

[Begin Mike Yasutake Interview]

Interviewer:

Today is May 13, 2004. We're having an oral history interview with Mr. Michael S. Yasutake at his office in Culver City. Good morning, Mike.

Yasutake:

Good morning.

Interviewer:

I want to thank you for meeting with us today and having us. This particular interview after it's edited will be placed on the website so people throughout the world, if they would like to hear some aspects of your life story or how Gardena was before or the South Bay was before World War II as well as how life was after World War II and the things that you did during the war... and so many other people in MIS and 442nd and others that didn't go to war, but were in internment camps have been interviewed. So, this is one of those living treasures that they're having for the state of California. So, we're thankful that you're able to spend some time with us. First off, where were you born?

Yasutake:

Huh?

Interviewer:

Where were you born?

Yasutake:

I was born in Long Beach, California.

Interviewer:

And what day was that?

Yasutake:

August 4, 1915.

Interviewer:

1915.

Yasutake:

So I'm 88.

Interviewer:

You're 88; that's nice.

Yasutake:

... and in good shape. [Laughs]

Interviewer:

In terms of... after you were born, did you grow up in Long Beach or did you move from the area?

Yasutake:

No, from Long Beach, we moved to, well, the corner of Crenshaw and Artesia Boulevard in Torrance, California... we had 40 acres... my dad had a 40 acre farm on the east side of Crenshaw on the corner of Crenshaw and Artesia, and 40 acre on the west side on Crenshaw.

Interviewer:

At that time... was that in the 1920s that you moved there?

Yasutake:

Yeah, we moved there in 1919.

Interviewer:

Oh, 1919.

Yasutake:

Yeah.

Interviewer:

Then did you live there... did you go so school in that area or where did you go to school?

Yasutake:

No, I went to school at Moneta Grammar School.

Interviewer:

Oh, that's in Gardena.

Yasutake:

On Gardena Boulevard; used to be west of Western Avenue about a quarter mile.

Interviewer:

How long did you go to Moneta Elementary School?

Yasutake:

Until I finished, so, I went to sixth grade to, what's that school now? I can't...

Interviewer:

Peary?

Yasutake:

Peary Junior High.

Interviewer:

Which was the high school then.

Yasutake:

Yeah, it was the high school, the Gardena High School.

Interviewer:

Then, did you graduate from Gardena High?

Yasutake:

Yeah, I graduated.

Interviewer:

What year was that?

Yasutake:

1933.

Interviewer:

Now, going back to... apparently you were farming? Your parents were farming?

Yasutake:

Yeah.

Interviewer:

Did you have to work on the farm?

Yasutake:

I used to help.

Interviewer:

Okay; did... at that time was it just farming? I mean, right now, there're a lot of buildings and the school nearby....

Yasutake:

Oh, it was wide open then---no buildings, no nothing.

Interviewer:

How were the roads then?

Yasutake:

The roads were just asphalt.

Interviewer:

Asphalt.

Yasutake:

Yeah.

Interviewer:

When it rained, did it flood in that area or was it not too bad?

0H04M35S

Yasutake:

No, it wasn't too bad.

Interviewer:

What kind of things did your family grow?

Yasutake:

They grew vegetables, celery, tomatoes, cucumber and things of that nature.

Interviewer:

Did you sell them there at the farm or did you truck them somewhere?

Yasutake:

No, originally, they started taking the produce to the Long Beach Market with horse and wagon.

Interviewer:

Really.

Yasutake:

Yeah.

Interviewer:

I guess a car or a truck then would have been pretty expensive to have?

Yasutake:

Well, no, my Father bought a car for his personal use; he had a Cadillac at that time, which was very big.

Interviewer:

Oh, that's a nice car. When you lived on the farm and worked on the farm, did you have helpers or were there other Japanese families nearby?

Yasutake:

No, we had Filipino workers. We had to board them and we had a big house; so they were all housed right there with us.

Interviewer:

Then, if you needed to go buy food was there a general store, for example a Japanese general store nearby?

Yasutake:

No, there was no store around that place. There was nothing around the place except farms.

Interviewer:

Just farms.

Yasutake:

Yeah.

Interviewer:

Then for the most part did you grow some of your things that you ate on the farm or did you?

Yasutake:

Oh, yeah; well, we used to eat whatever we grew.

Interviewer:

I see; in those times did you used to have **Mochitsukis** on the farm?

Yasutake:

Oh, yeah, we used to have Motchitsukis every year.

Interviewer:

Around New Year's time?

Yasutake:

Yeah, right after Christmas.

Interviewer:

Right after Christmas. Life before World War II in the 20s and 30s and when you were growing up... how would you characterize it? Was it a nice life? Was it an easy-going life? Was it a stressful life?

Yasutake:

No, it was a normal life. No... we used to walk to school, to the grammar school. Then they used to drive us to the Gardena high school; so it wasn't too bad. We were all together and we had a lot of farm families around there that we were friends with.

Interviewer:

Were there a lot of Japanese family farmers, or were there all different kinds?

Yasutake:

Oh, yeah there were; across the street on the south side of Artesia and Crenshaw was the Yanokawa's and then on the other side of them were the Kawashima's and on the other side of them were the Yagi's and so... and then the Higuchi's were further north, where the Red Car (rail line to downtown Los Angeles) use to run...

Interviewer:

I see.

Yasutake:

... and so we used to all be friends.

Interviewer:

Did you do sports at that time? Did they have organized sports?

Yasutake:

Oh, yeah; we used to... when we were going to high school; we used to play football and tennis and baseball and all the sports.

Interviewer:

At that... in those times in the 20s and 30s, did you see any kind or feel any kind of overt or covert discrimination for being Japanese?

Yasutake:

No, I never felt that way. Fortunately, all my life I have never been discriminated against, not even once---no place and I've been all over the world, and, fortunately, I have never been discriminated against. I've been treated equal all my life, and I'm very fortunate that way.

OH08M50S

Interviewer:

From... how many brothers and sisters did you have in your family?

Yasutake:

I had three sisters and four brothers.

Interviewer:

Plus yourself; so that's eight?

Yasutake:

Eight.

Interviewer:

Boy, that's a big family.

Yasutake:

Yeah, we had a big family. But we got along real great.

Interviewer:

I guess you had to get along real great.

Yasutake:

Never a fight, never had anything; all work together.

Interviewer:

When you were growing up, did you go to Nihongo gakko, go to Japanese school or just learned it at home?

Yasutake:

No; my mother used to make us go to the Moneta Japanese school just west of Western Avenue and... but we tried to get out of it as much as possible, and finally we used to go... they used to make us go right after the Gardena High finished which was around three o'clock and then so, from four o'clock to six o'clock we used to go to Japanese school. But, I needed to play sports; so I changed it to Saturday only, which was not very good with my family.

Interviewer:

[Laughs] Are you the oldest?

Yasutake:

I'm the oldest; yeah.

Interviewer:

Did you think that your younger siblings had it easier than you or did you feel it was about the same?

Yasutake:

Oh, no; we were all about the same.

Interviewer:

On that farm, the 40 acres and the 40 acres, did you own the farm, or did you rent the farm?

Yasutake:

No, we rented the land.

Interviewer:

And so when you... did you have to share in the profits with the landlord or you just paid him rent.

Yasutake:

No, we just paid him rent; and my father was the first one to buy a tractor and all the equipment that went with a tractor. So I used to have to go and help my neighbors out when they needed some work done on their farm, disking crops or whatever else.

