

Terno Odow

Go For Broke National Education Center, UCLA, Ethan Choi, Student Researcher

Terno Odow was born May 20th, 1920 in Moyer Junction County of Kemmerer East, Lincoln, Wyoming, USA. Born to Issei parents Gonichi Kanichi Odow (Father) and Haruye K. Odow (Mother) and raised as the oldest of five siblings: Toshiko Odow (sister), Fumiko Odow (sister), Masako Odow (sister), and Fusaye Odow (sister). Terno is a rare example of growing up as a member of a military household as his father Kanichi had enlisted into the United States Military from his home in Wyoming on June 5th, 1917 to serve in World War 1 when he was 30 years old.¹ Kanichi would actually decide to reenlist for World War II into the United States Military at age 56. At the time, his soon to be wife and Terno's mother Haruye remained in Japan prior to reentering the country as his wife in 1918. When Terno was born, his father aged 34 worked as a railroad foreman with his mother aged 25 in the role of a housewife.²



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¹ James C. McNaughton, *Nisei Linguists: Japanese Americans in the Military Intelligence Service during World War II* (Washington, D.C.: Department of the Army, 2006).

² McNaughton, *Nisei Linguists*.

³ Madison High School, *Yearbook*.

With the Odow family relocating to Rexburg, Madison, Idaho, USA Terno attended Madison high school for 4 years. While present, Terno achieved incredible success as a student but more prominently, an athlete, running the 100-220 yard, dash and low hurdles competition in which he had held the title of State of Idaho State Champion for many years. Terno's 5'8 frame powered him to the state record in 1938 set back in 1935 at 24.6 seconds. He was the only Japanese American member on his team, early on establishing himself as a trailblazer in his communities.

Following his graduation from high school, Terno Odow continued his studies abroad attending Keio University, Tokyo. Odow sharpened his skill in his mother tongue by returning to his motherland to continue his studies with residence in Hiroshima, Japan.⁴ He had been issued his visa on November 10th, 1938 in Washington D.C. and embarked on a two year stay in Hiroshima-Shi, Japan until returning on the S.S. M.S. Kamakura Maru from the port of Yokohama, Japan on March 27th, 1941.⁵

Terno returned from Japan now 20 years of age working as a truck driver. Seven months later, he would enlist in the United States Military to serve his country just as his father did so many years ago. On October 22nd, 1941, Terno Odow officially enlisted in the United States Military from his new home of Salt Lake City, Utah, USA.⁶ On the date of his enlistment, he officially was recorded standing at 69 in. and weighing 124 lbs. Following his enlistment, he first underwent basic training in field artillery, originally assigned to the 52nd Field Artillery Training Battalion at Camp Roberts in California.⁷

After demonstrating proficiency in basic training, Terno was transferred to CASC in 1961 at Camp Lockett in California. During this period, he saw his largest amount of growth in rank as he was promoted to Specialist 4th Class on February 16, 1942 (clerk) then promoted to Private First Class March 6, 1942 (clerk).⁸ He was then briefly reduced to Private March 10, 1942 before subsequently being promoted once more back to Private First Class March 17, 1942. His year of constant transfers continued as he was transferred to Fort Leavenworth, Kansas Reception Center on March 20, 1942 then transferred once more to Camp Crowder April 6, 1942.⁹ In the span of less than two years, Terno served on 4 different military bases occupying roles ranging from combat training to administrative work to instruction yet as his rank shows, these efforts were not in vain.

⁴ McNaughton, *Nisei Linguists*.

⁵ McNaughton, *Nisei Linguists*.

⁶ U.S. World War II Army Enlistment Records, 1938-1946, s.v. "Terno Odow."

⁷ Military Intelligence Service Language School (MISLS) Personnel Files, Camp Savage, 1942.

⁸ MISLS Personnel Files.

⁹ MISLS Personnel Files.

