STAFF SERGEANT DICK S. HAMADA
US Army (Deceased)

In early 1943, Dick Hamada was living in Hawaii when he answered the call for volunteers to join the 442nd Regimental Combat Team, a segregated unit made up of Japanese-Americans from throughout the US. He was sent to Camp Shelby, Mississippi, for combat training. A few months later, Dr. Daniel Buchanan with the Office of Strategic Services (OSS) visited the camp, seeking soldiers familiar with the Japanese language. Hamada was one of only a few enlisted Japanese-Americans chosen to conduct clandestine espionage, counterespionage and intelligence missions for the OSS in the Pacific theater.

In late 1944, Hamada arrived in Burma for his first assignment behind enemy lines. His unit's mission was to gather intelligence, conduct guerrilla warfare, and coordinate with other battalions to disrupt the enemy escape route to Thailand. Hamada's responsibility was to interrogate captured prisoners and translate captured documents. As platoon leader, he also led squads of Kachin Rangers on scouting expeditions to harass the enemy and set up intelligence nets to identify and locate targets for the US Army Air Forces.

In late February 1945, Hamada's battalion tried to enter a small village in western Burma, but was met with strong opposition by Japanese forces. The panicked native warriors deserted by the hundreds. On the third night of battle, with only one-quarter of the battalion's original strength remaining, the Japanese launched a strong attack on its western flank, which was guarded by Hamada and some newly assigned Chinese troops under his leadership. During the intense fighting, the Chinese troops began to falter and appeared ready to desert. Realizing the gravity of the situation, Hamada left his foxhole and crawled to each Chinese position to encourage them and bolster their defenses. He was not only constantly exposed to enemy fire but also faced the threat of being inadvertently fired upon by his own troops. His leadership and courage empowered the Chinese to fiercely defend their position and ultimately repel the Japanese, who withdrew and retreated. Hamada's courageous and valiant effort saved his battalion not only from defeat but possible annihilation.

In another incident in August 1945, Hamada's OSS team participated in Operation MAGPIE to rescue four survivors of the Doolittle Raiders and 600 other prisoners from a Japanese prison camp in Peiping (currently Beijing). The OSS team parachuted in and,

upon landing, drew fire from snipers. Still, they were able to successfully extract the prisoners.

SSG Hamada was discharged from the Army following the war. His awards include the Good Conduct Medal as a member of the 442nd Regimental Combat Team, Bronze Star Medal (with 1 Oak Leaf Cluster), Soldier's Medal, and the Distinguished Unit Citation awarded by GEN Dwight Eisenhower, then Army Chief of Staff. SSG Hamada also received a Presidential Unit Citation in 2000 for being a member of the Military Intelligence Service in World War II, a Special Breast Order from the President of the Republic of China Nationalist government for the rescue of the Doolittle Raiders, and the Congressional Gold Medal awarded in November 2011 to Japanese-Americans who served in World War II with the Military Intelligence Service, 100th Infantry Battalion and 442nd Regimental Combat Team. Efforts are currently underway to have SSG Hamada's Bronze Star upgraded to the Distinguished Service Cross or Medal of Honor.