Interviewer:

You know, Artesian and Crenshaw is not that far away from the beach, did you go to the ocean at all?

Yasutake:

Yeah, we used to go to Palos Verdes to get abalone and all those kinds of things that existed at that time.

Interviewer:

Then, did you go to Redondo or Hermosa?

Yasutake:

Yeah, we used to always go to Redondo Beach.

Interviewer:

You know, at that time, I think there was... there were piers there; did you ever go fishing off the piers?

Yasutake:

Yeah, we used to go fishing off the pier, and off the barges.

Interviewer:

Off the barges; then do you still stay in touch, or do you still know those different other farming families in that area?

Yasutake:

Well, I have met a few that used to be around there, but I think all the rest of them passed away or... the only one that I know that used to live across the street from me, across Artesia Boulevard, was Mary Ann Yanokawa, and I think she lives in West L.A. right now.

OH12M18S

Interviewer:

Oh okay; then after you went to the elementary school, you went to Gardena High and at Gardena High were there a lot of Japanese families?

Yasutake:

Well, there were quite a few Japanese... not that many at that time.

Interviewer:

Then as the war... when's the first time you found out about Pearl Harbor?

Yasutake:

Well, I was drafted in January of 1941. And they gave me... I got the draft notice came, the mail got twisted someplace and I only had three days notice, actually. So I went down to the Torrance Draft Board and they promised me that if I would go according to the instructions then, they won't draft my brothers until much later which they adhered to, because my brothers never got drafted until real late.

Interviewer:

Uh-hm.

Yasutake:

That... I admired that Draft Board. I had to leave the business and everything to do this.

Interviewer:

Well, that's good, because they probably needed to help your father on the farm.

Yasutake:

Yeah.

Interviewer:

Then in 1941... then when did you first go to basic training, and where did you go?

Yasutake:

I went to Fort Ord, California in January 20, 1941 and had my basic training and was ready to come out December of '41 when war broke out, and that was the end because I was supposed to have been discharged January, I mean December 19, 1941.

Interviewer:

So, at that time if you got drafted, you had, maybe, one year commitment.

Yasutake:

Yeah; a one year deal.

Interviewer:

Then after the war broke out, where did you go or what did the Army do to you... send you?

Yasutake:

Well, when the war broke out, we happened to be in a theater in Salinas, California and they shut the theater down and they sent buses to the theater to take us back to Fort Ord, and we packed up our belongings and went out into the field and stayed under pup tents. And from there about two weeks after the war broke, we were sent to the Golden Gate Bridge, and we had to guard the north end of the Golden Gate Bridge... our company, Company K, 17th Infantry, 7th Division.

Interviewer:

When you went to go to guard, did people look at you in a funny way because you were Japanese-looking or Asian-looking?

Yasutake:

No, I never felt that way. And nobody ever came up to me and said anything like that. I was assigned to headquarters later

on, and met Harry Umeda from Sacramento, and the two of us, I guess, were sent to Santa Rosa where the 7th Division headquarters moved, and we stayed there until the very---the last Niseis to leave and were shipped back to Fort Custer, Michigan for the MP Unit.

Interviewer:

MP Unit, so you went inland. Then, you were in the beginning parts of the Military Intelligence Service for the...?

Yasutake:

Yeah, also, we stayed in the MP unit for, I don't remember, I wasn't there very long until they started up Camp Savage, the MISLS Language School at Camp Savage, Minnesota. And at that time they sent us from Fort Custer to Camp Savage; so... the only sad part during that time was my mother passed away during evacuation, but I couldn't come back to the funeral, because they won't let us.

0H17M20S

Interviewer:

After the war broke out, were you able to communicate with your family, and when you were stationed...?

Yasutake:

Oh, yeah; because after the war broke out, we were all sent to Gilroy, California and we were housed in one of those big warehouses and we stayed there until... we stayed there---it must have been a couple of weeks or more, and then we were sent back to Fort Custer, Michigan.

Interviewer:

Your family... did they go to an assembly center?

Yasutake:

Yeah; they went to Rohwer, Arkansas.

Interviewer:

I see; from the farm, did they go to, for example, Santa Anita or somewhere, or they just went directly to Rohwer?

Yasutake:

No, they went to Santa Anita and then from there they went to Rohwer.

Interviewer:

I see. Okay; when you were at Camp Savage, what did you do or what was your rank or what were your responsibilities there?

Yasutake:

Well, by the time I finished basic training, I was already a Staff Sergeant, which was real good in those days, and then later on, I was... my stripes, I had another stripe for Tech Sergeant, and then I was in charge of most of the fellows that was being evacuated to Fort Custer. And when I went to Fort Ord, I mean to Camp Savage, then in those days, they didn't have too many officers, so we were always in charge of a lot of men.

Interviewer:

At Camp Savage, who was the commanding officer for the language school?

Yasutake:

Colonel Rasmussen.

Interviewer:

Did he know Japanese, or...?

Yasutake:

Well, I don't think he knew Japanese, but he was very... for me he was very nice to the Japanese.

Interviewer:

Was judge, well his name is Judge **Aiso** now, but was John **Aiso** there?

Yasutake:

Yeah; John **Aiso** was the principal.

Interviewer:

The principal of the language school?

Yasutake:

Yeah, of the language school.

Interviewer:

Did you work with him daily or you fought with him daily?

Yasutake:

No; I had a few arguments with him, because I didn't see eye-to-eye with him on some of the things he was trying to do. But he

was trying his best, and he did a very, very, very good job running the whole school.

Interviewer:

How many students did you have that went through there for the MIS?

Yasutake:

Oh, when we first started, we had... let's see, there were nine classes, I think, altogether?

Interviewer:

How many in each class?

Yasutake:

Oh, there must have been 10-15.

Interviewer:

Were most of them drafted or they come from the internment camps, or...?

Yasutake:

Oh, they come from all over, including some American fellows that lived in Japan.

Interviewer:

I see; also, it wasn't only Japanese-Americans. So it was really a school for any Army person that they would need for....

Yasutake:

Yeah; there were only a few of those fellows at that time. Later on, there were quite a few of us.

Interviewer:

From... how long were you at Camp Savage?

0H21M20S

Yasutake:

Well, we didn't like studying too well, and they stuck us up in the high classes, and I was personally stuck in a class with--- which was A2, which was all guys that were educated in... graduated in the university here in the States and graduated in the university in Japan. So consequently they didn't have to study Japanese like I did, because I didn't know that much Japanese. And so everyday we used to get a test, and we used to

go 50 **kanji's** a day, that's one of the tests. And the highest score I made was 38.

Interviewer:

[Laughs]

Yasutake:

And these other guys that were sitting next to me, they don't even study at night, but they get 100s every day.

Interviewer:

I remember at one time, maybe about ten or fifteen years ago, you had the opportunity to visit with Senator Sparky Matsunaga in Washington, DC and you hadn't seen Sparky in a long time. Can you tell me how you met Sparky at first Camp Savage?

Yasutake:

No, I met Sparky when he came back from Europe and he came to MIS school in Savage and we got along great together, together with a lot of other Hawaiian boys, and so we became good friends, especially when we transferred to Fort Snelling, that's when... about that time we transferred to Fort Snelling is when we came to Savage... I mean, to Fort Snelling from Savage. And when I got my medals from one ceremony, I was with Sparky because he received his medals at the same time, so that I have a picture of him together being presented with these medals. So we became good friends, and every Sunday morning Paul Rush used to make us go to the church; and so I used to have to wake him up every Sunday morning together with a couple of other guys and they grudgingly went to church. [Laughs]

Interviewer:

[Laughs] So you're responsible for Sparky's moral convictions then?

