

LIEUTENANT COLONEL RICHARD M. SAKAKIDA
US Army
US Air Force, Retired (Deceased)



Richard Motoso Sakakida was born on 19 November 1920, in Puunene, Maui. His parents had emigrated from Japan in the early 1900s. Graduating from both McKinley High School and Hongwanji Japanese Language School in 1939, Sakakida was recommended by his ROTC instructor to fulfill Gen. MacArthur's headquarters' request for two Nisei to go undercover in Manila to gather information on the Japanese. Accepting the mission, Sakakida enlisted in the Army on 13 March 1941.

On 7 April 1941, then SGT Sakakida and CWO Arthur Komori left for Manila. Disguised as a civilian, Sakakida, who had been given no formal intelligence training, quickly made connections with key Japanese businessmen. When the Japanese invaded the Philippines, Sakakida had kept his cover so well, he was assumed to be a Japanese spy by the Philippine Constabulary.

Almost a year after enlisting in the Army, Sakakida was ordered to leave the Philippines and go to Australia. The Japanese had taken Bataan and MacArthur was evacuating the area. Giving up his seat to an informant who had a family back in Hawaii, Sakakida sealed his fate with the Japanese.

Soon after the evacuation, Corregidor fell and Sakakida provided all of the translations and negotiations of surrender. Unwaveringly he declared he was an American and not a Filipino. In doing so, he was court-martialed by the Japanese Army as a traitor in November 1942. Brutally tortured by his captors, who were positive he was a US Soldier, Sakakida continued to assert his undercover story that he was a civilian interpreter. He never broke down and admitted that he was a US Army Soldier.

Unable to break Sakakida, the Judge Advocate General's Office of the Japanese 14th Army Headquarters used him as an interpreter. He would sneak food to US prisoners of war and helped plan and execute the release of 500 guerrillas and their leader at Muntinglupa prison, even though it put his life at great risk.

After the war, Sakakida stayed in the Philippines to help translate for the War Crimes Investigations and Trials. In 1948, he transferred to the Office of Strategic Intelligence (OSI) in the newly established US Air Force. As an OSI officer, Sakakida went to Japan to help organize all of the law enforcement agencies' efforts to stop the black market activities in Tokyo. He retired from the Air Force in 1975 as a Lieutenant Colonel.

Because of the sensitivity of his mission, Sakakida did not receive recognition for his dedication and service until 1996 when he was awarded (posthumously) the Purple Heart and, in 1999, the Distinguished Service Medal. LTC Sakakida died from complications of injuries he received from his torturers on 23 January 1996.

LTC Sakakida was inducted into the Military Intelligence Corps Hall of Fame in 1988 and the Air Force Intelligence Hall of Fame in 1999.

