

THE KAZUO MASUDA FAMILY STORY



MASUDA FAMILY

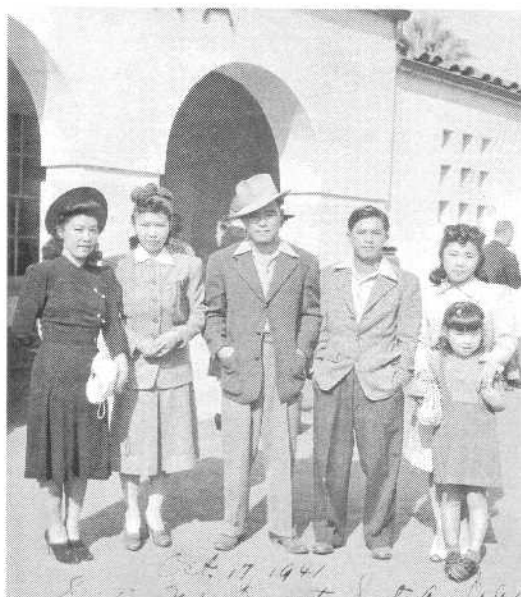
Front row (left to right): Masao, Mary, June, Mother Tamae, Kazuo, Takashi. Back row (left to right): Shizuko, Masakichi, Father Gensuke, Hisako, Mitsuo

It was a typical California day in the sleepy little town of Westminster, November 30, 1918. Gensuke and Tamae Masuda welcomed their newest born, Kazuo. He was to be one of eleven children. His brothers and sisters were Masakichi, Takio, Mary, Shizuko, Hisako, Nobuo, Mitsuo, Masao, Takashi, and June. Kazuo's early years were spent going to school in Tustin. He transferred to Fountain Valley



Father Gensuke, Mother Tamae, Shizuko, Takio & Mary

and graduated from the old Fountain Valley Elementary School on the corner of Bushard and Talbert in 1932. In 1936, Kazuo graduated from Huntington Beach High School. For the next few years he spent his time working for the family on their farm. He was inducted into the Army on October 16, 1941, when the peacetime draft started. While in basic training at Fort Ord, California, the December 7 raid on Hawaii was initiated by Japan; panic struck the United States.

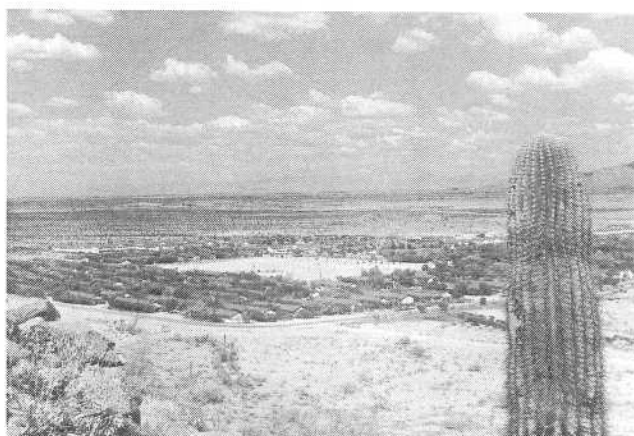


October 17, 1941- Takashi & Kazuo Masuda departing for basic training. Sending them off are sisters Mary, June, Shizuko and daughter Sachi.

On February 19, 1942, President Franklin Roosevelt signed an executive order which directed the Secretary of War to prescribe military areas from which all persons could be excluded and the right of person to enter, remain in, or leave these places would be subject to the restrictions of the Secretary of War. This order meant relocation of Japanese-Americans on the West Coast to camps throughout the West for the duration of the war. In all, over 100,000 Americans of Japanese ancestry was evacuated. They went to places such as Manzanar, California; Tule Lake, California; Poston, Arizona; Gila River, Arizona; Minidoka, Idaho; Heart Mountain, Wyoming; Granada, Colorado; Topaz, Utah; Rohwer and Jerome, Arkansas



The Masuda Family were interned in these barracks behind barbed wire fences and armed guards. The family resided in block 15-03-D from October 1942 until it was closed in June 1944. The population of Jerome was over 8,500 internees.



