



HISTORY

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BACKGROUND ON MIS

Unlike the better known stories and exploits of the [100th Infantry Battalion](#) and [442nd Regimental Combat Team](#), most are unaware of a special group of Japanese American soldiers who served in World War II. This is the unique story of the [Military Intelligence Service \(MIS\)](#).

The MIS servicemen included [Nisei](#) (second generation Japanese American) and [Kibei](#) (*Nisei* raised in Japan for any length of time) who were specifically recruited for their linguistic ability. Japan had a firm belief that because of the complexity of its language no foreigner would be able to comprehend it, therefore its battle plans were perfectly safe without special code. It did not consider the fact that some Japanese Americans learned the language or were educated in Japan. The U.S. military brought together these young *Nisei* and others knowledgeable in the Japanese language to perform Japanese combat intelligence and psychological warfare. Trained intensively at the [Military Intelligence Service Language School](#) (MISLS), the MIS held the important task of translating captured enemy documents, interrogating POWs, and participating in war crime trials. Serving confidentially, the MIS soldiers worked individually or in small units assigned to every combat division and every campaign in the Pacific after the battle of Midway. The MIS acted as what President Harry Truman referred to as the "human secret weapon" and "eyes and ears" in the fight against Japan.

The MIS soldiers were shipped out to various locations in the Pacific and Southeast Asia, ranging from [Alaska](#) and the Philippines, to Australia and Japan. The work of the MIS was invaluable in several battles, such as the battle of the [Philippine Sea](#), [Okinawa](#), [Bougainville](#), not to mention the capture and translation of the "Z" Plan document that contained Japan's entire strategy and tactical plan to defend the Marianas Islands and the Philippines. The MIS also served in the [China-Burma-India Theater](#), participating in important combat missions. Furthermore, the linguists continued their role in the [occupation of Japan](#) after the war. They became the essential link between MacArthur's general headquarters and the Japanese people.

Despite the fact that the MIS *Nisei* were first mistrusted, they were later recognized as invaluable men to every group in the Pacific. In all, 6,000 men graduated from MISLS and served in the MIS. According to Major General Charles Willoughby, "the *Nisei* saved countless lives and shortened the war by two years."

In 1972, President Richard Nixon signed Executive Order 11652 declassifying all military intelligence documents during World War II. The role of the MIS was finally recognized as its stories and experiences opened to the general public. In June 2000, the MIS received a well-deserved [Presidential Unit Citation](#).