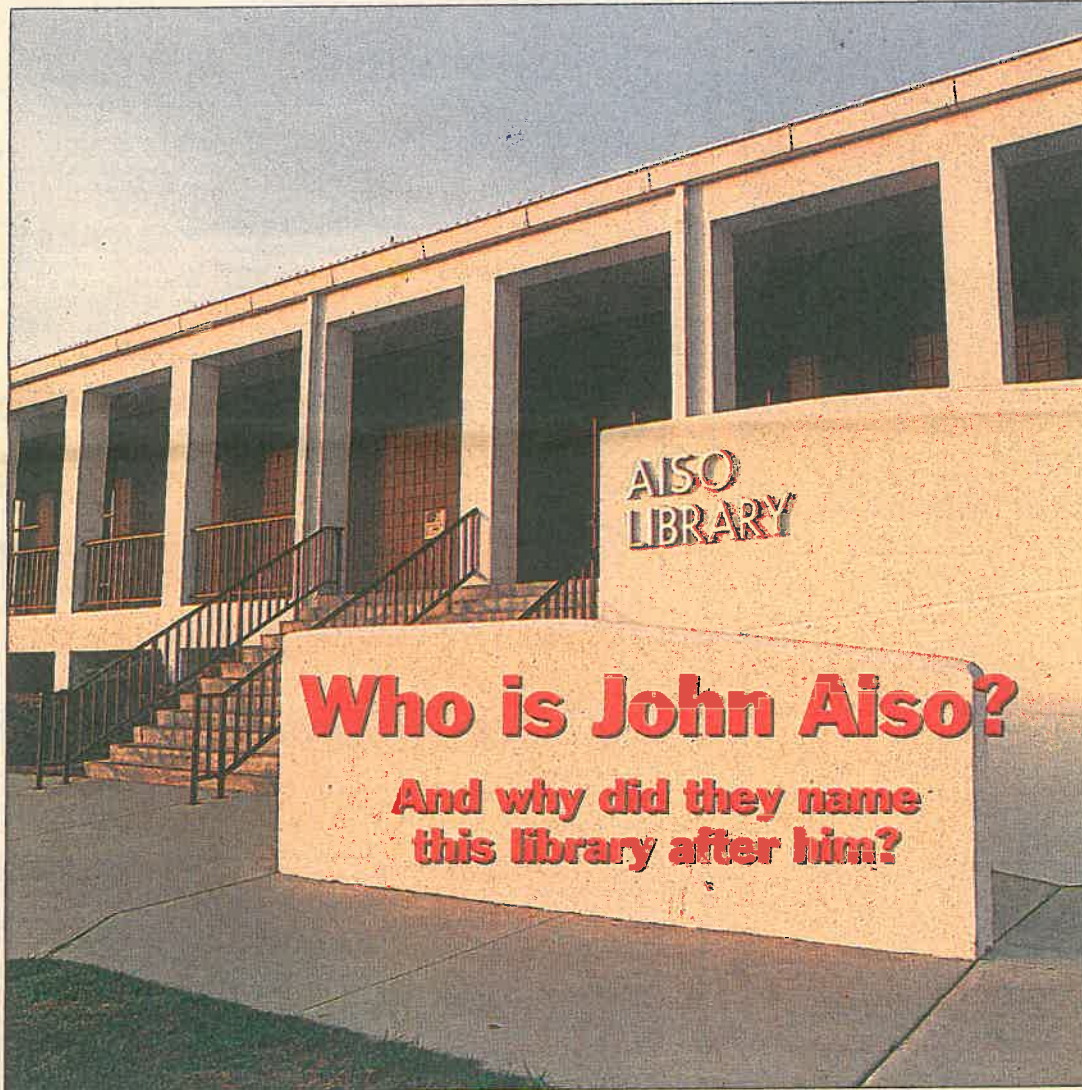


ALTA VISTA

THE SUNDAY HERALD MAGAZINE

SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 7, 1998



PLUS: MAXINE SHORE PUMPS UP LITERARY MUSCLES



DEFENSE LANGUAGE INSTITUTE
FOREIGN LANGUAGE CENTER

PRESIDIO OF MONTEREY, CALIFORNIA 93944-5006

REPLY TO
ATTENTION OF:

