Activity: A Japanese American Family’s Experience During World War II: A Living DBQ

Guiding question:
How did Japanese Americans make sacrifices to help the United States win World War II?

DEVELOPED BY MATTHEW ELMS
Grade Level(s): 6-8, 9-12
Subject(s): Social Studies, English/Language Arts
Cemetery Connection: Lorraine American Cemetery
Fallen Hero Connection: Private Victor Akimoto
Private First Class John Akimoto
Overview

Students will be given a series of document packets concerning the Akimoto family during World War II. Each of the four groups of documents deals with a different time period in the lives of the Akimotos. Once the students have reviewed the documents, they will act out specific scenes for the rest of the class. While students are acting out the scenes, the rest of the class will be completing a visual graphic organizer.

Historical Context

Most middle school students have a vague understanding of Japanese internment in the United States during World War II. However, the events leading up to Japanese internment, prior to the bombing of Pearl Harbor, and the role of Japanese-American soldiers in World War II help to expand students’ knowledge of U.S. history and issues related to World War II including training camps, shipping out overseas, loss of life, and prisoner of war camps.

Private First Class John Akimoto and Private Victor Akimoto are one of 26 sets of brothers buried in a special section at Lorraine American Cemetery. These Japanese American brothers and their families back in the states directly felt the implications of internment.

Objectives

At the conclusion of this lesson, students will be able to

• Explain anti-Asian and anti-Japanese sentiment before Pearl Harbor;
• Discuss the internment of 110,000 Japanese Americans;
• Examine issues related to the military service of 33,000 Japanese Americans; and
• Reflect on how these topics affected an individual family.

“This lesson allows students the opportunity to explore primary and secondary resources without writing an essay or document based question (DBQ) response. Instead, students are encouraged to act, write, and draw to facilitate their understanding of the material while gaining a deeper understanding of the issues that confronted Japanese Americans during World War II.”

—Matthew Elms

Elms teaches at Singapore American School in Singapore.
Standards Connections

Connections to Common Core

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.1 Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.2 Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of the source distinct from prior knowledge or opinions.

Connections to C3 Framework

D2.His.1.6-8. Analyze connections among events and developments in broader historical contexts.

D2.His.3.6-8. Use questions generated about individuals and groups to analyze why they, and the developments they shaped, are seen as historically significant.

Documents Used ★ indicates an ABMC source

Primary Sources

Group One: Anti-Asian Sentiment and Introduction to the Akimotos

Photograph, The Akimoto Family, 1927
Akimoto Family Collection

Photograph, Door of barber shop owned by Andy Hale, in a little desert town of Parker, 15 miles from where is located the Colorado River Relocation Center..., November 11, 1944
National Archives and Records Administration (210-CC-IN-4)

Photograph, Mary with Students, 1907
Akimoto Family Collection

Photograph, Masanori with Brothers, c. 1906
Akimoto Family Collection

Photograph, Ted and Johnny Akimoto, 1925
Akimoto Family Collection
Photograph, *The USS West Virginia and USS Tennessee after the attack on Pearl Harbor*, December 7, 1941
Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library and Museum
http://www.abmc.gov/multimedia?field_monument_war_tid=7&type[0]=image&page=4

Photograph, *Victor Akimoto by Bank*, 1940
Akimoto Family Collection

Political Cartoon, Dr. Seuss, *Waiting for the Signal from Home*, February 13, 1942
University of California at San Diego Library
http://library.ucsd.edu/speccoll/dswenttowar/index.html#ark:bb5222708w

Poster, *Chinese Excluded...*, 1882
British Columbia Archives
http://www.pbs.org/becomingamerican/ap_prog2.html

Poster, *Mass Meeting of the Oregon Property Owners’ Protective League, Inc.*, 1945
Densho

**Group Two: Internment**

*Granada Pioneer*, March 31, 1943
Densho

Letter from Johnny Akimoto to Mary and Masanori Akimoto, April 13, 1943
Akimoto Family Collection

Letter from Johnny Akimoto to Ruth and Hideo Kodani, February 19, 1943
Akimoto Family Collection

Letter from Johnny Akimoto to Mary and Masanori Akimoto, February 3, 1943
Akimoto Family Collection

Loyalty Questionnaire, War Relocation Authority, January 1943
Densho

Mary Miki Shiritori Akimoto, *Santa Anita Assembly Center Painting*, 1942
Akimoto Family Collection
Photograph, *Amache District Headquarters, Boy Scouts of America, Granada Relocation Center*, May 10, 1943
National Archives and Records Administration

Photograph, *Military Police on Duty in Watch-Tower at Santa Anita Park Assembly Center…*, April 6, 1942
National Archives and Records Administration (537019)

Photograph, *Arcadia, California. Evacuees of Japanese Ancestry from San Pedro, California, Arrive by Special Trains for Santa Anita Assembly Center…*, April 5, 1942
National Archives and Records Administration (537038)
https://catalog.archives.gov/id/537038?q=santa%20anita%20arrive

Poster, *Instruction to all Persons of Japanese Ancestry…*, May 23, 1942
National Park Service
www.nps.gov/manz/learn/historyculture/images/Poster.jpg

**Group Three: Military Life and Death**

Letter from Major General J.A. Ulio to Masanori Akimoto, August 21, 1944
Department of the Army

Letter from Johnny Akimoto to Mary and Masanori Akimoto, June 21, 1943
Akimoto Family Collection

Letter from Ted Akimoto to Mary and Masanori Akimoto, August 21, 1944
Akimoto Family Collection

Letter from Victor Akimoto to his family, April 29, 1942
Akimoto Family Collection

