I was out of water I filled my empty canteen with cool mountain water and took a drink before the halizon took effect. A hundred yards or so further up the mountain was a bloated cow in the stream that had apparently been killed in an artillery barrage. Then I swallowed a couple of halizon tablets in a hurry.

I don’t remember anything about that night. Years later my wife asked me “Were you ever scared?” I said, that is a hard question to give an answer to in a way that you would understand. Of course we were always on edge and on the alert. You had better be or else ...! A strange noise or footsteps would bring us to the ready. Some guys were on shifts to guard all night. We had signs and countersigns that were changed daily (passwords of recognition) in case any moving human approached. If we forgot the passwords we had a backup word to say “Buddahead” when challenged. Buddahead was the name used to identify Japanese-Americans from Hawaii. The mainlanders were called kotons. Back to my wife’s question. No, I wasn’t afraid, in the sense that I knew every soldier in the unit would help me to survive, if at all possible, as they would for every other soldier in the unit. These individual heroes were always “we.”

The next day my number came up. A barrage of 88 shells hit us. Several men were badly hurt. One close to me had little flesh left on the end of one leg after the blast. I knew we had 25 seconds before the Jerries could reload and the next barrage would hit. As the medics came forward to help I told (suppose ordered) the able-bodied men to help pull the injured quickly back into a ditch. I grabbed one end of a stretcher and helped move one of our excellent corporals with the shattered leg to a safer position. By the grace of God we got all the men out of that spot before the next barrage came in.
The medics worked frantically and with great skill. They cared for many wounded. Some of our medics had several years of medical school behind them. They were terrific in knowledge and bravery. I was catching my breath when a medic said “Lieutenant, you have blood running out of your boot.” Then I noticed my leg was getting stiff. The medic wrapped my leg and stopped the bleeding. I thought it would be o.k. for me to continue the battle later. However, the medic ordered me to go to the battalion aid station. One medic said he would go with me. “No,” I said “you are all needed here. I'll find my way.” And I did, hobbling on a stiff painful leg.

I was examined at the medical aid station, and sent by ambulance to Rome to the 12th General Hospital. There I had most of the shrapnel removed. I still have some to keep my blood iron high after this injection. But it doesn't set off airport security alarms, and I keep all jokes about that to myself at the airport. In the meantime, after bitter house-to-house fighting, the 442nd took Luciana. There were many K Company men wounded, including all but two officers. The regiment pushed forward, securing the western flank in Italy as far north as Pisa. On July 25th, the 442nd RCT was pulled back to rest and regroup. General Clark pinned a Presidential Citation on the 442nd regimental colors for the magnificent performance. This was one of eight Presidential Citations earned by the 442nd RCT by the time the war was over.

The various chronicles of war tell of the steady advance of the 442nd crossing the Arno River into Firenze (Florence). The Rome-Arno campaign was over with 1,272 casualties, about 25% of the total force. On September 3, the 442nd RCT was pulled back for replacements and regrouping. I mention these dates because I was in the hospital in Rome and afterward in the conditioning company (according to my Army 201 file) until September 16.

There were many 442nd guys in the hospital. The K Company soldier who had his foot blown off at Luciana, was wheeling around the ward cheering up patients and staff until he flew to the USA for rehabilitation. I recovered uneventfully, thanks to a huge surgeon who was a major. After the operation on my leg I was hobbling around. The surgeon stopped me in the hall, and put all his weight through his hands on my shoulders. He said, “Put pressure on your leg regularly until it hurts if you don’t want to be a cripple all your life!” Tears of pain squirted into my eyes, but, thanks to that surgeon's advice, that leg is basically okay today.

I did enjoy the Italian accordion player and the violinist in Rome who came through the wards playing songs like Lili Marlene, they learned from the Germans. We liked the song too. I rejoined Company K on September 17, in time to sail for France on the 26th of September.

The Rhineland Campaign

We landed in the south of France in the dark. I was concerned about minefields, but I was soon relieved to find cows grazing in the area. Their four feet were all intact. I was able to use my French a little.