The Masuda Family were relocated to the hot Arizona desert at the Gila River Relocation Center. They settled in block 49-11-D of Butte, the larger of the two camps at Gila. They were interned there from June 1944 until their release on July 19, 1945, to return to their home in Fountain Valley, CA.

On February 1, 1943, the 442nd Regimental Combat Team was activated and the Nisei were assigned to Camp Shelby, Mississippi, to begin what seemed a hopeless battle with mud, leaky barracks, cold snaps, and the rigors of basic training. Altogether 33,300 Nisei served in World War II. Kazuo Masuda was assigned to "F" Company, 2nd Battalion, 442nd Regimental Combat



NCO's of Co. F 442nd Infantry- This group was formed in early February 1943, to cadre a Japanese-American combat unit for the 442nd Infantry Regiment at Camp Shelby, Mississippi. S/Sgt. Kazuo Masuda is behind Co. F banner.

Team. He went to Camp Shelby for training, which was completed in February, 1944. In April, the combat team left Camp Shelby for Virginia en route to the Italian Campaign. They landed in Italy and started working their way up the Italian boot. They went to Naples through Anzio to Rome.

On the first of July, the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd Battalions crossed the Secina River and drove north to cut off an important road junction five miles northeast. By the 4th of July, the 2nd and 3rd Battalions went on to grind out a yard-by-yard advance against Hill 140 and a ridgeline running to the coastal plain of Italy. They stormed and seized their part of the hill in a vicious night attack before dawn of the 6th of July. On the 10th of July, the 2nd Battalion relieved the 3rd and set off with the mission of clearing a hilltop town. They had advanced on a short distance when they were stopped by heavy fire from their objective in front of the town of Pastina. The 2nd Battalion dug in the valley below and hung on against all the artillery the enemy could muster. After a two-day battle, Pastina fell on July 12. The decisive time in the life of Kazuo Masuda had started during this offensive. On July 6, 1944, Sgt. Masuda's unit was facing heavy fire from the German lines. Enemy shells had cut



Home on Furlough- S/Sgt. Kazuo Masuda visits his parents, Mr. & Mrs. Gensuke Masuda and relatives, the Kobashi and Kobayashi families at home in Jerome Relocation Center, Arkansas. He was scheduled to leave for combat duty soon. Unfortunately, it was his last visit home.



S/Sgt. Kazuo Masuda after returning from combat on the frontline



War Buddies- These 3 men: S/Sgt. Abraham Ohama, S/Sgt. Kazuo Masuda and T/Sgt. George Akiyama were members of Co. F 442 RCT. They were all killed while fighting in the campaign through Italy and France in late 1944.

the communications. Unwilling to risk the lives of members of his mortar crew, he obtained a mortar tube, 20 rounds of ammunition, and an extra helmet. With this heavy load, he walked and crawled 200 yards through the enemy fire. Using the helmet packed with dirt as a base plate for the mortar, he went into action when the enemy attacked, firing all 20 rounds and repulsing the Germans. The Nazis located his position and poured on mortar and artillery fire, but he returned to his lines for more

ammunition. He held this position for 12 hours. His fire was so effective, another attack did not even threaten the line. For his gallant action, Sgt. Masuda was awarded the second highest decoration the United States gives, the Distinguished Service Cross. However, he was never to live to receive that medal. On the 27th of August, Sgt. Masuda volunteered to lead a three-man squad on a night reconnaissance patrol across the Arno River. They crawled through the heavily mined and booby-trapped north bank of the river. Hearing movements to the right, Sgt. Masuda ordered his men to cover him while he investigated. He discovered a strong enemy force had surrounded them. Realizing they were trapped, he ordered his men to withdraw with their report while he boldly engaged two enemy automatic weapons. His companions, thinking he was following, fled back across the river. The next day they found Sgt. Masuda's body, his sub-machine gun in his hands, facing the enemy, lying over a dead German Machine gunner.

This ends the story of Kazuo Masuda, but not the story of the family or the 442nd. The regiment went on to rescue the Texas Lost Battalion where brother Takashi was wounded, and finally to end the war as the Unit most decorated for bravery in the history of the United States. They also sustained record casualties in living up to their "Go For Broke" slogan.