Photograph, *Johnny, Jane, and Ted Akimoto*, c. 1943
Akimoto Family Collection

Photograph, *Members of the 442nd Regimental Combat Team are seen in the Vosges mountain range in France*, October 1944 ★
U.S. Army Signal Corps, American Battle Monuments Commission
http://www.abmc.gov/multimedia?field_monument_war_tid=7&type%5B%5D=image
Photograph, Sergeant Victor Akimoto and Private Johnny Akimoto, c. 1943
Akimoto Family Collection

Photograph, Two color guards and color bearers of the Japanese-American 442nd Combat Team, stand at attention, while their citations are read…, November 12, 1944
U.S. Army Signal Corps (SC-196716)

Photograph, Victor on Guard Duty, c. 1943
Akimoto Family Collection

**Group Four: Life of a Prisoner of War (POW)**
*Comite International de la Croix-Rouge*, December 1944
Department of the Army

International Committee of the Red Cross Report, April 17, 1945
Department of the Army

Letter from Major General J.A. Ulio to Mary Akimoto, November 11, 1944
Department of the Army

Letter from Major General J.A. Ulio to Mary Akimoto, April 19, 1945
Department of the Army

Letter from Mary Akimoto to War Department, February 14, 1945
Department of the Army

Missing Report, 1944
Department of the Army

Photograph, Liberated Soldiers at Bad Orb Eating C-Rations, April 2, 1945
US Army Signal Corps (111-SC-231077)

Photograph, Reenacting the liberation of Stalag IX - B, April 2, 1945
U.S. Army Signal Corps (111-SC-339369)

Request for Disposition of Remains, November 24, 1947
Department of the Army

War Department Telegram to Mary Akimoto, May 8, 1945
Department of the Army
Secondary Sources

Becoming American: Between Two Worlds
PBS
http://www.pbs.org/becomingamerican/ap_prog2.html

Aleksi Solorio, Japanese American Servicemen in World War II
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lr6NrneZ59I&list=PLUTfnoHdXmEZ3QvLtN2BiLGrSaNlcMqib&index=17

A Return to the Internment Camp
New York Times

Eulogy for Private First Class John Akimoto, 2015 ★
American Battle Monuments Commission
http://abmceducation.org/john-akimoto

Eulogy for Private Victor Akimoto, 2015 ★
American Battle Monuments Commission
http://abmceducation.org/victor-akimoto

Lesson Video, 2015 ★
American Battle Monuments Commission
http://abmceducation.org/elms-lesson?resources=1

When the Akimotos Went to War, 2015 ★
American Battle Monuments Commission
http://abmceducation.org/sites/default/files/AkimotosBook_508.pdf
Materials

- Four source packets of primary and secondary resources
  - Group One: Anti-Asian Sentiment and Introduction to the Akimotos
  - Group Two: Internment
  - Group Three: Military Life and Death
  - Group Four: Life of a Prisoner of War (POW)
- Journals or online notebook
- Large, plain white paper to be used as the graphic organizer
- Assessment Writing Rubric

Lesson Preparation

- Teachers are encouraged to read the book, *When the Akimotos Went to War*. A free copy of the book can be downloaded at http://abmceducation.org/when-the-akimotos-went-to-war.
- Print one copy of each of the source packets (consider laminating for future use):
  - Group One: Anti-Asian Sentiment and Akimoto Family
  - Group Two: Japanese-American Internment
  - Group Three: Military Life and Death
  - Group Four: Life of a Prisoner of War (POW)
- Have students create a Graphic Organizer of Events (a large sheet of white paper folded into four quadrants marked as Section One, Section Two, Section Three, and Section Four) to track the story.

Procedure

Activity One: Sponge Activity (15 minutes)

- *Teacher Tip*: Depending on the level of knowledge of the students, the teacher may want to play one or both of the video clips by Aleksi Solorio or the *New York Times* to introduce the topic of Japanese-American soldiers of World War II.
- Ask students to respond to the following question in a student journal or notebook:
  - After Pearl Harbor was bombed on December 7, 1941, President Roosevelt issued Executive Order 9066 in January 1942. The order forced 110,000 Japanese Americans, many of them citizens of the United States, to leave their homes in California, Oregon, and Washington
State and move into internment camps surrounded by barbed wire and guarded with machine guns. If you were an eligible Japanese-American male, living in an internment camp during World War II, would you enlist in the United States Army? Why or why not?

Activity Two: Document Analysis and Presentation (60 minutes)

- Explain to the students that they will be assigned to one of four groups. Teachers may want to have a balance of male and female students in each group. Each group will be given a series of primary and secondary sources to examine.

- Ask students to read through the documents and work as a team to interpret and discuss the various items.

- Ask students to prepare a creative skit or dramatic reenactment of their evidence. Each piece of information as well as each student should be used in the group presentation. Each presentation should last two to three minutes.

- Circulate the room and help the students interpret the evidence, provide support for historical questions, and advice or ideas for acting out the skit.

- Distribute a piece of paper to create the Graphic Organizer of Events to each student. Ask each student to construct their organizer (fold to create four equal quadrants, label as sections one through four) and start by making a quick sketch/description of their part of the story.

  - **Teacher Tip:** Remind the students that they are reenacting events that directly affected the real lives of specific individuals and families. Their behavior and attitude should be respectful.

- Ask each group to present their skit or dramatic reenactment to the class. Provide time after each skit for the students to draw and write.

  - **Teacher Note:** It is very important to recap the scene and clear up any confusion, misconceptions, or questions for the entire group.

Activity Three: Reflection (15 minutes)

- Watch the eulogy for Johnny Akimoto or Victor Akimoto presented at the Lorraine American Cemetery.

- Watch the video about the Akimoto story filmed on location at the Lorraine American Cemetery.

- Engage students in discussion as to what they have learned and what questions still remain.