While Terno bounced around various camps, unbeknownst to him, the military viewed his distinct qualifications as a perfect fit for a special and secret unit that would prove to be invaluable to American victory. At last, for his final stop in training before field experience, Terno Odow was transferred to Military Intelligence Service, Language School, “Camp Savage” located in Savage, Minnesota, USA on May 24, 1942.¹⁰ Terno Odow is listed graduating under the class labeled “SAVAGE June 1942. Term: Special Class” in unit A-2. His class was the first ever official session of Military Intelligence Service Language School taught by Kibei army officials at Camp Savage in Minnesota whose operations had begun previously with The Fourth Army Intelligence School on November 1st, 1941 in Presidio of San Francisco, California, USA.¹¹

The first Camp Savage class began on May 28 with 200 enlisted men (193 were Nisei and seven were Caucasians) plus several officers carried over from the Fourth Army Intelligence School for further training. Instruction was carried out by a staff of seven or eight civilian instructors, all of whom were brought from San Francisco, and 10 enlisted instructors selected from the previous graduating class.¹² More emphasis was placed on practical problems which had arisen during the first six months of the war. Subjects taught were expanded to include Japanese history, Japanese geography, military language, as well as general Japanese conversation, translation, and reading of *sosho* (often termed grass writing). To facilitate the understanding of military terms, Army, Navy, and Air Force officers often came to MISLS to give detailed explanations. During this training, Terno Odow was once more forced into this training that deviated from that of his sports background in intent but not intensity.¹³

This experiment from the United States Military is one that they viewed as a massive gamble considering problems of possible betrayal from those who remained loyal to Japan. Terno Odow and the rest of the 12 officers and 117 enlisted men, proved following his departure from Camp Savage how foolish these conspiracies against them truly were. Concluding his time at Camp Savage, Terno garnered another promotion to Technician 5th grade on November 6, 1942, at the Headquarters of Military Intelligence Service, Language School “Camp Savage”, in Savage, Minnesota, USA.¹⁴ Terno had graduated as one of the best and brightest linguists at the entire school and had garnered enough attention to have the above listed accolades reported directly to the Adjunct General in

¹⁰ McNaughton, *Nisei Linguists*.

¹¹ McNaughton, *Nisei Linguists*.

¹² McNaughton, *Nisei Linguists*.

¹³ McNaughton, *Nisei Linguists*.

¹⁴ MISLS Personnel Files.

Washington D.C. confidentiality. Weeks later, he would be transferred to San Francisco Port of Embarkation November 18, 1942.¹⁵

Following his embarkation, what followed can be considered one of the most extensive and successful linguist campaigns of all time. During his time in the military, Odow had become a veteran of campaigns on Guadalcanal, New Britain, New Caledonia, Luzon, Panay, Negros, and Korea.¹⁶ His work spanned a variety of different areas as his background in combat training was used in tandem with his intelligence skills to make him an invaluable part of both in combat action and also interrogation and translation work both in the field and at headquarters. Traversing the battlefields within both the jurisdiction of the South and Southwest Pacific commands, his services were in high demand.



G-2 Section, XIV Corps, February 1943. In front row, beginning fourth from left: Shigeru Yamashita, Terno Odow, Roy T. Uyehata, and Isao Kusuda.

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In early 1943, under Major General Alexander Patch, the XIV Corps participated in the final drive to expel Japanese forces from Guadalcanal. Following this, Major General Oscar Griswold assumed command in April 1943. Under Griswold's leadership, the XIV Corps undertook a campaign beginning in June 1943 with the invasion of Rendova Island,

¹⁵ MISLS Personnel Files.

¹⁶ Cabatuan Airfield Records.

¹⁷ McNaughton, *Nisei Linguists*.

leading to the capture of New Georgia and the vital Munda airfield by August 6th. The campaign concluded in October 1943 with the mopping up of adjacent islands. ¹⁸

To the advantage of the Nisei linguists, the Japanese apparently believed their written language was so alien to Americans that they made no effort to destroy their most secret orders, communications or documents. Thus, tens of thousands of captured documents provided the American forces with an incredible amount of military intelligence of the highest value. Translating was done by American soldiers of Japanese ancestry. ¹⁹ Over five thousand Nisei soldiers served as translators in the Pacific Theater, not only at Divisional and Regimental Headquarters level, but right up front in combat, where their 'on-the-spot' translations gave the American forces a great advantage. So valuable were the translations they provided that General MacArthur personally credited them with saving a million American casualties. ²⁰ With reference to your 'Curious Cover', the 40th Division originally landed in the Philippines at Lingayen Gulf with Sixth Army on January 9, 1945. Shortly after the Clark Field and Fort Stotsenberg area had been cleared of the enemy, the 40th was reassigned to the Eighth Army for the Liberation of the Visayan Islands. It landed on Panay on March 18th and liberated the island in a few days. On March 29 it landed just south of Bacolod City on Negros. There was a large concentration of Japanese troops in the area, and the fighting turned into mountain warfare of the roughest sort. ²¹ The Division was relieved on June 9th. It is therefore apparent that the cover was found somewhere on Negros. And, incidentally, the language team of the 40th Division was headed by Lt. Richard Child, with Terno Odow as its leader, and the Nisei translators were Kay Futamase, Mike Hori, Moffet Ishikawa, Hisashi Komori, Kay Tamada, Shizuo Tanaka and Shogo Yamaguchi. ²²

