

Congressman Wally Herger
Marysville Japanese-American Citizens League
Congressional Gold Medal Ceremony
September 15, 2012

Remarks as prepared

Good afternoon. It's a privilege to be with you today to honor men so worthy of our gratitude and recognition: veterans who served in the Military Intelligence Service, the 100th Infantry Battalion, and the 442nd Regimental Combat Team during World War II. The members of these units are some of the greatest patriots in our nation's history. On behalf of Congress and our nation, thank you for your selfless and courageous service.

I am continually inspired by the sacrifice and unyielding commitment to freedom of America's greatest generation. The veterans we honor today modeled these most admirable qualities in a truly unique way. Sadly, their distinguished service came after our national leaders instituted a deplorable policy. The decision to relocate Japanese-Americans against their will was an injustice rooted in irrational panic and blatant prejudice. In 1988, the United States correctly apologized for this stain in our history and took small but important steps to amend the wrong. I was pleased to support this long overdue action.

The veterans of the Military Intelligence Service, the 100th Infantry Battalion, and the 442nd Regimental Combat Team chose to serve their country despite its injustice against them. After the attack on Pearl Harbor, the United States labeled all enlisted Japanese-Americans as "enemy aliens," making them ineligible to serve, but you and your fellow patriots were determined to fight to protect the country you called home. Japanese-Americans living in Hawaii petitioned their commanding general, declaring, "Hawaii is our home; the United States our country. We know but one loyalty and that is to the Stars and Stripes. We wish to do our part as loyal Americans in every way possible."

The general responded by putting the volunteers to work. For the next year, they built barracks, quarried rock, and surfaced roads. Their patriotism, demonstrated in their willingness to do even manual labor, led the War Department to reopen military service to Japanese-American volunteers. The Hawaiian volunteers

entered the 100th Infantry Battalion, and the War Department sent them to train with the 442nd Regimental Combat Team, which was composed mostly of Japanese-American volunteers from the continental United States.

Out of this group of Japanese-American soldiers, some were recruited to join the Military Intelligence Service. Throughout the rest of the war, they interpreted, translated Japanese codes, and served as counter-intelligence agents. Their work was critical to the United States' success in the Pacific.

Meanwhile, the 100th Infantry Battalion and the 442nd Regiment Combat Team participated in eight major campaigns in Italy, France and Germany, fighting in battles at Belmont, Bruyeres and Biffontain. At Biffontain, they were given the assignment to rescue the "Lost Battalion" of 275 soldiers from Texas. After five days and nights of continuous, severe fighting the Germans surrendered and the Lost Battalion was saved, but the 100th Infantry Battalion and the 442nd Regiment Combat Team lost over 800 men. Over the course of the entire war, the casualty rate these units bore was unprecedented. The motto of the 442nd Regimental Combat Team was fitting: "Go for Broke!" These courageous men truly did wager everything to protect our nation and our freedoms.

The illustrious Congressional Gold Medal, the highest civilian award presented by Congress, is awarded for an "outstanding deed or act of service to the United States." The first recipients were those who served in the American Revolution, the War of 1812, and the Mexican War. Other recipients have included George Washington, Thomas Edison, and Mother Teresa. In 2010, Congress voted to award the Congressional Gold Medal to the Military Intelligence Service, the 100th Infantry Battalion, and the 442nd Regimental Combat Team in recognition of their dedicated service during World War II.

It's an honor be here today to award these medals to eighteen patriots who served in these units. Even when our nation committed an injustice against you, you remained fiercely loyal to the country you loved. You risked everything you had to protect your homeland. I salute each of you here today and all who served with you. You embodied the courage to petition leaders who were against you, the integrity to do what was right in the midst of unspeakable adversity, and the grace to never give up on America. Thank you again, and congratulations on receiving this much-deserved recognition. May God bless you and the United States.