Assessment

- After the presentations, have the students respond to the following questions in their reflection journals or notebooks:

  - Considering what you now know about Victor and Johnny Akimoto, if you were an eligible Japanese-American male, living in an internment camp during World War II, would you
enlist in the United States Army? Why or why not?

ø Given these circumstances, are there other perspectives on the issue of enlistment for Japanese Americans during World War II? Discuss one or more perspectives.

ø Cite evidence from the performances to support your response.

• Teacher can assess student responses using the Writing Assessment Rubric.

**Methods for Extension**

• Download and read the book, *When the Akimotos Went to War*.

• More advanced students may want to investigate the resources provided in the bibliography of the book to gain more insight into this time period and these events.

• The American Battle Monuments Commission maintains U.S. military cemeteries overseas. These cemeteries are permanent memorials to the fallen, but it is important that students know the stories of those who rest here. To learn more about the stories of some of the men and women who made the ultimate sacrifice, visit www.abmceducation.org/understandingsacrifice/abmc-sites.

**Adaptations**

• A support teacher could read aloud the captions and content of the letters when necessary.

• Teachers can orally record a written document so students can play back and repeat as needed.
## Writing Assessment Rubric

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Advanced</th>
<th>Proficient</th>
<th>Basic</th>
<th>Emerging</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cites evidence from all four groups of documents</td>
<td>Cites evidence from at least three groups of documents</td>
<td>Cites evidence from at least two groups of documents</td>
<td>Cites evidence from only one group of documents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Well-developed response that considers multiple perspectives on the issue of internment</td>
<td>Well-developed response that considers at least two perspectives on the issue of internment</td>
<td>Response is standard, included minimal reference to more than one perspective</td>
<td>Basic response that is limited to one perspective</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Group One: Anti-Asian Sentiment and Introduction to the Akimotos

**Primary Sources:**
Photograph, *Japs Keep Out You Rats*, November 11, 1944
Poster, *Mass Meeting of the Oregon Property Owners’ Protective League, Inc.*, 1945
Political Cartoon, *Waiting for the Signal from Home*
Photograph, *Masanori with Brothers*, c. 1906
Photograph, *Ted and Johnny Akimoto*, 1925
Photograph, *Mary with Students*, 1907
Photograph, *The Akimoto Family*, 1927
Photograph, *Victor by Bank*
Photograph, *The USS West Virginia and USS Tennessee after the attack on Pearl Harbor*, December 7, 1941
Chinese Exclusion Act, 1882

**Secondary Sources:**
Excerpt, Matthew Elms, *When the Akimotos Went to War*
Group One Task Card

You will have 30 minutes to prepare a two to three minute skit that includes all of your group members. The skit will:

1. Introduce anti-Asian racism in America between 1880 and 1945. You should include quotes, posters, cartoons, etc.

2. Introduce Akimoto family members including Masanori (Father), Mary (Mother), Victor (Son), Johnny (Son), and Ted (Son) as they struggle to deal with anti-Asian sentiment.
Photograph, *Japs Keep Out You Rats*, November 11, 1944

Door of barber shop owned by Any Hale, in a little desert tow of Parker, 15 miles from where the Colorado River Relocation Center was located. Evacuees from the center, who cannot leave its confines without a pass, are discouraged from shopping in Parker, by WRA officials, Parker, Arizona, November 11, 1944
Poster, *Mass Meeting of the Oregon Property Owners’ Protective League, Inc., 1945* 

Densho
Political Cartoon, *Waiting for the Signal from Home*

*University of California at San Diego Library*

The “Honorable 5th Column” refers to an undercover Japanese spy organization. The Japanese Americans are depicted with racially stereotypical hats, round glasses, and slanted eyes. Dr. Seuss editorial cartoon, February 13, 1942
Photograph, *Masanori with Brothers, c. 1906*

Akimoto Family Collection

Masanori Akimoto (middle) with brothers. c. 1906
Photograph, *Ted and Johnny Akimoto, 1925*

Akimoto Family Collection

Ted and Johnny Akimoto, Idaho, 1925
Photograph, *Mary with Students*, 1907

Akimoto Family Collection

Mary “Miki” Shiratori with her first pupils prior to her marriage to Masanori Akimoto, c. 1907.
Excerpt, *When the Akimotos Went to War*

As Victor grappled with the ways of the U.S. Army, his family struggled with new obstacles placed in their path. In Los Angeles, California on Dayton Street, the Akimotos opened their home to another Japanese American family. The parents had been fired from their jobs due to their Japanese ancestry. One day after Victor wrote to his family, on February 19, 1942, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt issued Executive Order 9066. This powerful executive order changed the lives of hundreds of thousands of Japanese Americans living along the west coast of America. Within weeks, the isolation and forced incarceration of Japanese Americans would reveal long held prejudice against Asian Americans. Even Theodor Geisel, better known as Dr. Seuss, used his artistic skills to portray Japanese Americans as traitors wearing stereotypical bowler hats, round eyeglasses, and leering through slanted eyes.
Photograph, *The Akimoto Family, 1927*

Akimoto Family Collection

Akimoto family in Idaho, c. 1927
Photograph, *Victor by Bank*
Photograph, *The USS West Virginia and USS Tennessee after the attack on Pearl Harbor, December 7, 1941*

Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library and Museum
Chinese Exclusion Act, 1882
British Columbia Archives (PDP03732)

Reaction to the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882
Group Two: Japanese-American Internment

Primary Sources:
Mary Miki Shiritori Akimoto, Santa Anita Assembly Center Painting, 1942

Photograph, Arcadia, California. Evacuees of Japanese Ancestry from San Pedro, California, Arrive by Special Trains for Santa Anita Assembly Center..., April 5, 1942

Granada Pioneer, March 31, 1943

Photograph, Amache District Headquarters, Boy Scouts of America, Granada Relocation Center, May 10, 1943

