



# BEFORE THEY WERE HEROES

Sus Ito's World War II Images

Exhibition Fact Sheet



JAPANESE AMERICAN NATIONAL MUSEUM



## Susumu “Sus” Ito’s World War II photographs

document his tour of duty through Europe as a member of the celebrated all-Japanese American 442nd Regimental Combat Team’s 522nd Field Artillery Battalion. While Ito participated in such dramatic events as the rescue of the Lost Battalion and the liberation of a subcamp of Dachau, these rare and breathtaking images, taken with a prohibited camera, capture the humble daily lives of young Japanese American soldiers serving in a segregated unit. They are seen posing next to their jeeps, walking in the snow, swimming in a river, playing chess, and even visiting tourist destinations while on leave.

Ito went to great lengths to preserve the negatives, carrying his photos nearly 5,000 miles across Europe and having his film developed at villages along the way. Unseen for decades, these images provide a fresh look into the soldiers’ lives typically not found in history books.

*Before They Were Heroes* is the first in JANM’s Sharing Our Stories series of exhibitions drawn from the museum’s extensive permanent collection.

### Exhibition at a Glance:

- Approximately 220 historic WWII photographs
- Availability begins November 2015
- Booking periods for up to 12 weeks
- Contact Jay Brown, [jayb@flyingfishexhibits.com](mailto:jayb@flyingfishexhibits.com), for more information

*From left to right:*  
Soldiers playing volleyball during the seven months of occupation in Donauworth, Germany. 1945.

522nd Field Artillery Battalion, Charlie “C” Battery men transferred to Quartermaster Corps.

Sgt. Fred Oshima (second from left) shaking hands with Capt. Moyer Delos Harris after receiving the Bronze Star medal.

These and all other black-and-white images:  
Susumu Ito Collection,  
Japanese American National Museum

# ABOUT SUSUMU “SUS” ITO

Lt. Susumu “Sazmo” Ito during a field observation party in the Maritime Alps. Near Nice, France. December 1944.

Born in California in 1919 to a family of immigrant tenant farmers, Sus Ito was drafted into the U.S. Army in 1940. Following the bombing of Pearl Harbor, the army reassigned him to civilian duty while his family was confined at Rohwer concentration camp in Arkansas. In the spring of 1943, Ito was selected to join the 442nd’s 522nd Field Artillery Battalion. He went on to serve in all of the 442nd’s campaigns in Italy, France, and Germany, eventually rising to the rank of lieutenant. Ito’s tour of duty included such high-profile historic events as the rescue of the Lost Battalion and the liberation of a subcamp of Dachau.

After World War II, he studied Biology with the help of the G.I. Bill and later received PhDs in Biology and Cell Biology. A pioneer in his field, Dr. Ito joined the faculty of Harvard Medical School in 1960 and has been an emeritus professor since 1991.



# THE EXPERIENCE

Sus Ito during his first viewing of the exhibit. July 2015.

*“I was one of thousands, just doing my job.”*

–Sus Ito, 2014.