We weren’t on the coast of France for long. Let’s move our story swiftly to the Vosges mountain area. We were transported there in slow-moving World War I boxcars labeled “40 Hommes et 8 Chevaux.” The rails were laid in steps or else the wheels were square, so we hung on while looking out of the box cars through the side doors, open to
let air in. French people walking or biking along the country roads near the railroad waved to us and we waved back. Years later I was riding in a train in southern France. A French lady, who spoke English fluently, started a conversation with me. The conversation drifted back to World War II. She said, “I was a little girl in this area then, and I wondered who all those foreign (perhaps Japanese) soldiers were in American Army uniforms.” She, of course, knew the story later on.

On October 13 the 442nd was attached to another great army division, the 36th Division, for the attack on Bruyères. We had spent several days and nights in freezing rain, as we moved forward approaching crack German units dug in against the motherland. The Germans had chosen to establish their defense line in the mountains, closer to their sources of supply than it would have been in southern France.

On October 15 the battle began with the Germans entrenched on four hilltops outside of Bruyères. The 442nd was supported by tanks, artillery and mortars from the 36th division, but we faced more of the same from the Germans. While part of the first and third battalions fought their bloody way to the hilltops, my unit headed for Bruyères. During three days of ferocious battles, including a house-to-house cleanup in Bruyères, many Germans were killed, taken prisoner or escaped. We did not go unscathed either. The people of Bruyères have never forgotten the 442nd. They have named an avenue in honor of our unit, and have held anniversary memorial services.

Then it was on to La Broquaine. On the way, through “Death Valley,” the Germans had full view of us from the hills they had retreated to. As I led my platoon across elevated ground supporting a railroad track (with two scouts slightly ahead), the Germans dropped a mortar shell almost in my hip pocket. I was blasted down the slope. I tried to get up and couldn’t.

I don’t remember much for the next several days. I do remember two brave medics charging to help me, and I felt sorry that they had to carry this big “dead weight” up and back over the railroad embankment. Then I was lying, heavily sedated for 3 days, under a canvas tent cover, not far from the front lines. It rained almost continuously - what mud! Once I remember I foolishly tried to get up. The medic said “just take it easy lieutenant.” I did drink water. Probably I was offered food. Retrospectively, I realized what a great job the 442 medics must have done to keep me a breather. Finally, a break in the weather came. An ambulance gently bumped several of us a long way to a temporary air strip. There a C-47 (DC-3) flew us to a place I later learned was the 43rd General Hospital at Aix, in southern France.

I didn’t seem to much care what happened to me at that point. I was numb. And then a miracle happened! I was transferred from the ambulance into the bright lights of the operating room. A soft southern voice I will never forget said, “Why Foote, what are y’all doing here?” It was the same special wonderful nurse, among many wonderful nurses, who had taken care of me in Rome. I was suddenly alive, and I was sure, “I’m going to be all right now.” My other thought was I’m dirty and unshaven. I must look terrible; how did she recognize me? I must clean up. What vanity!

Well, I thought I was all right now, but I came close to dying in the process. I had a fever of 105 degrees F, or slightly higher. I was burning up. I was getting 8 shots of penicillin and sulfanilamide daily. I was put in a room for two people instead of the open ward, where I had been post-operatively with other soldiers close together all in a row.
That in itself was a warning sign of trouble. I heard the major (MD) in the hallway one night say to a nurse, “We may have an empty bed in the morning.” They did not know I was awake. I said to myself “The hell you will.” “Nurse, please bring me water and orange juice, lots of it.” I just about floated away, and so did the fever.

I have to thank Sir Alexander Fleming, also, for starting the research that led to penicillin production, of which I received 240 shots. The military had a good supply. It wasn’t especially fun to get poked every 3 hours, but then it did bring a nurse close by, and that was nice. We had the best possible care under the circumstances. I saw a wounded German officer in our ward die of “lockjaw.” German soldiers were not protected with tetanus shots.