Yasutake:

Yeah; in going to church.

Interviewer:

After you finished at Camp Savage, where did you go after that and what year was that?

Yasutake:

Well, 19... well, let's see; I went to the South Pacific in 1942 after about five months of.... I was supposed to go school for six months, but we only went five months because they needed

people in the South Pacific, especially on Guadalcanal, and so they asked for a volunteers and, naturally, our hands went up first---our ARA 3 Class. And so we had more volunteers wanting to go than they needed, so they just handpicked ten of us and we went.

Interviewer:

What made you want to volunteer to go in the first group?

Yasutake:

Well, because we're getting tired of studying every day from morning until night, and the Japanese wasn't an easy language to learn.

Interviewer:

Well, didn't you think that, let's say, you were in a theater of war and you're Japanese... you thought you had enough Japanese skills to communicate?

Yasutake:

Oh, yeah; that we did. So we figured, there's ten of us, so we had a lot of Kibei and Nisei guys along with us; so all the guys wanted to go with us. So that was good.

0H25M54S

Interviewer:

Then, what port did you leave from to go... from what port did you leave to and where did you go?

Yasutake:

We left from Angel Island in San Francisco on a Liberty Ship that took us 32 days to go to New Caledonia. And from New Caledonia we were equipped to go into war with the Japanese on Guadal... I mean Guadalcanal, and that was a sight to behold when all these ships lined up one morning to assemble all these soldiers to land on Guadalcanal. The Marines had already been in there, but we were supposed to go in there and support them; so it was quite a sight. So we had to land under fire, and... but we came on pretty good.

Interviewer:

When... from the ship to get to the shore... to the beach... was on a landing craft?

Yasutake:

Yeah; it was on a landing craft, you know, so some of the guys fell off into the water and we had to pull them out and put them back on the landing craft. But we got along all right.

Interviewer:

The first time you went into battle and people were shooting at you, were you scared?

Yasutake:

Well, me, I'm not the scary type; so I felt well, as long as I'm there, if I die, I die, and so that was my attitude. So, I just didn't give a damn; so I just went at it.

Interviewer:

Because the government had spent so much time and effort, resources in educating the 10 of you, did they have special ways of protecting you; did they have body guards?

Yasutake:

Oh, yeah, they had... I had a sergeant that was with me all the time.

Interviewer:

What was your rank then?

Yasutake:

I was a Tech Sergeant.

Interviewer:

Then, when you go into battle, did you carry a rifle, or do carry just a hand gun?

Yasutake:

No, I carried a carbine and a 45.

Interviewer:

Were you any good at shooting either one of them?

Yasutake:

Oh, yeah; I was pretty good. I used to get tops marksman in all the rifle and pistol competitions.

Interviewer:

Let me ask you a more sensitive question? Did you ever shoot the rifle... do you know if you ever hit anyone with a bullet?

Yasutake:

Actually, no; because well I was on the front line most of the time during the war, and during the war, especially during the New Georgia Campaign, we were on the front lines all the time. Actually, it was the infantry regiment and so you got to be pretty lucky, because when I finished Guadalcanal, they... we were prize property; so they took us to a rest area on a destroyer, and all the other soldiers wanted to know why we were so valuable. And so, I guess, they all wondered why and all during the time we ran around the islands, we were always transported with PT boats.

0H29M34S

Interviewer:

The first time you interviewed a Japanese soldier, what did you try to communicate or do you remember?

Yasutake:

Well, we tried to, you know tell them that we wanted to be friends, and so, they were real happy. And so it's amazing the American boys that... I was with the division, they were from New England, and those guys treated, like, for instance, they would bring back the prisoners that night from the front all ragged and hungry, these guys would... the cooks would get up and heat up, you know rations for them to eat warm, because they were running out of food on that island. And so they were very happy to get warm GI food. And so they became very friendly with us and it was easy to interrogate them, because they said Americans were not bad, they were nice guys, you know. And so, we got along with them very well.

Interviewer:

Do you think after being a prisoner, the Japanese felt after having a chance to talk to someone else like yourself that speaks Japanese, more "anshin," (relieved) about the situation?

Yasutake:

Oh, yeah; they were so happy. They were really happy.

Interviewer:

How old do you think most of the Japanese soldiers were?

Yasutake:

Well, they were in their 20s.

Interviewer:

When... who did you land... what divisions were you... the name of the infantry outfits that you were with when you landed on Guadalcanal or New Caledonia or New Georgia?

Yasutake:

On New Caledonia I was with the 37th and Guadalcanal I was with the 43rd. And so when we finished, well, the Marines did a good job on Guadalcanal, and we didn't much problem there. And so we cleaned up, so we weren't on Guadalcanal. Well, we had a lot of bombings from the Japanese, you know and my friends who were with me, especially the guys who I thought were not too strong, but, boy, when the bombs started to drop, these guys tried to dig a hole with their hands in coral, and this guy, Maracheck, you know that was with me on the side, he tries to dig into the coral and he would get his fingers all cut up and everything. And so I told him, he crazy, just lay still, you know but these guys get all excited when the bombs start to fall around you. But, you know, lay still and it's a good thing they didn't hit us directly.

Interviewer:

What other islands did you go to after New Georgia?

0H33M12S

Yasutake:

Well, I went to Guadalcanal, then we were on another small island where we rested for a month, and then we went into the New Georgia Campaign in '43, early part of '43. And we had three divisions side-by-side going in there, and we finished that in about, well, I guess it took us about a month to go through that island from one end to the other, and we had to capture... they had an airfield called Munda on the north end of the island. And so we chased the Japanese all the way across the island into Munda Airfield. And by that time, they had evacuated all the airplanes, but they left all these Japanese guys. And since our Navy became strong at that time, their food was running out. So the only thing they got was rice, which they put into these 50 gallon oil drums and they would throw them off the boat-off the transport ships in the sea. And the thing would float to the shore and they would roll the barrels onto the shore and cook their rice. And then, we... the Japanese Niseis, after everything was over with, we had plenty of rice to eat, but no meat or fish. So what we did was take hand grenades and throw them in the ocean and the fish would

come floating up and that's how we used to catch the fish to fry them. So, it was a lot of fun at that time.

Interviewer:

When you were there, did you receive mail when you were there, or could you receive mail?

Yasutake:

No; we didn't receive mail. I didn't receive no mail all the time we were there.

Interviewer:

Did you kind of wonder what was happening with your family then?

Yasutake:

No; we didn't know nothing. We were always... I didn't know what a hard floor looked like for all during the time I was there, we were always in mud or coral or sand.

Interviewer:

Then from... eventually you got off the island and were sent...?

0H36M09S

Yasutake:

Yeah; well, so when we finished New Georgia I received a medal for... they had underground tunnels underneath the airfield, and so somebody had to go in there coax the Japanese to come out, that they were safe and we weren't going to kill them. So, me--I, at that time was young and healthy, and so I volunteered to go in and I coaxed them all out. And so they gave me a medal for that. And then when that was over, the Australian elite patrol came onto the next island, Vela-Vela, and they need somebody to interpret for them; so I was sent there. Sent from Munda Airfield over in a fighter plane to Vela-Vela and landed on a bumpy air field there. And I joined the Australian guys, and I tell you, you talk about guys being real tough, these guys, they didn't care for nothing. They just went hell bent for election, and we went all the way through Vela-Vela all the way to the other end to Bougainville, and then by that time, I... they sent orders that I come back; so I went back, again on a fighter plane, to Munda Airfield, where the division headquarters were headed.

