

Grant Ichikawa, MIS War Hero, Passes



Vienna, VA. Grant Ichikawa, father, patriot, and inspiration to many, passed away peacefully on December 3, 2017. He was 98.

Ichikawa was born in Suisun Valley, California, son of a fruit farmer. He was the first in his family to receive a higher education, graduating from the University of California Berkeley in May 1941. Unable to find a job as an accountant, he decided to farm. When WW II broke out six months later, Ichikawa was forced to abandon his plans, sustaining huge losses to his investment and was among the 110,000 ethnic Japanese gathered up and sent to internment camps across the U.S. He and his family ended up at the Gila River Relocation Center.

When the US Army recruiters visited his camp in November 1942 to recruit qualified Nisei to serve in the U. S. Army, Ichikawa volunteered and was assigned to the Military Intelligence Service (MIS). He was sent to Brisbane, Australia to join the Allied Translation and Interpretation Service (ATIS) to translate Japanese documents and interrogate prisoners. He was eventually sent to participate in the liberation of the Philippines, where he received a commission and became an officer in the Army. It was in the Philippines following the Japanese surrender where he commanded an operation to go into the hills to convince a contingent of heavily armed Japanese soldiers to surrender.



Ichikawa says, "One day, we got word of 200 of them surrendering at a certain point. We went out there with around ten trucks; we were headed up by a Captain, and I was the Second Lieutenant, and the rest were just truck drivers. We went to this rendezvous point, and we could see the Japanese hiding around in the woods. They had white flags tied to their bayonets, but they wouldn't come out. So, as the linguist, I started walking across the field to the middle of the field and this small group of Japanese started walking with their white flags to the middle of the field. They weren't exactly ready to surrender yet. I had to talk to them. They finally surrendered. They were led by a Lieutenant Colonel. He gave me his sword as a gesture of surrender. All the troops came out. We disarmed all of them. And all the guns and rifles were well-oiled and in working condition. This unit was ready to fight. When we gave them C-rations, usually Japanese, the first man for himself. But, nobody ate. We wondered what was going on.

They waited until their commanding officer started eating. Then, I realized what kind of a unit we had over here. Anyway, nobody made any false moves. We returned to the base with our prisoners without incident. Thinking back, that was a real close shave. If somebody got a little itchy finger or moved something, we would have been mowed down.”

After the war, Ichikawa was reassigned to Tokyo, and served as the head of ATIS. It was here that he met a young lady, a linguist from Hawaii, among the first civilians to serve in post-war Japan. Ichikawa says “I sat next to a very pretty girl and I started making conversation about her perfume and things like that. She didn't give me the time of day. Salem Yagawa, my old tent mate in Australia met Elaine, another one of the girls. She wouldn't go out with him except on a double date. I guess she didn't trust him. Salem got me as his double date, and Elaine got Millie as her double date. We became a pair. After a short courtship, we decided to get married. We were married on April 2, 1946. It was the first marriage in Japan. We had a great write-up in the papers. The ATIS Officers Club threw a reception for us; we had a nice reception that didn't cost us a penny.”

When his enlistment requirements were met, Ichikawa was discharged in 1947. When the Korean War broke out he was recalled to duty and served in Hokkaido, reporting to the Central Intelligence Corps. Following the end of the Korean War, Ichikawa was discharged again, and was headed back to California to become a fruit farmer once again.

His final attempt at being a farmer was interrupted. He was recruited by the Central Intelligence Agency and his long and illustrious career was under way. He served in a variety of positions throughout Asia, but tours of duty in Indonesia and Vietnam were to define his calling.

One morning in September 1965, huge demonstrations were staged against the U. S. Consulate in Surabaya. The massive crowds surrounded the consulate, shutting off any access. Ichikawa received a police escort to the consulate where he was able to receive the delegation and their political demands, able to gain access to the consulate as the demonstrators were confused as to why a Japanese was present.

Following Indonesia and a short stay in the U. S., Ichikawa was assigned to Vietnam, spending two tours there before being evacuated during the fall of Saigon on April 29, 1975. He was one of the last to leave, departing via helicopter to the USS Okinawa. Eventually making his way back to the U.S., Ichikawa decided to retire, at the age of 56.

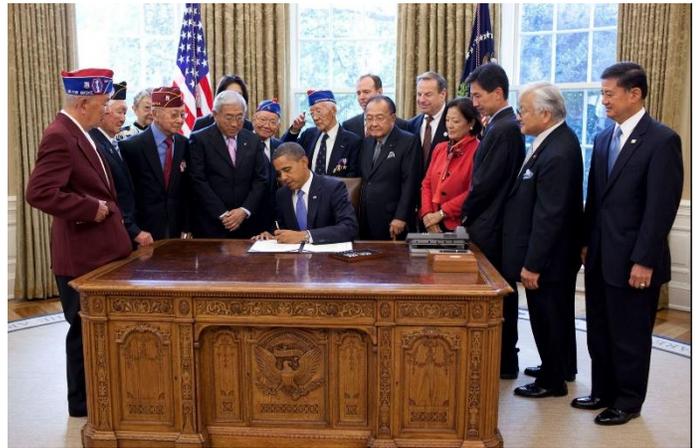
Immediately after retirement, Ichikawa and his wife Millie began working to help Vietnamese families resettle, opening their home and their lives to many families, until they were able to settle in homes of their own.

Ichikawa served the Japanese American veteran's community for many years through JAVA and others' efforts. He started the Round Robin in 2003 as a way to get information out quickly to veterans. In addition to many other efforts, Grant collaborated with others on a project to compile a roster of approximately 6,000 full names of MIS compatriots who attended the MIS Language School (MISLS).

Ichikawa loved to do outreach, telling folks about the Japanese-American experience and also serving as a bridge between Japan and America. He did this for many years with aplomb, grace, and effectiveness.

On November 2, 2011, in an award ceremony held in the Emancipation Hall at the United States Capitol, Ichikawa was bestowed the great honor to receive the medal on behalf of the MIS.

The Congressional Gold Medal is the highest civilian award in the United States. The decoration is awarded to an individual or unit who performs an outstanding deed or act of service to the security, prosperity, and national interest of the United States. U.S. Congressman Adam Schiff introduced H.R. 347 to award the Congressional Gold Medal to the 100th Infantry Battalion, the 442nd Regimental Combat Team and the Military Intelligence Service.



It is with great pride and sorrow that we bid farewell to a true patriot and hero of the nation.

He is survived by his son Bryan, daughter Lona, and grandson Devin.



MIS Veteran Ichikawa, holding the Congressional Gold Medal, (center). Left is John Boehner, Speaker of the US House of Representatives and right is US Senator Daniel Inouye. Emancipation Hall, US Congress, November 2, 2011.

For those who are interested in attending the service, it will be held on Saturday, December 16, 2017, at 11:00 am:

Money and King Funeral Home
171 Maple Ave. W
Vienna, VA 22180
(703) 938-7440

Celebration lunch afterwards:
Harvest Moon Restaurant,
260 Arlington Blvd
Falls Church, VA 22042.

The family requests in lieu of flowers donations be made to the JAVA Scholarship Program.

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