Loyalty Questionnaire, War Relocation Authority, January 1943

Poster, Instruction to all Persons of Japanese Ancestry…, May 23, 1942

Letter from Johnny Akimoto to Mary and Masanori Akimoto, April 13, 1943

Photograph, Military Police on Duty in Watch-Tower at Santa Anita Park Assembly Center..., April 6, 1942

Letter from Johnny Akimoto to Ruth and Hideo Kodani, February 19, 1943

Letter from Johnny Akimoto to Mary and Masanori Akimoto, February 3, 1943

Secondary Sources:
Excerpt, Matthew Elms, When the Akimotos Went to War
**Group Two Task Card**

You will have 30 minutes to prepare a two to three minute skit that includes all of your group members. The skit will:

1. Introduce Executive Order 9066
2. Internment process from homes, to assembly centers, to permanent camps
3. Introduce the Loyalty Questionnaire
Mary Miki Shiritori Akimoto, *Santa Anita Assembly Center Painting, 1942*
Akimoto Family Collection

Watercolor of the Santa Anita Racetrack Assembly Center painted by Mary “Miki” Akimoto. Notice the guard towers with machine guns pointed toward the internment barracks. The small fort and post office fly the American flag outside the fence. The San Gabriel Mountains are portrayed in the background, 1942.
Photograph, Arcadia, California. Evacuees of Japanese Ancestry from San Pedro, California, Arrive by Special Trains for Santa Anita Assembly Center..., April 5, 1942

National Archives and Records Administration (537038)
Activity: A Japanese American Family’s Experience During WWII | Group 2

Granada Pioneer, March 31, 1943

Densho

**Article announcing the induction of Johnny Akimoto out of the Amache Internment Camp in Granada, Colorado.**

Granada Pioneer, March 31, 1943
Photograph, *Amache District Headquarters, Boy Scouts of America, Granada Relocation Center, May 10, 1943*

National Archives and Records Administration
Loyalty Questionnaire, *War Relocation Authority*, January 1943

Densho

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27. If the opportunity presents itself and you are found qualified, would you be willing to volunteer for the Army Nurse Corps or the WAAC?

28. Will you swear unqualified allegiance to the United States of America and forswear any form of allegiance or obedience to the Japanese emperor, or any other foreign government, power, or organization?

29. Have you ever worked for or volunteered your services to the Japanese or Spanish government? If so, indicate which and give date!

(Yes) (No)
Activity: A Japanese American Family’s Experience During WWII | Group 2

National Park Service

Poster, Instruction to all Persons of Japanese Ancestry..., May 23, 1942

The following instructions must be observed:
1. A responsible member of each family, preferably the head of the family, or the person in whose name most of the property is held, and each individual living alone, will report to the Civil Control Station to receive further instructions. This must be done between 8:00 A.M. and 5:00 P.M. on Sunday, May 24, 1942, or between 8:00 A.M. and 5:00 P.M. on Monday, May 25, 1942.
2. Each person is required to carry with him on departure for the Assembly Center, the following property:
   (a) Bedding and linens (no mattress) for each member of the family;
   (b) Toilet articles for each member of the family;
   (c) Extra clothing for each member of the family;
   (d) Essential personal effects for each member of the family.
All items carried will be securely packaged, tied, and plainly marked with the name of the owner and numbered in accordance with instructions obtained at the Civil Control Station. The size and number of packages is limited to that which can be carried by the individual or family group.
3. No pets of any kind will be permitted.
4. No personal items and no household goods will be shipped to the Assembly Center.
5. The United States Government will provide for the storage, at the sole expense of the owner, of the more substantial household items, such as bedchairs, cooking stoves, and other heavy furniture. Cooking utensils and other small items will be accepted for storage if crated, packed and plainly marked with the name and address of the owner. Only one name and address will be used by a given family.
6. Each family, and each individual living alone, will be furnished transportation to the Assembly Center. Private means of transportation will not be allowed. All instructions pertaining to the movement will be obtained at the Civil Control Station.

Go to the Civil Control Station between the hours of 8:00 A.M. and 5:00 P.M.,
Sunday, May 24, 1942, or between the hours of 8:00 A.M. and 5:00 P.M.,
Monday, May 25, 1942, to receive further instructions.

J. J. DeWitt
Lieutenant General, U. S. Army
Commanding
April 13, 1943

Dear Mom & Pop,

I’m leaving for the army tomorrow morning.

I talked with Mr. Findley and he said it would be alright for you to come to camp [Amache.] Margaret has to make direct application to this camp if she wants to come in. Tell her to wire right away if she wants to come in. They won’t take anybody if they can help in.

Not much to write about. Will write later after I have been stationed.

Always,

Johnny
Photograph, *Military Police on Duty in Watch-Tower at Santa Anita Park Assembly Center..., April 6, 1942*

National Archives and Records Administration (537019)
Excerpt, *When the Akimotos Went to War*

In Washington, D.C., despite the lack of evidence of Japanese American traitors, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt made his most controversial decision during his nearly four full terms in office. He issued Executive Order 9066 on February 19, 1942, sealing the fate of nearly 120,000 Japanese Americans. In the weeks and months that followed, Japanese Americans along the West coast of the United States were rounded up and put into internment camps. While Victor trained with the U.S. Army to defend America, that same U.S. Army put his family under armed guard.

Thousands of Japanese Americans, faced with threats of bayonets and machine guns, sold their homes. Victor’s family unloaded their home, as well as household furnishings and family heirlooms, at cut-rate prices. As his family departed their home, eagerly awaiting profiteers snapped up the riches left behind. Items such as cameras, shortwave radios, and ceremonial Japanese swords were forbidden in the assembly and internment camps. These articles were discarded or sold for pennies on the dollar.
Dear Ruth & Hideo,

Well, I guess I might as well get to the point. I joined the army. I done a lot of thinking about it before I signed so don’t think I done it on the spur of the moment.

