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ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Shiroku "Whitey" Yamamoto (WY)

Honolulu, O`ahu

February 18, 2005

BY: Warren Nishimoto (WN) and Michi Kodama-Nishimoto (MK)

MK: [This is] an interview with Mr. Whitey Shiroku Yamamoto on February 18 . . .

WY: Eighteen.

MK: . . . 2005. And the interviewers are Michiko Kodama-Nishimoto and Warren Nishimoto.

And Mr. Yamamoto, we'll start rolling then. We'll start the interview now.

WY: Okay.

MK: First of all, Mr. Yamamoto, how come you're called "Whitey"?

WY: Well, my name is Shiroku, my first name, you know. And Yamamoto is, of course, naturally my last name. But *shiro* is "white" in Japanese, right. And *kuro* is "black." But my name is Whitey. But Whitey came about when I was going to Stout Institute in Wisconsin. And at the end of the class, being the Yamamoto, I'm always the last person, almost the last person to be called. So all the rest of the students had their roll call and they already gone and here I'm stuck with. . . . And the poor professor, she's from Tennessee, she cannot pronounce my name, Yamamoto and Shiroku. So I got together with her, "Let's settle this thing once and for all." And I explained to her, "*Shiro* is 'white' in Japanese so why don't we call me 'Whitey'," because Whitey is so common. So that's the way it started. So it started up in Wisconsin. And the people on the Mainland refer to me as "Whitey," they all know me by "Whitey." And when I came back here to Hawai'i, I tried to tell my friends or anybody that I know to call me "Whitey" from here on, it's easy. But my foster parents which was *haole* people that I was, they were my administrator after

my dad passed away, they make a remark saying that, "Gosh, why did you do that?" Because "Whitey" actually is a Mafia group, people that always call "Whitey" are the gangsters, you know, so it's not too good a name to hold on to. And, of course, being Shiroku Yamamoto, Shiro, then I said, "Well, let's keep it as it is." So all these years it's been Whitey Yamamoto. And the word *shiro*, if anybody called me "Shiro" or "Shiroku" and I have to stop and think, "Gosh, I wonder who could that be." But the only people who would know would be when I was growing up, going to school, when I was in the lower grades going to school. They're the only ones who used to call me "Shiro" for short or call me "Shiroku." So here on it's always been "Whitey." Even my wife calls me "Whitey." (Laughs) So that's how it came about.

MK: So for this interview and for everything else, we'll call you "Whitey" then.

WY: Oh, sure. That way I'll feel more comfortable. Thank you. (Chuckles)

MK: So Whitey, . . .

WY: Yes.

MK: . . . when were you born?

WY: I was born in 1923. So I just made my birthday last year in December. So I'm 81 years old, an old man already. (Chuckles)

MK: And where were you born?

WY: I was born in Ninole, Hawai'i, on the Big Island, out in the Hämākua Coast. And, yes, so that's it.

MK: And what were your parents' names?

WY: My parents' name is Yamamoto. And my mother, which I'm not acquainted, I don't remember how she looked like because I was only three months old before she left me. And my dad brought me up until he passed away. So for me, I had a mother for only about three months before she abandoned me. But prior to that she was married. She had two young boys, I understand, from what the neighbors have told me. And when I was born, my dad was in the forties already so my guess, from what I know, is that he named me "Shiroku" when he was I think forty-six years old so that he can remember, Shiroku. That's what I came about. Yes, so for a number of years, all my life my dad was alive, he took care of me and raised me up until I was able to return that favor before

he passed away to take care of him. And he passed on in 1941.

MK: And you know, your father, Asaemon Yamamoto, what did you hear about his background in Japan and his immigration or his early life in Hawai'i?

WY: From what I understand, knowing him growing up together, we lived together with three other Yamamoto families but they all went back to Japan, which I don't remember. I had a cousin, but he's gone now. Shizuichi Yamamoto was my cousin. That's the only other family that used to live together as a group in one big house.

But my dad was a cane planter. He had an individual cane field next to our house, which was about four, five acres of land. And he had another piece of land that he leased up on the forest line on the Big Island. So he raised the sugar cane alternately so that he can take care of the sugar cane on one property. When that is fully grown and ready to be harvested, he was concentrating on the other cane field up on the forest line. So he sort of alternate his crops. So he was occupied throughout the year.

MK: And, you know, the acreage that you mentioned, that's pretty big. Who worked the land?

WY: My dad worked on the land. So if he was working right next to our house, well, it's no problem for him. But since he has his property on the forest line, that's about, oh, almost two miles or so to get up to the forest line, so he had a horse, a mule, that he had. And then when I was growing up as a young boy and Dad would be working out in the field, I would cut grass to feed the horse. So that's the only transportation. And I can remember he used to carry me on his back, to go up to the forest line, and as he was working out in the field, he would find some dry sugar cane leaves, lay it down on the ground, and put the raincoat, which was a homemade raincoat, on top of the pile of dry sugar cane leaves to make it comfortable for me to sleep or play. And then I always had a bottle of milk so that I can drink milk if I want to drink milk on it, you know. And that's how he worked and constantly keeping an eye on me so that I don't get lost in the cane field or out in the forest (chuckles) if I crawled. But I wasn't able to walk anyway or go too far, yeah. So that's the way he used to do his sugar cane business, right, yeah.

MK: And, you know, after he raised the cane and harvested the cane, where did he take the cane to?

WY: When the cane was ready to be harvested, he hired the plantation, like, next to our house was Laupāhoehoe Sugar Company so he would ask the plantation to harvest the cane and that's how he got his income after the harvest. Now the one up on the forest line, that is with Hakalau Plantation Company, so he made arrangements with them. So that's how it's done.

MK: You know I know that you were just a young boy, but just from your understanding . . .

WY: Yes.

MK: How did you think your dad was faring economically? Was it hard or okay for you folks?

WY: I guess we had no choice. That's the only way they can make a livelihood is to raise the sugar cane and then survive that way. And the only time they can get payments would be after the harvesting of the sugar cane. And the plantation would take up all the expenses and the food that he was charging from the plantation stores and then they would take all that expenses of accumulation of the expenses, then he would get his portion of it and that's the way he survived, we survived actually, between he and I, yeah.

MK: You know you mentioned the plantation store.

WY: Yes.

MK: What kinds of items did your family depend on from the plantation store?

WY: The main product was rice and, as I can recall, I think like a can of salmon or other things. I don't quite remember. I was growing up and he took care of that. But rice was the main thing, yeah.

MK: What did you folks do for like meat and vegetables?

WY: We had a few chickens running around. And as far as meat, I don't remember eating any meat. But Dad used to buy fish. And of course those peddlers would come around. But it's so, you know, inexpensive compared to what it is today. Well, those days you could buy a whole tuna for ten cents or fifteen cents, like that. So he made use of the whole fish. So that's the most I can think of. No meat, but a fish, vegetables, and that's about it that I can think of.

MK: And where did you folks get your vegetables from?

WY: Oh, we raised our own vegetables. Dad used to have a little garden so he raised. When the sugar cane is caught up and he has nothing to do, that's what he used to enjoy, raising sugar cane. And then being down next to the gulch, he had a fairly good-sized patch of watercress. And that watercress was really good because you have a constant flow of natural cold water, spring water. So the watercress is really wonderful. All his watercress was big and long. And it's so soft. The ones that you find in the market today (chuckles) those we don't consider good watercress. They get a lot of roots on that. But no, this watercress, you can just break it off, almost about a foot long, and so soft, with your finger you can break it off.

And as we were growing up, I remember, with the neighborhood children, kids, we used to go down to the cliffside of the ocean, go fishing or so. And they have watercress growing on the side of the cliff. And the wind blowing up the cliffside and the waterfall from the gulch or rivers, small streams, makes it very, you know, watercress grow up real nicely. Yeah, we used to pick those from there, you know, cliffside.

MK: Were there other items that you folks used to pick as kids? Guavas or other fruits?

WY: Oh, yes, as we were growing up, yeah. They had a lot of mountain apples, a lot of guavas down the gulch. And I can't think of it, but we used to sneak into the plantation sugar cane field (chuckles) and chew sugar canes, too. So that was another thing, yeah. But a lot of other things that are available, too, which, we never But during the summertime, mountain apples and guavas were plentiful.

MK: You know, you mentioned that earlier there were some other Yamamoto families that were with you folks. I was wondering, what people lived near you and your dad?

WY: Oh, our area in Ninole, we weren't living right in Ninole Village but just the outskirts, just about, oh I'd say about quarter-mile or half a mile away from there. And we had a family of Yamamoto, Uyeno, Yada family, and they had a small bachelors' quarters. At the beginning part, I understood that they have that Chinese single men lived in that little camp. Then, the Filipino people, bachelors, occupied that housing. Then finally I can remember the last was Korean bachelors. They all worked in the plantation at Laupähoehoe Sugar Company. So that's about the only neighborhood that I had. So they were a very close, as far as I'm concerned, they were very nice to me. Because being the only child in the family, so I used to go and play with

their children and we associated with them. And they treated me very nicely, being part of their family group.

MK: And, you know, because you had families there, were there things that the families did as a group at any time? What types of socializing were there with the other people?

WY: Oh, I see. Well, they were all active in the church. And the church they had over at Ninole, small church, but the main church for us and the Uyeno family was connected with Honohina and so was Sasaki. He was connected with Honohina Buddhist church over there. And Rev. [S.] Okura was the minister at that time. And the other families had another church with, I guess, connected with Pāpa'aloa church, I suppose. So that's about the only social family get-together like that. And of course you have other events coming out, New Year's Day or some other time. We don't get together, but we sort of, each family had their own celebration among themselves. But, how shall I say? But the family, you know, the older people, they get together more so and they socialize. But the kids, like us growing up, we would have a baseball or some other games to play with it. And of course another village, Kaia'akea is not very far and they have Kaia'akea plantation camp. So they have a lot of children that goes to Ninole School and John M. Ross School. So we know them well, so we all play baseball games together with them.

MK: You know, you mentioned school, what school did you attend?

WY: When I was growing up we had this Ninole School, which they had class up to the sixth grade—or fifth grade, I suppose, yeah. And Mr. Kamakaiwi was the school principal. Both Mr. Kamakaiwi and Mrs. Kamakaiwi were teachers. And they had three children. The oldest is Charlotte, and James was the second one, and Daniel was the youngest. And Daniel was my playmate, too. Of course, he was a couple of years older than me but we were about the closest ones. So that was the additional thing in that area we had these families. So Kamakaiwi. But they always used to go back to Hilo on the weekends. And then they would come out to Ninole School for the whole week.

MK: And what grades did you attend at Ninole School?

