

Purple Heart Battalion was the nickname given to a Japanese American unit in the United States Army during World War II (1939-1945). The unit was officially the 100th Battalion of the 442nd Regimental Combat Team. It earned its nickname due to the many *casualties* (people killed and wounded) it suffered in combat. American soldiers wounded or killed in combat are recognized with a medal called the Purple Heart.

On Dec. 7, 1941, the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, brought the United States into World War II. The attack also stirred hostility against Japanese Americans. After the attack, the U.S. government moved many Japanese Americans to camps in the western United States. Early in 1943, however, the government approved the formation of a Japanese American combat unit—the 442nd Regiment.

In September 1943, the 442nd's 100th Battalion entered combat against the German Army in Italy. In early 1944, the unit fought in the bloody battles at Monte Cassino and Anzio in Italy. Later that year, the 442nd suffered terrible casualties freeing the French towns of Biffontaine and Bruyères from German occupation. The unit then took many casualties rescuing the 1st Battalion of the 141st U.S. Infantry Regiment, a "lost battalion" trapped behind enemy lines. The 442nd saw continued action until Germany surrendered in May 1945.

Of the roughly 14,000 soldiers who served in the 442nd, the U.S. military awarded 9,486 of them Purple Hearts. Twenty-one of them received Medals of Honor. The Medal of Honor is the highest military decoration awarded by the U.S. government. The 442nd also received seven Presidential Unit Citations, the highest award for valor given to a military unit as a whole.

The 442nd continues today as an infantry unit in the U.S. Army Reserve. Monuments honoring the 442nd stand in Biffontaine and Bruyères and in the Los Angeles neighborhood of Little Tokyo. In 2010, the unit received the Congressional Gold Medal. The Congressional Gold Medal is the highest civilian decoration awarded by the U.S. Congress.

