Guide to the Oiye (George) Album 1943-1946


Japanese American National Museum
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Guide to the George Oiye Album 1943-1946

Item number: 95.158.48

Descriptive Summary
Title: George Oiye Album
Date: 1943-1946
Creator: Oiye, George
Repository: Japanese American National Museum (Los Angeles, Calif.)
Los Angeles, CA 90012
Language: English.

Access
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Preferred Citation
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Acquisition Information
Acquired in 1995 as a gift of George Oiye.

Processing Information
Album was processed by museum staff. The finding aid was originally encoded by Snowden Becker in 2001, and updated by Jamie Henricks in 2017.

Historical Note
(From George Oiye's own notes on the creation of his World War II albums)
Covers: Battery C of the 522 Field Artillery Battalion occupied a town named Donauworth in Germany for eight months following the end of WWII. It was a town of perhaps 2000 people and had a number of shops within its gates. The town had a fine bookbinding and print shop, and several photographic processing shops, as well. The 522nd Field Artillery Battalion had several skilled graphic arts designers who created a design for album covers and had them printed with individual names, in gold letters, for a total cost of about $2.00 or so. There were two sizes and a choice of blue or gold; I bought one of each.

Photographs: During combat, we were not allowed to have cameras or take combat pictures, but Lieutenant Susumu Ito and I bent a lot of rules and smuggled our cameras in with our military equipment. Sus had an Argus 35mm camera and I had a Kodak 620 folding camera. I later made a battlefield acquisition of a Kodak 35mm camera. Sus had connections with the Army Signal Corps guys and got us lots of film, which we loaded by hand inside of a sleeping bag. I had to use my Kodak 620 camera very sparingly because it only took 16 exposures per roll and film was hard to get from home. Being of a medium format, however, the 620 negatives produced excellent enlargements.

Sus Ito was a forward observer and took over 2,000 combat photographs, which he shared with everyone. I only took about 700-800 photographs, mostly of life around camp and portraits, which I also shared. As the end of the war neared, an abundance of fine cameras were liberated by many of our comrades. They took good photos for their albums and shared them as well.

Albums: After my discharge from the Army, I had all of my undeveloped film processed in America and began a culling, sorting and organizing process for the albums. I tried to make as clear and complete a photo essay of my WWII experiences as I could, from basic training to discharge. The time frame of the album is from May 1943 to January 4, 1946. It was a challenge to try to remember the names of people and places, the chronology of events, and the significance of each photograph after several years had elapsed. Many of the snapshots were taken by Sus Ito and other photographers who were willing to share their work.

My albums became part of my memorabilia and moved along with me until 1993. At this time, the covers started to show severe wear and tear, so I elected to donate them to the Japanese American National Museum as part of the 522nd Field Artillery Battalion’s wartime history resources.
Author’s Note: It is my sincere desire that the contents of these albums are shared with anyone interested in a pictorial WWII history of C Battery of the 522nd Field Artillery Battalion, for as long as they exist. —George Oiye

Biographical Note

Staff Sergeant George Oiye was born on February 19, 1922 in a log cabin at a gold mining camp near Basin Creek, Montana. It was forty below zero on the continental divide and his Japanese-born parents and two older sisters had fifty cents to live on for the winter. The nearest store was seven miles away and was a twelve-hour trip on homemade snowshoes. They lived there for two years before moving to Helena, Montana to work in the Northern Pacific Railroad round-house; from there they moved to Trident, Montana, at the headwaters of the Missouri River, to work in a cement factory. George went to grammar school at Trident and high school at Three Forks, seven miles away. In 1938 his parents bought a small 23-acre truck farm at Logan, Montana, where they lived for the next fifty years.

When Pearl Harbor was bombed, George was enrolled in mechanical and aeronautical engineering at Montana State College in Bozeman. He was also in the ROTC and became drill sergeant and captain of the rifle team. Through his scholastic leadership he became president of the Society of Mechanical Engineers in spite of racial prejudice. His draft classification of 4-C (enemy alien unfit for military service) prevented him from volunteering for military service until February of 1943, when President Roosevelt rescinded the 4-C classification and changed it to 1-A. On May 5, 1943, Oiye was drafted into the Army Infantry and sent to Camp Shelby, Mississippi for training with the all-Japanese American 442nd Regimental Combat Team. He was assigned to Battery C of the 522nd Field Artillery Battalion.

The 522nd Field Artillery Battalion supported the 100th/442nd Infantry Regiment throughout Italy and France and became very famous for its forward observers’ expertise and the accurate direction of its twelve 105mm Howitzers. One of the most famous battles of the entire second World War was the “Rescue of the Lost Battalion” by the 100th/442nd Regimental Combat Team. In this heroic engagement of October, 1944, 223 soldiers of the 36th Infantry Division from Texas were surrounded by Nazi troops in the Vosges Mountains of France. Staff Sergeant Oiye was selected to be one of the field artillery forward observers of the battle to free the “Lost Battalion,” which succeeded but ultimately cost the 100th/442nd over 800 casualties.

In March of 1945, the 522nd Field Artillery Battalion was called out to support the 7th and 3rd Armies, to breach the Siegfried line in Germany, while the 100th/442nd Infantry went back to Italy to breach the Gothic line. Both efforts were successful in spite of tremendous odds and the 522nd has since been recognized for its participation in the liberation of Dachau and Berchtesgaden.

Staff Sergeant George Oiye was honorably discharged from the U.S. Army on January 4, 1946 and is identified in the aerospace and laser industry for his achievements. He retired in 1998 at the age of 76 and continues to support Japanese American WWII historical activities and Christian outreach. He passed away February 28, 2006.

Scope and Content

One 34-page album of black and white photographs taken by George Oiye and Susumu Ito.

Indexing Terms

Oiye, George
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United States. Army. Field Artillery Battalion, 522nd
Dachau (Concentration camp)
War photographers

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Creator: Ito, Susumu
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