



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

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NEWS RELEASE

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16th Annual Korean War Veteran Reunion, Oahu

More than two hundred Korean War veterans from adjacent islands and the mainland celebrated the 16th Annual Korean War Reunion on Oahu. The festivities began on Tuesday, July 26th at the Pagoda Hotel. Veterans arrived early in the morning and continued to arrive throughout the afternoon. Guests from the mainland included Mits Asakura (originally from the Big Island), Roy Shiraga (originally from Tacoma), Dr. Noelan Maehara and his wife Sandy Sakamoto (President of the JACCC board), Russell and Barbara Shoho (originally from Kauai and Oahu), Rafu Shimpo Editor Gwen Muranaka and CEO of Japanese American Living Legacy, Susan Uyemura. The hospitality room was manned by the wives of the Oahu chapter of the Korean War Veterans; the room was well-stocked with local pupus, homemade cakes, desserts and drinks. A chartered bus arrived that evening to take all of the attendees to a dinner cruise. Chairman, Richard Higa and his co-chairs, Tom Tahara and Francis Yasutake worked diligently to keep everything running smoothly.

Wednesday's events began early with a bus shuttling attendees to the Punchbowl National Cemetery of the Pacific to attend a memorial service. The cemetery's director introduced VIPs that included Mr. Allan Kellogg, the last living Marine Medal of Honor recipient from the Korean War, and General David Bramlett (a decorated Vietnam combat veteran) who was the keynote speaker. The ongoing rain and hungry mosquitoes did not seem to bother the crowd as the floral tributes were presented by the various attending groups. Following the ceremony, lunch was provided by a local Korean Christian Church.

Chosin Reservoir survivor, Roy Shiraga, enjoyed the ceremony and the tour of Punchbowl; this was his first trip to the islands. Shiraga had made this special trip in hopes he would get to meet the family of Lawrence Nihei, the man who saved Roy's life during the war. Nihei was killed-in-action during the Korean War. Nihei was from Oahu. Shiraga unfortunately did not reconnect with the Nihei family; however, he was able to meet up with classmate Ken Tashiro who attended Presidio with Shiraga this was the first meeting in over 60 years.

The dinner banquet was held at Pagoda Hotel with over two hundred attendees. Master of Ceremonies, Colonel Walter Ozawa, retired, kept the audience entertained and the program on schedule. Japanese American Living Legacy was allowed to present their annual Living Legacy award to Korean War veteran, John Iwamoto (from Kauai). Classmates from Kauai High School, Class of 1946, came out to support John Iwamoto. Attendees included Albert and Barbara Hamamoto, Kenji and Betty Uejo, Sam Watanabe, Russell and Barbara Shoho, and Richard Miyaji. Kauai veteran, Royce Ebesu made the announcement that Kauai would host the 17th Annual Korean War Veteran Reunion.

Thursday began with an early 6:00 AM bus ride to Pearl Harbor. The veterans were treated to a private tour of Pearl Harbor and the USS Arizona. Afterward, the group divided into two smaller groups with one group headed for the Joint Pacific Accounting Command (JPAC) Identification Lab and the other headed for the Pacific Air Museum (PAM). The groups rejoined each other at Hickam Air Force Base for a hot lunch at the officers club. After lunch, we returned to the Pagoda Hotel. It was a long day filled with a lot of history, good food and perfect tropical weather and beauty, a unique and total experience as only the Hawaiian islands offer.

It was a terrific reunion with some attendees seeing each other for the first time in over sixty years. The reunion renewed old friendships and forged new ones. In as much as the Korean War is often referred to as “the forgotten war,” none of these veterans will ever forget that chapter of their lives. Richard Higa and the Oahu Korean War Veterans did an excellent job with the reunion. Aloha until the next time we meet!

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, please visit their website at www.jalivinglegacy.org or call them at (657) 278-4483.

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