WY: Ninole School is up to, I think, I was third grade and then, at that time Hakalau plantation built the John M. Ross School up to seventh grade. So they closed down Ninole School and then opened up John M. Ross School. And that's where all of us attended was John M. Ross Elementary School. And after seventh grade, we go down to Laupāhoehoe High School. So that's how we met my wife, down at

Laupāhoehoe. And that area, Ninole School was one end of the community and 'O'ökala was the other extreme area and they all merged down at Laupāhoehoe High School, to finish the high school down there, the classmates.

MK: Now going back to Ninole School.

WY: Yes.

MK: How big was that Ninole School?

WY: Oh, it's pretty large size those days. And of course, they had a Japanese[-language] school adjacent to that Ninole School. And Mr. Shigaki was the principal and the schoolteacher for the Japanese-language school. So after public school they would attend the Japanese school over there. But when they closed down, everything all the buildings were demolished. And then there's no Japanese school in that area. But next to John M. Ross School, they had Ninole Japanese-language school and Honohina language school. And I attended the Honohina Japanese-language school for a short period of time. And Reverend Okura from Honohina Buddhist church and they had two—Mrs. Okura was a teacher, Japanese-language teacher, also. And had additional teachers but usually a lady who taught. So I wish I was smart enough to realize I should have concentrated to learn Japanese language, you know, take advantage of it. But no, we didn't do that. We just went over there to play because the parents told us go attend the Japanese school. But thinking back, you know, I should have taken advantage. (Chuckles) Kids are kids, I suppose, yeah. (Chuckles)

MK: You know, I'm wondering what impact do you think the Japanese school had on you?

WY: Thinking back at that time, when I was growing up, I didn't think too much about it, though. Yeah, but now, since World War II came about, I can see that was a valuable asset to have. Boys who took it seriously, they took advantage of the ones and they became, during World War II, as MIS people, yeah. Military Intelligence [Service]. So that was good for us in the military.

MK: But for yourself, you didn't take it too seriously?

WY: No, I didn't take it too seriously. (Laughs) Rascal over there.

MK: And then you mentioned that you went to John M. Ross School after third grade.

WY: Yes.

MK: It was a new school that opened up?

WY: Yes, it was a brand-new school. And Hakalau plantation, Mr. John M. Ross was the plantation manager and he had a big influence on that. I guess that was his pride and joy to build this school. And then, of course, then Ninole School was small. And I guess a new building being John M. Ross School was more modernized and was well built. And they had a yard, they had a big ballpark to play with. But the outhouses were not within the building. You have to go out for the outhouses for the boys and the girls. So that's about all. And then they had teachers' cottage for Mr. Kamakaiwi and three or four other, what do you call, living quarters for the other teachers. And like Mr. Toledo was a schoolteacher at that time. I don't know his first name, but he lived next to the school anyway, not too far, walking distance for him. And Jack Nishimoto, another prominent family, he was a schoolteacher, too, in the fifth grade. And Mr. Toledo was for the fourth grade at that time.

MK: And how was it for you at John M. Ross School?

WY: Oh, it was, I liked it because we all, you know, we know each other, all the students from Honohina, Ninole, Kaia'akea, and all the communities. So we know them well. The classes were small then. I would think for each class they had about, oh, I think fifteen, sixteen pupils per class. So you get to be very close relationship, yeah? Yeah.

MK: And I was wondering, you know, what was transportation like for you folks back then, you know, going to and from school?

WY: Oh, you have to use your foot. You have to go to school rain or shine and that's about a mile, mile and a half walking distance from where I used to live. So that was something. But on the way going to school or not, it's no problem. Rainy days was a little bit difficult and all barefooted, too. So during the rainy days, barefooted, and of course, we're familiar with it. It doesn't bother us. And that was that.

MK: And then after John M. Ross School, you went to Laupāhoehoe?

WY: That's correct, yeah, we went down. And they had school buses provided going from—the buses picked up the students from Honohina. I think it went a little farther beyond,

more toward Honoka'a. Like the Nonakas were on the extreme end or close to Hakalau and, of course, that's the only family. Takashi Nonaka was one of the boys that I recall, my classmates, so when the buses, Yamada transportation used to provide the bus for that whole district, for Laupāhoehoe. So we took the Yamada bus transportation down to Laupāhoehoe School.

WN: Was that bus free?

WY: Yes, those were free. I guess the government or city and county provided, paid for the transportation, yeah.

The Yamada family lived in Laupāhoehoe. So I remember Mr. Yamada, the father, started off with a, if you can remember, you heard them talking about banana bus? Well, that's how he started his transportation business. Then the boys took over. And I can see, if I can recall, Bob Yamada, that's the oldest one, and Hiroshi and Nobuo. Wait, Hiroshi, I think, was the second one. I'm not too sure about him. And then Nobuo is the youngest. And they had, I think, two girls. I think that's the regular, first Yamada family. And second Yamada family, the father must have gotten married and they had two other girls. One of them was my classmate, too. And the Yamada family, Bob started hauling sugar cane from, I think, it was from Ninole to Hakalau. Load the sugar cane and then take it over to Hakalau sugar mill. Then, the other two boys started out with the school bus. And that's how the Yamada enterprise started to grow.

MK: And you mentioned banana wagon.

WY: Yes.

MK: Can you describe for us what a banana wagon was?

WY: A banana wagon is more of a square, it's made of, that's a nice little vehicle. How to describe it? It's more of a square design and had a wooden panels on the side and back. And they had, I think, three rows of seats in the little bus and the driver. And the father, Mr. Yamada, used to pick up passengers from the countryside to Hilo in the morning and then return back in the afternoon. And that's it.

MK: And, you know, we were talking about Laupāhoehoe School, what do you remember most about going to school there?

WY: Well, the nice part about Laupāhoehoe School, they have a lovely campus over there. And they have a settlement of Hawaiian people down at the point. And the school was nice.

They had nice, nice campus, how shall I say, they had nice trees. And during the time that I started, they built a gymnasium on the *mauka* side of the Laupāhoehoe School. And they had a great big banyan tree between the two buildings. And it was L-shaped—well more like a T-shape, how the layout of the school is. And then of course they had a Hawaiian grave adjacent to that, and plumeria trees. Of course, lot of coconut trees in the little community. But Laupāhoehoe used to be a small town. It was more of a seaport. They had the sugar mill down there. They had a courthouse and a general store. I think the general store was part of the hotel, too, from what I understand about the old history. And they had a church down there. And further up the valley, they had a good . . .

END OF SIDE ONE

SIDE TWO

WY: . . . Ota family, and Rev. Ota was Buddhist church. But another outstanding family that I can remember, the families was Akiona, Laeha. Mr. Laeha was also a schoolteacher at Laupāhoehoe, too. And Bob Yamada lived down in that area, too, and he used to transport the trucks, used that transportation. And so was raising chickens, poultry, down at the point.

MK: So Laupāhoehoe was much bigger than Ninole?

WY: I would say equal, no, when I was growing up. But ancient time being a little seaport landing area for the boats to come in on the Hāmākua Coast, so that community must have grown up like a small town or village those days.

MK: And you know I was wondering, as a student how were you at Laupāhoehoe?

WY: Oh, I enjoyed while I was going to school. Yeah, just like any other schoolmates. And, of course, I attended over there up till tenth grade. And I left Laupāhoehoe School to take care of my dad when he got ill, sick. And until he died I took care of him. So I didn't go back to school at all. And after that, well, after my dad passed away, let's see the war came by in 1941. And of course, the school principal was my, what do you call, well just like a foster parents. They looked after me. Because since I was orphaned at sixteen and he was appointed the administrator of our estate by Judge [J.F.] McLaughlin over at Hilo Third Circuit Court. So when the war came in December 7, 1941, the school was closed for about three months, I think. While the school was closed they asked any high school students if they would help the military for the defense

purpose, to join up with CCC [Civilian Conservation Corps]. During that time, CCC was very strong under President [Franklin] Roosevelt time to take care of the depression period I suppose. So CCC was just about phasing out, but when the war came they started up again. And all the high school boys volunteered to join the CCC and we were up at Pöhakuloa. That's where we were assigned to the headquarters and build the Saddle Road, they called at that time during the war, from Kona side to Hilo, out in the lava rock field. And what we had was one big dump truck—in fact, two if I call recall now—two dump trucks and one bulldozer and the rest was manpower, high school boys. And they issued us leather shoes naturally and lava gloves because lava rocks are so rough and when you handle that, you know, it cuts your leather gloves and soles of the shoes because we're working out in the lava rock field to get up these rocks, put 'em in the dump trucks. And once that is full, the dump trucks will take it over to where there's a spot in the road that we build needs to be filled up and leveled. And the bulldozers would come and then pat it down to make it solid. And we continued that until, oh gosh, we left. I left the CCC, but that's how the CCC was formed to build that Saddle Road was fortunately.

MK: And how were living conditions for you and the crew of boys working?

WY: Oh, I tell you up in Pöhakuloa—Today, of course, that's a military place—oh up there was cold, cold. (Chuckles) It's a high elevation at the base of Mauna Kea mountain. And they provided us with about two or three blankets and sleeping on the canvas cot, and that was still not enough to keep us warm. But we had lots of meat because they had wild sheep running all over the place. So like the superintendents would have the rifle, they would go and shoot those sheep when they come around the camp area. And we had the outdoor netting enclosure where they hang up all these meat. And the boys, when they go back home, they take us on the truck and if anybody wants a chunk of meat, oh we got lots of meat.

(Laughter)

WY: So well supplied with meat. And we used to, as a whole, you know after having supper at the camp there's nothing else to do. The boys would play baseball and others; we would climb up on the side of the mountain because the mountain was right next to it. And they have a big gully. And when we had the idea of how to catch those lambs, I mean the sheep. One group of boys, about three or four of 'em, would be walking up on the side of this end of the gulch. The other group would go up the other side. And one or two boys

going on the ledge and look for the animal. And if we do, then what we would do is pick up some small rocks, all little, about this size, and we would throw it down and then startle the sheep. And some of them, what do you call, being hit by the rock and they would topple over and then land down at the base of the gulch. And they had two or three fellows going up the gulch. And if any of those sheep topples over and falls down to the base, they would go and use a knife to kill the sheep. And after we have about two, three of 'em we would go back down and then help the boys over there to bring all the part of the sheep and then take it back to the camp. And then we would hang it up inside the enclosure. So we had ample meat for the meals and then take it home during the weekends, yeah. So that's it. But that was part of the fun. We enjoyed it.

MK: Sort of like an adventure.

WY: Yes, it is. But today growing up at Pöhakuloa, it's much different from what it was. They have the military camps over there, yeah. But all those things come back to us, especially for myself, too. That, oh gosh, times have changed, not like the old camp.

MK: You know you mentioned earlier that your dad had taken ill and he had passed away when you were about tenth grade. Last time we were here you were telling us how he got some medical help before he passed away. How did you arrange for him to get into the plantation hospital?

