



Commander, U.S. Pacific Fleet
Nisei Veterans French Legion d'Honneur Award Ceremony
Japanese Cultural Center, Honolulu, Hawaii
Admiral Harry B. Harris Jr.
23 January 2015
As prepared for delivery

Governor Ige, it's always a privilege to share the stage with you; Governor Ariyoshi, Consul General Shigeeda of Japan.

Consul General Carmona of France, thank you for flying in all the way from San Francisco and thank you for the island-hopping you've been doing, as you've presented the French Legion of Honor to our veterans first on the Big Island, then Maui, and now here on Oahu.

I would like to take this moment to offer condolences to the people of France for the recent terror attacks in Paris. We stand with you.

And a special welcome to the Nisei warriors of World War II who we honor today. It's no exaggeration when I say that for me to be here, a Japanese American four-star admiral, in command of the United States Pacific Fleet – the same fleet Admiral Chester Nimitz commanded as he fought the Imperial Japanese across the Pacific – well that's because of you and those trail blazers like you.

The men of the 100th Infantry Battalion, and the 442nd Regimental Combat Team, the Military Intelligence Service who fought against Japan, the 1399th Engineer Construction Battalion here in Hawaii, and the 300 Nisei women who joined the Women's Army Corps, or WACs. Those are names and numbers that have moved mountains.

I am humbled to be in your presence and thankful to play a small part in your special ceremony.

And it's great to see so many current members of the "Go For Broke" Battalion of the Army Reserve here today. Yesterday was the tenth anniversary of the death of Kailua-native and U-H grad, first lieutenant Nainoa Hoe. His brother, who serves as a senior noncommissioned officer in the battalion to this day, Staff Sergeant Nakoa Hoe, thanks for continuing the legacy of excellence for the 100th Battalion – Go For Broke!

Fellow flag and general officers, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, I know that the French Legion of Honor has been awarded to only a select few of our nation's military heroes who served in World War II and I'm sure you will recognize some of their names: heroes from our past, like General George Marshall, Omar Bradley, Douglas MacArthur, Mark Clark and Admiral Chester Nimitz.

And now the names of these brave veterans here today will be added to that very select group of international heroes, and that honor is well deserved. For each of you are heroes who served on the front lines, fought in the battles, bled on the battlefield and helped liberate a nation. Gentlemen, your deeds are the stuff of legends.

Just consider what the 442nd did in France during World War II.

After joining the 100th Battalion and fighting up the Italian peninsula through the summer of 1944, the 442nd sent its anti-tank company to participate in Operation Dragoon, the invasion of Southern France.

A few months later, the rest of the 442nd was pulled off the line in Italy and sent to France to lead the breakthrough around Bruyeres, where the Seventh Army had been held up for weeks.

And the rescue of the Lost Battalion in the Vosges Mountains of France is considered one of the greatest land battles of the war. Where you broke through with a banzai charge, uphill, and fought through to rescue the 1st Battalion of the 141st Infantry Regiment after it had been cut off and surrounded for six days. You rescued 211 men of the Lost Battalion, even while losing many more of your own men doing so.

For those who survived that rescue, I know it still brings up painful memories today. I've heard that on windy, gusty nights at home, amid the rustling of the trees, some can still hear the echoes of the dying comrades calling for their mothers – “okaa-san, okaa-san.”

And the men of the 442nd fought on to see that terrible war brought to an end.

Before leaving France, the 442nd managed to capture a German mini-submarine at Menton. That would be quite a feat for the Navy to achieve – and here it was the Army.

Much of the 442nd redeployed back to Italy where they broke the Gothic Line.

The 522nd Field Artillery Battalion drove into Bavaria in Germany, freeing inmates from the Dachau concentration camp complex.

To this day, the 442nd remains the most highly decorated unit in the history of the United States military, for its size and length of service. You gentlemen, have much to be proud of.

For each and every one of you, through your individual acts of heroism and sacrifice, played a part in underwriting the freedoms we enjoy today, not just here in America, but in Italy and in France, and most of Europe.

Today France is an important and powerful NATO ally in Europe and in the Pacific. Like the U.S., France is a Pacific Power. Last summer the French ship FS Prairial sailed with ships from 21 other nations in the waters near Hawaii, during the Rim of the Pacific exercises. And we look forward to working with the French in the future as we work together to guarantee stability and security in this important region of the world.

Folks, I've intentionally kept my remarks short today, so that we can get to the business of honoring these men with France's highest medal — the Legion of Honor.

So I'll close my remarks with this final thought.

Today our nation draws her strength from those who served in the past, like these veterans of World War II. Our nation draws her strength from those who serve today, like those in uniform seated throughout the audience. And our nation will continue to draw her strength from those who freely volunteer to serve and defend our nation as members of our armed forces. Those who serve are part of an unbroken chain, linking Americans, generation to generation.

And our strength as a nation also comes from loyal citizens like each of you in the audience today – Americans who are aware of the challenges, the opportunities and the dangers we face. Those of us who serve are grateful for patriots like you, who help make us what we are today, the shield that protects nation, the armed forces of the United States of America.

May God bless each of our veterans, and each and every one of our Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, Marines and Coastguardsmen, past and present, who have courageously entered the breach and who fought for the freedoms we hold so dear.

May God bless the great nation of France, a powerful ally in Europe and here in the Pacific.

And may God bless the United States of America, land of the free, and home of the brave.

Thank you.