

LETTER FROM A JAPANESE AMERICAN SOLDIER.

This edited letter was written by George Saito, who served with his brother Calvin, while their family was in an American concentration camp. It was written on July 11, 1944, four days after his brother was killed in action, and addressed to his father, Kiichi Saito.

Dear Dad –

I believe the War Dept. has notified you of our loss of Calvin. Dad, I am writing you now because I've just learned of his passing. July 7th was the immemorable day.

I can imagine what a shock it was to you, as it was to me, because it happened so soon – on the twelfth day of combat.

A few events and action leading up to the time of his loss as related by a member of his company, are: On the 6th of July his unit was attacking a hill held by the enemy. After a hard fight with even a little hand-to-hand combat, they took the hill. The Jerries,* after being shoved off, were reforming for a counterattack. In the confusion and disorder of battle, Cal, being the radio-man, somehow got a call through to the artillery to open fire on the enemy. He personally directed and guided the firing on the enemy positions, which routed the enemy. His action and doing his job well at this one instance, explained the fellows, saved many of his buddies. Their unit held that hill that night but the next morning the enemy barraged the hill with mortars and he happened to be one of the unlucky ones. His passing was instantaneous. All of the fellows were telling me what a good soldier and radio-man he was and that his loss was keenly felt.

Well dad, now that the inevitable has happened, I guess you're wondering about his remains. Right now I can't do much for we're still in battle and I am writing you while at our gun position, but as I understand things now, they will bury him here in Italy and after the war you can ask the Government to transfer them to an American cemetery in the States. His personal belongings will be shipped to you in time.

Dad, this is not time to be preaching to you but I have something on my chest, which I want you to hear. In spite of Cal's supreme sacrifice, don't let anyone tell you that he was foolish or made a mistake to volunteer. Of what I've seen in my travels on our mission, I am more than convinced that we've done the right thing in spite of what has happened in the past. America is a damned good country, and don't let anyone tell you otherwise.

Well dad, the Germans are beginning to throw a few shells our way now so maybe I'd better get down in my hole. If there is anything also that you'd like to know except the place, I shall only be too glad to let you know. In time though, when we're allowed I'll give you the exact location.

Cheer up, dad, and do take care of yourself. Regards to all.

Your loving son,

George*

N.B. Three months after sending his father this letter, George Saito was killed in battle.

*Have students research and discuss these.

Gift of Mary S. Tominaga, Japanese American National Museum (94.49.42).

QUESTION TO CONSIDER:

1. If you were Calvin or George Saito, would you have volunteered to serve in the U.S. Army?