WY: Oh that was, well, that was a desperate moment for me already. And I didn't know what to do, how to go about it. So I went to—the birds over there (chuckles)—I went down to Laupähoehoe School and talked with Mr. Rhoads being the only person that I was able to get in touch with to help me out. Because Laupähoehoe had a hospital, plantation hospital, and Mr. Rhoads was a good friend of the manager, which is Mr. Hutchinson, and he made arrangements to move my dad from my house, our house, down to Laupähoehoe Hospital. And within a week period of time, he passed on. So they were very much concerned about me being the only child at the age of sixteen or seventeen by that time already. And he was very sympathetic and tried to help me out and he helped. Of course, we don't have---my dad didn't have hardly anything anyway, so not much of an assets or anything like that. But he felt very pitiful to help me out and, well, he did a lot of help, how shall I say, and went make arrangement with Judge McLaughlin over at Third Circuit Court. And that's how the judge appointed him to be my administrator. So that's how I got involved with that wonderful family, the Rhoads family.

MK: And I remember you also said something about what happened to your father's last crops after he passed away.

WY: Mm-hmm. So the fields were, I just let it go, I didn't know what to do with it. So Mr. Rhoads made arrangements with the plantation to harvest the crops when it's fully matured. And then that was the final thing. So both the farm, sugar cane farm next to our house and up on the forest line, after the harvesting of the crop, that's finalized, that was the end of that venture.

MK: And if you don't mind . . .

WY: Yes.

MK: . . . if you can tell us something about the Rhoads family who, you know, took care of you after your dad's passing.

WY: Yes. Well, I was old enough to, you know, get along by myself. But they were concerned about my life, too. So they always looked after me that way and trying to advise me or be part of the family member. And soon after Dad passed away, I lived with them at Laupähoehoe. I had a room and I was with them. I had my meals with them and everything. Then, I decided, well, I better not; I was kind of concerned about myself. So after joining the CCC, I started to work with Moses Stationery Company instead of going back to school. And worked over there. Then before too long, the following year, the war came by in 1941. So I still continued until the time they asked us to form the 442 by volunteering and then be in the service that way. But all the time I was on the Big Island, the Rhoads family always kept close in touch with me, they helped me out that way, whatever I wanted to get advice, they were always there.

MK: When you mentioned the Rhoads family, who were the members of the Rhoads family at that time?

WY: Oh, at that time Bob was part of the family, too. He was legally adopted because Mr. and Mrs. Rhoads were not able to have children so they adopted Bob. And Bob became legally adopted and then he was in the family. So that's how I got close to him, too. We were close. And Bob, present day they live up in Roswell, Georgia, just about twenty-five miles north of Atlantic City. And he has three children, two boys and one girl. And Chris is the oldest boy, and Sheila and then, third boy is David?

WY's wife: Douglas.

WY: Oh, Douglas. Oh, I see. Thank you, honey.

(Laughter)

MK: You know you mentioned Bob was adopted by the . . .

WY: Rhoads family.

MK: . . . Rhoads family.

WY: Yeah.

MK: I know that last time we were here, we also heard that there were people who wanted to adopt you.

WY: Oh, yes. Well, like my wife's family is one of 'em. And while I was on a trip on the 50th anniversary to Bruyeres reunion, World War II we liberated that town of Bruyeres. And at that time on the trip there was another girl. What's her name, honey? Yoshie?

WY's wife: Yoshiko.

WY: Yeah, Yoshiko Kishinami. She mentioned to me that their family wanted to adopt me, too, because they had all girls and one boy. But unfortunately the boy got into an accident while swimming in the pool, I understand. And he passed on. And so they don't have any boy members in the family. So from what I was told by her—(WY coughs), excuse me— they wanted to adopt me, to carry on the family name, I don't know, I'm not too sure. But my wife's family, I guess, won the case.

(Laughter)

And fortunately her name, my wife's maiden name is Yamamoto, too. And they had a brother, Shiro.

(Laughter)

So that's it. But I'm pretty sure, I have a guess, of course I would like my wife. When we were going down to Laupāhoehoe School, I saw my wife and I got closely attached to her as being a nice lady (laughs) today, an attractive lady. And, of course, I guess my joke is, "Oh, probably your mother outsmarted you. Used my daughter to adopt me."

(Laughter)

Oh, there was another Yamamoto in Hilo, too. I understand. Because, you see my foster parents—Mr. Rhoads, his name is Elvis Rhoads—was school principal at Laupāhoehoe to start with. And when the war came, he was transferred over to

Hilo Intermediate. And before the summer was up, they transferred him to Hilo High School. And we had a house on Haili Street. And next door there was Yamamoto family. And Mrs. Yamamoto was a schoolteacher, I understand, and Mr. Yamamoto was a carpenter, I think. And they had one daughter by the name of June. So before I left for the service, I guess prior to that, they beginning to be good neighbors and I suppose just seeing me coming up to the house, you know, all the time. Because I used to stay down at the dormitory down Kino'ole Street, all right. So I used to come up and visit the folks and they said, "Chee, who's that Oriental guy coming to visit you?"

So they told them, "Gosh, by the way," he says, "That's my foster son. And his name is Yamamoto."

So naturally things beginning to click in for that family, (chuckles) Yamamoto family. But that was the end of it. So from what my foster parents was telling me is that, yeah, they were kind of interested about getting me and the daughter to settle down, get married or so eventually in the future. So that was one other one for adopting me.

MK: You're a much-sought-after young man.

WY: I guess so.

(Laughter)

MK: You know I know that you were a part of Rhoads family. What did you call Mr. and Mrs. Rhoads?

WY: Oh, I called them "Mom" and "Dad." Yeah, I was very comfortable. And they accepted me calling that. So anything, oh, I spent a lot of time with the family. So it's just like one big family. They made feel as if I'm part of their family.

MK: And you mentioned earlier that you were working at the Moses Stationery Store in Hilo. What was your job there?

WY: Oh, I was a delivery boy. And then between deliveries, I would help Mr. Carvalho. He was a man taking care of all the school supplies. So anything that needs to be delivered to different schools in Hilo or in the vicinity of Hilo town, then I would help deliver all those merchandise.

MK: And then I'm just going back a little bit.

WY: Yes.

MK: I was wondering, how come you didn't choose to continue school after being with the Rhoads family?

WY: That's a good question. Hard to explain right now but thinking back, I should've. But I didn't want to sort of—it was a little a touchy thing thinking to myself. You know, I don't want to impose on my foster parents, the Rhoads, to send me to school. Probably they would have wanted for me to continue. But when you stop and think about it, you know, that's a lot of responsibility. So I didn't ask to go back to school or anything. But I wanted to, I was old enough to do some work and started to work for Moses Company. So I had a little income coming in to take care of my living expenses and rent the dormitory, so forth.

MK: And also, what was it like living with all these other young men at the Sagawa Dormitory?

WY: Oh, it's nothing, any difficulty, because they were all working people, working young men. And I can recall two young men at that time, Kurata and I know a Shoozo, but two of those boys. But they were working. Kurata was working at [Theo. H.] Davies [and] Company and Shoozo was an accountant also, young men just get starting. But both of them joined the army, 442, when the time came where we were asked to volunteer to form the 442 at that time.

MK: And then before we get into your volunteering, I was wondering when December 7 occurred, what were you doing?

WY: On that day of December 7? The folks were getting ready to go to church. And of course, I don't go to the same church like they do. So I was just, well, I stayed around—this was in the morning—and we had a visitor from the police department, Nishida. And Mr. Nishida was, we used to call him "Dime" because he's up in Laupāhoehoe, the police department over there. So he came down and they talked with Mr. Rhoads that something happened. And that was December 7. They were trying to keep a low profile of that incident taking place. They didn't want the community to get all excited about it. So that was on Sunday.

MK: And what did you feel at that time when you heard about the attack on Pearl Harbor?

WY: I wasn't quite familiar about that kind of situation. That's the first time anybody would get involved. So it's sort of a mixed feeling as to what's going on. December 7 here, Japanese people came to Pearl Harbor to drop the bombs. So I was kind of confused, you know, let's see. But I wasn't old enough to realize how serious that was. So this happened when I was only about what, seventeen,

eighteen years old down at Laupāhoehoe side. So that's it. But when the war came, I guess, as time went by, we took it kind of seriously, realizing. But it wasn't too close to my age. I was getting to be almost nineteen years old.

WN: Were you familiar with Pearl Harbor at that time, you know, where it was?

WY: Yes, I knew where it was. But I didn't think much of it at that time, no. It's kind of difficult thing, you know, living on the Big Island and I'm almost what, going to nineteen years old. And of course, I kept in touch with my former neighbors in Ninole and they were concerned saying, "You being Japanese descendent," you know ethnic, "and you living with the *haole* people." And they were concerned, too, how my feeling at that time. So I had advice or I consulted with them. I wonder how—oh they were concerned about our relationship, the Rhoads and myself. And I guess not only my former neighbors but also other people in the community. And they said, "Chee, I wonder how they felt." You know because I guess some other ethnic groups among the white people, few white people, and I guess like the Filipinos and the Portuguese people. But being country people, they're not so radical, I don't think, compared to the city of Honolulu. The people over here are more so. But they were all understandable, I suppose, yeah, very sympathetic. But I felt kind of, you know, not comfortable being Japanese and then Japanese came over here to drop the bomb. So I don't know, I just took it one step at a time.

WN: Can we stop here? We're going to change tapes now.

WY: Oh, I see. Okay.

END OF SIDE TWO

TAPE NO. 44-5-1-05; SIDE ONE

MK: Okay, we're going to start rolling and this is tape two of session one with Mr. Whitey Shiroku Yamamoto.

And we'll continue now with the World War II period. You were telling us about, you know, the advice you were getting and how you were feeling, yeah . . .

WY: Mm-hmm [yes].

MK: . . . after the war started. You know I was wondering, you got some advice and some discussion from people in Ninole?

WY: Yeah.

MK: And what did Mr. and Mrs. Rhoads talk to you about, if anything?

WY: Well, not very much. They were concerned about me and I suppose they were concerned about themselves, too. So they didn't express very strongly as to what their feelings were. They more or less went along by the minutes and hours or days just like regular parents. And they didn't emphasize about, oh, what you should do or what their feelings were. But I have felt, you know, it's a little bit touchy. Let's put it. . . . I can feel that, you know, they didn't know what to do with me, I suppose. And I don't know what to do with myself, being a young person yet. And of course I don't want to go to war. And nobody wanted to. And I talked to my former neighbors out in Ninole and they felt the same way like the Rhoads folks, too, because of our relationship being I'm Japanese and they were the *haole* people. They were very sympathetic and, of course, they know that if I was in their family, they don't want to see any of us to go to war. Of course, this was when they were called up for the volunteers to join up in the 442.

But from getting all this feedback, then I decided, well, I better join up because my classmates down at Laupāhoehoe School, one, two—about three of 'em joined up. So I felt more at ease because they went in. Well, I have a little encouragement or felt more comfortable that I'd be with the boys, together. So that's why I volunteered also. And it was easy, at that time then, realizing. So the other boys, too, and they felt, "Oh, good. I'm glad at least you're in the service, gonna join up. Oh, we'll join up." So it was gung-ho. And of course (chuckles), I guess we're young and more adventurous type. And no brains but more guts.