ATFL-CMT (870)

25 March 1988

MEMORANDUM FOR: Commander, 7th Infantry Division (Light) and
Fort Ord, ATTN: AFZW-AG, Fort Ord, CA 93941

SUBJECT: Memorialization

1. The new DLIFLC Academic Library will be opening later this year at the Presidio of Monterey. The DLI Memorialization Committee has recommended and I agree that it would be most appropriate that this building be named in honor of John F. Aiso, the first Director of Academic Training for the World War II predecessor of the Defense Language Institute.
2. John F. Aiso was a second-generation Japanese-American (Nisei) and Harvard Law School graduate who was called to serve his country at the beginning of World War II. He was chosen to organize the Military Intelligence Service Language School (MISLS) that opened on 1 November 1941 at the Presidio of San Francisco. Under his vigorous leadership as Director of Academic Training from 1941 to 1946 the school graduated over 6,000 military linguists. These men and women contributed immeasurably to our winning the war against Japan and the peace that followed. His students served in the jungles of Guadalcanal, on MacArthur's intelligence staff and on the decks of the USS Missouri in 1945.
3. After the war he resumed the practice of law and was the first mainland Japanese-American to enter the judiciary in California. A few weeks after his appearance last year at DLIFLC as the guest of honor at the 46th MISLS Anniversary Celebration, he was killed in a robbery attempt in Los Angeles at the age of 78.
4. This memorialization action will enable future generations of students at DLIFLC to recognize the traditions of academic excellence, personal achievement and service to their country that is their rightful heritage as personified by John F. Aiso. I strongly recommend your favorable consideration of this request.

TODD ROBERT POCH
Colonel, USA
Commandant

3 Encls

1. Memo, DLIFLC, ATFL-MH,
26 Jan 88, Subject: Memo-
rialization Committee Mtg
Minutes, 19 Jan 88.
2. Photograph, MAJ John F. Aiso
3. Shigeya Kihara, "John Aiso,
Great WWII Nisei

John Aiso: First Japanese American Judge on the Mainland

Editor's Note: The following is an edited version of an article written in Japanese by Rafu Shimpo staff writer Kiyoshi Yano. The article was translated into English by Haruo Kugizaki, formerly an instructor with the Military Intelligence Service.

Part I

Imagine a boy being barred from leading his school as student body president because he is Japanese American. Imagine him not being able to study at a Japanese university because he, as a foreigner, was not "a loyal subject of the emperor."

Yet these experiences were a reality for John Fujio Aiso, who was born in the Los Angeles suburb of Burbank when anti-Japanese sentiment and prejudice against Asians were rampant.

But he did not let these obstacles overtake him. He went on to become the first Japanese American judge on the mainland. Now at 78, Aiso still works part-time at the law offices of O'Melveny & Myers.

From childhood to retirement, Aiso's life reflects the challenges that have faced a segment of the older Japanese American population.

"I think I have been a most lucky fellow," he said in an interview. "Yes, there were times in my childhood when I wondered if I could change the pigment of my skin and questioned why God had created me a Japanese."

"As I look back now, I feel very humble and grateful to the Lord for having given me such an interesting role to play in life's drama."

Aiso was born the son of a gardener and laundrywoman. His father emigrated to the United States in 1898, and engaged in gardening.

"There were no pick-up trucks nor motor-driven lawnmowers at that time," the former judge remembered. "He rode a bicycle to work, carrying a lawnmower on his left shoulder and hanging a 50-foot garden hose on his handlebars."

Aiso's mother came to California during the Russo-Japanese War. "Out of her meager earnings as a laundrywoman for an American family, she purchased framed pictures of George Washington, Abraham Lincoln and Jesus Christ. She hung them in the parlor of our modest home, and instructed us to emulate the admirable qualities of these historical characters," Aiso said.

