

HEARING BOARD FOR LEAVE CLEARANCE.

December 1st, 1943

MEMBER OF THE BOARD; John D. McGowan, Project Attorney.

Interviewee; . Kiyoshi Okamoto
22-8-B
Heart Mountain , Wyoming.

USES 9649

McGowan; Have you ever had a leave clearance hearing ?

Okamoto; Yes. *should be no*

McGowan; You are 55 years old ?

Okamoto; Yes.

McGowan; Where were you born ?

Okamoto; Hawaiian Islands.

McGowan; Was your father a Japanese Citizen ?

Okamoto; Yes.

McGowan; Was your mother a Japanese Citizen ?

Okamoto; Yes.

McGowan; How long did you live in the Hawaiian Islands ?

Okamoto; I came into this Country in 1928. Up to that time....

McGowan; How old were you when you came to this Country ?

Okamoto; 39

McGowan; Did your father and mother come to this Country with you ?

Okamoto; No

McGowan; Had they died in the meantime ?

Okamoto; Yes.

McGowan; Do you have any other relatives in this Country ?

Okamoto; Yes.

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McGowen; Will you state their names, ages, locations ?

Okamoto; I have a brother in Idaho, he is a veteran of the other War.

McGowen How old is he ?

Okamoto; About 40. I have a sister in Pleasantville, New York. She is teachin Social Science. She is about 45 or 46. I have a sister, she went back on the Gripsholm the first trip. She is married to an Alien, so-called. She is about 52. Then I have another brother, he is about 42 Or 43, somewhere in China, I dont know where.

McGowen, In the Japanese Army ?

Okamoto; No, no, no. As a merchant I think. When the Japanese Army invaded China, he took over quite a lot of American interests, I think. He is a Citizen of this Country.

McGowen; You are a Citizen are you not ?

Okamoto; That is what I am wondering...am I or, am I not ?

McGowen; You were born in Hawaii ?

Okamoto; Yes.

McGowen; Doesnt that automatically make you a Citizen ?

Okamoto; According to the Ammendments, I had assumed it to be so. Since I have been shoved into here, I have been kind of doubtful about it.

McGowen; You know darn well you re a Citizen, Okamoto.

Okamoto; The assumption and the actual facts are different. I have very littl little rights left.

McGowen; Do you care to revoke your Citizenship in the United States ?

Okamoto; Why not. It is through compulsion that I am placed this way, not through voluntafy acts of mine.

McGowen; Were you treated any differently than any other people of Japanese descent were ?

Okamoto; In what way ?

McGowen; By being in a relocation Center ?

Okamoto; Treated differently from others of Japanese descent ,I dont think so.

McGowen; Where did you land on the mainland of the United States ?

Okamoto; San Pedro.

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McGowen; What did you do ? It is omitted this group were Caucasians from Beverly Hills, Santa Monica and Hollywood and Ocean Park

Okamoto; Primarily I came into this Country to introduce sub-

tropical horticulture, mainly, the papaya. I came over here thinking of introducing it in preference to the avocado, which had just gained popularity. For that reason you might say humanitarian standpoint. I started organizing Borego Valley. And then I was instrumental with my objective of homesteading that Valley. In the meantime I organized a ~~group~~ corporation or land holding corporation together. To make it fascile I was instrumental in getting Imperial Board of Supervisors to take interest in building road to connect that Valley with the outside market. It is a secondary paved highway. (Omitted...Together with San Diego Board of Supervisors.)

McGowen; How long were you engaged in this work ?

Okamoto I went broke in 1929...the crash came.

McGowen; What did you do after the crash ?

Okamoto; I felt like getting drunk so I started out for Canada. At ~~Turlock~~ ^{divington} two jobs were offered. I took one of them as field foreman for the Pacific Fruit Exchange.

McGowen; How long did you work on that job ?

Okamoto; Two years.

McGowen; Then where did you go ?

Okamoto; In the meantime a ranch was palmed on me. I became a farmer for a while.

McGowen; Where was this ?

Okamoto; At Turlock.

McGowen; How long did you farm ?

Okamoto; About two years; grasshoppers.

McGowen; Then where did you go after that ?

Okamoto; I returned to Los Angeles, hoping that the Depression was about over, but didnt materialize. I went into newspaper writing, a little promotion....

McGowen; For what ?

Okamoto; Business branches. Didnet succeed. Then finally I entered the Movies.

McGowen; You mean you worked for the movie companies ?

Okamoto; an extra; acting.

McGowen; Did you act in any picture ?

Okamoto; May West, in the Charlie Chan series, Love before breakf
I forget.

McGowen; What kind of parts did you take in these pictures ?

Okamoto; Chinese characterization.

McGowen; Then what did you do ?

Okamoto; Then I became teacher in the adult program, emergency
education program in Los Angeles,

McGowen; Then what ?

Okamoto; I was such until I was evacuated, that was for about six
-years, I think.