Brother Pfc. Takashi Masuda visits the grave of S/Sgt. Kazuo Masuda, who was killed on August 27, 1944 and buried in Italy.



Sister Mary Masuda



Brother Pfc. Takashi Masuda



Sister June Masuda

Brother, Mitsuo Masuda, received a medical discharge. The fourth brother, Masao, served with the military intelligence in the Pacific Theatre. But it is Mary who reaches our attention next. At the time of Kazuo's death, the family was still living in the relocation center in Arizona. Mary returned to investigate the Orange County conditions prior to moving back from Arizona. She was met by four men who fancied themselves as "Patriots". They warned Mary not to move her family back into Orange County. She was told that she should leave, that Japanese were not welcome here. But Mary called upon the courage shown by her brothers and stayed. She returned her family to their former home in Talbert despite repeated threats by the thugs. She tried to explain to the men that her brothers were fighting to free this world of the same kind of prejudice that these "so called patriots" were exhibiting. She received support from all over the county. Finally, she and her family moved back to Talbert, California, and on Saturday



Mas Masuda with Father and Mother. Mas was on furlough to attend the ceremony honoring his brother S/Sgt. Kazuo Masuda



Mary Masuda was presented with S/Sgt. Kazuo Masuda's Distinguished Service Cross from General Joseph W. Stilwell

morning, December 8, 1944, in a simple ceremony on the porch of the small framed family home on Talbert, Lt. General Joseph W. Stilwell pinned Kazuo's Distinguished Service Cross on Mary Masuda. This marked the first time in the United States Army history that a four-star general traveled 3,000 miles to present a medal. The presentation was made at the home of



Mary presented the Distinguished Service Cross to her Mother Tamae

the Masuda's and not at an Army installation, which is the usual procedure. The medal was presented to Mary Masuda as tribute to her bravery. The former Commander of the China-Burma-India Campaign, General "Vinegar-Joe" Stilwell said that he felt it an honor to be delegated to make this award. As he completed the presentation, Mary turned and pinned the medal to her mother's dress. Also present at the ceremony was Captain Ronald Reagan who

later became the Governor of the State of California and ultimately the President of the United States. At a rally at the Santa Ana Bowl later that day, General Stilwell said "the amount of money, the color of one's skin" do not make a measure of Americanism. A square deal all around; free speech; equality before the law; a fair field with no favor; obedience to the majority; an American not only believes in such things, but he is willing to fight for them. The real American is a man who calls it a fair exchange to lay down his life in order that American ideals may go on living. Judging from such a test, Sgt. Masuda was a better American than any of us here today.

This ended another brave stand by the Masuda family but is not the end of the story. On November 9, 1948, Sgt. Kazuo Masuda's body returned. An Army transport arrived from Italy with Kazuo's body. The Masuda family went to the Westminster Memorial Cemetery to make arrangements for burial. The manager of the cemetery told them it was a racially restricted cemetery and Sgt. Masuda could not be buried in a desirable location, "desirable" being defined as a place where grass would grow and in a central section of the cemetery. Reaction from the public was intense and supportive. The cemetery manager reversed himself and allowed the Masuda family to have the plot they desired for the burial of their son.

Finally, 52 years ago, December 9, 1948, Kazuo Masuda came home. In a funeral service on that day with full military honors, Army Staff Sgt. Kazuo Masuda, Company F, 442nd Regimental Combat Team, was buried at the Westminster Memorial Park. A chapter closed on a brave man, a brave sister, and a brave family.





Wreaths and floral tributes adorn the surroundings of S/Sgt. Kazuo Masuda's final resting place.