'Don't Give Up'

Aiso was always a diligent student. A few school bullies at Grant Grammar School in Hollywood would verbally harass him, as well as the other Japanese American children, but this proved to only make Aiso more determined to do well academically.

While at Le Conte Junior High School in Hollywood dur-



JOHN AISO

ing the academic year of 1922-23, Aiso successfully ran for student body president. Receiving 900 votes out of a total of 1,200, Aiso was elected to lead student body meetings in the auditorium.

Aiso's celebration, however, ended a day after the election. A group of parents protested the election, shouting, "No child of mine is going to be under a Jap."

The parents demanded that the principal remove Aiso from office, or else submit his resignation. With such an ultimatum, the principal decided to suspend student government until Aiso graduated.

"John, don't give up," said some sympathetic teachers. "No one can stop a good man." Thus, Aiso persevered and continued to put more effort into his studies.

Graduating from junior high school did not end the controversy surrounding John Aiso.

At Hollywood High School, Aiso attempted to get involved in various activities — Junior ROTC and cheerleading — only to be turned away for being a "Jap."

He finally found a niche on the debating team, later becoming the group's captain. He led the Hollywood High School debating team to the Southern California championship in 1926.

It was about this time that he was selected by the faculty to be the valedictorian of his class in June and the first Japanese American to be elected an Ephebian.

He then went on to take first place in a preliminary selection contest for a national oratorical contest on the U.S. Constitution, sponsored by a number of national newspapers, including the Los Angeles Times.

Aiso was called in by the principal, and instead of being congratulated, was informed that he had to choose between being the valedictorian or representing the school in the oratorical competition. Aiso reluctantly chose the valedictory, and Herbert Wenig, the second place winner, was selected to represent Hollywood High

School.

Racism and Jealousy

Regarding this incident, The Rafu Shimpo reported at that time: "Because of jealousy against him for getting two honors, John Aiso gives up participating in speech contest. . . . One of our countrymen is cursed by hateful racial discrimination. . . . How sad [that this occurs] even in the educational world."

When this series of events was told to The Los Angeles Times, one of the sponsors of the event, the secretary to Harry Chandler, the president of the newspaper, met with the principal and Aiso.

The secretary decided that racial discrimination was behind the principal's request, and urged Aiso to participate in the contest.

Moved by this encouragement, Aiso consulted with the chairman of the Japanese Merchants Association, who also recommended participation, saying "there is no reason to buckle under unreasonable pressure."

Aiso then met with the principal and expressed his desire to participate.

The principal reiterated his fear that an unfavorable feeling might arise among the white parents and students if Aiso were to "monopolize" both honors.

Since the change had already been announced in the school newspaper, the principal recommended that Aiso stay with his original decision.

Aiso agreed out of respect. Herbert Wenig, Hollywood High's representative won the West Coast division on May 14. For his victory, Wenig received \$500 in cash, an expense paid trip to Europe, and the right to represent the West Coast in the final contest to be held in Washington, D.C.

Aiso was selected as a traveling companion and coach to Wenig. The national contest was held on June 3. Wenig won first place and was heralded as the best high school orator of contemporary United States.

However, according to a Rafu Shimpo report, Wenig almost gave up participating in the Washington finals of the contest. Two newspapers — the Washington Post and Washington Star — had run articles narrating the background of Wenig's participation in the contest and criticized the school authorities and parents for forcing Aiso to abandon participation in the contest because of the racist sentiment on the Pacific Coast.

On the evening of June 3, the night before the finals, Wenig

was close to quitting. He sent telegrams to Hollywood High School and The Los Angeles Times; both responded that he continue in the contest.

Returning to California, both Wenig and Aiso were given a welcome party on June 15 by the student body and faculty of Hollywood High.

It was later revealed that Aiso's trip to Washington had been paid for by Los Angeles

busiest man" of his class, won a varsity award on the Brown University cross-country team, led the debating team to an Eastern Intercollegiate Debating Championship, and represented the fraternity Delta Upsilon in the university's interfraternity governing board.