(Laughter)

And of course that's what they were looking for I suppose, yeah, because there were about 10,000 of those people out here in the Islands joined up. They don't want to take an old man in the forties. They'd rather have a strong back, young men. So that's how it is, I guess. We were able to get in on the first wave.

MK: I know that last time you were telling us, too, that you were worried about how people would react towards the Rhoads.

WY: Yes.

MK: So part of that motivated you to join up.

WY: Yes.

MK: Can you kind of explain that, you know, what you were worried about for the Rhoads?

WY: Yes. Like I mentioned, some people, other than the Japanese people, they think, "Oh, gosh. If he doesn't join up with the 442, oh gosh, probably he's influenced by them, by the Rhoads family," to get me, what do you call, excused not to join the group. But on the other hand they may think, "Gosh, he's getting away easy if he doesn't join up." But if I do volunteer to join up in the service, then it's a different story, just the opposite. And say, "Gosh, you know that young man willing to join up the service." And then at least that would relax their emotional feeling with my *haole* foster parents, the Rhoads. So I feel better looking at both sides. That's how. And today, of course I'm glad that I joined up. And the Japanese community was very much closely attached to the Rhoads, you know, when they found out I was part of the Rhoads family. And they think, "Gosh." And they would ask them, "How's Whitey doing?" and all that. They were concerned about my welfare, even the Rhoads family, too. And so when the other, I guess, the other people look at it, non-Japanese people look at it, "Gee, after all, you know, he had a Japanese boy and then he volunteered in the service." And they feel very openhearted to them, also. So I think they benefited quite a bit for me to be in the service. So their relationship with the school, the school principal and the student parents are very closely, couldn't get along with it.

(WY clears throat.) I'm sorry my throat is beginning to get. . . . Got to [reach over] to that side. Okay.

MK: And you know I was wondering, how did you folks hear the call for men to volunteer?

WY: Well it came out in the paper, the newspaper, you know, to join up, volunteer.

MK: And you also mentioned that some of the other men in that dormitory also joined up.

WY: Yes. The other two friends of mine, roommates, not roommates but people that lived in the dormitory, volunteered.

MK: And when the call came out for men, was it something that you young men all talked about among each other?

WY: Oh, if you were, yeah, we did. And of course, I talked to my classmates, too, at that time, too.

MK: And what were the concerns that other young men had about this issue?

WY: Well, of course, I suppose it's the same thing, join up. Because, you know, being Japanese ethnic people like us, we said, "Oh, gosh," here, you know, had some really strong feeling that we're caught in between. That gosh, just to show our Americanism, I think to show our patriotic feeling, I think we should do the best we can to convince those ones that's doubtful about it. To prove ourselves that, you know, we're like anybody else. So we signed up and they had the same feeling like I did. Of course, probably mine was a little bit difficult. But it was a right decision that I did and there's no regret today. In fact, I feel very proud of it.

MK: What was the process in those days to sign up? What happened after you made the decision to join up, what do you do?

WY: Oh, we signed up and volunteered. And they registered us, took our names, and sent us to O'ahu at Schofield Barracks to get our military uniforms and for arrangements to ship us out to the Mainland for basic training, military training. Yeah.

MK: Shall we end here at this point?

WY: Yeah.

WN: Well, I had one question, backing up a little. You know when you were adopted by the Rhoads family, how did you adapt to things like food and other things that, you know, difference from being raised from your father and by being raised by the Rhoads family.

WY: Rhoads family.

WN: Was it an adjustment for you?

WY: Oh, yes. In fact, it was, to me, it's more luxury like, yeah. Because white people they have a better living arrangement. And their food is different, of course, but still no problem for me as far as food intake. So I felt very comfortable with them. So I was very fortunate that way. I can have good food. And they were concerned about my welfare, see to it that I could be adjusted to live among a family group because prior to that it was just my dad and I. So it's a different arrangement. And to call somebody "Mom" is really nice. I was very fortunate that way.

WN: What kinds of lessons or values did you learn from the Rhoads family?

WY: Oh more, think for yourself and determine what you want to do. And there's good and bad part of life. So I took, of course, it was no problem. I guess I was brought up like the old days with my dad. So it was easy arrangement. But, yeah, I gained a lot from their taking me in. So learning from my observation what kind of life they had made it easy for me to learn about ways so I could get along with the other people. And other *haole* people associated with my foster parents were very nice to me. So I was very easily adapted that way to learn their ways. So I got to be a better person that way and gained that type of arrangement, type of life, yeah. Otherwise, I would be like a little country boy, yet.

(Laughter)

WN: So how would you compare the way your father raised you to how the Rhoads raised you?

WY: Oh, it's a big difference yes. Because all I knew with my dad was being a young boy or young man. It was just a day-to-day affair, how to survive, working hard up in the field. Of course, I didn't work hard just like my dad, what he went through. He did a lot of work. When I think of what he went through in life, raising me plus his work in order to make income to take care and support both of us. But with the Rhoads family, it's almost the same thing but more in a professional way. Different life, you know, not like the plantation life. So that was it.

MK: You know before your father passed away, I was wondering, what kind of hopes or aspirations or goals did you have in life back then? Ninth, tenth grade, what were you thinking you were going to do when you grew up?

WY: Well, I wasn't thinking that far away. I'm thinking of more going to school, have fun with the neighbor's kids, and all that. So, that's, I guess, a normal process for a young boy or man to experience. We weren't thinking too far ahead then. But get a good education, go to school, get educated. But I was thinking of what probably a plantation life, I suppose. I wasn't thinking that far ahead.

MK: What did your dad think about education?

WY: That was very important, yes. My dad, my original dad, biological father, well, education was very important. Yeah, especially for him, he doesn't know too much about public school. But for Japanese[-language] school, he

wanted for me to learn as much as I can. But I think I disappointed him. (Chuckles) But whatever education that I got from the English[-language] school, public school time, yes, it was worthwhile. Today it's so important. So when the old folks used to tell us, gosh, you know, "Go to school, learn as much as you can because once you learn, nobody can take it away from you." And that's true. And boy, when were young, those things never sink into the mind.

(Laughter)

We want to have play. We want to enjoy life, you know, the easy life, have a good time.

WN: I think it's a universal thing, yeah.

WY: Yes.

WN: That's the way all of us. I was just wondering, you know going from John M. Ross to Laupāhoehoe.

WY: Yes.

WN: Was that a common thing for boys your age to make that adjustment or did some families not send their children to Laupāhoehoe School because it was maybe harder.

WY: Uh, I don't think so. We were all required to go to public school.

MK: And then another question we have is, you know you mentioned that when war came Laupāhoehoe School closed, yeah.

WY: Yes.

MK: How long did it take for the school to reopen?

WY: Oh, after three months, I guess they opened up. I'm not familiar because I didn't go back to school. So I don't know what the transition period looked like at that time.

MK: And then for your adoptive father and mother, about when did they make the move from Laupāhoehoe to elsewhere.

WY: Well, it depended on the department of education I suppose, transferred him from Laupāhoehoe School to Hilo Intermediate and Hilo High School. Then during the war period, I don't know what year it was, I think it was about '44, they transferred him to Leilehua on this island of O'ahu.

MK: And as for yourself, you joined the 442 in what month and year?

WY: Oh, that was in 1943, March.

MK: Then, I think we'll end right here. And then the next time we come, we're going to continue with your time with the 442.

WY: I see.

MK: And your discharge and your use of the GI Bill and your return to the Islands. So we will cover that (WY chuckles) next time. But we thank you for today.

WY: Oh, gosh.

MK: We thank you.

WY: We cannot continue and finish it up and you don't have to come back anymore? And all these lovely ladies.

(Laughter)

END OF INTERVIEW

Tape Nos. 44-6-2-05, 44-7-2-05, and 44-8-2-05

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Shiroku "Whitey" Yamamoto (WY)

Honolulu, O'ahu

March 1, 2005

BY: Warren Nishimoto (WN) and Michi Kodama-Nishimoto (MK)

MK: This is an interview with "Whitey" Shiroku Yamamoto on March 1, 2005 at his home in Honolulu, Hawai'i. The interviewers are Michi Kodama-Nishimoto and Warren Nishimoto and this is session number two.

Okay, Mr. Yamamoto, we'll start the interview and we're going to continue from the time you volunteered in March, 1943.

WY: Yes.

MK: What happened to you when you volunteered on the Big Island?

WY: I guess a lot of things went through my mind. The emotions which I never experienced before—it's kind of very fragile, touchy, sensitive and, of course, at my young age, I'm looking for adventure, also. But daring, being a young person. I think like I mentioned to some of the boys, it's more brains and guts—no brains but have a lot of guts to go into that kind of adventure, I suppose. So, it was not that difficult a decision. But still, I was in a more difficult, compared to other schoolmates of mine, because I was living with the *haole* foster parents since I became an orphan at the age of sixteen. And I left school at tenth grade—after tenth grade—and the war came about. And they asked if any of us would like to volunteer to be in the service. So, we talked among the boys, I talked to the former neighbors that I grew up with, and putting all these things together, I decided to volunteer for the first group of the boys from the Big Island. Yes.

MK: And then after you volunteered as part of that first group from the Big Island, what happened to you?

WY: Well, we were selected, and then I was sent to Schofield Barracks on a ship, on the Inter-Island ship. And then, at

Schofield Barracks, we were assigned to the tent city. That's the backside of Schofield Barracks, and we were furnished with the uniforms, physical exam, and orientation. That was the most things we went through before we were shipped out to the state side. Of course, before we departed the islands, they had a big gathering down at the 'Iolani Palace of all the volunteers, and we had a big gathering by the people in the community. And that was a solemn, very sad and solemn occasion. I guess all the parents must have felt that way, too, to see their boys, or their sons, leave the islands to go into the military service. Then, after the ceremony, we went back to Schofield Barracks and, in a day or two, we were shipped out from the Islands to the Mainland. So we were on a ship, *Lurline*, and took us about three, four days to reach the San Francisco area. But it was cold winter months (chuckles) up in San Francisco. March is still a cold time of the year, yeah.

MK: What were your feelings as you left the Islands?

WY: The feelings were. . . . All, like the rest of us, were sort of-mixture of adventure, what to expect in the future, and yet it's a sad thing that we're leaving all the families behind. And I cannot describe the feeling we went through, this is about (chuckles) sixty, seventy, almost seventy years now, since then. Yes.

MK: And then I know that from that San Francisco area, you folks proceeded by train to Mississippi. How was that trip across America?

WY: Ah, it was sort of---we forgot about everything, we felt more like a tourist, you know, seeing out from the train windows. For the first time, we're discovering how the Mainland U.S.A. looked like. And, of course we talked to the boys, each other carry on, and just look out from the window and see how the country looks like until we reach Camp Shelby, Mississippi.