And the General wanted, General Wing, wanted to give me my commission, but this guy, an attorney that went with us... we

had two American fellows when we left San Francisco that went with us and one was from Seattle, Washington, a guy named Eugene Wright; he was an attorney. And he and this other fellow, I can't think of his name right now, but they were both very nice guys. And so they suggested that I had enough action already and my luck wasn't going to last forever, because during the war everybody around me died, and me---I'm the only one that was not hit or not killed; so they said he had enough luck already, so you better go on back. So they sent me back to Fort Benning, Georgia to the Infantry School, where I....

Interviewer:

What year was that?

Yasutake:

That was 1943... 1943; yeah.

Interviewer:

What did you do at Fort Benning then?

039M37S

Yasutake:

Well, Fort Benning, that's a tough school, and, fortunately, I... when I was at Fort Ord, I did my basic pretty good, and so that's why I got my stripes real fast. And I went to Fort Benning, and after, it must have been the first... I've forgotten how many weeks it was... first three or four weeks they asked me if I would become instructor for the jungle warfare. So that's how I got my stripes over there... you have to go through the school, but at the same time, I had to teach. So when the thing finished, three generals came out to where we were having a bridge crossing and graduation and they came out and gave me their thanks and everything. And I was real happy about that.

So, then about that time, when you graduate from there, they ask you where you want to go or what theater you want to go or what division you want to go in or anything---they give you a choice. So, I volunteered because the 442nd was training at Shelby, Mississippi. So I volunteered for that, and the War Department came back and says, nothing doing, you go back to MISLS (Military Intelligence Service Language School). So, I was sent to Camp Savage.

Interviewer:

Again?

Yasutake:

Yeah.

Interviewer:

When... I've known you for a while and, maybe, 40 years, I never knew you knew jungle training... you knew how to fight in the jungle?

Yasutake:

Yeah; well, you had to... either they die or you die. So you got to be quick.

Interviewer:

Did anything growing up on a farm help you in that or is this something that you just learned when you were there?

Yasutake:

No, no; you just learn that during military training. See, a lot of the guys went through training in Fort Ord by... well, they just wanted to get out from the draft, you see. Me, well, I figured well as long as I'm there I might as well learn whatever they want to teach you, so the first thing you learn is that anything starts to fire at you, jump into a hole.

Interviewer:

When you were doing jungle warfare though, obviously, you must have come under attack by a lot Japanese snipers in the trees?

Yasutake:

Oh, yeah; all the time.

Interviewer:

Did you ever have to return fire, or how...?

Yasutake:

Oh, yeah, yeah, but the other guys around me did their job.

Interviewer:

Then after you went back to Camp Savage the second time, what year was that?

Yasutake:

That was 1944.

Interviewer:

Then did you teach again, or...?

0H42M57S

Yasutake:

Well so I have to teach the OCS (Officer Candidate School) boys there; and so those guys were all college educated and they had their Masters and Ph.D. degrees; and so, consequently, every night I had to study again to keep up with them for the next day's classes, you know. So I got tired of teaching and at the same time we had to run companies, and so I had B Company and Peter Yamazaki had C Company and Fred Kosaka had D Company, and then when the boys came back from Europe, Sparky Matsunaga and Tusbota and Kuramoto and those guys, they all got assigned to companies to be company commanders.

So then we only had our one company to command; so when we moved from Camp Savage to Fort Snelling, I had 800 soldiers under me. I had three companies that I had to command, and... so what do you call it? We had C--D Company, so three Nisei's plus one covered the whole thing in the move. And so, you had to teach, you had to command a company, had to do all these kinds of things.

Interviewer:

Did you find that the Nisei soldiers were wanting to learn, or did you have some people that were real guzu guzu or people that moku or...?

Yasutake:

No; they knew they had to go overseas, especially these boys from Hawaii; you know, those guys were, some of them were real rough and tough and so they'd go downtown and they get in fights in Minneapolis, and come back. And so, we have to take care of them, and then one time, when graduation came and when they come back from graduation leave, they would be sent overseas. So, then about that time, Peter Yamazaki, Fred Kosaka and myself, we were appointed to the Court Martial Board, you know. And so we sat on this Board and we'd hear all these stories about these guys... you know the MPs would bring these guys in and find out what they were up to, you know, and so then we had to take care of.

So we used to give them the lightest sentence as possible, you know. And so the other officers didn't like that. Well, so

then the cake for the whole thing was... well, one graduation we gave them two three-day passes and we shouldn't do that, you see. But we practically sent the whole school on a two-three-day pass and told the, "Hey, you use one three-day pass and hide the other one until the other one expired." Well, some of these guys, they showed both of them at one time and the MPs picked them up, you see. So, we had quite a few being picked up. So now, this guy under Colonel Rasmussen, a guy named Colonel Hollingshead... we were called before him, and also Rasmussen, and they kicked us off the Court Martial Board because we were too lenient with the boys, you know. But we were doing, you know after all these guys, they were going to go overseas, and these other guys, you know, these other officers were going to stay put there and, what do you call it, enjoy life.

Well, so then what happened was while I was going to school there they... Rasmussen said, hey, how about going to Commanding General Staff School in Kansas? So I went down to Leaven..., I mean, Fort Leavenworth and went to Commanding General Staff School and I came back when I finished, and Colonel Rasmussen's driver, my relative Paul Yoshida was Rasmussen's driver; so he met me at the station---at the train station in St. Paul. And he said, "Hey, I'm supposed to take you to Minneapolis." So I said, "What for?" He said, "Well, somebody wants to meet you." Well, so then I said, "Well okay." So he drove me down there and took me to the Nicholas Hotel, and I met this guy, Colonel... I can't think of his name right now; but anyway, he used to be in the South Pacific with me. But he was now on the staff of General... that was commanding the China forces. So, I met with him and we had a great time together.

[Laughs] And this guy is a stamp collector so I used to travel with him and everyplace we went overseas, he used to collect stamps. Well, so, he said, the General wanted me to come join him in China. I can't think of the general's name right now. But, anyway, he was a Commanding General and he was hot. Their headquarters was in Chunking, China. So, we put in for a transfer to Chunking, China, the Chinese forces, but we got turned down. They wouldn't let us go; the War Department wouldn't let us go.

0H49M56S

Interviewer:

Were you too valuable to go?

Yasutake:

Yeah; we were supposed to be no place other than MISLS. Well, anyway, so I got a buddy by the name of Reed Jorgenson, and he said, "Hey, if you go, I'll go, too; so, help me out," you know. So, I told this guy to put Jorgenson's name on, too, the first time. Well, we both got turned down, you see. So, finally, after several back and forth letters and everything, this guy was pretty smart from China, he said they were bringing officers from overseas to Washington, DC for interrogation, Japanese Army (Officer) prisoners.

OH50M53S

Interviewer:

Oh, really.

Yasutake:

So, these were all officers. So to guard an officer, you got to have an officer; so he got a brilliant idea that we go on a temporary duty assigned as an officer to these officers that they were sending back when they finished you see. So, that's how we got temporary duty order to accompany four officers going back to China. So, we were real happy you know; so we left, because they're a bunch of guys that we didn't care for much in the administration at that time in the MISLS, you see. So we were happy to get out you see.