McGowen; Are you married ?

Okamoto; No.

McGowen; Do you have any children ?

Okamoto; Not that I know of .

McGowen; How do you feel about the War Mr. Okamoto ?

Okamoto; You might say my sensitivities on current events, I har
pay any attention to them.

McGowen; You just dont read about them ?

Okamoto; In fact, it is only in recent months that my mind is be
ginning to function again properly. While at Santa Anita
I was simply mad.

McGowen; Mad at whom ?

Okamoto; No one in particular. just disillusioned.

McGowen; About the United States ?

Okamoto; About what I had been taught about Democracy, fair pl:
justice, things like that. I realized you cannot rely
upon humane beings very much, they change so much.

McGowen; Do you think that any different in the United States t
in Japan ?

Okamoto; I never gave that any thought .

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McGowen: Are you still mad about Evacuation ?

Okamoto: Well, I wouldnt go to that extent. The pain is a little bit more...I could look at it a little more philosophically but I still think it is unfair.

McGowen: Who do you want to win the War ?

Okamoto: I am not interested.

McGowen: You dont care whether the United States win or lose ?

Okamoto: Not under the circumstances. Not until clarified of my status

McGowen: Has anyone told you that you were not a Citizen ?

Okamoto: No, but I assume that since I was not given due process of Law, being condemned as a criminal, an outlaw, an outcast, a Citizen without a Country.

McGowen: Have you been condemned ?

Okamoto: What are we here for then ?

McGowen: Have you tried to get out of this place, relocate ?

Okamoto: No, I havnt tried.

McGowen: I think you could, couldnt you ?

Okamoto: What are those soldiers down there for ? If I was a Citizen, an American, there should be no fence, no soldiers to hamper my free movement, but the WRA, the Military is hampering through threat, bullet, bayonet, so there is no common sense standpoint, unless I want to be shot.

McGowen: You know, dont you, that you could apply for leave clearance and go clear on out of this place, and the soldiers wouldnt shoot you and no one would bother you.

Okamoto: I grant that. But is that leave clearance of such a nature as to be unhampered by any red tape ?

McGowen: Oh, I think so.

Okamoto: I can go back right to California, can I ?

McGowen: No, that is the Army, that is not WRA.

Okamoto: In my case, I am not differentiating between the WRA and the Army. I figure as a Citizen I shouldnt be hampered in any movements.

McGowen; The United States Supreme Court may declare your position right some day.

Okamoto; That is very good. I hope it does for the sake of not of myself only, but for the sake of others who may come in the future but, what is the point of sending flowers after you are dead ?

McGowen; Isn't it true that most people rather like this place ?

Okamoto; Somebody is crazy then.

McGowen; It is true they don't want to leave here, do they ?

Okamoto; They must have some other reason then, because they are not in love with Heart Mountain.

McGowen; We can't get them to relocate.

Okamoto; How could expect, when you have pauperized them, taken away everything they had built up for the last 20 to 40 years ! It isn't fair to ask any one to relocate in a strange environment on \$ 50.00 especially after the agent responsible for that condition have not taken into consideration any of those matters pertaining to equity and justice.

McGowen; How much schooling have you had ?

Okamoto; I have never graduated any school...grammar, high school or college. But I have attended them all.

McGowen; Did you go clear through grammar school ?

Okamoto; I jumped from the seventh grade.

McGowen; Did you go as a senior to High School ?

Okamoto; From senior to College, yes.

McGowen; How long did you go to College.

Okamoto; Two years.

McGowen; Where ?

Okamoto; University of Hawaii.

McGowen; Can you read and write Japanese ?

Okamoto; No. I did take it but that was forty five years ago.

McGowen; Did you attend language school in recent years ?

Okamoto; No.

McGowen; Do you want Japan to win the War ?

Okamoto; Why should I ? I dont know Japan.

McGowen; You said you didnt care whether the United States won didnt you ?

Okamoto You asked whether I wanted Japan or the United States... to me it is indifferent, to me it isnt my war.

McGowen Yes, but you and I both are seriously involved in this War Who do you want to win this War ?

Okamoto; It is immaterial. It isnt a case of my wanting or not wanting.

McGowen. Dont you have any wishes in the matter ?

Okamoto; No, that is the reason that I am simply disgusted. I havent paid any attention and I have no wishes in the matter

McGowen Do you consider loyal to the United States ?

Okamoto; I do, more so than a lot of people think or imagine. I would like to make a little correction about that word "loyal". The institutions, the ideals, there is nothing the matter with it, I am for it. But, the distortion of all those ideals is something that hurts me.

McGowen Would you be willing to fight for the United States ?

Okamoto Under certain conditions, yes.

McGowen ~~Isnt it worth the protection of its ideals~~
What are those conditions ?

Okamoto If it was for the protection of its ideals or institutions

McGowen Would you be willing to fight Japan if Japan was invading the United States ?

