

Proof of Loyalty

Kazuo Yamane and the Nisei Soldiers of Hawai`i

PRODUCED AND DIRECTED BY LUCY OSTRANDER AND DON SELLERS

DVD, 55 MINUTES, COLOR

STOURWATER PICTURES, 2017

Awards:

2017 Audience Choice Award, Documentary—Asian American International Film Festival

Best Feature Documentary—Celluloid Bainbridge Film Festival

Official Selection: Asian American International Film Festival, Gig Harbor Film Festival, Friday Harbor Film Festival, Celluloid Bainbridge Film Festival, Hawai`i International Film Festival, Northwest Filmmakers' Festival, Everett Film Festival

Reviewed by David Huebner



The story of the internment of Japanese-Americans on mainland USA during World War II is well-known. Lesser-known is the story of 150,000 Japanese-Americans living in Hawai`i, fewer than 2,000 were interned. Why the difference? Perhaps because in Hawai`i: Japanese-Americans had long been accepted as loyal Americans.

Proof of Loyalty is the story of Kazuo Yamane, a Japanese-American born and raised in Hawai`i, who made immeasurable contributions to the successful Allied war efforts and the story of the “Nisei”—those second-generation Japanese-Ameri-

cans who served America so well during the war. All the planets seemed to align correctly for Yamane: intelligent in spite of segregated schools in Hawai`i, an expert in Japanese due to his university years in Japan, and born into a successful businessman’s family. But above all, Yamane was loyal to America.

Serving the 100th Infantry Battalion with skills, dedication, a superb command of the Japanese language, and a winsome personality, Yamane’s service took him all the way to the Pentagon and then on to serve with General Dwight D. Eisenhower in Europe. His translation skills were in high demand already when he came upon a crate of captured Japanese documents. These documents served the war effort well, as they provided valuable information on Japanese plans, their officers, supply sources, military equipment, and industrial facilities. This amazing discovery was the “crown” that proved Yamane’s loyalty beyond reproach, giving the US a powerful strategic advantage.

The film is better organized than many documentaries, has superb narration, contains remarkable quality for war footage, and richly blends the stories of Yamane’s youth with his superior wartime service and numerous high-quality photos of family and friends. This story of unparalleled loyalty was set aside and almost forgotten, as Japanese-Americans returned from their military service to Hawai`i. Yet as the stories emerged in the 1990s, the Nisei were finally recognized by Congress, and Yamane was awarded the Legion of Merit in 1997.

The documentary contains a great lesson to these difficult times, when bigotry and bias are on the rise: diversity is what has made America great. ■

DAVID HUEBNER is a full-time Social Studies Teacher in Columbia, Tennessee, and resides in nearby Spring Hill. He is President of the Tennessee Council for the Social Studies. Active in his local community, as well as in the Tennessee Council for the Social Studies and the Tennessee Geographic Alliance, David was honored as Tennessee Geography Teacher of the Year (2007), High School Teacher of the Year (National Conference for Geographic Education, 2008), and Tennessee Social Studies Teacher of the Year (2009). He is also presently serving as Maury County Education Association President.

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