The future judge was selected valedictorian of his class, and graduated cum laude with honors in economics.

'Aiso attempted to get involved in various activities — Junior ROTC and cheerleading — only to be turned away for being a 'Jap''

Times President Harry Chandler, instead of by the Hollywood High School student body as had been previously announced.

From this time on, Aiso came to have a good friendship with Chandler.

College in Old America

While in Washington, D.C., Aiso visited Japanese Ambassador Matsudaira. "What university do you intend to attend?" asked the ambassador.

"I would like to attend Stanford, but our family cannot afford it, so I'll probably be going to UCLA," said Aiso.

"You should plan on becoming more knowledgeable with the older part of America," advised Matsudaira.

The ambassador then sent Aiso to speak with the president of Brown University in Rhode Island, Dr. W.H.P. Faunce. The Japanese Embassy had close ties with Brown University.

Faunce said he could make no promises to Aiso, but would look into a scholarship for him.

At age 18, Aiso graduated from Hollywood High School in June of 1926. He then persuaded his parents to allow him to go to Tokyo to study the Japanese language. He enrolled in a special class at Seijo Gakuen and studied there for 10 months.

Meanwhile, Aiso had been accepted at Brown, and received a generous scholarship. He had to be literally called away from Japan to enroll in the Rhode Island university in the fall of 1927.

Even with his scholarship, Aiso had to supplement his funds with part-time work, both on and off campus. He was, however, still active in school. He was voted by his classmates as the "second

Aiso then went on to Harvard Law School as the first Nisei student from the continental United States, having been preceded by three other Japanese Americans from Hawaii.

Legal Eagle

After graduating from Harvard Law School in 1934 with a law degree, Aiso went to New York City — one of the few places in the continental United States where a Nisei could find a job at a law firm. He was admitted to the bar in New York and was hired as a law clerk in the Wall Street firm of Patterson, Eagle, Greenough & Day.

Aiso began this job during the days of the Depression, when even some Harvard Law School graduates went to work for \$5 per week. In some cases, wealthy parents would pay firms for permitting their son to work. Aiso's starting salary was \$15 a week, which was raised to \$25.

Even in New York, only the offices doing work with Japan were interested in hiring Japanese Americans. At that time, the American base for commercial transactions between Japan and the United States was New York City.

(To be continued)

JOHN FUJIO AISO

(14 December 1909 - 29 December 1987)

--- one of the founders of what was to become DLI ---

Background--

- born in Burbank, California
- a second generation American of Japanese ancestry (Nisei)
- degrees from Brown University, Harvard Law School and Chuo Univ.