MK: And then when you reached Camp Shelby, what company, or unit were you assigned to?

WY: For a couple of days, we were sort of at loss, more like, we don't know what's going on because the upper echelons are taking care of all the assignments of the boys. But I was selected to go to the Antitank Company. And here I was thinking, "Antitank Company, what could that be? Are we going to be, what do you call, be with a tank crew to drive a tanks or be assigned in a tank?" I wasn't familiar with that. But as were assigned and formed a group of Antitank boys, then we realized what Antitank was. Actually, we were

assigned with the 37-mm antitank guns, and we were the mobile company. So, you know, we were very fortunate to think that we don't need to do any walking. More only riding around the places, yeah. So I was assigned to be a jeep driver, and the other boys were assigned to motor vehicle area. More like-not depot-but company vehicle area, to look after the vehicles, learn all the fundamentals of the trucks, and learn the mechanics of that vehicle so that in case of malfunction of the vehicles, or accidents, we know how to take care ourselves and the vehicles.

MK: And when you assigned to be a jeep driver with the Antitank Company, how did you feel about that assignment?

WY: Well, I thought, it cannot be any better. I was very happy (laughs). I could think to myself, "I am very fortunate, not walking." And looking at it, I can go places with the officers. So, in my assignment, I was assigned to the headquarters platoon of the Antitank Company. And we had three of us, which is Lieutenant Milner, he's the officer of the reconnaissance squad; and Toru Hirose, he's a Mainland boy, was a sergeant; and I was the PFC [private first class] driver. Very efficient driver (chuckles).

MK: You know, you mentioned your fellow enlisted man, Toru Hirose, from the Mainland. People have told us about local boys and Mainland AJA [Americans of Japanese ancestry]. What's your feeling about that mix between the local guys and the Mainland guys?

WY: I didn't have much of a discrimination between the Mainland boys and myself. I could get along with anybody. And, to me, he was just another person, likeable person he was, and we got along real fine. But the only difference was that, well, they spoke perfect English, (laughs) we were local boys, we talked more in pidgin. But we got used to one another, and they talked pidgin, carry on our way of conversation, and we, likewise, tried to better ourselves by talking better. But we had the advantage. From what I understand throughout the war, is that we communicated with pidgin English when the critical time comes around, so the enemy happen to tap in our line, then they would be confused and they would be at loss as to what we were talking about. But we knew all about it (chuckles). So, I suppose that's how we accomplished our mission, more so.

MK: And you mentioned your officer, Officer Milner.

WY: Yes.

MK: How were your relations with the *haole* officers?

WY: Well, we have to respect being an officer. And they had their position, and we understood that. But we got along real good. And, well, we had fun at times when we were up by ourselves, you know, three of us. So we go some of the places that we're not supposed to be cruising around and have pleasures, but strictly, business comes first. And we had some free time, then we would do some socializing, too. Or go for a cruise, sightseeing. Well, that is part of the training, I suppose.

(Laughter)

WY: Okay.

WN: Sightseeing where?

WY: Oh, the countryside (chuckles). Whenever we're in the cities overseas, to get familiarized with the city, too. But of course, men are men, and we like to see some sceneries, which is a learning process, and enjoy the city of a foreign country, and see the value of it.

MK: So from the time you were at Camp Shelby . . .

WY: Yes.

MK: . . . the three of you worked together throughout the war?

WY: Yes, we were assigned throughout the war. Mm-hmm [yes].

MK: And, in a sense you folks were together a long time. What did you learn about Hirose and Milner?

WY: Well, each one of them talk about their families and part of their lives, too, but not in a broad way. But we were more concerned about what our mission is during the war. But we had our own things to talk about. Yes, thank you.

MK: And then I know that when you folks were stationed at Camp Shelby, you were in the South, in Mississippi. What were your observations about African American and white relationships in that part of the country?

WY: For my part, I didn't have too much of the outside contact with the local people. We were so busy with the training. And the only time we ever been out is during the basic time. We were assigned to take the German prisoners that were captured in North Africa. They were the cream of the German army, I suppose. And to them, the war is over. They were happy. And we were assigned to take these German prisoners over to Georgia and Alabama to harvest the peanuts from the farmers raising peanuts. And that was

quite an adventure because we didn't have to worry too much about being attacked by them. In fact, they were happy that we were able to take them out from the camps and assign them. So nearly about a whole month, we concentrated harvesting peanuts in Alabama and Georgia.

And in the morning, we would take them out from the camps, assigned to the trucks, and we distributed those prisoners in different farmlands. And they would harvest the peanuts for about eight hours a day. I think they got paid twenty cents an hour by the farmers. But the farmers were very happy and they prepared good sandwich lunches for them, and they gave them cigarettes, and they feel so happy. (Chuckles) And after we take them to the individual farmlands, we become the guards, standby guards, to be sure that none of them will escape. And to them, they don't have time to escape because they have a good deal as in the war is over for them.

And when we bring them back at the end of the day, into the camps, they have their own recreation. The prisons get together, and then they form a chorus, and they sing. And we would stand outside the stockade and just listen to them, and we clap our hands for what they sing, and likewise, they feel happy about it. And somehow, there's a warm relationship, and I think that helped a lot for the war cause. So after the war is over, they could go back, and then they think of Americans as very nice, hospitable people, I suppose. We treated them decently.

MK: And were there opportunities for you to talk with these prisoners?

WY: Causally, yes. We would talk. And for that matter (chuckles), the funny part is, they would ask us, "Hey, farmer, you standing up guarding us, he say, let me relieve you."

(Laughter)

And of course we just kind of joke, but they were really nice. And we enjoyed it, and we understood, so we get along good. And when the time to go back to camp at the end of the day, they were ready to go. And so we drove back to the camp. That was the nice part about—during our basic training time.

MK: And then I was wondering, how did these farmers in Georgia and Alabama react to you guys? You know, AJA army men there?

WY: We didn't carry on a conversation too much because we were, you know, supposed to be guarding the German prisoners working out in the peanut field. But they were nice, and they talked to us casually. But a long---not more than ten, fifteen minutes, because they, themselves, were busy with the farms. But they were nice people. In fact, I think the farmers are all nice. Country people.

WN: So kind of a situation of distrust or suspicion, you know, these are prisoners of war. How heavily guarded were they?

WY: It's just like if you were out in a field. It's not that heavily guarded, just--because in the group that's doing the harvesting, probably there's about half a dozen of them doing the harvesting, so it's very simple. And of course, there's no such thing because they don't have any weapons, they're stripped of weapons. And we are the only ones with the rifles. But in the rifle, we don't have any bullets in the rifle (laughs). They wouldn't know the difference. But just---but still, we get along real good.

MK: Why is it that you folks have no bullets in the rifles?
(Chuckles)

WY: Well, probably we might---one of us might have misjudged and use it for special other purposes, we don't know. But we weren't--we didn't have any bullets in the rifles. But in case of emergency, we have the bullets on our waistline. Had the cartridge with bullets so we can load up the rifle with the bullets if we want to. But that wasn't necessary.

MK: And I know that your guarding these German prisoners of war was part of your training. Tell me basically, what was training like at Camp Shelby for you folks?

WY: Well, at that time, it was. . . . Since we were in the camps by the end of March, in April, started the basic training and all that, it was getting to be during the summer months. Hot summer months. So it was getting kind of uncomfortable. During the period of the height of the summer, ho, was hot and sweaty. A lot of chiggers, and a lot of perspiration, yeah. But, in my situation, and the other boys, drivers and mechanics, we were more comfortable. We had at least shady areas in the garage or so that we can relax and talk stories, and then talk about vehicles, mechanics of the vehicles, what to do in case of this and that. So we were not loafing or anything, or go to sleep. Probably we might take a short nap, that's all. But we're under the control of the pool's sergeants, motor pool's sergeants, and the lieutenants, you know, officers. So we were constantly working on the vehicles. Either

polishing or other things that need to be taking care of, yeah.

MK: And how were living conditions like for you folks at Camp Shelby?

WY: Oh, was good, just like any other military people. Then winter months are different. It gets cold and we always have to take care of our own barracks. We had about ten, twelve men per barracks. So we had a potbelly stove to keep us warm. And the barracks were made of wood and tar paper on the outside. Big wooden windows that flaps out. You have all that clothes during the winter months, and we had two potbelly coal stoves. So each hut members take a turn to go out and get the coal from the coal bin, bring it into the hut, and then we have our assignment. Each one of us has an assignment to keep the potbelly stove going all the time so that we have enough heat to keep us warm. But mostly, we were in the bed covered up when we go to sleep. It's too cold (chuckles), yeah. But it's okay.

MK: And how about the food?

WY: Food is wonderful. Just GI food, but it's good food. Plenty to eat. (Chuckles) Thank you.

MK: So it wasn't that much of an adjustment for you, coming from the islands then?

WY: Ah, not that much. Except we kind of miss the rice pot yeah?

(Laughter)

So the mess sergeants made sure that we had enough rice, from what I was told by the mess sergeants. Because in my platoon, in the headquarters platoon, the mess sergeant is doing all the cooking with two helpers. All the boys are taking turns being a KP [kitchen police]. And they'd make sure that when they go down to the quartermaster corps to pick up the food supplies, they try to get as much rice so we make an exchange with the white boys. If they want our potatoes, and we want their rice, and which they don't need, right? So we make an exchange, from what I was told by the mess sergeant. So it came out okay.

WN: Was the mess sergeant a local guy?

WY: Yes---well, at the beginning part at training in the camps, we had the Mainland boy. But during the war, we had Goro Inaba from Kona, was our mess sergeant. So they improvise,

like what we normally eat here in the islands, so that's. . . .

WN: I noticed, because on the Mainland, they cook rice differently. I was just wondering, when you got the rice, did they cook it the local style, you know, the steamed . . .

WY: Yes, the steamed, soft rice. Yeah, they cook it that way. I don't know how the Mainland people. . . . They do the same thing, too.

WN: I thought they boiled it? So it comes out more-less sticky.

WY: Oh, just like what we used to do, I suppose (laughs). But yeah eventually. . . . But no complaints about the way how the mess sergeant prepares the rice.

MK: And, you mentioned that the mess sergeants would kind of improvise . . .

WY: Yes.

MK: . . . local style. What did they cook for you folks?

WY: Oh gosh. . . . Well, let's see, they have chicken, probably they might add a lot of vegetables, more like chicken *hekka* for Hawai'i people. Well, Mainland people and Hawai'i people, no complaint about it because they have-like, we had a guy, part Mexican guy, Joe Cause, he was mess sergeant, too, regular cook. And we had another fella, Japanese guy. So three of them were more of the assigned cooks. And the rest of us that's assigned to do the KP duty, which is dishwashing, preparing the vegetables, or meat. So, well, we had a mixture of the Mainland style, but I'm not familiar with the Mainland style, but. . . .