The first thing I asked for after the operation was a V-mail to sign and tell my parents that “I’m okay” I don’t know the exact sequence of news received at home, but my sister told me after the war that the War Department had reported that I was killed in action. Later they sent a correction which my folks wouldn’t open, and gave it to my sister to open. I guess they thought by now I really had died. My parents never mentioned this to me, but, occasionally, when I think of how distressed my parents must have been, it helps me to have enormous empathy for the thousands of loved ones who received KIA (killed in action) telegrams that were not mistakes. Wars are terrible for those who are at home and wait tearfully for good news.

Well, two operations on my shoulder, leg and hip, and five months later I was undergoing conditioning again. In the meantime the 442nd had been ordered to do the almost impossible task of rescuing a battalion of the 36th Division surrounded by the Germans. This has been chronicled as the battle for the “Lost Battalion.” The battalion was rescued, as only the 442nd could do it. They fought what the War Department has officially declared as one of the 10 most heroic battles in the history of the United States Army. Members of the 36th Texas Division have been great supporters of the 442nd ever since. My K Company had only 17 men left alive or unwounded. Really lucky me; I was in the hospital. A staff sergeant was company commander at the end. These sergeants were terrific. Some received battlefield commissions. Some refused them, as did the platoon sergeant, George Masakazu Nishi. He didn’t want his men to think he was any different. He would not have been any different, but I respect him for his decision.

The Champagne Campaign

The 442nd was so depleted after these battles, including the rescue of the “Lost Battalion” that they needed months for replacements. They were sent to guard the Italian-French border, in case Germans tried to escape from northern Italy. The guys dubbed this the Champagne Campaign. The unit was there from mid-November, 1944 to mid-March 1945. All this time I was in the hospital under the tender loving care of an overworked medical staff. We had visits by Red Cross personnel, and by Katherine Cornell, who entertained us at the hospital. Also, it was a delight to have meals served to us by cute young French girls, “trés gentile.”

Chaplain Yamada from the 442nd came to the hospital in late March and said, “You have to get out of here. The unit is going home.” So he persuaded the hospital director to sign me out, as I had been in the reconditioning program one day already.
Thus, I rejoined K Company, 442nd on March 20, 1945.

**Going Home? No! Cracking the Gothic Line**

Oh Lordy! The boats we boarded in Marseille were nice big landing craft. Under cover of darkness we sailed for northern Italy. It was a big surprise for us and it was going to be a bigger surprise for the Germans. General Clark had not been able to advance his army very far for months against the German Gothic line in the Appennine mountains, a line built by 15,000 slave labor Italians. General Clark had requested the return of the 442nd to Italy.

The 442nd moved under cover of darkness on April 3 and remained concealed all day on April 4. Talk about discipline! On the night of April 4 several units moved up the nearly straight sides of 3,000 foot cliffs. In 32 minutes, after reaching the peak of Georgia Hill, the 100th had secured the peak that had defied the U.S. troops from advancing previously for many months. In another 2 days the Gothic line was cracked by other units of the 442. K Company was hit hard climbing Mt. Folgorita in daylight. The toll of killed and wounded was high, but for the Germans it was many times higher. The invincible Kesserling units were beginning to stumble backwards, although they fought to the end. No longer was it “Hitler über alles.”

The medics had done a great job taping my feet as this tenderfoot(e), just released from the hospital, was having a bit of a bloody problem shifting so rapidly to mountain climbing. Although the line was broken, we still had some scary moments ahead. There were plenty of firefights as we cleaned out pockets of resistance up and down the mountains in the Carrara marble quarry area. The Germans had great views of the plains below and their guns were concealed in granite quarries in the mountains, protecting them from our artillery fire. There were plenty of minefields around.

