

Isle-born filmmaker to recount Nisei heroism

By **Vicki Viotti**
Advertiser Staff Writer

More than five decades have passed since the last big-screen treatment of Hawai'i's own heroic World War II story, the part played by Japanese-American soldiers in the liberation of France.

Isle-born filmmaker Lane Nishikawa seized the chance to tell that story, and hopes to begin shooting it in late January.

"Only the Brave" has a script and several actors committed to the project — Tamlyn Tomita and George Takei among them — and about \$450,000 of its budget. Nishimoto's push now is to raise the remaining \$300,000 through a donations drive and events such as tonight's screening of his earlier documentaries (see box).

Nishikawa said the film will be a fictional treatment of the famous 100th Infantry Battalion and 442nd Regimental Combat Team. But unlike the 1951 film "Go For Broke," he wants the story told from the soldiers' point of view.

It's a "Saving Private Ryan" approach to the story of the war's most decorated units, he said. Most of the soldiers came from Hawai'i, so the Wahiawa-born Nishikawa made sure the Islands were amply represented. The soldiers' flashbacks to their families, he said, will help convey the deeper human experience.

"Only the Brave" tells the story of how the soldiers rescued the "Lost Battalion" of the Texas 141st Regiment. The all-Nisei regiment saved more than 200, but suffered more than 800 casualties as they fought through German lines.

"This is definitely a dramatic, fictional story based on true events," Nishikawa said.

"I think the more specific you are with their experiences, the story starts to become more universal."

Tomita, who appeared in "Karate Kid II" and "Joy Luck Club," plays the wife of the central character, a sergeant. The Los Angeles actress, 37, has a mother born in Japan and a Nisei father who grew up partly in the Manzanar resettlement camp.

But the Nisei woman of the war years is a drastic departure from her own experience, Tomita said.

"I have to capture the image of a Japanese-American woman in a very codified society, where manners and cordiality are paramount. Today we are interested in getting to the truth as quickly as possible... they were very kind, and that's a word I can't apply to many people my age."

"Only the Brave" was awarded \$100,000 from the California Civil Liberties Public Education Program; the goal is to grow this seed money to \$750,000.

That's a paltry sum for a major feature film, but as one of three filmmakers selected by Universal Studios for its independent film program, Nishikawa also earns production services from Universal at a deeply subsidized rate.

"I'm very realistic ... but I would like this to be seen in as many countries as possible," he said. "I think it will have universal appeal."

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Screenings to benefit project "Forgotten Valor" and "When We Were Warriors," a benefit screening sponsored by the 100th Infantry Battalion Veterans and Hawaii Dental Service

• 6:30 tonight

• Farrington High School auditorium

• \$10

• 946-0272

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