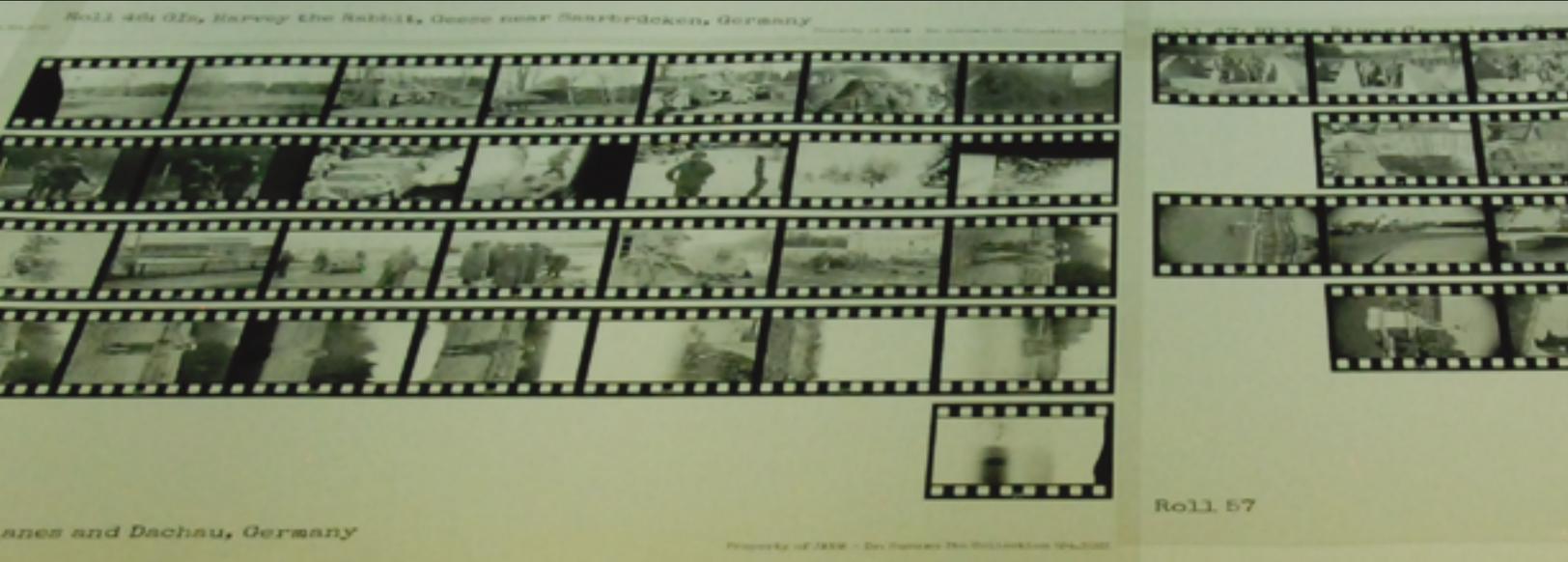
# Photographs

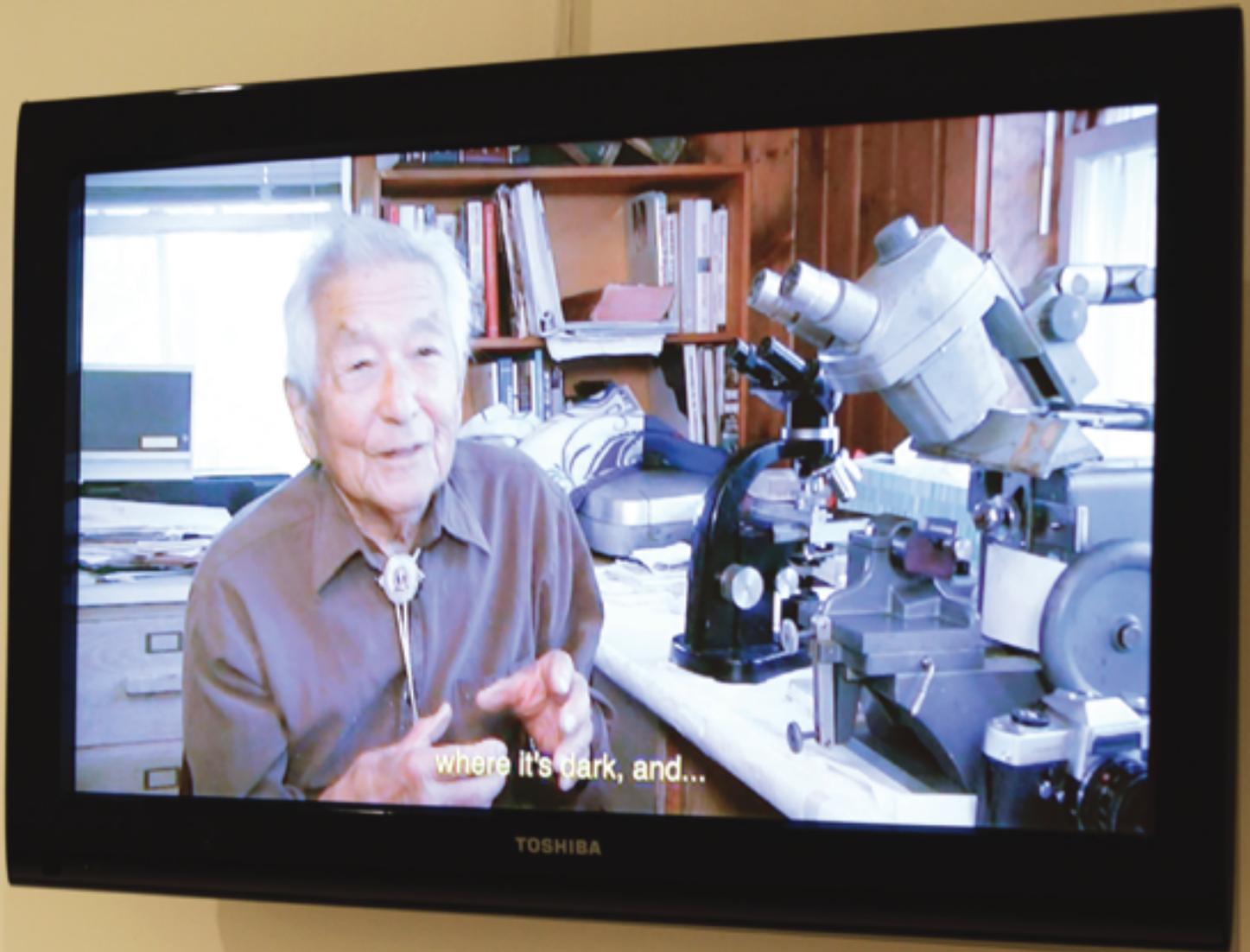
Featuring over 200 photos, the exhibit creates a truly immersive experience. Visitors can freely pick up the smaller reproductions of Ito's photographs and read the labels placed on the back. These photos serve as snapshots directly into the lives of young Japanese American soldiers during the war years.