So, now, we met this guy in Washington, DC and the next day we go to the airfield and get on the plane and be on guard to bring the prisoners. Well, these guys are nice guys, you know. So, anyway, we get in the plane and we go across. And so, we go to Azores and then we went to Morocco; then we went to New Delhi, India and those kinds of places because the planes at that time only DC-3s.

Interviewer:

DC-3s?

Yasutake:

Yeah; so we used to hop rides with the Air Force, you know. And so this guy would go to one place and, I can't think of the guy's name... but, anyway, he would stay two-three days. So I say, "How come we stay two-three days, why don't we just keep going, you know?" So he says, "Well I got some business." All he did was collect stamps, you see, so he went around two-three days buying up all the stamps he can get a hold of. Then we go

to the next place, and he'd do the same. Man, when we got New Delhi and then it was hot and humid and everything and we want to get out, and here he is running around buying stamps. Well, when he finished at least we got to the airfield and he used to ride with the Air Force, and then one night we got to China. We landed at Kuming where they have the air base, you know. And we go there and it's raining like crazy, and the ground is muddy like crazy; man, we're just walking in the mud all over the place, you know. So, Reed Jorgenson says, "Hell, we don't want to come to this kind of place. We'll go back tomorrow, we're going to have our orders changed again," you know.

So, we went to headquarters and said we want to cancel our temporary duty and we want to back, you know. By that time they had changed the temporary duty---this other guy---temporary duty to permanent duty. So, now we have to hitch a ride to Chunking. So we went to Chunking.

Interviewer:

When you flew over from New Delhi, you obviously went over the Himalayas or the Burma Hump.

Yasutake:

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Interviewer:

But you went over in a DC-3?

Yasutake:

Yeah.

0H54M17S

Interviewer:

Was it a great sight to see these huge mountains or was it scary?

Yasutake:

Oh, no; we went over at night time.

Interviewer:

Oh, so... oh, I see. When you got into Chunking then what happened?

Yasutake:

Well, I was assigned to the G-2 section, and they used to have to send the boys out to these prison camps for interrogation, and that's all we did. But I had a great time in Chunking, though, you know, staying at headquarters and...

Interviewer:

Did you eat well?

Yasutake:

Huh?

Interviewer:

Did you eat well?

Yasutake:

Oh, yeah, ate real well; and I became good friends with... who was that Chinese leader?

Interviewer:

Chiang Kai-shek.

Yasutake:

Chiang Kai-shek and his wife, you know. So once a week, she used to invite me to dinner at her house, and so we used to have the best of food. You know, it was terrific.

Interviewer:

At that time, were you... what were you doing for military intelligence then?

Yasutake:

Oh, we used to gather all this information, and put it together and send it back to Washington, DC.

Interviewer:

How did they send it then---by radio wave?

Yasutake:

No, they used to send it by courier.

Interviewer:

I see; why don't we take a quick break and have some water and then start it up again; okay.

[End CD 1; Begin CD 2]

Interviewer:

This is the second disc continuing onwards with Mr. Yasutake, and he's now in Chunking, China. What year was that?

Yasutake:

1945... 1945---yeah; first of January.

Interviewer:

January; at that time did you know that the war was starting to wind down?

Yasutake:

Oh, yeah; I knew that, especially in China the armed forces were doing a good job.

Interviewer:

Well then in early 1945 as you established a closer working relationship with Chiang Kai-shek who was in charge of the nationalist in defeating the Japanese in parts of China, what was your responsibility then?

Yasutake:

Well, so at that time we were gathering mostly communistic information. The Communists were getting into China although China was more communist than everybody thought they were.

Interviewer:

Was this mainly Mao Tse Tung or...?

Yasutake:

Yeah, that group; and so we went all over China. We sent our Nisei boys out to interrogate, to see what was happening out in the country. So, they used to go out in the morning and come back at night with whatever information they got.

Interviewer:

Did the Nisei soldiers know how to speak Chinese?

Yasutake:

No; they didn't know how to speak Chinese, but they had interpreters.

Interviewer:

I see; when you were in... now how long did you stay in the Chunking---or what were the months before... ?

Yasutake:

I didn't stay in China too long. I was there about six months before the war ended, so when the war ended, the Colonel says, go to Shanghai immediately. So I said, "How do we go to Shanghai?" He says, "Find your own way." That was the answer.

OH02M49S

Interviewer:

Chunking to Shanghai's a long distance; China's a huge country.

Yasutake:

Yeah; so first I knew some of the Air Force boys so they said the only way you can do that is go down to Kunming again and hitch a ride there. So we said okay; and so we hitched a ride down to Kunming and then the only planes that used to fly to Nanking, you know was from Kunming.

Interviewer:

Was this still a DC-3?

Yasutake:

Yeah, yeah, yeah; that's all the planes they had.

Interviewer:

Was a DC-3 pressurized?

Yasutake:

No; they're not pressurized.

Interviewer:

Oh, so you can get pretty cold inside.

Yasutake:

Oh, yeah, man, I tell you... and those seats they had in there.

Interviewer:

They weren't seats; they were benches.

Yasutake:

Benches, yeah, alongside the side; but, anyway, we got Kunming and we didn't want to stay there too long, so we asked the Air Force to fly us on to Nanking, because we had a hurry-up call to go to Shanghai. So they said okay; so they only used to fly to Nanking. So we got to Nanking and Nanking was pretty nice, you know. So they put us in a good hotel. So then the boys said,

hey, let's stay here a couple of days. So we were there for a couple of days, and then one day on the streets, downtown, we ran into this Colonel, see. And he said, "What the hell are you guys doing here," you know. So, I said, "Well, we're just resting because we had a tough time in Chunking." He said, "You never had no tough time in Chunking." He says, "Get the heck to Shanghai, because they're waiting for you." So we say, "Yes, sir; yes, sir." [Laughs]

Interviewer:

[Laughs] You were AWOL.

0H04M50S

Yasutake:

Yeah; so I said, "We don't have a ride to what do you call it." He said, "No; I'll get you a ride." So, he says, "Report to me tomorrow morning." So we went over there to his office the next morning and, sure enough, he had a reservation on the train going to Shanghai from Nanking. And I forget how long it took us to get there, but, anyway, we rode the train. We had seats on the train, but also, all the other people are trying to get to Shanghai, too, with their roosters and their chickens, and their pigs and everything, with them, you see. So, it was a gung-ho ride there, amongst all the animals and everything.

So, we got to Shanghai, you know, and they put us in a real nice hotel there. What the heck was the name of the hotel? It was the best hotel in Shanghai at that time. And so we have nice, big suite, the one I had, anyway. And so, our job was to go to all the banks and go into their vaults and count all the cash and securities that were in the bank.

Interviewer:

Japanese securities, American---anything.

Yasutake:

Well, anything the bank had; because all the banks were all tied up. So we worked on that for, it must have been a couple of weeks, I guess, and we got all that done. And then, I was ready to go home, you know. Then, this guy, at that time, I was assigned to CIS for the Army, you know.

0H06M59S

Interviewer:

CIS stands for?

Yasutake:

Civil Intelligence Section; and so, this guy, the boss of CIS says to me that, "You're not going home yet." So I says, "What do you mean? I'm supposed to go home." "Yeah, but Washington wants you to work on something else." So, I said, "Why me; why not get somebody else to do it?" He says, "Well, you're the logical one." So, I says, "Well okay." So, then they sent this guy... I met this guy, a guy by the name of McKenzie, I forgot his first name. He was from Arizona, but he had the rank of... he was a civilian, but he had the rank of a Colonel. He was from, let's see... what city in Arizona? I forgot the name of the city now... from Arizona, and so he was sent by the War Department to set up Communist gathering centers in Shanghai and in Beijing or Peking at that time. So, they wanted someone to help him.