Not only did Odow serve the role as a translator, interpreter, and reader of Japanese documents, but what had earned him such distinction was his work as a writer. Due to his university level education in Japanese and proficiency in the English language he had grown up using, he possessed a higher level of mastery of language than most of his peers. As he was once blazing trails and breaking records on the track, Odow sought to develop past the expectations placed on him and took what it means to be a linguist to a whole new level. ²³

¹⁸ McNaughton, *Nisei Linguists*.

¹⁹ McNaughton, *Nisei Linguists*.

²⁰ McNaughton, *Nisei Linguists*.

²¹ Cabatuan Airfield Records.

²² Cabatuan Airfield Records.

²³ Cabatuan Airfield Records.

Eventually ascending to the rank of Technical Sergeant, Odow had now obtained elite status. In addition to basic translation work and obtaining other vital information from enemy prisoners, what set Terno apart from the rest was what he had created using language including drawing the assignment of questioning of more than 1,700 Japanese who had surrendered in August in addition to his crowning military achievement of drafting four leaflets in English and Japanese, 40,000 of which were dropped on two Philippine islands. These leaflets were directly responsible for the surrender of 5,000 troops. The mastery of language such an effort requires is incredible. With the same commitment to excellence he had approached his athletics, Odow's devotion to this cause had an impact on the war more profound than any singular man could have taken up arms.²⁴

The trust and acclaim his skills had garnered him placed him into some pivotal positions in the war effort such as serving as the interpreter for Colonel Raymond Stanton, commanding officer of the 160th Infantry Regiment as he negotiated the Japanese terms of surrender at the signing ceremony at Cabatuan Airfield, Barrio Tiring, Cabatuan, Iloilo, Panay Island, Philippines, on September 2, 1945.²⁵ Terno's voice and presence was the center of attention as his services were absolutely necessary in this moment with other high ranking American officers in attendance. Brigadier General Donald Myers, commanding the U.S. Army's 40th Infantry Division; Rear Admiral Ralph Davis, commanding the U.S. Navy's 13th Amphibious Group; Capt. Bob Matthews (U.S. Navy), commanding USS Estes; and other officers of the U.S. Army and the U.S. Navy.²⁶

Following the conclusion of the war, Terno was discharged from the United States Military, returning home to Salt Lake City, Utah, USA. concluding his assignment in Busan, Korea and his 4 years of military service on November 17th, 1945.²⁸

Returning to society, Sergeant Terno Odow resumed life as a normal citizen, reuniting with his family and getting his first job back in real estate. Odow eventually continued to further his education along with his sisters Fumiko and Masako at the University of Utah where they all graduated with bachelors degrees in business administration.²⁷ A few years later, Terno moved to Denver, Colorado where he met his wife Rosa. While living in Denver, he worked as an office manager at Ponder & Best Camera Company. Years later, he was transferred to Panorama City, California to become Vice President of the company. He continued to develop a career in real estate and continued his prolific sports career as an

²⁴ Cabatuan Airfield Records.

²⁵ Cabatuan Airfield Records.

²⁶ Cabatuan Airfield Records.

²⁷ University of Utah Alumni Records, 1948.

avid golfer featured multiple times in local newspapers. He was also the President of the Southern California chapter's optimist club.²⁸ On September 12, 1999 Terno passed away in Los Angeles, California. His legacy will be remembered forever and he truly will go down in history as one of the greatest Nisei Linguists of all time.²⁹

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²⁸ "Terno Odow Obituary," *Los Angeles Times*, September 1999.

²⁹ U.S. Social Security Death Index, s.v. "Terno Odow."

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