*Masuda 50th Wedding Anniversary 1952
Lft. to rt.: June, Mas, Mary, Joe, Tak, Shiz, Mits, Hisako.
Front: Mother Tamae, Father Gensuke*



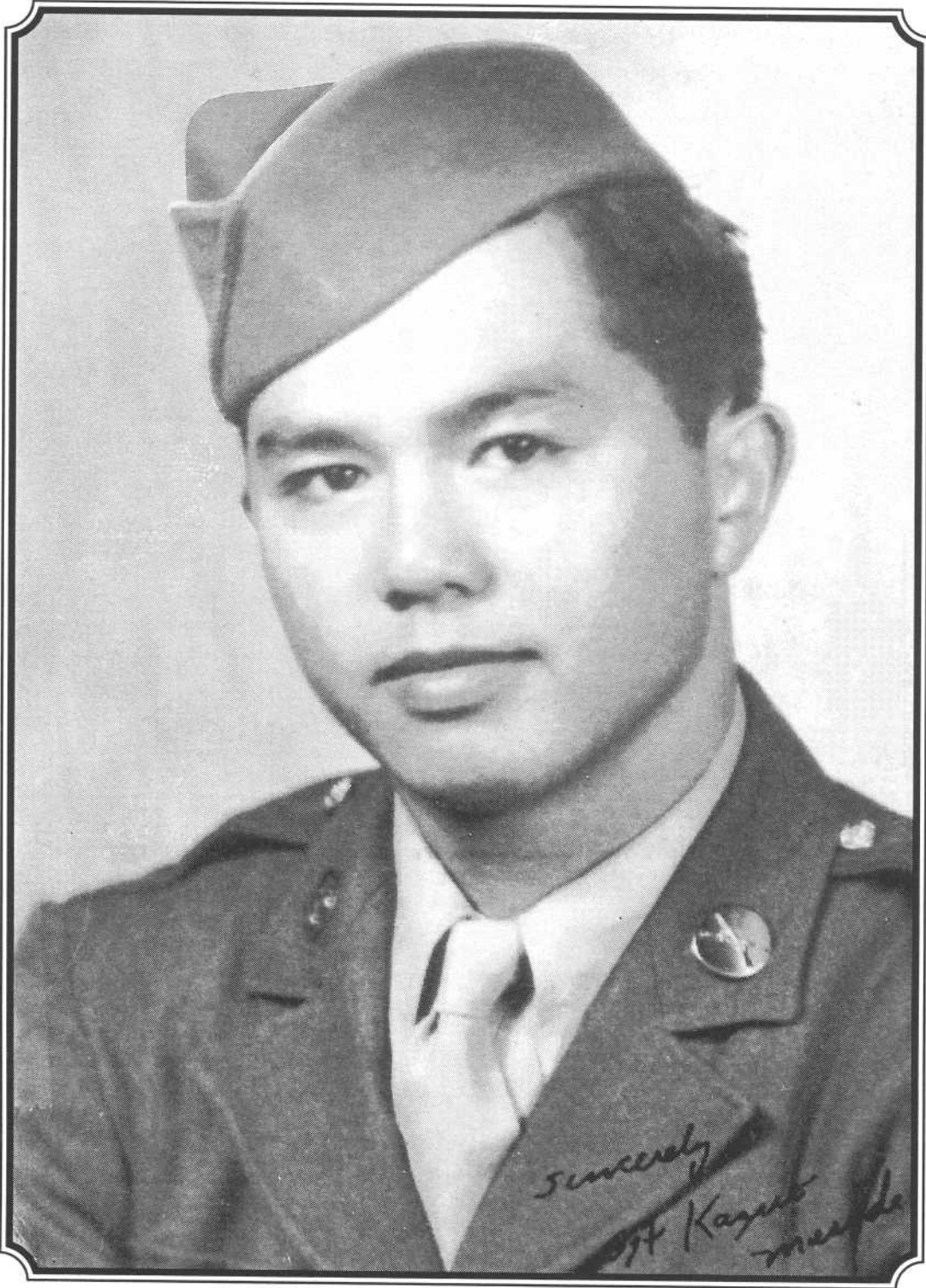
Kazuo Masuda School dedicated on December 17, 1975



Kazuo Masuda School Dedication Ceremony



*Kazuo Masuda School Japanese Garden dedicated on June 7, 1977.
Garden was a gift from Kazuo Memorial VFW Post 3670. Donations for garden were received from many organizations and individuals.*



S/Sgt. Kazuo Masuda
November 30, 1918 - August 27, 1944