Well, so, in the meantime, me, I go roving around with the Chinese and everybody and the Japanese when I was Shanghai and so I said, "Well okay; I'll do that with you," you know. So I met this guy, he was a nice old man; and so he says we need to set up a center to gather information. I say, "What kind?" He says, "Chinese Communist information, because we think the communists are going to take over pretty soon." So, I says, "Yeah; I know." So he says, "How do you know?" "Well, talking to all these Japanese guys, that's what they tell you."

So I met along the line I had met two, when I was in Shanghai, I ran into one day going to lunch down the street, I ran into a fellow that looked like I knew from way back. And, sure enough, he comes running back after me and says, "Hey, aren't you from Gardena?" I says, "Yeah." So, he says, "Hey, don't you remember me?" So he says, "Oh, yeah." I looked at him and sure enough I say, "Hey, you're Ray Uyeshima," you know. And he used to have a nursery, I think on the corner of Western and Redondo Boulevard at that time.

And so he had gone to China; he had done very well; he had made tons of money, and he had---during the war, he had supported all Nisei that were stranded there in Shanghai. Yeah, he took them all in, and fed them, and took care of them during the war. And there's a bunch of them. And one of them was brother-in-law, David Inoshita. He used to live here---over here in Los Angeles, and he was a reporter for... at that time, I forgot what news agency he was with; but, anyway, he was a news

correspondent. So I met him and we became very friendly. And he lived in the French Quarter and we were invited to his place for dinner and everything else, because he had all kinds of maids and everything else, and the money was flowing out of his pockets all over.

OH11M35S

Interviewer:

Shanghai is called the Paris of the East?

Yasutake:

I guess.

Interviewer:

And it was a Bund, B-u-n-d; is that the area you were in?

Yasutake:

Yeah.

Interviewer:

And the international section was nearby?

Yasutake:

Yeah, well, they had the French Section and all kinds of sections but the French Section was the nicest. So, anyway, I became friends with him, so then I met a lot people and at the same time I was doing... we were collecting CIS, Civil Intelligence Section was, you know collecting intelligence about civilians and anything else. And so I used to roam around all over, especially in the Japanese Section. They had a big Japanese Section there.

Interviewer:

When you say Japanese is this Japanese business men from Japan?

Yasutake:

It was the district where they all lived. Like here Nihonmachi here, or the same situation. And so, I used to be associated with the Chinese headquarters all the time on these kinds of things.

Interviewer:

Did you wear a uniform when you're doing this?

Yasutake:

Oh, yeah, yeah; we were always in uniform. And so, he came and so I found these two Japanese guys that used to run the Japanese Communist Intelligence Centers, you know. And that's all they did for the Japanese government was collect Communist information in China for the Army... and so, especially north China. And so, these guys were not doing anything, so I hired them. And we hired them to set up this center, so we rented a big building and we put these two guys in and they got all their cronies that used to work for them, and we hired them. And everyday, we'd get information about the Communist movement, you know. And all the movement said, "Okay, China, if nobody does anything, we'll turn Communist in '48," you know.

And, sure enough, it turned '48; so we had these guys come from Washington, DC, and we used to tell them, you know. It's a good thing I don't remember their names, you know. But they come and say, "Yeah, yeah, yeah." It was just yeah, yeah, yeah, you see. And so, we.... I hate to say this, but they really had some dumb guys, you know. They just came for a joy ride. Well, anyway, so then, we set up one in Nanking, I mean, in Peking, and I went up there one day with this guy, McKenzie, and we checked into the Peking Hotel. So, I got in my room and we went down and had dinner, came up, and one lady come knocking. And she said "Aren't you from Gardena?" I said, "Yeah," you know. So, she says well, she was so-and-so, I can't think of their names, but, anyway, so they had bought that hotel, that Peking Hotel.

0H15M27S

Interviewer:

Oh, really. [Laughs]

Yasutake:

So they owned everything, you know.

Interviewer:

_____.

Yasutake:

Yeah, Japanese, yeah; and one was Kurata, you know; they used to have a department on Gardena Boulevard, you know. And they had bought that plus this guy from... that now they owned, well, not now, I don't know who owns it that trading company here - Mutual Trading?

Interviewer:

Oh, Mutual Trading.

Yasutake:

Yeah; their son, I know, used to be part of that group, you see. So, they were telling me one day that they knew they were going to lose the hotel, so they gave me all their papers for the hotel, the, -I don't know, Chinese documents, you know. So they asked me if I would bring them back to the U.S. for them; so I said, "No problem." So, there was a stack of papers, you know, so I got, well, anyway, we set up the Chinese Communist Gathering Information for the U.S. government up there, and then I was all finished.

Interviewer:

You were actually what would be the equivalent today of the CIA, Central Intelligence Agency.

Yasutake:

Yeah, more or less; but the problem was, we used to send back information every night, you know, back to Washington, DC. Nothing ever happened, you know? And they didn't take it seriously, so sure enough, China went Communist in '48, you know? All these things all came true. And then, when we went to Japan when I joined Paul Rush in CIS, you know, it's the same thing. I hired these two guys, Kitano and what the heck was that, Watanabe---those two guys, they were real cracker-jacks, because that's all they did all their lives was gather Communist information. And these guys knew where to get the information. So we... all this information we used to send back information to Washington, DC and I don't know what happened to them. Check

Hey, I'm finished. So, he said, "McKenzie happy?" He says, "Yeah, he is going to take care; he knows all the people now, so it's no problem." So I'm ready to go back. So, along about that time, he says, "I've got one more job for you." So I said, "I don't want no more jobs." "It's only going to take a week." So, I said, "Okay." So then this guy came from Washington, DC, a guy named... he was a general, a one-star general. He had quite a name, but not O'Brian... oh I can't think of the name right now. But, anyway, so he says, "You're going with him to Nanking where the Japanese headquarters was." So, I... in his plane---went over to Nanking and met with the boss of all the Chinese Army, the head of the Chinese Army, and... not the Chinese Army; I'm sorry. The Japanese Army on how to send back

all the Japanese soldiers back to Japan. So, we went over the whole thing, and each district and each port, we brought in ships to put all the soldiers back on, you see.

Interviewer:

Did the Chinese Nationalists at that time, did they want to keep the Japanese soldiers?

Yasutake:

No, they want them out. So they helped us, you see. So, between the Chinese, the Japanese, and us, we made all the plans to send back all the Japanese soldiers.

0H19M50S

Interviewer:

How many were there, do you think?

Yasutake:

There was a lot, I forgot how many, you know.

Interviewer:

A hundred thousand, or...?

Yasutake:

At least, at least yeah; and then I went back when I finished and the general thanked me, and then I went back to the office and, "I'm finished." Then they said, "No, one more." "What do you mean... one more? Every time I come back you say I've got to do one more. Why don't you let the rest of the guys do the damn jobs, you know?" So they said, "Well, you're the logical one because you know everybody." So, I say, "Okay; what's the next job?" It's to send back all the Japanese civilians from Shanghai. So, I say "That's not so easy." So, he says, "No, the Japanese Army, I mean, the Japanese Navy is cooperating with us and they will give us their hospital ships and there other transport ships to take them back." So I say, "Well okay."