MK: And then, I was wondering, when you folks weren't drilling or training, what did you folks do in your free time at Shelby?

WY: Well, the boys, at the end of the day, they go to the PX [post exchange], they would buy drinks. At the PX they have a place where they can consume whatever other soft drinks, and the *pūpūs* that they sell. And they enjoying themselves. Some of the boys play music with the guitars or 'ukuleles that they brought along. A lot of card playing, gambling going on. But myself, we stayed mostly in the hut house or we socialized with the other boys in the other barracks. So we have a social get-together. But I don't drink so I'm not up at the PX, drinking.

MK: How about smoking?

WY: No, I don't smoke so. . . . Well, if I do get---during the year, assignment overseas, I used to give my cigarettes to the other boys that needed. So I don't smoke at all. So I just give it away. So I don't touch any hard liquor and all that.

WN: Were you sort of different, I mean, did most people smoke and drink? Most of the GI's?

WY: Not necessarily. But very few non-smokers. But most of them would get involved in smoking. I suppose, to them, that's how they keep themselves occupied until, you know. . . . Well, boys love to drink, they're happy when they have enough liquor and they smoke, likewise, they enjoy, they're satisfied that way. Well I was satisfied not drinking or not smoking. I'm a good boy.

(Laughter)

Save money, too.

MK: By the way, what was the pay like back then?

WY: Gosh, I think we started off with about twenty-one dollars a month. Yeah, mm-hmm [yes].

MK: What did you do with your money?

WY: Oh gosh, what did I do? (Chuckles) I'm not familiar with what I done with it. I don't recollect. Probably we saved and-I'm not too sure-or send it back home. I'm not. . . . But usually, we saved to spend the money in case we go on a pass into town. Spend the money to buy camera films or other things, souvenirs, going to restaurants. So that's about all, it's pretty well spent. Doesn't go too far on twenty-one dollars. Of course, we had overseas compensation, though.

MK: And I know that one time when I spoke with you, you mentioned that while at Camp Shelby, you had this one opportunity to visit an internment camp. You went to Rohwer, Arkansas.

WY: Oh, yes, yeah. Okay.

MK: Tell us about that.

WY: Well, I found out one of my neighbors, Sadami Yada, and her brother, Sam Yada, and his family, were in camps at Rohwer Relocation Camps. So we went to visit at Rohwer Relocation

Camps with four of us, and talk with them, entering the camps. But it's an experience itself, too, to see the relocation camps. It's a huge camp, it's all built, more like an army barracks, wooden barracks, with tar paper on the side. And they had this stockade fence, high fence, around the camp (clears throat), excuse me. And every here and then, along the camp, you have the high towers where the white boys, the GI's, being a guard and looking down in the camps to see that everything is normal. So it was a kind of experience that, here, we were in the uniform going to the camps to visit friends and relatives and the boys were up there on high towers. I was thinking, "Chee, I wonder what (chuckles), what their feelings, I would like to know about their feelings." But I wouldn't think nothing much about it because we were just visiting our friends.

And that was quite a sobering thing because they were in the camps. And from what I understand, they had about three, four families in one barracks, and divided by just a plain sheet of cloth between them. So they can hear all the conversation going on between the families. I haven't been into the barracks, but from what they told us. So we socialized with the people outside the camps. Some of them who had relatives in the camps, of course, they were in the barracks with them. So we spent one day over there, and we left the Camp Shelby in the morning, took the bus, and then came back that evening, back to the army camp. So that was not too far from Camp Shelby, Mississippi. Just across the border.

MK: At that time, what were your thoughts about, you know, your friend's family being in the camp?

WY: It's kind of a mixture of feeling, to think that here, all our friends and relatives are in the camps, and they don't have the freedom that normally you can just go out and visit anybody outside. Well, to begin with, they hardly know anybody outside anyway. It's a strange area because they're so isolated out in the open country. So they were more comfortable in the camp, as opposed among themselves. But socializing with the outside people, I have no idea. But I can just think for myself, it's an awkward feeling to be confined in a camp for days and months or probably years, being isolated.

And our thoughts was more like, when I think about it back then, it's just like the Jews in Europe, they were in that concentration camp. Of course, our relocation camps were not that severe. From what I've seen over in Dachau, about thirty-five miles northeast of Munich—I've been there two times—at Dachau, which the 522nd Field Artillery boys came across that when they were pushing real rapidly into

Germany. I felt differently about our camps in the Mainland. Of course, the ones in Dachau, they had incinerators where all that Jewish people were exterminated in a big chamber. After they remove all their clothes, they were marched into the chambers, and then they were gassed, and they were exterminated. Then they put them in a big incinerator and then cremate those bodies, yeah. And then I don't know what they did with the bodies. But at least our relocation camps, they have a social get-together, and they go to school, they have recreations, and all that. And of course, my neighbor from the Big Island, Sadami Yada, was working in the dispensary, medical dispensary. And from what I understand, they got only eighteen dollars a month for that. So at least she was occupied in the camp.

MK: And I was just curious, was it during the wartime that you visited Dachau or . . .

WY: No, after the war. Way after the war when we visit Europe. Every year, we used to take a trip to Europe and that is one place that I thought I would like to see for myself and make comparison about our relocation camp and the Dachau concentration camp that was for the Jews. And that was a really sobering experience that we seen. I would never want to see that again to anybody—put in the camps and be exterminated. It was really sobering.

MK: I'm just curious, too, about your opinion on whether you thought the incarceration of Japanese Americans in these camps. . . . Okay, not okay? What did you feel about it? About their being placed in camps?

WY: Yeah, I felt very sorry for them, you know, because our own government picked those people up on the West Coast and elsewhere with not much of a day's—within twenty-four hours or forty-eight hours, that they have to leave their farm, their stores, their own business, and take whatever they can. And they had no time to make arrangements to have somebody to look after their property. If they have some good neighbors, white people, and there were a few white people that really went out to help those Japanese Americans. And it was pitiful that they lost everything. Of course, later on, they were compensated a small token of \$20,000 per person, which [Ronald] Reagan's time, I suppose, that they compensated for them. But that is not enough, because some of the people invested so much money on their farms and business, and they lost everything. It was a sad thing. And, of course, that is something that will hopefully that it never happens again to anybody in our county. So, in a way, I think we sacrificed that way by our families remaining back on the Mainland, while we sacrifice ourselves, our portion of it, overseas.

MK: And as you say that, when you folks were still training at Camp Shelby, the 100th Battalion had already gone overseas, yeah?

WY: Yes.

MK: And by that time, what had you heard about the 100th and their battles in Europe, or their . . .

WY: Yes. When we arrived in Camp Shelby, the 100th were transferred from Camp McCoy down to Camp Shelby and they were going through light maneuvers. And during the summer months, they were on the major maneuvers with other outfits, preparing to go overseas. So, when they left for overseas, it was kind of a sad feeling, that here, the boys are going overseas, and one of these days, we'll be in that same position. So it was a mixed feeling. We thought and talked over very soberly that the day will come, and we have to be very well prepared and got good training. So, when they started off in Salerno, then we kept a close watch as to the casualty list, who that we might know. In fact, for that matter, as the 100th boys started to advance up north of Salerno, going through the battle, and our 442nd boys were called to be a replacement. And in my company, we had an officer by the name of Bun Takagi. He was part Irish, part Japanese. His mother was Irish and the father is Japanese, and he's from Attica, New York. And he was one of the replacement officers, and he went overseas to be with the 100th. But within three months, he was killed by the snipers, the German snipers got him. So that was a sad thing for us, at that time. So when you come across somebody that you know very intimately, like Bun Takagi, it's, you know, a really sobering experience that we went through, before we were shipped out. And the boys---we heard other boys that went overseas as the 100th Infantry replacement. Another person that was assigned to us before we went overseas was Lieutenant---oh gosh. But anyway---oh gosh, I can't think of it now (chuckles).

MK: This lieutenant?

WY: Yeah, but he got killed toward the end of the war, and that was another thing that was really, you know, hit us, too. Of course, our own boys, the 4th Platoon boys, got killed, too, overseas. But something like this, when we went through that basic training and maneuvers, it's just like one big family that kind of gets you. And I can---because like Bun Takagi, he's a big part Irish Japanese and he was executive officer. And Captain Damon was our company commander. And both of them were football players, and Damon from Texas, he's a football player. And boy, those two guys, (chuckles) they would come into the bathroom

house where we taking a shower and both of them would wet their towels, wrap around like this, and they would go after each other (chuckles), and we had to get away from them, oh god. Yeah, well, officers, but their . . . Yes?

WN: How did you hear about casualties or, you know, the progress of the 100th while you were at Shelby? Was it like official notification, or was it more like talking amongst yourselves?

WY: Yeah, we hear, because I guess the headquarters in the regiment would get all the casualty list. And down through the---by word of mouth, it comes down to us, so we got the news that way. At least that way, they may have published the casualty list in the headquarters of the regiment, but I guess by word of mouth, we heard that. So when we got through with our training in Mississippi, maneuvers and all that, then we were assigned to go overseas. So, that's that. So after the training at Camp Shelby, we were shipped out to go overseas from Camp-over in Virginia-Camp Patrick Henry or whatever, yeah, that's where we were shipped out.

MK: And when you folks were shipped out, I heard it was like almost a month trip, zigzagging the Atlantic . . .

WY: Yes, that was a long trip. Took us twenty-eight days to cross the Atlantic. And we had a convoy ship of, I'd say, oh gosh, almost, in my estimation, I would think almost a hundred ships on this big convoy and we were second from the outside on the Liberty Ship. Two companies of us on that ship. And we had great big huge, a metal net, hanging from the derricks on the ship, from the front to the back, lowered down so that in case of the enemy German submarines come and shoot the torpedoes, those nets will catch the torpedoes and we won't be destroyed. But the convoy, the inner part-we can see with the binoculars-they have passenger ships all loaded with soldiers, and a big mass of them are on that ship. And I understand they had some women service personnel on that ships, too. But when you look at the convoy, for miles, there's big mass of us crossing, zigzag crossing the Atlantic. That's why took us twenty-eight days.

So when we came to Rock of Gibraltar at the entrance to the Mediterranean Sea, it took us long days for each ship to go into Mediterranean. And our group, of course, went to Naples, by way of Salerno, not Salerno, but Corsica, down that way. And between Corsica, Island of Corsica, and the foot of Italy, the country of Italy has more like a boot, so cross between the Straits of [Bonafacio]-I don't remember. And we can see all these people from the island of Corsica and the foot of Italy, they come out with the

rowboats, and they know that so many ally ships passing through the straits, and here we throw the cigarettes and they would throw oranges to us.

(Laughter)

So they getting the cigarettes, and cigarettes must be hard to get for those people. And the sailors was telling us, "Hey, save your cigarette, don't throw cigarettes, or any other thing, you know. Save it for yourself." And we had chocolates, too, we toss the chocolate, they would throw oranges on our ship.