To provide context for the photographs, the exhibition includes historical background as well as an exploration of Sus Ito's life before and after the war.

World War II veteran Nelson "Nelly" Akagi, with a photo of himself as a young soldier. July 2015.

**Transparencies** feature over 1,100 of Ito's images reproduced as contact sheets. When placed on a light table, guests can visualize the vast quantity of photos Ito took and carried with him during his tour across Europe.





## Video Presentations

During his time in Europe, Ito notably kept three things with him: a small bible, a *senninbari* (Japanese thousand-stitch cloth belt traditionally given to soldiers who are going to war, made for Ito by his mother and the other women at Rohwer), and a 35mm Agfa camera. Ito explains the significance of these objects to his wartime experience.

In a second video, Ito recalls how he protected and developed the photographs during his service.

*“I was just a young, naive 26-year-old then.”*

Lt. Susumu “Sazmo” Ito and S/Sgt. George “Montana” Oiye  
after a swim. Vada Beach, Italy. Summer 1944.



*From left to right:*  
Soldiers standing in front of a  
Munich sign. Germany. 1945.

Cpl. Norimasa "Yammy"  
Yamahiro, S/Sgt. James Takaki  
(Service Battery), and unknown  
soldiers giving each other haircuts.



## THE EXHIBITION PACKAGE

**As a host of *Before They Were Heroes*, you will receive the following:**

Estimated Number of Crates: 3

- 187 black-and-white photographic reproductions (approximately 9" x 13")
- 33 black-and-white photographic reproductions (16" x 24")
- 5 black-and-white photographic reproductions (24" x 16")
- 2 black-and-white photographic reproductions (24" x 24")
- 1 black-and-white photographic reproduction (24" x 18")
- 1 black-and-white photographic reproduction (14.5" x 32")
- 42 wooden shelves (36")
- 5 primary text panels (40" x 32")
- 4 secondary text panels (12" x 18")
- 52 transparencies of contact sheets (8.5" x 11")
- Light tables
- 2 video presentations ([5.5 minutes](#) and 2 minutes, DVD format)

A selection of Ito's three-dimensional artifacts can be made available for an additional cost. Exhibitors will need to meet key requirements regarding environmental controls, lighting, handling, security, and fire protection.



**Japanese American National Museum**

100 North Central Ave.

Los Angeles, CA 90012

[janm.org](http://janm.org)

The mission of the Japanese American National Museum is to promote understanding and appreciation of America's ethnic and cultural diversity by sharing the Japanese American experience.

**Find out more about this traveling exhibition:**

Jay Brown,

[jayb@flyingfishexhibits.com](mailto:jayb@flyingfishexhibits.com)

[janm.org/sus-ito](http://janm.org/sus-ito)

*Front cover:* Mitsuo Sakamoto holding a box of military rations in the Maritime Alps. December 1944.

*Back cover:* Lt. Susumu "Sazmo" Ito on R & R in Paris, France. Summer 1945.