The 280-mm coastal guns that we were told were only able to shoot out to sea at a possible invasion force, fired one-ton projectiles at us as we moved north a few miles inland from La Spezia. Fortunately they just missed us. I think it was the first blast that blew gravel against my face as I hit the ground. My face hurt. I wiped it with my hand which was bloody. I thought, oh Lord, I’ve lost part of my face. But no, it was only cut fingers and a stone-stung face. A little first aid by the medics and we were quickly on our way. Later, we found the German coastal guns mounted on railroad tracks running into the hillside. The guns could be propelled out of their tunnels and turned inland. In the tunnels were piles of leaflets, like the propaganda ones floated down on us earlier. They showed a cover mimicking “Life Magazine” with a pinup girl on the front and a skeleton on the back, headed “Death.” Of course, the caption on the back read “Surrender and Choose Life.” We actually chuckled at this. Probably these made the German soldiers homesick as they fought one losing battle after another. We were homesick too, and this simply stimulated us to get this damn war over soon.

The Panzers and Blitzkriegers were beginning to run backwards. Our engineers built bypasses around blown-out bridges so that our motorized units could speed up the chase. The Army records show us pushing 75 miles in 5 days, with heavy packs. Various units were capturing thousands of Germans and hundreds of bottles of champagne. But that’s another story. Sometimes it was a disadvantage to be an officer. One night after capturing a town, we found in one of the bombed out houses a bed with
a mattress on it. We were all used to sleeping on the ground, in a foxhole or sitting against a tree in the rain all night. However, this night the 3rd platoon guys insisted I sleep on the mattress. I tried to argue that several of them could fit on it, but I was outnumbered in the voting. However, soon I was outnumbered by bed bugs and then I spent a miserable night on the floor getting rid of them. I wonder if the guys knew what they were getting me into and having a little fun.

There were still some very sad events – a sniper deliberately picked off a medic just before the war was over by aiming at the big red cross on his helmet. Luckily for the sniper he took off quickly. We heard a German motorcycle leaving town, with K Company in hot pursuit.
Chapter 3. What Now?

The End and The Beginning

On May 2, 1945 the notorious dictator Hitler saw his invincible war machine surrender in Italy. Peace at last, and forever. Was that an impossible dream?

There were 680 men in the 442nd RCT who would never see home again. There were 9,486 wounded, 18,143 individual decorations, and 8 Presidential Unit citations in this little unit--the most decorated unit per man and per unit in the history of the United States. When at full strength, the unit had numbered about 4,500 men. Honors were received from the U.S. military chiefs, President Truman, and the Prime Minister of England, Sir Winston Churchill.

A memorial service was held in Italy on May 6, 1945 at which the living members of the 442nd RCT honored their fallen comrades. In the book “Go For Broke” Chester Tanaka, a K Company veteran, and colleagues have simply, but elegantly chronicled this and many other events. There was the Lord’s Prayer, the singing of “Rock of Ages,” and “God Bless America.” Colonel Miller, commander of the Combat Team, said the following: “The sacrifice made by our comrades was great. We must not fail them in the fight that continues, in the fight that will be with us even when peace comes. Your task will be the harder and more arduous one, for it will extend over a longer time.” How true! How fully this scene recapitulated the one addressed by President Lincoln at Gettysburg on November 19, 1863. The ceremony ended with the singing of “The Star Spangled Banner.” These were Americans gathered here, not just Japanese-Americans. It is a scene one cannot forget. I wish I could convey the feeling to all nonveterans in America today.

Perhaps those who read this story will understand why tears trickle down my face whenever songs such as “God Bless America,” and “The Star spangled Banner” are played. And just perhaps, if you are a reader who hasn’t fully appreciated the great freedom we enjoy in the United States of America, you will begin to feel and assume a greater responsibility to preserve that freedom, and have a greater respect for the diversity of people who have preserved it for us, the living.

When The War Was Over in Europe

When VE Day came we were happy for both sides. I didn’t feel the jubilation that I later read about in magazines describing the celebrations back in the States. Yes, we were happy, but tired, weary and longing to go home. We also had heavy hearts in which were embedded the souls of the brave companions who would never know the joy of going home. Also, many went home in pieces, no longer able to pursue their childhood dreams or professions they had embarked on before the war.