(Laughter)

So, that's it. And then we ended in Naples.

MK: And then for yourself, how was that almost one month trip aboard a ship?

WY: It's kind of monotonous. Every day you would go up on the deck and just talk stories. Boys that gamble, well, they had the fun gambling. A lot of gambling going on, (chuckles) throw dice, card playing, and all that. So, the trip wasn't so bad compared to coming back. Coming back from Europe after the war, that was a different kind of trip because the winter months in December was so rough. And on our ship—chee, what was the name of the ship, I kind of forgot already. But we had some women service personnel coming back on our passenger ship. But they were in the cabins and we were down in the hold. I was assigned to the bottom in the hold where they had canvas bags. So that was that. But it was rough. And if you go up on the deck, you see the wave above your ship, and the next moment you see the wave below your ship. Was that big (chuckles).

MK: But in comparison, the trip over was smoother?

WY: Very calm, smoother, very calm.

(Discussion about changing tape.)

MK: So we'll stop here and change tape, and we're going to continue.

END OF SIDE ONE

TAPE NO. 44-7-2-05; SIDE ONE

MK: Okay, this is the second tape of the second session.

And before we continue, we had another question about when you were guarding those German prisoners of war in the South.

WY: Yeah, in Alabama.

MK: How did you folks communicate?

WY: We communicate like you and I. They can speak English, not perfect like we are. But from what they---they converse intelligently. They knew the English language easy because I think the Europeans are well-educated people. And these Germans, they're very intelligent people. So we can communicate easily, we understand each other nice. And we have our fun, we joke with one another. So made our day, every day, we looked forward to go out in the farm and then work, we do the guarding, guarding of the prisoners. And then they working. And it's not mandatory for the Germans to continuously work. They would get tired of it, stand up and relax, and during that period of time, they would talk to us and we talked to them. But then we keep our distance. Once in a while, (bell sound) we get close to each other, too. Okay, yes.

MK: Since we're talking about communicating, before we continue with your story, I'm going to back up a little bit and, you know, I was wondering, when you were at Camp Shelby, how much communication did you get from home, from the Islands?

WY: Oh, we had regular mail coming to us. So our friends and folks used to send the mail to us and we'd write back.

MK: And in those days, what were your adopted mother and father writing to you about?

WY: Just regular correspondence. About what they doing, and if they met up with some of their friends, they would mention about that, too. So it's just like ordinary family members, keep us informed. And I tell them what I'm doing, about my experience, and let them know everything is okay. So they were concerned about me, and they wrote letters all the time.

MK: Now we'll proceed . . .

WN: One more question. When you talked to the German prisoners, did they ever ask you, who are you, what your nationality is, or anything like that?

WY: Oh, yes. Well, that's true, I never thought about that. They know---they find out that we were Japanese Americans and (chuckles) there was a kind of humorous event, too,

that takes place. We said, "Chee, how come that you're German, and we're Japanese descendents, and we supposed to be allies" (chuckles) "but here we are, you're Germans, and we're Americans, even though we're Japanese Americans." But that's a light moment of humor that we enjoyed talking to them. But they understood, because they're, like I said, the Germans are well educated and they understand that America is made up of all different ethnic groups, and they know that they have German Americans, or any other ethnic group here in America. So they understand our position. So we kind of joke and say, "Hey, we supposed to be allies, and here we guarding you, and you working hard."

WN: Seems like the Germans understood it better than the Americans.

WY: I think so. Americans, that's us. Ah, we had our light moments, so like I mentioned to you, they were happy to be American prisoners of war because they were well treated by us.

MK: Now we'll proceed.

WY: Yes.

MK: So you folks landed in Naples, and then, maybe about a month later or so, the 442nd was attached to the 5th Army, 34th Red Bull Division, and then the 100th Battalion became part of the 442nd. How was it when the 442nd and 100th men were together again?

WY: Well, chee, for my feeling and information, it was more like two brothers get together. But we think of 100th as the older brother, and we're the younger brothers to them. Because they were formerly national guard boys and they went through training before we did. And, of course, not only training, but they're already regular soldiers with the national guard here in Hawai'i. The 25th Division, 298th, and 299th. So we considered them—and in fact, when we were in Camp Shelby, they were telling us about their training in Camp Savage. So they act more like a big brother advising us what to do, what not to do, and then tell us—how should I say—"Do your duty, take it very seriously. Get your good training so you won't get into a foolish situation." So we learned the basic training real well, so is the maneuvering. So they acted like our big brothers.

So going back to Italy to join up with the 100th Infantry, after we landed in Naples, we got all our equipments, and clothing, then we got on the LST [landing ship] and we sailed up to Civitavecchia, that's above Rome, and we landed over there, and then caught up with the 100th. We

formed a complete unit, 100th and the 442nd merged together. From then, we continue with the war going on in that part of the country.

My first experience, after we landed in Civitavecchia, going up to where the 100th were located, we were assigned on the trucks, and here I've seen, my first experience about the war, is that I saw a dead German soldier on the roadside laying down, minus his shoes, and with his leg all swollen up, because this is during the summer already. And, gosh, that kind of hit you in a realistic way, hey, chee, boy, are we going to be facing with this kind of situation fighting the war? And that kind of sobered everybody up, who saw that body. But we just continue on, going to join up with the 100th. So when we came to the area where the 100th were assigned, we joined up with them.

Another incident, the funny part, is that once we settled down, and our first sergeant—we were getting organized and getting settled down—our first sergeant took a shovel and then went into the bushes area to relieve himself. And before you know it, he was coming back with a German prisoner.

(Laughter)

So we were all surprised. Here we were thinking, oh gosh, what's going on, and we didn't realize how close we were in the front. But I guess this young German soldier realized he's going to be overrun by the Allies, so he was isolated, I suppose, and he was hiding, not to be caught by the Allies, the Americans. But the first sergeant went into the bushes (chuckles), didn't realize it, I don't know what happened between them two, but here he comes out with a German prisoner (laughs), and all he had was a shovel.

(Laughter)

Must have had a roll of toilet paper, you know, toilet tissue.

(Laughter)

Oh, that incident. But it was sort of comical, when you stop and think back again. (Laughs) Oh, boy. But I guess he was taken back somewhere—the German prisoner—he was taken back to the rear echelon, I suppose. But that was kind of a sobering incident to start the war on the front line. Here I saw a dead German prisoner that sobered you up, and here, (chuckles) the first sergeant comes back with a German prisoner, young boy. And he was kind of, the German prisoner, he was kind of concerned about himself, I

suppose, to be captured by us. And I guess after he made the little adjustment for himself what he was facing, and I guess he felt more relaxed, I suppose, yeah. But (chuckles) that could happen within a couple of days, within a day or so.

MK: And, as you mentioned, you folks caught up with the 100th at Civitavecchia, and you folks started moving more northward, yeah?

WY: Yes.

MK: And as you proceeded north of Italy, again, what was your work? What was your . . .

WY: Now the actual, the work assigned us, fighting men. My position was to---being a jeep driver. The officer know what he's supposed to be doing, looking for gun emplacement of the platoon with the antitank gun. This time, we. . . . At Camp Shelby, we had the

37-mm antitank gun, but when we went overseas, we were assigned with the 57-[mm] antitank gun. That's a little bit bigger and was pulled with the weapon carrier vehicle. So it's a little heavier gun. And my position with the lieutenant and Toru Hirose, the sergeant, was to drive around, and locate where the regiment is and where the 1st Battalion, 2nd Battalion is located. To help set up the antitank gun so that the Germans won't infiltrate from either the left side or the right side of the flanks. So, and then we assigned the platoons to set up their guns, in that position, until we were asked to move out again, advance. As the regiment advanced, then we have to do the same thing, to find a new location. So it's a constant reconnaissance job for us to find a new position. And the terrain might be different, so it's not always on the flat ground. Some on the hillside, and all that.

MK: And as you went out to reconnaissance, to what extent were you placing yourself in a dangerous situation?

WY: Well, once we selected the position for the platoon, then the lieutenant would tell that platoon, and that officer for the platoon, the lieutenant, "This is where your position is to set up your gun," and it's up to the platoon leader, the lieutenant, to do the job for themselves. And then we go to the second platoon position, then the third platoon. And the fourth platoon is the mining, mine and heavy weapons platoon. So they would be assigned to other positions, that way. So it's always a constant reconnaissance that we do.

MK: And then as you folks are traveling into these areas, to what extent did you depend on the engineers? Were they going ahead of you, or making . . .

WY: Oh, well, the army engineers, we had the 232nd [Combat] Engineer Company, they had their jobs where, depending if there's no roads on the front line and the vehicles have to approach the company, go to the company, well, they would establish a makeshift roadway, or trail, so the jeep or trucks can approach to their own company. So that was their job. So we go accordingly, yeah? So they would let us know where the roads are made so the vehicles can go use that road, it's a rough road.

MK: And, I think you also told me that, in addition to doing that kind of work, you also had to deliver mail and hot meals sometimes in your jeep?

WY: Yes, because the boys, when they out in the field, or in the position in the front line, they have C ration or K ration, but hot meals is very—we try to accommodate for the boys to have hot meals as much as possible. So, I was part of that transporting hot meals to the boys, to different platoons. And then do it during daylight hours if it's safe enough to deliver those hot meals. Otherwise, sometimes in a forest like that, at night, when we can make the trip, we would do it at night. But at night it's more difficult to deliver the hot meal because you don't know how the roads are, and hopefully we can find the road to get up to them. So we dropped them off, and then they would come in with a basket and collect all the food. Once that container is all taken out already, all the food is distributed among the boys, then we could come back and then we had the KP [kitchen patrol], our boys, we did that, we helped them out to clean the utensils and everything.

WN: How many people would go on these trips to deliver foods?

WY: Oh, depending on if the cooks want to go on that trip, they would go, but very seldom. We would---I would do that job, or another jeep driver in a company. The captain has another jeep driver because the captain of the company have to go here and there, too. So when he's available, he and I would deliver those meals to the boys.

WN: What was considered the more dangerous time: nighttime or daytime?

WY: I would say nighttime because you have to be very careful as to where you driving into. But if it's daylight, it makes it easier. But at night it's difficult. But daylight, the enemies can spot you, watching your movement. So we

have to be careful, try to conceal ourselves as much as possible.

WN: But at night, did you put on headlights?

WY: That is no-no. You giving your position.

WN: Yeah, that's what I was thinking.

(Laughter)

WY: So we have a small light on the headlight, but even at that, that won't help anyway, to find your way to get to the boys, yeah. So we don't use it. And usually when we go, we'd drop our windshield down and put the canvas over it. And, well, if you have your windshield down, you don't want any reflection on the windshield to give away your position, so you drop it down and camouflage as much as possible.