You know I never did like any part of farming and about getting jobs in defense plants are a bunch of baloney. I didn’t want to be a farm laborer, and don’t want to stay in camp so I signed up.

Another thing, on our registration we got a couple of questions concerning our loyalty & willingness to fight for America. Well, to those two questions, 3 to 1 nusus put no to that question. Well, that would take away all our rights & stuff. Well them dumb guys just make things tough for everybody else. Don’t think I’m patriotic or stuff but I’m just looking out for myself. We’ll be going the 1st of next month.

Ask Ned if he wants my clothes or what. Only thing he probably could wear would be my shirts. I was thinking of leaving them with my friends or something.

How is everything down in Idaho? How is the PH situation coming along? Has mom gone to Arizona yet?

The weather down here is well. Haven’t seen any snow since I hit camp. For the last 2 weeks, it’s been just like L.A. weather. The food is good and bad. We have roast pork or beef at least once a week. The barracks are a lot better than Santa Anita but spread out to far.

Well, not much more to write about so I’ll sign off. Be seeing you. (I hope)

Just Johnny
Letter from Johnny Akimoto to Mary and Masanori Akimoto, February 3, 1943
Akimoto Family Collection

Transcription:

Dear Mom & Dad,

February 3, 1943

Arrived in camp Monday [sic] night. Everything is pretty good out here. It's [sic] not like Santa Anita though.

I'm staying with Ioshi Mori & Yammy in a barracks.

The floor is brick & the inside is like our bunkhouse, lined with seltex.*

There's a coal stove in every barrack and they furnish all the coal. It sure is nice & warm in the room.

I've seen Watada san already & he sends his regards.

So far the food is pretty good. Haven't seen everybody yet cause the camp is pretty well spread out.

Nothing more to write so I'll sign off. Say hi to Dot & Vic.

Just Johnny

Address: 6F – 3F
Amache Branch
Lamar, Colorado

*Seltex – a thin-coated paper product used to cover the outside or inside of wall to keep dust, dirt, and wind out of the internment camp barrack building.
Military Life and Death

**Primary Sources:**

Letter from Victor Akimoto to his family, April 29, 1942
Akimoto Family Collection

Photograph, *Members of the 442nd Regimental Combat Team are seen in the Vosges mountain range in France*, October 1944
U.S. Army Signal Corps, American Battle Monuments Commission

Photograph, *Two color guards and color bearers of the Japanese-American 442nd Combat Team, stand at attention, while their citations are read...*, November 12, 1944
U.S. Army Signal Corps (SC-196716)

Akimoto Family Collection

Photograph, *Johnny, Jane, and Ted Akimoto*, c. 1943
Akimoto Family Collection

Photograph, *Victor on Guard Duty*, c. 1943
Akimoto Family Collection

Letter from Major General J.A. Ulio to Masanori Akimoto, August 21, 1944
Department of the Army

Letter from Ted Akimoto to Mary and Masanori Akimoto, August 21, 1944
Akimoto Family Collection

Letter from Johnny Akimoto to Mary and Masanori Akimoto, June 21, 1943
Akimoto Family Collection

**Secondary Sources:**

Excerpts, Matthew Elms, *When the Akimotos Went to War*
Group Three Task Card

You will have 30 minutes to prepare a two to three minute skit that includes all of your group members. The skit will:

1. Re-enact the demotion of Victor
2. Accurately present the death of Johnny in Italy
3. Present the Battle of the Lost Battalion in France
Letter from Victor Akimoto to his family, April 29, 1942

Akimoto Family Collection

Transcription:

April 29, 1942

Q.M. Detachment

Building 212

Dear Family,

Just received your letter today and sure am sorry for causing all of you to worry over me. Everything is fine out here so please don’t worry as the only way I could ever suffer any serious casualty out here in these wild hills of Wyoming is by overeating. In fact the way things are shaping out there in Calif. It the other way around and…I’m worried about how you folks are going to get along.

As for my hand, it is just about healed now and by the end of this week I should be ready for duty again. It sure will feel good to start working again for it sure gets tiresome laying around the barracks as I’ve been doing for about a month now and the way I’ve been eating I think this month instead of the government paying me, I should pay them.

Vic.

P.S. You have to excuse the writing as three of my fingers are still bandaged and its [sic] just awkward trying to write.
Excerpt, *When the Akimotos Went to War*

As fall became winter in central Europe, the world braced for the final European battles of World War II. By the time the 442nd Regimental Combat Team arrived at France’s Vosges Mountains, the fighting was frantic. Adolf Hitler had ordered his troops to fight to the last man to defend Germany from the Allied advance. Victor’s company would be fighting in mountain terrain, much trickier than the flat plains of Italy. Here, they had to contend with trees, rocks, fog, and rain, as well as a highly trained, professional German Army fighting to defend its homeland.

The 442nd Regimental Combat Team was ordered to rescue the 141st Infantry Regiment, composed of members mostly from Texas. Allied bombers air-dropped supplies to the surviving 275 Texans. But the weather conditions were so poor that most of the supplies fell into German hands. Artillery shells stuffed with emergency supplies, aimed at the entrenched Americans, fell into enemy hands as well.

