



The real story. Japanese American History told by those who lived it.

Ms. Susan Uyemura, CEO
(714) 515-5501
suyemura@jalivinglegacy.org

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Echoes of Silence: A Mission of Remembrance

In a quiet suburb of Southern California sits an 87-year old Nikkei veteran, who fervently works on a project called Echoes of Silence. Echoes of Silence is an educational project dedicated to honoring the Nisei soldiers who were killed-in-action (KIA) during World War II. In a great many ways, the soldiers who never made it back home were prematurely “silenced.” The KIA cannot share their feelings, pass down stories or share about their moments of triumph and courage. However, by recognizing their sacrifices and acknowledging their lives, we give them a voice that will continue to “echo” for future generations.

The project includes a directory of Nikkei soldiers and, in some case, their white commanding officers, biographical profiles, written accounts of the major World War II campaigns, and much more. All of this information is placed on a single CD and is available to the public free of charge. Junwo "Jim" Yamashita started the Echoes of Silence project under the auspices of the Americans of Japanese Ancestry World War II Memorial Alliance. During the past 20 years or so, Jim and his team of volunteers have collected data on all 812 KIA soldiers of World War II.

Jim grew up in Moapa Valley, Nevada and served with the 442nd Regimental Combat Team's I Company. The government originally denied Jim the ability to enlist in military service. Jim remembers how difficult it was to watch his classmates go off to war. However, Jim enlisted as soon as the government lifted the enemy alien status. He eventually joined fellow Nikkei soldiers in Mississippi as he trained at Camp Shelby. During this grueling training period, lifelong friendships were forged that continue to this day.

As the years have gone by, reduced mobility has not deterred Jim from staying active on this project and vigilant for new information. He spends hours on end on the computer, sometimes well into the night. His unswerving gratitude for the soldiers who gave their lives, drives him to continue collecting information and photos about his fallen comrades. Jim is determined to continue updating the Echoes of Silence data, duplicating hundreds

of educational CDs and special DVDs, and mailing them out to those who request it. Jim's mission is to keep doing this for as long as he is physically able.

About five years ago, the Memorial Alliance decided to partner with Japanese American Living Legacy to help perpetuate the Echoes of Silence project. Living Legacy is another all-volunteer organization comprised of multigenerational Nikkei and many non-Japanese community members. Their mission is to educate the public on all aspects of Japanese American history by means of creating oral histories and educational materials.

People might ask why the Echoes of Silence project is so important to our community. The answer is simple. We might etch our KIA names in granite, expecting that the names alone will evoke emotion and commemorate their sacrifices. However, the Echoes of Silence project believes in the lives "behind" the carved names, lives that belonged to honored soldiers who made the ultimate sacrifice for their country. Our community's recognition must go beyond just seeing a name on the wall. We need to recognize each life as somebody's son, husband, father, uncle, brother, cousin or friend. Only then will we truly understand the price each of them paid.

Jim regularly receives inquiries about someone's great uncle, grandfather or cousin - someone only "heard about" or "seen in a photo." Jim patiently addresses every single inquiry as if he were seeking his own family member's information. Helping others find information about their veteran relatives brings Jim some peace.

Echoes of Silence is provided free of charge. However, donations are accepted but never required. If you are interested in receiving a complimentary copy of the Echoes of Silence CD, e-mail info@jalivinglegacy.org and make sure to include your mailing address. To correct any errors in the material or provide additional information for a Nisei KIA soldier of World War II, please contact Jim Yamashita at jyamashita@jalivinglegacy.org. For general inquiries, please contact us at info@jalivinglegacy.org.

Japanese American Living Legacy is a California nonprofit (501.c.3) organization based out of California State University, Fullerton. All of the board of directors, staff and advisors are volunteers. For more information on Japanese American Living Legacy / Nikkei Writers Guild please visit their website at www.jalivinglegacy.org or call them at (657) 278-4483.

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