With the formal end of hostilities, we assisted in the orderly disarming and processing of German soldiers. We also guarded a large supply depot. This included acres of cartons of beer that had come over to provide ballast in the ships that brought other supplies.
There was time to travel. If you were lucky in drawing lots you might get to Florence or Switzerland. I visited both places, no longer carrying grenades and weaponry. Mail call always was a highlight, especially if your name was called, and you knew from the handwriting that there would be news inside from mom or your sweetheart. Packages of brownies and other goodies were highly appreciated. The recipient was popular, and the package contents were quickly consumed by all.

It was relaxing to sit around a campfire at night. Now you could have a light at night without being targeted. Our Hawaiian boys, especially, had managed to bring along a ukelele or other small musical instrument. By bartering with the local farmers a chicken could be obtained in exchange for a few candy bars and cigarettes. Chicken, rice and soy sauce simmered over a campfire. This was supplemented with PX rations, including a valiant effort to reduce the huge supply of beer that was guarded in the depot. Also, pidgin English songs from Hawaii helped pass an evening away. We still lived in tents, and there was no TV then either.

Occasionally we had a dance. The local Italian young ladies had formed a type of Italian USO. I was the recreation officer. My job, a rather delightful one, I must admit, was to contact a young lady, Maria Gracia, who headed the Italian group. After meeting with her at her home, and passing inspection under the watchful eyes of her grandmother in the shadows, Maria Gracia enlisted the help of her friends to come and dance with our K Company guys. Many of the girls were as large as the guys. My job was to ride the army truck to pick up the girls and deliver them to their homes after the dance. I did get a big hug the last time I rode the delivery truck before it was time for me to return to the USA. Thanks for this pleasant memory.

Soon my number came up in an exciting way, with enough campaign points to go home. When I said “Au revoir” and not “Goodbye” to K Company guys, I meant it. We still correspond, and have met again at 442nd family reunions.

Thanksgiving Day, 1945 was spent on the high seas, and they were high indeed, with 30-foot waves. One had to hold on to the anchored dining room table with one hand to keep from sliding around the room. There were many empty chairs, as many returnees were holding on elsewhere. When I commented to one later about a weak stomach, he said, “Hell no, I was throwing it as far as the rest of them.”

Starting a New Life Back Home

Life back in the USA these past 54 years is a long story to be told elsewhere. In a nutshell, I was indeed fortunate to come home largely in one piece, thanks to the expert medical care of K Company medics all the way up to the general hospital staffs. Of course it was an emotional homecoming. A bunch of us took a cab from our point of discharge, Ft. Devens, to Hartford. From there I hitchhiked to a crossroad half a mile from my family home. Motorists kindly picked up soldiers, but I walked the last half mile on that familiar country road I had walked on to grammar school and high school hundreds of times before. Now it was a special road. When I reached home I knocked on the door. Mother did not know that I had left Italy. She almost fainted when she answered the knock and saw me through the glass panel of the door. Her little boy really had come home!
I was now “free” to marry Ruth Parcells, a college classmate. We were engaged before I went overseas, but I could not marry then, knowing that I might leave a widow or a wife with a mangled husband. Besides now there was time for my future mother-in-law to plan a church wedding she dearly wanted for her only daughter (the other two children were sons).

My career plans had changed while I was convalescing for five months in the army hospital. I knew that I could not carry the full physical load I would have expected of myself on the home dairy farm. Besides, I had seen a new, more complex world during my army career, both in the USA and abroad. And most importantly of all I felt compelled to commit myself to somehow fulfill a broader mission than home on the farm. I must do a little extra to try, in a small way, to make up for what those brave and talented young Nisei guys would have accomplished, had they not given their “last full measure of devotion” in a foreign land.