The 442nd Regimental Combat Team battled for five days before finally breaking through the German defenses. On October 30, 230 men of the 141st Infantry Regiment came out alive. The 442nd suffered over 800 casualties, deaths and injuries combined. More Japanese-American soldiers sacrificed and lost their lives in what became known as the Battle of the Lost Battalion than soldiers of the 141st Infantry Regiment were saved.
Photograph, *Members of the 442nd Regimental Combat Team are seen in the Vosges mountain range in France, October 1944*  
U.S. Army Signal Corps, American Battle Monuments Commission
Photograph, *Two color guards and color bearers of the Japanese-American 442nd Combat Team, stand at attention, while their citations are read...*, November 12, 1944

U.S. Army Signal Corps (SC-196716)
Photograph, *Sergeant Victor Akimoto and Private Johnny Akimoto, c. 1943*

Akimoto Family Collection

Sergeant Victor Akimoto (left) and Private Johnny Akimoto (right) at Camp Shelby.
Photograph, Johnny, Jane, and Ted Akimoto, c. 1943
Akimoto Family Collection
Photograph, *Victor on Guard Duty, c. 1943*

Akimoto Family Collection
Excerpt, *When the Akimotos Went to War*

As the oldest son, Victor believed in his family duty to look after his younger brothers. As any good son would do, he promised his mother to keep Ted and Johnny safe. Yet, the U.S. Army decided to keep sergeants of the 100th Battalion stateside to continue training new soldiers. In order for his commander to give him permission to go overseas, Victor willingly gave up his rank as sergeant, demoted to private.

But Victor, trained by a Glove Gloves contender on the streets of Los Angeles, had one more left hook in his arsenal.

During that same conversation in 1943, Victor had the chaplain and commander make a promise. He made them promise neither to send Ted into battle nor to allow Ted to take a reduction in rank to go into battle like Victor.
Letter from Major General J.A. Ulio to Masanori Akimoto, August 21, 1944

Department of the Army

21 August 1944

Mr. Masanori Akimoto
11-G 10-A
Aurora, Colorado

Dear Mr. Akimoto:

It is with deep regret that I confirm the telegram of recent date informing you of the death of your son, Private First Class John Akimoto, 37, 344, 336, Infantry.

The official casualty report states that your son died on 2 August 1944 in Italy as a result of hepatitis edema pulmonary.

I fully understand your desire to learn as much as possible regarding his death, but unfortunately reports of this nature are brief due to the conditions under which they are prepared and the limited means available for their transmission.

I realize that there is little which may be said or done at this time to lessen your sorrow but it is my hope that in time you may find sustaining comfort in the knowledge that he died while in the service of his country.

Please accept my deepest sympathy.

Sincerely yours,

J. A. Ulio
Major General
The Adjutant General

1 Dlosure
Bulletin of Information.
Letter from Ted Akimoto to Mary and Masanori Akimoto, August 21, 1944

Akimoto Family Collection

DEAR DAD & MOMS,

I RECEIVED YOUR TELEGRAM TODAY AFTER WORK. PLEASE BELIEVE ME, IT CAME AS JUST AS MUCH A SHOCK TO ME AS IT MUST HAVE BEEN TO YOU.

I WENT TO SEE THE MINISTER OF THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH IN TOWN AND HAD HIM SAY A FEW WORDS OF PRAYER FOR JOHNNY, AFTER WHICH HE TALKED TO ME FOR A WHILE. HE MADE ME FEEL CONSIDERABLY BETTER.

I NEVER TOLD YOU THIS BEFORE AS I THOUGHT IT WOULD BE BAD LUCK TO MENTION IT, BUT, JUST BEFORE JOHNNY EMBARKED, HE SAID: "IF I DON'T HAPPEN TO COME BACK, TELL EVERYONE, ESPECIALLY MOM, TO NOT CRY TOO MUCH BECAUSE THERE'S ENOUGH SADNESS IN THIS WORLD ALREADY, OKAY?" SO I LAUGED AND TOLD HIM NOT TO TALK SO CRAZY, BUT SAID "OKAY! HOWEVER, TONIGHT, I WENT UP TO MY ROOM AND CRIED LIKE A BABY FOR ABOUT AN HOUR. I JUST COULDN'T HELP IT. SO CRY MOM, BUT DON'T GRIEVE TOO LONG. I KNOW THAT JOHNNY DIED HAPPY AMONG HIS FRIENDS, AND KNOWING THAT HE WAS FIGHTING TO MAKE A BETTER PLACE FOR CHILDREN SUCH AS NON AND MARGARET'S BABY TO COME. WE USED TO TALK ABOUT IT A LOT WHEN WE WERE IN SHELBY TOGETHER. NO MATTER WHAT THE COST, WE HAVE TO MAKE THIS WORLD A BETTER PLACE FOR THE COMING GENERATIONS SO THAT THEY DON'T HAVE TO GO THROUGH THE TRIALS AND TRIBULATIONS.
Letter from Ted Akimoto to Mary and Masanori Akimoto, August 21, 1944
Akimoto Family Collection

\[\text{THE NINJNIN HAVE HAD TO GO THROUGH UP TO}\\ \text{NOW. \textit{SO JOHNNY HAS GIVEN HIS "ALL TO}\\ \text{WHAT HE FIRMLY BELIEVED IN, AND WHAT I ALSO}\\ \text{BELIEVE IN. \textit{THIS IS AS HE WOULD HAVE WANTED}\\ \text{IT, THAT MUCH I AM SURE.}}\\ \text{I HOPE I HAVE HELPED, DAD & MOM TO GIVE YOU}\\ \text{SOME IDEA OF HOW JOHNNY FELT AND HOW I}\\ \text{NOW FEEL. CAN\’T SAY MORE.}}\\ \text{LOVE}\\ \text{Jed.}\]
Letter from Johnny Akimoto to Mary and Masanori Akimoto, June 21, 1943
Akimoto Family Collection

Transcription
June 21, 1943

Monday Nite

Dear Mom & Dad,

I hope everything is OK. up in Grenada. We've been pretty busy the two a days and didn't have much spare time. I saw Bill and Ted yesterday. Ted is in 1st Battalion, Headquarters Company and Bill is in the Field Artillery.

