



# Success Story Brief

## Daniel K. Inouye A Man to be Admired

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### Mission:

To increase employment opportunities for Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders with disabilities nationwide.

### Based at:

University of Hawai'i at Manoa, Center on Disability Studies

### In collaboration with:

Hawaii Centers for Independent Living

Hawaii Vocational Rehabilitation and Services for the Blind Division

### Funded by:

U.S. Department of Education

Rehabilitation Services Administration

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*The following is the fifth in a series of portraits of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders with disabilities who have embodied the following quote:*

*"Nothing in the world can take the place of persistence. Talent will not; nothing is more common than unsuccessful men with talent. Genius will not; unrewarded genius is almost a proverb. Education will not; the world is full of educated derelicts. Persistence and determination are omnipotent. The slogan 'press on' has solved and always will solve the problems of the human race."*

*- Calvin Coolidge*

### Introduction

United States Senator Daniel K. Inouye is a role model for other Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders (AAPIs) with or without disabilities; however, AAPIs with disabilities have an increased reason to admire him. In spite of tremendous adversity, Senator Inouye has succeeded and achieved much more than most individuals without any challenges, even more than those with privilege. Inouye, the third most senior member of the U.S. Senate, is known for his distinguished record as a legislative leader and as a World War II combat veteran who earned the nation's highest award for military valor, the Medal of Honor.

In addition to his support of numerous Native Hawaiian policies, Senator Inouye has supported landmark disability legislation as well. For instance, he served as one of the original co-sponsors of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990. The ADA is a law that guarantees civil rights for individuals with disabilities. The ADA prohibits discrimination against anyone with a mental or physical disability in the key areas of employment, public services, transportation, public accommodations, and telecommunications. Senator Inouye also supported the Improving America's Schools Act of 1994, which amended the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act to offer wider support for families of children with disabilities. Both acts have greatly improved the lives and futures of individuals with disabilities.

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As important as his legislative work, simply by occupying his current position in American politics, Senator Inouye serves as an inspiration for individuals with disabilities. He proves that regardless of disability status, one can still accomplish great things with hard work and perseverance. Moreover, he believes that when all people are treated with dignity and respect, everyone benefits. In Hawai`i, the Senator served for numerous years as the Honorary Chairman of Winners at Work, an organization that garnered national recognition for promoting and supporting the full participation of individuals with disabilities in their own communities. Among its many positive contributions, Winners at Work also established the first community-based employment program in Hawai`i for persons with severe developmental disabilities.

The following biography of his life is based largely on information from Senator Inouye's homepage:

The son of Japanese immigrants who came to Hawai`i to earn money, Dan Inouye was born on September 7, 1924. Raised in Honolulu, as a child growing up, he learned that opportunity awaited those who had the heart and strength to pursue it. Exactly three months after he celebrated his 17th birthday, on December 7, 1941, the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor. Young Inouye, who had basic medical training, rushed into service to lead a first-aid litter team, helping transport stretchers. He recalls that he saw a "lot of blood" in that role.

In March of 1943, 18-year-old Inouye, then a freshman in pre-med at the University of Hawai`i and long eager to join the war effort, enlisted in the U.S. Army's 442nd Regimental Combat Team, the famed "Go for Broke!" regiment of soldiers with Japanese ancestry. "Go for broke!" refers to the team's characteristic of giving everything they had during their time of service. That team is also known for having the lowest AWOL (absent without leave) rate during the war in the European theater of operations.

Inouye was soon promoted to the rank of Sergeant, and was chosen as a combat platoon leader during the Army's campaign in Italy, where he endured nearly three months of heavy fighting.

In the fall of 1944, Inouye's unit was relocated to the Vosges Mountains in France and he spent two of the bloodiest weeks of the war rescuing a battalion from Texas that was surrounded by German forces. The rescue of the "Lost Battalion" is listed in the Army's annals as one of the most significant military battles of the century. During this battle, Inouye lost 10 pounds, became a platoon leader, was awarded the Bronze Star, and received a battlefield commission as a Second Lieutenant. He and other Japanese-Americans continued to fight with courage that would eventually result with the 442nd being the most decorated unit in U.S. military history.

As the war was nearing its end, Inouye displayed "extraordinary heroism" on April 21, 1945, near San Terenzo, Italy, as he led his platoon through "formidable resistance" to capture a key ridge. His Medal of Honor Citation states in part:

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“With complete disregard for his personal safety, Second Lieutenant Inouye crawled up the treacherous slope to within five yards of the nearest machine gun and hurled two grenades, destroying the emplacement. Before the enemy could retaliate, he stood up and neutralized a second machine gun nest. Although wounded by a sniper’s bullet, he continued to engage other hostile positions at close range until an exploding grenade shattered his right arm. Despite the intense pain, he refused evacuation and continued to direct his platoon until enemy resistance was broken and his men were again deployed in defensive positions.”

After losing his right arm, Inouye spent 20 months in an Army hospital in Battle Creek, Michigan. A nurse taught him to light a match with one hand. From that valuable lesson, Inouye began to apply his “Go for Broke!” mentality to life with a disability. On May 27, 1947, he was honorably discharged with the rank of Captain, and returned home with a Distinguished Service Cross, the nation’s second highest award for military valor, along with a Bronze Star, Purple Heart with cluster, and 12 other medals and citations.

Inouye’s Distinguished Service Cross was upgraded to the Medal of Honor, and that medal was presented to him by the President of the United States, President Clinton, on June 21, 2000.

“Please remember that the story of my experiences during World War II is by itself not important,” Senator Inouye wrote in 2003 to a girl who visited him in his Washington office. “Much more significant are the values that the 442nd Regimental Combat Team and other segregated units represented: that patriotism and love of our great country are not limited to any ethnic group, and wartime hysteria must never again lead us to trample on our democratic principles.”

With financial assistance from the G.I. Bill, Inouye graduated from the University of Hawai’i and then the George Washington University Law School. Returning to Hawai’i from Washington, Inouye served as a Deputy Public Prosecutor for the City of Honolulu. He broke further into politics in 1954 during the “Democratic revolution” – the Republican majority in the Hawaiian legislature began to crumble with the candidacy of Japanese, Portuguese, Caucasian and Hawaiian Democrats – and, subsequently, his election to the Hawaii Territorial House of Representatives. Democrats took 22 of the 30 seats in the Territorial House, and 10 of the 15 in the Senate, as well as gaining control of most of the city and county councils. In 1958, Inouye was elected to the Territorial Senate. A year later, when Hawai’i became a state in 1959, he was elected the first Congressman from the new state, and was re-elected to a full term in 1960.

Senator Inouye was first elected to the U.S. Senate in 1962 and is now serving his eighth consecutive term. Daniel K. Inouye is an Asian American, war hero, patriot, Medal of Honor winner, senator, and a man for all to admire. For more information about Senator Inouye, please visit <http://www.senate.gov/~inouye/>

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## References

Daniel K Inouye. (2005). Condensed from his book Journey to Washington, GO FOR BROKE is the story of Senator Daniel K. Inouye's experiences during World War II. Retrieved May 20, 2005, from <http://www.senate.gov/~inouye/>