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Proud American

Son of Japanese immigrants wanted to fight

By JEFF ROBINSON

jrobinson@postregister.com

BLACKFOOT -- Jim turned 90 on Friday. Like many men his age, he's a proud World War II veteran and considers himself a patriot. He's a member of the American Legion and the Veterans of Foreign Wars.

"I was proud to be part of the United States Army and to do my little part to preserve this great country," Jim said of his service.

After the war, the Firth High School graduate came back home, got a job, settled in Blackfoot and raised a family.

While Jim's history may sound familiar to members of the generation that fought the war, his story is different.

Jim Shikashio was born in Shelley to Japanese immigrant parents and grew up in the Lower Presto Valley in the mountains east of Firth.

He joined the Army Air Corps in July 1941 before the United States entered the war. After basic training, he was stationed at Stockton Field, Calif. He was an inline mechanic and inspected planes prior to takeoff.

But when the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor in December of that year, the Army wasn't quite sure what to do with Shikashio because he was of Japanese descent. So, that following February, it sent him home as a member of the Reserves.

That same month, President Franklin Roosevelt ordered the forced relocation and internment of more than 100,000 Japanese nationals and Japanese Americans living along the West Coast. About 13,000 of them were put in a camp near Twin Falls.

Because Shikashio's family lived inland, it was spared from being sent to a relocation center.

In 1943, as soon as he could, Shikashio enlisted in the Army a second time.

"I was very patriotic," he said. "I wanted to join the Army mostly because I was a minority. I wanted to show the rest of the Caucasians that, being Japanese Americans, we were just as patriotic as they were."

After his second enlistment, Shikashio was assigned to the 442nd Regimental Combat Team, which was made up of American-born sons of Japanese immigrants.

The 442nd landed in Italy in June 1944, just in time to take part in the Anzio Campaign, one of the war's bloodiest.



Monte LaOrange / mlaorange@postregister.com - Jim Shikashio was born in Shelley to Japanese immigrant parents and joined the Army twice "to show the rest of the Caucasians that, being Japanese Americans, we were just as patriotic as they were."

Shikashio, who was a sergeant in the service battery, makes no claims of bravery or even of doing any shooting at the enemy. But in his 18 months in Europe as the 442nd advanced from Italy to France and, finally, Germany, there were many times his life was in danger.

He recalls being shelled by the Germans and still shivers at just the thought of the German 88s, which he describes as "wicked guns."

The 442nd combined with the 100th Infantry Battalion, made up primarily of Japanese Americans from Hawaii, to form "the unit that would later become the most decorated in U.S. military history for its size and length of service," according to Go For Broke, an organization formed to chronicle the contributions of Japanese-American soldiers to the war effort.

Shikashio's war experience affected him so much that he's never had the desire to ever pick up a gun again for any reason, including a hunting trip.

"That's an awful thing to try to shoot another human being," he said.

After the war, he went to work as an automotive technician. He later took a job as a millwright at Idaho National Engineering Laboratory and retired from there after 20 years.

If he faced the same circumstances, he'd do it all over again.

"I'm awful proud of what we did," he said. "It made life so much easier for our families and for future generations."