I guess all of us are finally here. Only we're kinda split up.

There's really not much to write about so I'll sign off. Take care of yourselves and please don't worry about me.

Always,

Johnny
Life of a Prisoner of War (POW)

Primary Sources
International Committee of the Red Cross Report, April 17, 1945
Missing Report, 1944
Letter from Major General J.A. Ulio to Mary Akimoto, November 11, 1944
Photograph, *Reenacting the liberation of Stalag IX - B*, April 2, 1945
*Comite International de la Croix-Rouge*, December 1944
Letter from Major General J.A. Ulio to Mary Akimoto, April 19, 1945
War Department Telegram to Mary Akimoto, May 8, 1945
Letter from Mary Akimoto to War Department, February 14, 1945
Photograph, *Liberated Soldiers at Bad Orb Eating C-Rations*, April 2, 1945
Request for Disposition of Remains, November 24, 1947

Secondary Sources
Excerpt, Matthew Elms, *When the Akimotos Went to War*
Group Four Task Card

You will have 30 minutes to prepare a 2 - 3 minute skit that includes all of your group members. The skit will:

1. Introduce the capture of Victor Akimoto
2. Present conditions of POW Camp at Bad Orb
3. Present Mary at Amache Internment Camp
International Committee of the Red Cross Report, April 17, 1945

Department of the Army

COPY OF INCOMING CABLEGRAM:

INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE OF THE RED CROSS
DELEGATION IN THE UNITED STATES

Ref. C/x

Translation

Date sent: April 17, 1945
Date received: April 19, 1945

Cable received from: Intercroixrouge
Geneva, Switzerland

1944 GENERAL VISIT INHERENT IX FROM 6TH TO 21ST MARCH FOLLOWING CAMPS
OFLAG IX/A/H/Z STALAGS IX/A IX/B IX/C LAGARDES STADTRODA HILDESHEIMEN
BADENOBERSCHAFEN HEINIGEN SCHLITZE THESIG SITUATION CRITICAL FOR
THOSE THOSE SINCE BEGINNING AND PRISONERS EVACUATED UNDER VERY BAD
CONDITIONS FROM CAMP IN THE EAST CONSIDERABLE LOSS OF WEIGHT, DIARRHEA,
DIARRHEA HEMORRHAIGICA GENERALIZED INFECTION, HYGIENE NONEXISTANT, VERMIN
SWARM, DANGER TYPHUS, CLOTHING IN SHORTS, STOP BARRACKS AND TENTS
OVERCROWDED, PRISONERS SLEEP ON DREARY FLOORS OR UNCLEAN STAIRS, STOP
EXREMELY SMALL PORTIONS OF FOOD, STOP STALAG IX/B WITHOUT SALT FOR WEEKS
STOP NO SHIPMENTS SINCE SEVERAL MONTHS, SUPPLIES EXTREMELY URGENTLY
NEEDED, FOOD, CLOTHING, SHOES, MEDICINES, PARTICULARLY QUININE, SULFAPYRIMIDINE
OPiates DISINFECTANTS SUCH AS IODINPELZIN,"(SWISS PREPARATION ZYMA MERCURY-
BROMAT WITH IODINE)" ANTITYPTHEROS SERUM, TYPHUS VACCIN PENICILLIN
MATERIAL FOR DRESSINGS, BLANKETS, UTENSILS, STOP, GRAVE DANGER OF EPIDEMICS
SANITARY INSTALLATIONS ALTOGETHER INSUFFICIENT, SOAP, TOILET PAPER
COMPLETELY LACKING, STOP, GENERAL APATHY, REPRESENTATIVES HARRIASED WITH
QUESTIONS HIGH, PERCENTAGE DEATHS, STOP, RELATIVELY BETTER NO NEW
ARRIVALS, OF PRISONERS, FOOD CONDITIONS BETTER, BUT NO SHIPMENTS OF FOOD
RECEIVED, NECESSITY CONSTITUTE, RESERVES FOR FRESH ARRIVAL EVACUOS.
STOP, STALAGS, NOT IN AS POOR CONDITION AS STALAG IX/B, BECAUSE PRISONER LESS
NUMEROUS, MEDICAL CARE STILL INSUFFICIENT, BUT SYMPTOMS OF DISEASE CAUSED
BY UNDERNOURISHMENT.

INTERCROIXROUGE H9746
Missing Report, 1944

Department of the Army

MISSING REPORT

To accompany AGO Form 66-1 or 2 of Missing or Missing in Action Personnel (Other than those covered by Missing Air Crew Report.)

NAME
AXIMOTO, Victor
ASH 19 078 557
GRADE
Pvt
Arm or Service
Inf

GRN Co A 100th Bn, 442d Inf
APO 758
Reported MIA 23 Oct 44

MISSION
Being evacuated to the rear aid station

POINT OF DEPARTURE
Diffontaine, France
DATE
23 Oct 44

INTENDED DESTINATION
En Aid Station, V295976

LAST KNOWN WHEREABOUTS
V312582, Map, Eastern France, Bruyeres, 1/50,000

BRIEF RESUME OF CIRCUMSTANCES SURROUNDING DISAPPEARANCE:

Pvt Akinoto, 19078557, was a litter case and he was being evacuated to the rear aid station with several other wounded soldiers. Apparently this group lost their way in the thickly wooded area and ran into an enemy patrol. The entire group were presumably captured with the exception of a few who escaped.