It should be recognized that the Nisei who returned, and their children, have contributed greatly to the well-being of this country in all fields. A high proportion have achieved an advanced education. They have become leaders in science, education, government, business, and a host of professional fields. These American families put great emphasis on traits that build character. Dan Tani, a current astronaut (and a son of Japanese-American parents who were interned), stated that “I know I really benefit from being a citizen of such a tremendous and privileged country. And I know that my parents were heavily influenced by their Japanese experience and that certain values and morals and ethics were passed on to me by my parents” (from Nikkei Heritage, Fall, 1999).

Special recognition should be given to the little publicized life of Mary (Yuri) and the late Bill Kochiyama (a K Company soldier). They have tirelessly worked for the good of impoverished people of all races. In 1993 the National Association for Asian American Studies presented to Yuri and Bill the “Outstanding Service Award” given to a civilian couple who had contributed the most in the post-war era to peace and harmony among the different ethnic groups in America. What a well-deserved honor!

So it was back to college for me. My teachers at the University of Connecticut steered me toward a great educational center, Cornell University. I was accepted there as a graduate student, where I completed both my M.S. and Ph.D. degrees. It wasn’t easy. Teachers set high standards. Competition was keen, but returning vets encouraged and helped each other. The GI bill was a blessing.

Both Cornell University and Iowa State University offered me good jobs when I finished grad work. I now had a family with two young sons. My wife and I loved Ithaca. That was important, so I chose to stay at Cornell University.

At Cornell I have taught over 8,000 undergraduate students, trained more than 200 undergraduate teaching and research assistants, together with about 100 graduate students, postdoctoral students and visiting professors. We always had an international group from East and West. I wanted students to have the benefit of counting among their friends, people from different cultures. Numerous teaching and research awards came my way as I advanced through the ranks to full professor and finally to a distinguished professorship. All of these accomplishments are shared with these many fine young people who helped to make it possible. The scientific part of this journey has recently
gone to press (From Artificial Insemination to Cloning: Tracing 50 Years of Research). My research has taken me to many countries, including the countries we fought through in World War II. But I have visited military cemeteries only once. It simply is too much for me!

None of this would have been possible without the medical care on the front lines in WWII. Nor would it have been possible without the inspiration and the drive derived from my experience with my Nisei buddies. It is both natural and fitting that I try to honor my lifelong bonded family with a life of hard work, honesty and humility. Thanks go to all who made it possible for me to pursue knowledge, to unravel a bit of the biology of life and continue to ponder the meaning of it all.
Appendix

Famous Quotations from Four Centuries that Aptly Reflect the Spirit and Legacy of the Men of the 442. (Listed in Chronological Order)

“Cowards die many times before their death; The valiant never taste of death but once.”
From *Julius Caesar* by William Shakespeare, 1599.

“These are the times that try men’s souls. The summer soldier and the sunshine patriot will, in this crisis, shrink from the service of their country; but he that stands it now, deserves the love and thanks of man and woman.”
From the *American Crisis*, no. 1, by Thomas Paine, 12/23/1776.

“It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the greater task remaining before us -- that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion; that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain; that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom; and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.”
Excerpted from Lincoln’s *Gettysburg Address*, 11/19/1863.

“Ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country.”
They Loved - I Lived

Hail to the exploits of the American Nisei
Deprived of citizenship rights, USA.
Yet filled with loyalty, democracy to save,
On battlefields of Europe their lives they gave.

Uprooted from homes, their business or a farm,
Herded into camps, based upon false alarm.
Despite disruption, being pushed and shoved,
They displayed devotion to the country they loved.

This “Yankee” farm boy was just a “Kodomo”
With lots to learn from 442-GI Joe.
We lived, fought and shared as a family,
United in a cause with close harmony.

And so America, do you remember each day
To thank the Lord for American Nisei?
We are one nation with freedom of choice.
We should always respect each others voice.

War surely is hell, but this experience of strife
Taught me a great deal about the best things in life.
Every soldier for others his life surely would give,
And so many died that others might live.

Robert H. Foote, 1st Lt. (Capt., Reserves)
Co. K, 442nd RCT, U.S. Army