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Jap-American Defended

With eloquent simplicity the deserving case of Japanese-Americans is pleaded by Richard L. Neuberger, writing in a recent issue of The Saturday Review of Literature. Unjustified vindictiveness toward this group, known as Nisei, was widespread during the war years, particularly on the West Coast where 112,353 men, women and children of Japanese ancestry resided, out of a total of 126,947 in the United States at the time Japanese bombs fell on Pearl Harbor.

Mr. Neuberger begins with a touching human interest appeal, as he pleads the case of the Nisei. He described a heavy train plunging down the gorge of the Columbia River, while Staff Sergeant Taro Asai of the 37th Army Infantry Division looked out the coach window on the familiar scene. Coming home after 44 months in the Southwest Pacific, the soldier wondered how he would be received when he reached Hood River.

His parents were not yet out of the relocation camp a thousand miles from the Pacific seaboard and his three brothers were still in the Army. He knew, too, that the Hood River post of the American Legion had taken the names of the four Asai boys off the servicemen's honor roll on the Sandstone County Courthouse. The Saturday Review of Literature writer draws a graphic picture of the scene when Taro picks up his duffle bag* and alights at the station. [*which happens to include a Bronze Star]

"The cab took Taro past the courthouse. He peered at the white placques on the side of the building. Some were freshly painted and not stained by weather. Four caught his glance -- Gene Asai, Masami Asai, Masaaki Asai, Taro Asai. The names were back. The names that had been torn down while his division was fighting its way across the long island battleground -- New Guinea, the Solomons, the Philippines." **

Proceeding in the cab, Taro passes the fir-planked Methodist Church where he hoped he could see the Rev. Mr. Burgoyne's tall figure in the arched doorway. The minister had written him at his A.P.O. address that in the house of God in Hood River men were judged by their deeds not by their color. Then Taro began to wonder about the 40 acres of fruit trees that his father Sagoro had planted long ago as an immigrant from Japan.

But this vignette prefaces a chronicle of events that are a disgrace to the perpetrators who call themselves Americans. For example, Frank Hachiya, one of the Nisei whose name had not been deemed worthy of the Hood River honor roll, was awarded the Silver Star posthumously for gallantry in action on Leyte Island. Prejudice against the Nisei, which was indefensible at the outset, still smoulders in some areas of the United States but the defense of the Japanese-Americans by Richard L. Neuberger will serve to answer the charges of bigots to the satisfaction of any thinking American who reads it.

** The same names will later be among those included on a Congressional Gold Medal