STATEMENTS OF WITNESSES, IF ANY:

REMARKS: (Any information not covered above, including details and results of search, if any, conducted)

ENTRIES BRADLEY
Nov 44

(Signature of preparing officer)

Determined to be an
Administrative Marking
Not National Security Information
By
NARA Date 1/1/1965

Confidential

ABMCEDUCATION.ORG
American Battle Monuments Commission | National History Day | Roy Rosenzweig Center for History and New Media
Letter from Major General J.A. Ulio to Mary Akimoto, November 11, 1944

Dear Mrs. Akimoto,

This letter is to confirm my recent telegram in which you were regretfully informed that your son, Private Victor Akimoto, 19,070, 57th Infantry, has been reported missing in action in France since 23 October 1944.

I know that added distress is caused by failure to receive more information or details. Therefore, I wish to assure you that at any time additional information is received it will be transmitted to you without delay, and, if in the meantime no additional information is received, I will again communicate with you at the expiration of three months.

The term "missing in action" is used only to indicate that the whereabouts or status of an individual is not immediately known. It is not intended to convey the impression that the case is closed. I wish to emphasize that every effort is exerted continuously to clear up the status of our personnel. Under war conditions this is a difficult task as you must readily realize. Experience has shown that many persons reported missing in action are subsequently reported as prisoners of war, but as this information is furnished by countries with which we are at war, the War Department is helpless to expedite such reports. However, in order to relieve financial worry, Congress has enacted legislation which continues in force the pay, allowances and allotments to dependents of personnel being carried in a missing status.

Permit me to extend to you my heartfelt sympathy during this period of uncertainty.

Sincerely yours,

J. A. ULIO
Major General,
The Adjutant General.
Photograph, Reenacting the liberation of Stalag IX - B, April 2, 1945
U.S. Army Signal Corps (111-SC-339369)
**Comite International de la Croix-Rouge, December 1944**

Department of the Army

**German**

Nach der Amputation des rechten Beines hat Kranker der Artzin die Mitteilung gemacht, sterben zu wollen und daraufhin jede Nahrungsaufnahme verweigert.

**English Translation**

Following the amputation of the right leg, the patient informed the doctor that he wants to die (sterben zu wollen) and therefore refused all food (Nahrungsaufnahme).
Letter from Major General J.A. Ulio to Mary Akimoto, April 19, 1945

Department of the Army

Dear Mrs. Akimoto:

It is with deep regret that I am writing to confirm the recent telegram informing you of the death of your son, Private Victor Akimoto, 19-070-357, Infantry, who was previously reported missing in action on 23 October 1944 in France.

Information has now been received from the German Government through the International Red Cross stating that your son died on 14 December 1944 as a result of wounds received in action. It is reported that he died in a hospital.

I realize the burden of anxiety that has been yours and deeply regret the sorrow this report brings you. May the knowledge that he made the supreme sacrifice for his home and country be a source of sustaining comfort.

I extend to you my deepest sympathy.

Sincerely yours,

J. A. Ulio
Major General
The Adjutant General of the Army

1 Inclosure
WB Pamphlet No. 20-15
War Department Telegram to Mary Akimoto, May 8, 1945

Department of the Army

TELEGRAM

OFFICIAL BUSINESS—GOVERNMENT RATES

From

WAR DEPARTMENT

AG 201 AKIMOTO VICTOR Pvt 19 APR 45
ASK 19 078 557 Son

SPXPC-113110-2-23 29 APRIL 1945

MRS MARY M AKIMOTO

11-G 10-A

AMACHE COLORADO

REPORT NOW RECEIVED FROM THE GERMAN GOVERNMENT THROUGH THE

INTERNATIONAL RED CROSS STATES YOUR SON PRIVATE MX VICTOR AKIMOTO

WHO WAS PREVIOUSLY REPORTED MISSING IN ACTION DIED OF WOUNDS ON

FOURTEEN DECEMBER. THE SECRETARY OF WAR EXTENDS HIS DEEP SYMPATHY

CONFIRMING LETTER FOLLOWS

ROBERT H. DUNLOP

ACTING THE ADJUTANT GENERAL

OFFICIAL

ADJUTANT GENERAL

BATTLE
Letter from Mary Akimoto to War Department, February 14, 1945

Department of the Army

Transcription

11G – 10A

Amache, Colorado

February 14, 1945

War Department

The Adj. Generals Office

Washington, D.C.

Re: A G 201 Akimoto, Victor

PC – N InJO 273

Dear Sirs:

It has been over three months since your telegram of November 10th and your letter of November 11th in regards to our son, Victor (19078557) who has been missing in action since October 23rd. We lost one son, John in Italy on August 2, 1944 so you can well understand why we are anxious to get some information about Victor.

According to your letter you stated that you would communicate with us again after the expiration of three months. Since we haven’t heard from you we are writing to see if you have been able to obtain any further information.

Could you please let us know at the earliest possible time?

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Mr. & Mrs. M. Akimoto
Excerpt, When the Akimotos Went to War

When amputation became the only option, new problems faced Victor. With medications in short supply, including anesthetics such as ether, Victor faced having his leg removed while still conscious. Anesthetics allowed doctors to put patients to sleep and to conduct operations without causing pain to the patient. However, these drugs were probably not available to Victor or any other POW. Germany reserved medical supplies for soldiers and civilians, not Allied prisoners of war. Perhaps the doctors had access to a bit of alcohol, which would have made him drunk, or chloroform, which would have helped to put him to sleep. Both of these could have helped to reduce the pain.

Other POWs held down Victor’s shoulders, torso, and legs. A tight belt or piece of rope, used to restrict blood flow, may have been used. The tourniquet would reduce bleeding. Victor bit down on a stick while the doctors sawed through the thigh tissues and bone.

They amputated his infected leg.

After the procedure, Victor recovered enough to speak to his doctor. He had one request, no more food.
Photograph, *Liberated Soldiers at Bad Orb Eating C-Rations, April 2, 1945*

US Army Signal Corps (111-SC-231077)
Request for Disposition of Remains, November 24, 1947

Department of the Army