Role in founding DLI--

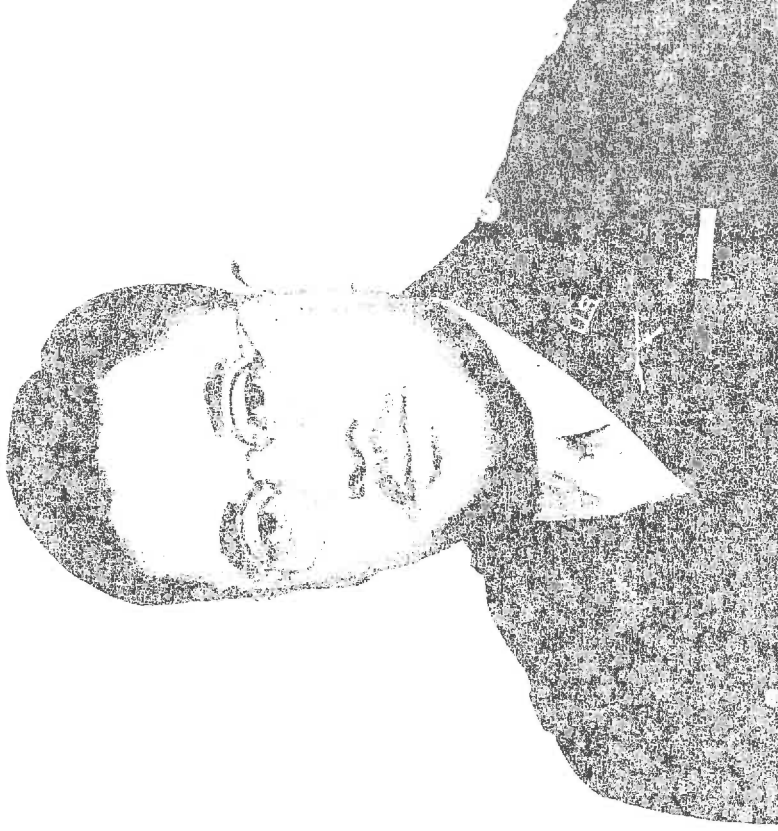
- drafted into the U.S. Army in April, 1941
- during secret screenings was found to be a qualified linguist
- named as one of two military to instruct at the new school
- along with two civilian instructors, prepared all textbooks and classroom exercises for the Japanese language course.
- for school opening, reverted to civilian status
- school opened 1 Nov 1941 as the 4th Army Intelligence School
- served as first Chief Instructor (with four other instructors)
- changed title to Director of Academic Training, 1942-1946
- at some point, brought back to active duty and commissioned Major
- at peak enrollment, nearly 100 instructors and 2000 students
- by the end of World War II, the school had graduated 6,000 linguists.

Impact of the new school--

The war in the Pacific could not have been won without the graduates. Hardly anyone in the U.S. in 1941 was qualified in Japanese, Japanese-Americans included. Only 3% of Japanese-Americans were fluent in Japanese. Consequently, most of the 6,000 graduates were trained in Japanese. They served throughout the Pacific Theater, becoming the eyes and ears of not only the American fighting forces, but also of other Allied forces fighting Japan. After the war was won, the graduates continued to be important in serving with the American Occupation and rebuilding of Japan.

Postscript--

- awarded the Legion of Merit
- first Japanese-American to be named to a judgeship on the U.S. mainland
- awarded the 3rd Class Order of the Rising Sun by the Emperor of Japan for his contributions to understanding between the U.S. and Japan.

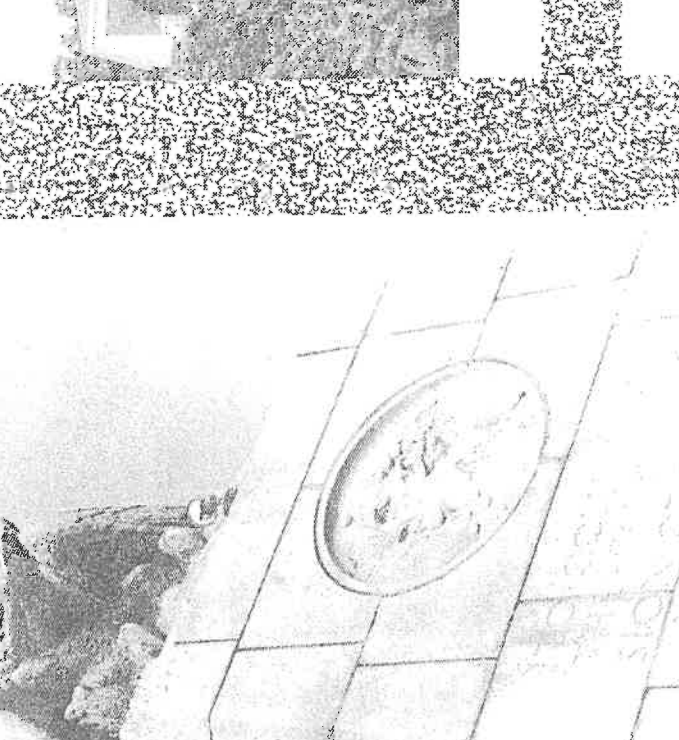


JOHN F. AISO

MAJOR, AUS
Director of Academic Training
1941-1945



Aiso Library



Rasmussen Hall



**DEDICATION
CEREMONY**

28 OCTOBER 1988

DEDICATION CEREMONY

AISO LIBRARY

RASMUSSEN HALL

SEQUENCE OF EVENTS

OFFICIAL PARTY ARRIVES

TROOPS MARCH INTO POSITION

ATTENTION IS SOUNDED

COLORS ARE PRESENTED

PLAYING OF THE NATIONAL ANTHEM

INVOCATION

INTRODUCTION OF GUEST SPEAKER:

COLONEL RONALD I. COWGER

GUEST SPEAKER:

MR. SHIGEYIA KIHARA

MEMORIAL PROCLAMATIONS

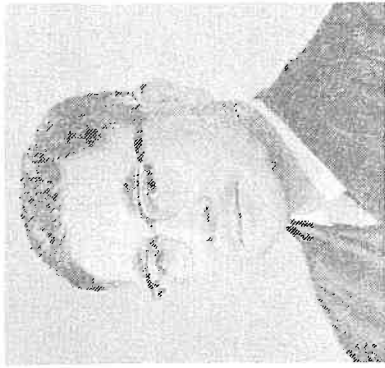
RIBBON CUTTING

UNVEILING OF NAMES

FIRING OF VOLLEYS

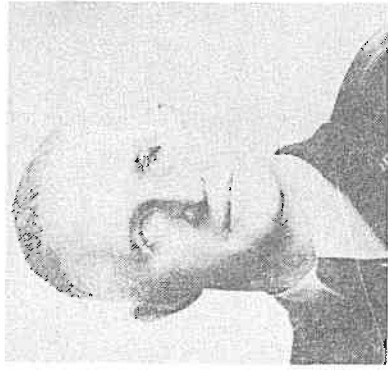
PLAYING OF TAPS

CONCLUSION OF THE CEREMONY



*Dedicated to the Memory of
Judge John Fujio Aiso
1909 - 1987*

John Fujio Aiso was born in 1909 in Burbank, California, as a second generation Japanese-American (Nisei). He graduated from Brown University and the Harvard School of Law and worked from 1937 to 1941 for a British company in Manchuria. He was conscripted into the United States Army in 1941, and within months he was called upon to serve as the chief instructor of what became the Military Intelligence Service Language School, the predecessor of the Defense Language Institute. Under his inspiring leadership as Director of Academic Training, the school grew to graduate over 6,000 military linguists from 1942 until 1946, linguists who contributed immeasurably to the American victory and to winning the peace that followed. He was given a direct commission to major and awarded the Legion of Merit. After the war he resumed the practice of law and in 1953 he became the first Japanese-American to enter the California state judiciary. For his contributions to understanding and friendship between the United States and Japan, in 1984 the Emperor of Japan awarded him the 3rd Class Order of the Rising Sun.



*Dedicated to the Memory of
Colonel Kai Eduard Rasmussen
1902 - 1988*

Kai Eduard Rasmussen was the first commandant of the Military Intelligence Service School (MISLS), predecessor of the Defense Language Institute. Born in 1902 in Helsingør, Denmark, he emigrated to the United States in 1922 and enlisted in the United States Army. He graduated from the United States Military Academy in 1929 as a coast artillery officer and from 1936 to 1940 he served as military attache in Imperial Japan. In 1941 Captain Rasmussen and Major John Weckerling established the secret Japanese language school at the Presidio of San Francisco with sixty students. When war broke out he rose to the rank of colonel and headed Fort Snelling (1944-1946), Minnesota, until it was relocated at the Presidio of Monterey in 1946. The school's 6,000 graduates served throughout the Pacific Theatre during the war and during the occupation of Japan that followed. He earned the devotion of his predominantly Japanese-American students and staff by placing great faith in their loyalty and abilities and was awarded the Legion of Merit for his dedicated leadership. He subsequently served as military attache to Norway and on General MacArthur's intelligence staff during the Korean War. He retired from active military service in 1955.