



U.S. Army Tec 4 Terry T. Shima 442nd Regimental Combat Team - World War II

Terry Shima was born outside of Hilo, Hawaii. Both of his parents emigrated from Japan in 1915. His father worked on a sugar plantation where the family also lived. Shima attended a local high school and lived a normal life in the country. In 1940, he graduated high school and began working as a bookkeeper for a sugar manufacturer.

On the morning of December 7, 1941, Shima and some friends were on their way to the beach when a police officer stopped them from entering because "you people" attacked Pearl Harbor. Suddenly, he was regarded by white Americans as the enemy. There was "mass hysteria against all persons of Japanese ancestry. We were viewed as collaborators and saboteurs." Yet young nisei — second-generation Japanese Americans — remained intensely loyal. "While the government had given up on the Japanese Americans, we did not lose faith in America," Shima says.

Many of his fellow Japanese Americans were sent to internment camps, where they had a "huge mental and intellectual shock. They were told this was for their protection." But people quickly saw the camps were ringed with gun towers — pointing at them.

Shima's older brother had been drafted before the war and served in the U.S. Army 100th Infantry Battalion, a unit that was initially made up almost entirely of Japanese Americans from Hawaii. In October 1944, Shima enlisted in the U.S. Army and trained at Camp Blanding, Florida. In the spring of 1945, Shima was shipped to Naples, Italy. All of the Japanese-Americans wanted to be in the 442nd Regimental Combat Team (RCT), another all Japanese-American unit. When he arrived in Italy, he heard that the war had ended and he went to the replacement depot for the 442nd RCT. Soon, Shima was asked to join the public relations office by Mike Masaoka, an advocate for the creation of the unit and Executive Secretary for the Japanese American Citizens League. When the 442nd RCT formed, Masaoka was among the first to join the unit. Shima was taught how to write proper English and succeeded Masaoka in rank and position when he was sent home. In July 1946, Shima returned with the regiment.

Shima recalls with pride President Harry Truman's words to the 442nd RCT in Washington in July 1946: "You fought not only the enemy, but you fought prejudice and you won."

Shima went on to serve in the U.S. foreign service for 30 years. In 2013, President Barack Obama awarded him the Presidential Citizens Medal. Two facts give him immense pride: "By the time the war ended, no Japanese American had been convicted of helping the enemy. And not a single nisei soldier had been court-martialed for desertion. We came out clean — very clean."

Years after the war, Shima headed the Japanese American Veterans Association (JAVA), an organization formed to make sure that the accomplishments of the 442nd RCT and of individual veterans in subsequent wars would never be forgotten. He has interviewed several members of JAVA for the Veterans History Project.

Shima turned 99 in February 2022. He currently resides in Gaithersburg, Maryland.

[View Shima's oral history – part of the digital collections of the National WWII Museum](#)