

“Go For Broke”

The internment of Japanese-Americans along the west coast of the United States is an infamous chapter in America’s World War II story. Less well-known is the story of the 442nd Regimental Combat Team, composed mostly of Japanese-Americans who fought with such distinction in Italy, southern France and Germany that it became the most highly decorated regiment in the history of the United States armed forces. The Regiment’s motto was “Go For Broke.” One of its leaders was Robert Louis Hempstead, Clemson College Class of 1941.

A chemical engineering major from Atlanta, Hempstead’s service as the advertising and business manager of *The Tiger*, earned him the nickname “Pinch Penny.” He was selected as a member of the Junior and Senior Platoons, the Presbyterian Student Association and the YMCA Council. He attended ROTC Summer Training at Fort McClellan, Alabama.



R. L. HEMPSTEAD

Robert volunteered for active duty immediately after graduation and received his basic training at Fort McClellan. In early 1943 he was stationed at Camp Shelby, Mississippi where he was assigned to duty with the 442nd Regimental Combat Team.

In early 1942, the War Department called for the removal of all soldiers of Japanese ancestry from active service. Japanese-American soldiers discharged from the Hawaii Territorial Guard petitioned General Delos Emmons, commander of the US Army Hawaii, to allow them to assist in the war effort. The petition was granted and they formed a group called the Varsity Victory Volunteers, which performed various military construction jobs. General Emmons, worried about the loyalty of Japanese-American soldiers in the event of a Japanese invasion, recommended to the War Department that the Japanese-American soldiers in Hawaii be organized into a "Hawaiian Provisional Battalion" and sent to the mainland. The move was authorized, and on June 5, 1942, the Hawaiian Provisional Battalion set sail for training. They landed at Oakland, California on June 10 and two days later were sent to Camp McCoy, Wisconsin. On June 15, the battalion was designated the 100th Infantry Battalion (Separate)—the "One Puka Puka."

The Varsity Victory Volunteers proved their dedication to the United States and performed so well in training that, on February 1, 1943, the U.S. government reversed its decision on Japanese Americans serving in the armed forces. It approved the formation of a Japanese-American combat unit. The Army called for 1,500 volunteers from Hawaii and 3,000 from the mainland. An overwhelming 10,000 men from Hawaii volunteered. Around 3,000 men from Hawaii and 800 men from the mainland were inducted. President Roosevelt announced the formation of the 442nd Infantry Regimental Combat Team, saying, "Americanism is not, and never was, a matter of race or ancestry."

The 442nd Combat Team sailed from Hampton Roads, Virginia on May 1, 1944 and landed at Anzio, Italy on May 28. The 442nd was attached to the 34th Infantry Division north of Rome on June 11.

The 442nd encountered heavy resistance from each town until July 25 when they reached the Arno River, ending the Rome-Arno Campaign. The 442nd suffered heavy casualties before being pulled from the line for rest from July 25 to August 15. The 442nd was then moved to patrol duty along the Arno River. Its mission was to gain control of the north bank in order to allow engineer units to build bridges.

On August 23, 1944, Robert Hempstead was the commander of M Company, 3rd Battalion, 442nd Regimental Combat Team. According to the citation for the Silver Star posthumously awarded Hempstead:

When it was discovered that the Germans were maintaining a patrol base in San Columbano on

the south side of the Arno and on the left flank of the 3d Battalion, Captain Hempstead volunteered to lead a combined Company M and L patrol to wipe out the enemy nest. The patrol went out with a forward observer from Cannon Company. Aided by fire from Cannon Company the patrol cleared out one enemy strongpoint, killing eight Germans and wounding several others. As the patrol worked its way beyond San Columbano, it was ambushed near a canal and caught in a crossfire from two enemy machine guns, supported by mortars. Captain Hempstead, seeing the patrol was trapped, left his covered position and opened fire with a Tommy Gun, drawing the enemy's attention to him. He was instantly killed by a burst of machine-gun fire, but by creating a diversion, he enabled his remaining men to withdraw to better positions and call down artillery fire on the enemy.

The 442nd was the most highly decorated regiment in the history of US armed forces. Captain Robert Louis Hempstead, through his bravery and selfless devotion to his men and their mission, contributed to the remarkable legacy of the regiment. In addition to the Silver Star, Hempstead was awarded the Bronze Star, Purple Heart and Combat Infantryman's Badge.

Captain Hempstead was survived by his mother Beatrice, his widow Louise Ross and their son Ronald Ross Hempstead. Both Ronald Ross and his son eventually followed in the footsteps of their father/grandfather by achieving the rank of captain in the US Army. Robert Louis Hempstead was originally interred in Vada, Italy in 1944, but was repatriated in 1949 and interred at the Westview Cemetery in Atlanta, Georgia.