So, now, I gave orders on what to do to all the Japanese that were there; send them directions and flyers, you know, saying, ok, this, this. And so, we get them all on this big naval area there and we get them all together in the morning, and the Chinese would come and inspect what they were taking back, you know, and there's my sister-in-law, my wife's older sister. She got permission to go back, because she's an actress, you see. And so, now they had this girl, I can't think of her name now,

Rikora, you know famous female vocalist of Shi na No Yoru, she was a singer.

Interviewer:

Oh, yes.

Yasutake:

Yeah, the Chinese won't let her go back, you see. So, I said... so they came to me and they said, "Help us get her to go back. She don't want to stay," you know. So I said... she was good friends with my sister-in-law, so I said, "Okay." So, I went to the Chinese headquarters and we, wah, wah, wah, way for a long time there, and give and take, give and take, you know, and finally they said, "Okay; we'll let her go." So, when the time came, you know they have to line up on this big open ground, and they come and inspect what you have and then they okay it. And then they get on the boat. Well, so, I had enough pull, so I had her and my in-laws all got on the hospital ship, you see. So, they were okay. And the rest of them, we put on these transport ships, which were good, you know, they were transporting people, so it was now a freighter, so, it was not bad.

Interviewer:

It's about one or two days from Shanghai to... where did they go back?

0H23M20S

Yasutake:

Well....

Interviewer:

Yokohama, or...?

Yasutake:

No, no; the hospital ship went to Yokohama because they lived in, outside of Tokyo there... heck, I can't think of the name of the town. Getting old; but anyway, so, when I finished that I finally got to go home. **[Laughs]**

Interviewer:

What year was that?

Yasutake:

1946.

Interviewer:

Were you married at that time?

Yasutake:

No, no; so, then, I came home and we landed at San Francisco and then we went to Monterrey, you know where they have the school?

Interviewer:

Defense or language school, or, the Presidio there.

Yasutake:

So, I had all these guys like, Ralph , Stu Tsubota, all those guys were there, you know? And so, now I was ready to go get discharged, see. Well, they say, "Come on; let's go to Japan," you know. So, I say, "What for?" "Oh, we want to go to Japan; we're going to Japan." So, finally I got talked into going to Japan. So, at that time to go to Japan it was only by boat, you see. They wouldn't fly us. Oh, I say, "If they're not going to fly us, to heck with it." They say, "No, no, we go then this guy that grow roses in San Leandro up in Northern California?"

Interviewer:

Oh, yeah.

Yasutake:

What the heck was his name Shibata, I think it was. We were all together there, so we were all going over. So all we did morning, noon, and night... just play poker. I had also the money, you see when we finished.

Interviewer:

It was Shinoda.

Yasutake:

Shinoda; was it Shinoda. I don't know.

Interviewer:

San Lorenzo's is....

Yasutake:

You know where they grow carnations and thing. Anyway, we sure had a good time on that boat. And then, we go to Tokyo and when we land, and the headquarters were at the NYK building, you know.

Interviewer:

Oh.

Yasutake:

So, we're all over there getting ready for assignments, you see. So, then, I ran into this guy, Shiro Omata from Hanford, California, you know, and he was the personal interpreter to General MacArthur, you see. So, he comes to me and he says, "Hey, I got a job for you." So I say, "I don't want more job." So, he says, "Yeah; I got a job for you." So, I said, "Doing what?" "Taking my place." So, I said, "What the hell;" I said, "I don't know that much Japanese." "Well, you got to learn;" you know honorific Japanese and all that? So I says, "Not me... don't, don't, don't." No, he says, "Come on; we're going to go see Colonel Bunker tomorrow. So you come with me, because I'm going back to the states," you know. **[Laughs]**

So, next morning he comes and wakes me up and gets me all go to headquarters... General Mac's headquarters and Colonel Bunker says, "Hey okay; no problem, no problem." So, I said, "No, I don't want to do it, you know." And he says, "Yeah; you're assigned. You take orders." **[Laughs]**

So, then, what happened, I go back to NYK building, see? Then, here comes this guy, Tom Tagami, you know. He's in Honolulu now. He's in hospital right now; I'd like to see the guy, you know. So, Tom comes along and I say, "Hey Tom, I got a good job for you." That guy, he went through Japanese school so he knows Japanese and he knows English. He went through UC, Berkeley, I think, and I forgot what Japanese university he went through. But I knew he was strong in both languages. "I got a job for you." So, he said, "No I don't want a job." "I got a job for you, a good one." So, he says, "What." I said, "All you have to do is blah, blah, blah." So, he says, "Well, maybe---okay." So then I took him back to headquarters again and I said, "He's going to take my place." So they said, "Okay." So I was out, you see.

So then I get assigned to Yokohama to the 8th Army Headquarters, and I was having a good time. You know, the general used to send me to Nagasaki and all these places to take care of little problems, you know. So, I used to enjoy that job, you know.

Interviewer:

What was your rank then?

Yasutake:

I was a Captain then. And then, I stayed there about two months and then this guy, Paul Rush; he is the head of CIS. Well, he wanted me back over to his place, so I said, "No, I'd rather stay here," because I was having a good time in Yokohama, you know, the boss. So, but then, the General says, "No, you got to go back, because they outrank us over here. So, you have to go back." So, I said, "Well okay; so I packed up and went back to Tokyo and stayed with CIS." I was the Executive Officer. I used to run the whole show, because Paul Rush used to spend so much time with his Kiyosato Project, you know.

Interviewer:

What was that project?

Yasutake:

That farm in the mountains at Kiyosato..

Interviewer:

Is that where they built the airplanes?

Yasutake:

No, no; where they farm---dairy farm and all that. It's a big operation now. They have a very big place now. They raise cattle and vegetables. They have schools. They have churches. They have everything there. It's a huge place. And so, I used to, when they first started, I used to have to go on a weekend to iron out all the problems. I used to have to ride in that Jeep all the way up there and all the way back... oh. And so, I spent a lot of time with that. I spent a lot of time when I came back out of the Army traveling with Paul Rush on the East Coast and South raising money for the what do you call it. He used to give lectures at the churches, collect donations. I spent two months doing that; yeah.

And so, when I was in Japan I was Executive Officer to Paul Rush and that's where all my friends used to come for lunch, because we were in a ...that was the only building that was standing out of all the buildings around there were all down. There wasn't a building standing... just that one building.

OH31M18S

Interviewer:

Is the NYK building at that time where the general headquarters was?

Yasutake:

No, the headquarters was in Daiichi. The CIS building was in--- near the British Embassy, you know.

Interviewer:

Oh, what's that Sanbancho or Ichibancho?

Yasutake:

Yeah; so we were there and we had two guards at the front door of the building and then the first floor was the general entry way and the kitchen and everything and then the basement. And then the second floor was the executive offices where I was and the library and the dining room. They had a big dining room. The third floor was all guest rooms. So we used to house the high-powered guests that used to come in from Russia, from China, from all the other foreign countries. And we used to have to feed them, so we used to always have two cooks and a pantry full of food, and everything, you know. And then the 3rd, 4th, 5th, 6th floor was all working place. We used to have about 60 civilian employees working on all these information that used to come in.

Interviewer:

What year was this, '46-'47?

Yasutake:

Yeah; '47.

Interviewer:

Forty-seven?

Yasutake:

Yeah....

Interviewer:

Then when did you end up leaving Japan?

Yasutake:

Forty-eight.

0H33M30S

Interviewer:

Oh, in '48; after '48 then you went back to California?

