Who is John Aiso?

And why did they name this library after him?

PLUS: MAXINE SHORE PUMPS UP LITERARY MUSCLES
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 POCCH
Colonel, USA
Commandant

3 Encls
1. Memo, DLIFLC, ATFL-MH, 26 Jan 88, Subject: Memorialization 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 for the newspaper 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 the main character, a man 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 deter him. He went on to become the first Japanese American judge in the mainland.

On May 28, 1928, Aiso still works part-time at the law office of his father.

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

“I think I have been a most lucky man,” he said in an interview. “Yes, there were times in my childhood when I wondered whether 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 giving 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.

“Those were: we had no television. We were a lawmower at that time,” the former county commissioner said. “I rode a bicycle to work, carrying a lawmower on my left shoulder and hanging a 50-foot garden hose on his handlebars.

Aiso’s mother came to California during the Russo-Japanese War. "I did not mean to go to work as a laundrywoman for an American family, she purchased framed picture of George Washington, Abraham Lincoln and Jesus Christ. She hung the picture in our modest home, and instructed us to respect these admirable qualities of these historical color-tects,” Aiso said.

'Don’t Give Up’

Aiso was always a diligent student and school building at Grand Grammar School in Hollywood was verbally harass him as the representative of the Japanese American children, but this proved only to make Aiso more determined to do well.

At Le Conte Junior High School in Hollywood during 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 Aiso. Aiso also went to Hollywood High School. Aiso attempted to get involved in various activities — Junior Boys’ and Girls’ Club — but were turned away for being a "Jap.”

Then he finally found a niche on the debate team, later becoming the team’s captain. He led the Hollywood High School debate 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 on Ephe- bian. 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 also was called, in his 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. And 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 that at that time, Aiso continued to work against him for getting two honors. John Aiso gives up participating in speech contest.

One of our contemporaries is cursed by hateful racial disc- crimination. How sad! [that this occurs] even in the educational world.

When a 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 encourage- ment, Aiso consulted with the chairman of the Japanese Mer- curial Association, who also recommended participation, saying "There is no reason to buck the situation, and let us all get along with each other.” Then Aiso then met with the principal and expressed his desire to participate.

The principal reiterated his fear that an unfavorable sen- timent might arise among the white parents and students if Aiso were to “monopolize” both positions.

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

Aiso also agreed out of respect.

Herbert Wenig, Hollywood High’s representative won the West Coast division on May 10. For his victory, Wenig received $500 in cash, an expense paid trip to San Diego, and the right to represent the West Coast in the final contest to be held in Wash- ington D.C.

Aiso also was selected as a travel- ing 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 Hollywood 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, saying that he would 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 Times President Harry Chand- ler, instead of the Hollywood High School. The reason for this had been previously announced.

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

College in Old America


"I would like to attend Stan- ford, but our family cannot afford it, so I’ll probably be going to UCLA,” said Aiso.

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

The ambassador then sent Aiso to speak with the pres- ident 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 the matter for him.

At age 18, Aiso graduated from Hollywood High School in June of 1926. He then persuad- ed 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 joined the track team voted as the "second

Businessman" 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 rep- resented the fraternity Delta Upsilon in the university’s inter-fra- ternity governing board.

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

Aiso then went on to Harvard Law School as the first Nisei student from the continental United States, having been preceded by three other Japa- nese American students from Hawaii.

Aiso began his law career in 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 & Co.

Aiso also began his 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.

Aiso moved to New York, only the offices doing work with Japan were interested in hiring Japa- nese Americans. At that time, the American base for commer- cial transactions between Japan and the United States was New York City.

(Tobe continued)
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.
CONCLUSION OF THE CEREMONY
PLAYING OF TAPS
UNVEILING OF NAMES
MEMORIAL PROCLAMATIONS

MR. SHIGEYA KIHARA
GUEST SPEAKER:

COLONEL RONALD L. COWGEE
INTRODUCTION OF GUEST SPEAKER:

INVOCATION

PLAYING OF THE NATIONAL ANTHEM
COLORS ARE PRESENTED
ATTENTION IS SOUNDED
TROOPS MARCH INTO POSITION
OFFICIAL PARTY ARRIVES

SEQUENCE OF EVENTS

RASMUSSEN HALL
ASLO LIBRARY
DEDICATION CEREMONY
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.

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 attaché 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 attaché to Norway and on General MacArthur's intelligence staff during the Korean War. He retired from active military service in 1955.