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

AG 201 Akimoto, John
Pl:W 227092

21 August 1944

Mr. Masanori Akimoto
11-G 10-A
Amache, 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

[Stamp: DEATH CASE - SEND TO CERTIFICATION SECTION]

[Stamp: CASUALTY BRANCH]

1 Enclosure
 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 LAUGHED 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 NEEDED HAPPY, AMONG HIS FRIENDS, AND KNOWING THAT HE WAS FIGHTING TO MAKE A BETTER PLACE FOR CHILDREN SUCH AS DON AND MARGARET'S BABY TO COME. WE USED TO TALK ABOUT IT A LOT WHEN WE WERE IN SHELLY TOGETHER. NO MATTER WHAT THE COST, WE HAVE TO MAKE THIS WORLD A BETTER PLACE FOR THE COMING GENERATIONS SO THAT THEY WON'T HAVE TO GO THROUGH THE TRIALS AND EXPERIENCES.
Letter from Ted Akimoto to Mary and Masanori Akimoto, August 21, 1944

Akimoto Family Collection

Dear Mom & Dad,

The Nihonjin have had to go through up to now. So Johnny has given his all to what he firmly believed in, and what I also believe in. This is as he would have wanted it, that much I am sure.

I hope I have helped, Dad & Mom to give you some idea of how Johnny felt and how I now feel. Can't say more.

Love,

Ted.
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