Yasutake:

I came back home. So, while I was in Japan I met up with a... the Mitsubishi family, and Madam Sawada was the daughter of Lorenzo Sawada who was the first ambassador to the UN. And she... she was a real go-getter, and you know, used to always have cigarettes and rice and whatever food and that stuff. So, we used to give it to her you see for certain things. Then, she started this orphanage down in Oiso, which is near Kamakura, south of Tokyo. And so, when I got ready to come home, they won't let me come home, because they said that I was involved with her in setting up this orphanage and that I had donated a lot of Army stuff to her and this and that, which was against the law and this and that, you know. And, a good thing, you know I used to have to teach CIC classes in Tokyo, you know. And so I did that and those kinds of things and all these guys all helped me. So I got out of all that jazz you know. But she made a nice orphanage down there at one of her holdings; you know they had a lot of houses and things like that all over Japan. That Mitsubishi family and she was a real go-getter, and she was always looking for donations for the orphanage, and... oh, she used to have a lot of orphans there. And, later on, she used to take those orphans and take them to South America and to the US here, and everything, you know. She did a lot of good; she worked hard. Well, anyway, so I got held up a couple of months, investigations.

Interviewer:

[Laughs] Well, you still went out every day, huh?

Yasutake:

Oh, yeah, yeah; so Shiro Omata and I, we were the only ones that had the General MacArthur pass, just the two of us, you know. And he used to get it from the General, and we could go anyplace we wanted. The MPs or nothing... we had power over all of them. And, I tell you we used to do some crazy things. We used to be able to go Sushi bars and things like that where the other guys couldn't, you know.

Interviewer:

Really, you couldn't go to the Sushi bars?

Yasutake:

No, they were off limits.

Interviewer:

Really?

Yasutake:

Yeah, and to Geisha parties and things like that. We had the run of the place... not that we did anything bad, so during all the Army life I went to all the schools that the Army had. They used to let me go through all the schools.

0H3716S

Interviewer:

By the time you got out of the service then, what was your rank?

Yasutake:

Major.

Interviewer:

Then, was that... did they have some kind of special ceremony or... when you got to become Major?

Yasutake:

No, they don't have no ceremony; they say "Hey." They give you some of those oak leaf clusters and say, "You're it."

Interviewer:

Then you came back... after Japan, you came back to California?

Yasutake:

Yeah.

Interviewer:

And then you started a family then, or...?

Yasutake:

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Interviewer:

But then throughout your life and your career then afterwards, you continued doing things with Japan and...

Yasutake:

Yeah, because I got hooked up with some guys at the... wanted to do business, you see. And so, number one, we got into a little play pen manufacturing business, and George Aratani helped us with that a little bit, you know. And then, from there, they

started building that Ensenada breakwater in Ensenada, Mexico, and they were buying... they were looking for equipment, like cranes, and shovels and backhoes, and tractors and things like that, you see. So, I hooked up with this guy, Hiromisa out of L.A. He was in that business and so we started bringing in surplus equipment from Japan. And we used to sell it to them. They were good equipment, you know; they were practically brand new. So, we did quite well with that. So we supplied them with all their spare parts and everything else. And there was an outfit that was doing that was called Clark Imocena, which is... well, Clark was the head of the Mexican Olympic Team; yeah.

0H39M58S

Interviewer:

Well, what I want to do is thank you for taking time out to have this short time to talk with you and maybe in the next week or so, we could finish up on, maybe the second part.

Yasutake:

Yeah.

Interviewer:

But I want to thank you very much for your time.

Yasutake:

No.

Interviewer:

It's interesting how many times they wouldn't let you go.

Yasutake:

Yeah. [Laughs] I had a lot of fun and I was educated real well during the time I was in the Army. I went to practically all their schools---their intelligence schools and CIC schools and CIS schools and all those schools. I learned a lot there, you know.

Interviewer:

Where do you think you got your discipline from?

Yasutake:

Well, I don't know; I mean, I guess from working all my life, I guess. I had a lot to do.

Interviewer:

Well, you're now, what, 88?

Yasutake:

Yeah.

Interviewer:

Well, it's "kore kara"; you've got to start for now.

Yasutake:

Oh, from now, I got a few things that I got to clear up. I got a few more businesses that I've got to sell, and sell my land and make sure that family don't have to pay a big taxes to the government when I say bye-bye.

Interviewer:

Well, I want to thank you for your time today, and it's really moving to hear about the different kind of things that you remember from those times past.

Yasutake:

Well, there's a lot more that I didn't say, you know, but they were generally that, you know. So, you know, these guys that were in the Army up to now, I guess they like to be in the limelight, you know. And so they, what do you call it, me, you know. Whatever medals I got, and whatever things, that the Army gave me for doing things, well, they're just my own and so I don't advertise it.

Interviewer:

Well, I think that's why people gravitate towards you and respect you, because you're kind of like the Kage Musha, the Shadow Warrior.

Yasutake:

[Laughs] Well, I don't... I'm... they came to me you know and wanted to make a documentary, but I wasn't about to advertise myself.

Interviewer:

Well, you know, maybe at this point where you look at it from this standpoint, and you should probably be encouraged to try to at least do that documentary. And the reason is it's not to advertise yourself; it's more to provide a medium in which younger people, like the Sansei, Yonsei, Gosei, the others can look at the Issei and Nisei and the kinds of sacrifices and experience that they have, because even the Yonsei and Gosei

think that the Sansei didn't do anything. Which may be true, I don't know. But certainly the contributions and things that the Nisei have done is all from, I think, just from the hard work that the Nisei did, and they instilled in you to do things. And you had duty, honor and things you want to do for your country, as well as your community and you did it. And so, you may want to re-think the documentary, not so much that it's about me, but I think it's more about the community. And we need it.

OH44M25S

Yasutake:

Well, so, you know, like the Army... like when the 43rd Infantry Division went into New Guinea, way south, the General asked for me specifically to come join him, you know. But the War Department wouldn't let me go. So I felt good, because I felt that at least I did my share, and I was looked upon as one of the key persons that everybody wanted to do something for them, you know. And that I could, and the War Department was controlling what I did, you know or where I went, you know. Every time I wanted to move... I wanted to go to 442nd, they said, "Absolutely no," and then I wanted to go overseas and they put their hands down and said, "Absolutely no." And it was a real, absolute no, you know. And so, in China I was selected to head the return of the soldiers back to Japan, the civilians back to Japan and all those kind of things, you know. And set up the Communist Gathering Centers, you know. Oh, I put up a big center, you know, to gather communist, and one thing we kept telling Washington, hey, you got to do something, because in '48 China going to go Communist. And we sent them all the documents that went with it. I should have kept them, I guess, but... they were top secret, you see. Well, anyway, can't run the world, I guess.

Interviewer:

You can try... you were there at the levers of the world at a real critical time.

Yasutake:

Yeah, the basic, especially China, you know.

Interviewer:

Well, what's surprising about China, well, maybe, not surprising, but you had inside knowledge plus the nature of the relationship that you had with Chiang Kai-shek, and I'm sure that he knew that he was going to be in a battle for his life,

and then, I'm sure it was a very sad time when he left mainland China for Formosa.

Yasutake:

Yeah, well, he had no choice.

Interviewer:

Well, thank you very much, Mike.

Yasutake:

Oh, no.

Interviewer:

Thank you for your time. I know you're busy, but we appreciate it.

Yasutake:

Anything I can do.

[End Mike Yasutake Interview]