Okamoto I would.

McGowen Then I take you would be willing to volunteer if you were a younger man ?

Okamoto No, I wouldnt, for I would desire a little more clarification of the objective of the War.

McGowen Japan attacked the United States .

Okamoto I dont agree to that statement.

McGowen Didnt they bomb Pearl Harbor ?

Okamoto Thar is so, but of course it goes further back.

McGowen What do you think is the cause ?

Okamoto This Country delving into business affairs that wasnt any of its own....meddling in other peoples affairs.

McGowen Would you today swear unqualified allegiance to the United States of America and faithfully defend the United States from any or all attack by foreign or domestic forces and forswear any form of allegiance or obedience to the Japanese Emperor, or any other foreign Government, Power or Organization ?

Okamoto Yes, that is right.

McGowen In other words you do not like Japan any better than you do the United States.

Okamoto No, wait a minute. I said this; I do like the United States better than I do Japan. And forswear allegiance...I never did owe allegiance to any other Country anyway in the first place, and I will also defend its institutions if it were jeopardized.

McGowen But, you dont believe they are jeopardized now ?

Okamoto No, I dont think so.

McGowen Have you ever asked for expatriation or repatriation ?

Okamoto No

McGowen Have you ever had army training any place ?

Okamoto No, in the other war I volunteered for the aviation corps United States, but I was deferred at that time, I dont know who was responsible, but I was deferred into the J classification.

McGowen Have you ever been outside of the United States to any other Country ? and Hawaii

Okamoto No.

McGowen Have you never been back to Japan ?

Okamoto No

McGowen Will you tell me the Japanese organization you belong to ?

Okamoto I dont belong to any.

McGowen Do you belong to Ken Jin Kai ?

Okamoto No

McGowen Do you believe in judo ?

Okamoto I suppose if I know it, it might come in handy sometime.
I never did have any hankering for it.

McGowen Are you working here at the Project ?

Okamoto No

McGowen Are you a dual Citizen ?

Okamoto No, not that I know of .

McGowen Do you own any property in Japan ?

Okamoto No

McGowen Are you the oldest son ?

Okamoto Yes.

McGowen Did you inherit any property in Japan at that time ?

Okamoto No, I dont know. It may be it was transfeered to my brother

McGowen Do you have any hobbies or sports that you enjoy ?

Okamoto At present ? Minerology, camera, color photography.

McGowen Baseball ?

Okamoto Baseball and football were my strong points a long time ago

McGowen Did you used to play football, baseball ?

Okamoto Yes, pretty good at that, if I may brag.

McGowen What religion ?

Okamoto None, not any organized or established church.

McGowen You are not a member of the Buddhist Church ?

Okamoto No.

McGowen Can you write Japanese ?

Okamoto No

McGowen You speak it of course ?

Okamoto yes.

McGowen Have you ever invested any money in the Japanese organizations or securities ?

Okamoto No. I have dealt very little in my life with the Japanese my work itself kept me away from them as a sugar chemist.

McGowen You are a chemist ?

Okamoto was.

McGowen You studied chemistry at the University of Hawaii ?

Okamoto Yes, and engineering. I took an examination with the Civil Service. It was granted without examination. I was inspector of the project at a secondary naval base in the Hawaiian Islands.

McGowen Are you buying any war stamps or bonds ?

Okamoto Cant do it. broke.

McGowen What are your plans for the future ?

Okamoto Search me.

McGowen Do you intend ultimately to go out and relocate ?

Okamoto What is the use of planning anything when higher authority or power shoves you around ? Individual power, strength is nothing.

McGowen Are there any statements you would like to make ?

Okamoto Yes, I would like to ask the properly constituted authorities to reinstate me back to my original status, such as existed before the evacuation.

McGowen Anything else ?

Okamoto Well, of course in such manner that compensation be given in justice, equity and fair play, according to American ideals.

McGowen according to this record, you have been sent to several times and didnt come in.

Okamoto Yes, unfortunately I do not visit the post office so often and each time I got it, it came too late, the day had passed

McGowen I was going to say if you had appeared for a hearing at the first opportunity you probably could have been out of here by now.

Okamoto What is the inducement right now ? My job as a sugar technologist is so limited. As a promoter, you could do nothing until you have adjusted to the new environment.

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McGowen Have you ever tried to get a job with any of the American Sugar Companies ?

Okamoto Not with sugar companies. With General Mills and alcohol distilleries.. .Ohio.

McGowen How long ago ?

Okamoto Six , seven months ago.

McGowen Have you made any other attempts to get jobs ?

Okamoto My facilities are limited.

McGowen Why did you quit the Council ?

Okamoto Council ? oh that ! It was useless to me to try to talk to that calibre of intelligence.

McGowen That is represented by the Japanese people on the Council?

Okamoto That was in that group. To me it appeared as if they were only twelve or thirteen year old kids.