

SPECIALIST HARRY M. AKUNE **US Army (Deceased)**



Harry M. Akune volunteered for service with the US Army from the Amache Relocation Camp, Colorado, on 12 December 1942. After graduating from the Military Intelligence Service Language School, he served as a Translator/Interrogator to the US 33rd Infantry Division in British New Guinea in May 1944 and then to the US 6th Army in Hollandia, British New Guinea, as part of the Allied Translator and Interpreter Service. In November 1944, SPC Akune was attached to the 503rd Parachute Regimental Combat Team (RCT) to provide intelligence services for the amphibious invasion of Mindoro Island. This became a vital base for the American aerial war against the main Japanese forces on the island of Luzon in the Philippines.

The 503rd Parachute RCT became the lead unit in retaking the fortress of Corregidor, key to Manila harbor and the site of the surrender of American and Filipino forces in 1942. COL George M. Jones, commanding the American Rock Force, recognized the valuable services that SPC Akune could provide and personally asked him if he would volunteer in what became the most daring and dangerous airborne assault in the Pacific. SPC Akune replied that he already felt as though he was a member of the 503rd and would be honored to continue to serve with them.

Although he lacked formal parachutist training, SPC Akune was among the first Americans to land among the splintered tree stumps, rubble, and enemy fire on the heavily-defended island fortress on 16 February 1945. He joined his fellow troopers in firefights and assaults on the rapidly-reforming enemy garrison. Later, he participated as an infantryman in a number of combat patrols.

Shortly after the landing, SPC Akune extracted timely and valuable intelligence from the few prisoners taken and documents he translated. He discovered that the enemy commander had been killed just before the airborne landing, that severe damage had been done to the Japanese communication system, that the strength of the opposition was 5,000 and not the 850 previously estimated, and that the nature of the enemy force included a number of highly-motivated Japanese Imperial Marines who would not

hesitate to give their lives while taking those of American troops. These findings enabled our land forces to design the most effective offensive.

SPC Akune also discovered that 100 enemy motor boats packed with explosives were hidden in caves around the island ready to destroy Allied shipping. With this information, the US Navy was able to take timely countermeasures to avoid losses. SPC Akune demonstrated that a human intelligence capability was essential for success in a wide variety of combat situations. Consequently, the 503rd's after action report recommended that an intelligence specialist be permanently assigned to every combat operation.

COL Jones and his staff stated many times that the personal bravery and truly outstanding actions of SPC Akune allowed American forces to take rapid and effective offensive action against a larger enemy force, thereby shortening the duration of the campaign and significantly reducing the number of American casualties.

Immediately after, SPC Akune's service with the 503rd Parachute RCT, he was with the Filipino Forces, in Luzon, Philippines. At this time, he received a field commission as a Second Lieutenant and served with the Allied Prisoner of War Recovery Team during the initial occupation of Japan. His final duties were with General Headquarters, Army Forces Pacific, Advanced Echelon, Economic and Scientific Division before his separation from the Army in January 1946. 2LT Akune was belatedly presented with a Bronze Star Medal for his World War II service on 6 May 1991.

SPC Harry Akune was inducted into the Hall of Fame in 1996. He passed away on 26 September 2011.



Harry Akune receives his Hall of Fame certificate during a ceremony in 1996.