Oh, another thing about our jeeps, when we got down in Naples, where we got our jeeps, we had the welders at the depot put up angled iron on the front bumper. One straight up and down and two support beams to retain its upright, vertical position, so that it's above the windshield. And this angled iron has a slot that it can cut up, because the Germans are not dumb, they're smart. They may string a piano wire across a trail, or street, or road, and then if you driving, it may, if you get involved, they cut your throat, and your head might fall in the back, and you're gone. So these poles that was welded on to the front bumper—when we come across a German piano wire or so—that will cut the German piano wire, so that would save us from getting decapitated. I forgot to mention that. So that was one of them. So you hear, you see all the jeeps are going around with that poles in the front of your vehicle.

WN: I was wondering, too, how fast did those jeeps go?

WY: Oh, on a normal road, they go pretty fast, like any other cars. Can go thirty-five, forty miles, fifty miles an hour. But that's way---you were in the back already, where you safe. But on the front line, no, it's a different story. You have to be very careful.

MK: You know, other than that piece of iron, what other protective gear did you folks have in the jeep? Either carried on yourselves or in the jeep?

WY: Oh, we always had the M1 rifle with us. We had our holsters for that. And then we carry our bags in the back of the vehicle, too. Just a small knapsack. But all our main

personal possessions were always on the rear. So as we advanced, the boys would load up the duffle bags and everything and move forward. But once we were engaged in the front line—we engaged for about two weeks or so—then we would pull back for a week to get a hot shower, change of clothing, hot meals, and write letters. Or some of the boys would go on a path to visit in the cities or down in the village.

MK: And, you know, like when you folks were moving north along the Italian coast, you know, you going up Leghorn, Arno River, Florence . . .

WY: Yes.

MK: Like, you mentioned that sometimes you folks, at that time, would you folks have passes to . . .

WY: Oh, yes, depending. If we come to a position where there's no advancement of the troops, kind of stalled because you have a strong resistance by the enemy, then we're in the sitting position and we're not asked to advance. Then, if it's about two weeks or so, probably some of the boys may have a pass to go to a small village like that. But, you have to be back at a certain time. Probably one or two days.

MK: And then in those days, when you were going up northern—moving northward through Italy—what did you think of the conditions?

WY: Well, toward the end of the war. . . . Well, let's see, our company, we didn't spend too much time—I'm putting two and two together between France and Italy—I think our company, we spent more time over in France. The rest of the 442nd spent more time fighting in Italy. And when they came to France, we fought up in the Bruyeres, that's southeast of France, close to Germany. I'd say only a couple of months up there in Bruyeres and Biffontaine, then we pulled back down to southern France because we were so heavily devastated, and we were low on manpower. So to get the replacements from the Mainland, it took us about a couple of months. So we were down back to France, southern France, defending the Italian-French border. And once we built up the strength, then General Mark Clark called us back to Italy. So then we went back to Italy. So the reason why I said our company, we spent more time over in France, because we made. . . . The 442nd Antitank Company was detached from the 442nd after about two months of the battle, at the beginning. And we were pulled back down to Rome to go through the glider training for the southern French invasion which we took part, August 15. And we flew

into southern France, landed in Le Muy, and then we were attached to the 517th Paratroopers Airborne Group [517th Parachute Infantry Regiment].

MK: And you talked about being deployed as the glider unit, yeah?

WY: Yes.

MK: What did that involve? See, I don't know what a glider unit is.

WY: Yes, well, glider is just a one-time mission. It's made up, from my observation of the equipment, it's just like a motorless aircraft. It's made of canvas, aluminum tubing, and light wood materials. So when that one mission is done, that glider is useless. Of course, it's all damaged already. And, from what I was told, one glider at that time cost \$18,000 a piece (chuckles). And for that one mission. So . . .

MK: How was the glider directed in flight and how was it propelled? How did it work?

WY: Oh, okay. So we had the two or three weeks training down at the outskirts of Rome in the field. So we learned how to load the glider. The glider is just like a regular—almost like a small plane, but it's big and bulky, square-shaped, motorless aircraft. The front portion, where you load—the cabin portion, where the glider pilot and co-pilot—that portion, the cabin of that, comes up and you can load your 57-[mm] British antitank gun on that, or a trailer full of ammunition, or you can load up a jeep, which is my case was jeep, and then a trailer with the supplies, you know. So each glider carries only one wagon with ammunition, a jeep, or that British pounder.

So we had forty-four gliders crossing over for that southern France invasion. And we had DC-3 aircraft, or the Douglas DC-3 aircraft, or I may call it C-47—and that aircraft will pull two gliders. And the linkage between the aircraft, C-47, is hooked on to the tail end of that ship. And our glider is attached to the cabin overhead—what you call that?—catch. So the C-47 will pull the two gliders across the ocean to Le Muy where we were released. And to release the glider from the C-47, the pilot or the co-pilot would reach overhead and would pull that lever, and that releases the cable. Of course, the cable is not cable, it's nylon rope. It's just about this round. Nylon rope is very strong. And it stretches. So when the plane takes off, it stretches, and when it comes to the end of the stretch, then it pulls up in the air. And when we cross over to

southern France, Le Muy, that's close by Marseilles, then the pilot or the co-pilot releases that catch and the C-47 aircraft will be gone, and we have to come down on the ground on our own. So whoever comes down first, he gets the chance to land wherever he wants to land, and the rest of them, I guess, no choice, (chuckles) you have to go in, because aircraft not going to be up there, it's going to be coming down, right?

And the Germans were smart, too, they had about ten-foot pole, or about fifteen-foot pole, with cables holding up the poles. And they knew just about where we were going to land, and they must have studied, that's what's going to happen. But, I guess—you see, Normandy had taken place about, what, month and a half or two months ago prior to our mission, so we came on the southern side of France about a month and a half or two later, to make that mission. But at the same time, as we looked down from the glider, we can see all the ships ready to come in for the land invasion. So after we landed and held our position, and then they would come in, they would invade southern France, and once they established themselves on the position, then we started to move toward Italy. And we were on southern France, going through all the different cities and towns, like Cannes; Nice; Monte Carlo, the gambling famous Monte Carlo; and then on to the French-Italian border, and we stopped. And that's how our mission was. And then the 7th Army came in and they headed up north and east, and eventually met up with the Normandy group.

While we were in southern France after we stopped, then the 442nd, they were assigned and detached from the 5th Army, and then they came to Marseilles and went up north to Bruyeres and they started to have their campaign to liberate the town of Bruyeres. Meantime, the Antitank was down, we were attached to the 517th Paratroopers. So once that was accomplished, they released us, then we joined up with the 442nd up in Bruyeres. But by the time when we joined them, Bruyeres were already liberated and they were involved in the Lost Battalion, a rescue mission. Of course, Biffontaine was already liberated, and that Texas battalion was lost. The Germans had surrounded them.

So after, from what we were told, the 442nd was pulled back after the battle, and we were supposed to have one recuperation before we were assigned back to the front. But after two days, they assigned the 442nd to go on that mission to rescue the Lost Battalion. After General [John] Dahlquist put two of their battalions simultaneously, but they couldn't reach the Lost Battalion. So they assign us. And of course we were, of course, low on casualties, too. We didn't have the full power of the whole full regiment,

but we were told to rescue them, regardless what it is, at all costs. So that's what our mission was. So we joined up with the 442nd when they started to go on that mission to rescue the Lost Battalion. So we were assigned—and that company was a full company—so we had all the manpower for one company, while the other rifle company, going through the campaign of Bruyeres and Biffontaine, they had about two hundred casualties. The manpower was down, so Antitank had all the manpower so we were assigned to take part in that Lost Battalion campaign.

WN: Did you ever know why you, the Antitank Company, was assigned to the glider unit? Did they give you any reasons?

WY: Yeah, because we were the Antitank. Paratroopers would go down, they don't have heavy equipment, they have strictly rifles, paratroopers. So they would go down and establish, so that we could come in, because we were heavy equipment, like the 57-mm British antitank guns. So we would be able to take care of any advance of the German tanks that come toward us. So we were sent over for that particular mission, is to have that antitank guns available, in case the enemy sends in the tanks, and we would be able to be in position to repel the tanks' advances.

WN: And how did you feel about leaving the larger group?

WY: Oh, in Italy?

WN: Yeah.

WY: I didn't feel anything too much. More of a relief that we're going to go into another different kind of mission. So, we didn't know what we were going to get involved in when they pulled us out of the 442nd. And when we got down to Rome, then they told us what we were going to get involved. So that's what it was, glider training, and then we take part in the southern France invasion. So only two months after we started to get into the campaign with the 100th, they pulled us out. So that was sort of a secret mission. Because we didn't know what we were going to be doing. We were taken out, hey, we have to go down toward Rome. And then when we got down to Rome, then they told us what we were going to get involved in.

MK: I have a question about Rome.

WY: Yeah?

MK: When your jeep was placed into a glider, and put into the air, and it was time to land, how did you feel?

(Laughter)

WY: Well, like the rest of the group in the company, they felt the same way too, yeah. 'Cause I hope—looking down—I hope we'll be in a safe position, that we won't get killed or anything like that (chuckles). But it's kind of . . .

WN: Were you worried that it was going to crash? No motor, right?

WY: Yeah, no motor, (chuckles) and then hopefully, the pilot will be able to find a little space that can be safe enough to land safely. But all of us, we got involved, all of—some of the guys are not that bad, but others landed on the tree, and couple of them got killed, especially the glider pilot. Yeah, because one of them, well, they couldn't just push forward, it wasn't fully secured. So coming down, naturally, sloping down, I guess he's trying to avoid the enemy, probably have the opportunity to shoot us down, right? Because we're all coming in. So they landed on the tree and then I guess the pilots were crushed from the equipment that was on the backside. So that's what happened. And a couple of boys became casualties, too.

So once we landed, then able to try and get that front cabinet up so that we can unload the equipment, so we were fortunate that way. So the jeeps had quite a bit of work to do, and so is the. . . . Because when we went across, we left all our heavy equipment, like the weapon carrier vehicles, in Italy, and we have only nothing but jeeps and the wagon trailer with the ammunitions and all that. So it was strictly wagon, the 57-[mm] gun, and the jeeps that went across.

MK: And how many of you were there? How many gliders came down?

WY: Well, all forty-four came down. But not in the same spot, all scattered around the ground. Some in the crevices, some. . . . But they are all mostly damaged, yeah? And the others, well, landed on the tree.

MK: And then earlier, you know, we were talking about you folks came down to France and you were involved in the rescue of the Lost Battalion.

WY: Yes.

MK: What was your involvement in that?

WY: My position was to. . . . Oh gosh. Looking for position, but most of our boys were part of the Rifle Company. Because the Rifle Company, their manpower is way down,

because they lost about two hundred people, yeah? So we have to kind of fill in because the Antitank Company can't do too much because that was all forest—pine trees, and forest like that. And we cannot set up the gun effectively, but they needed the manpower, so we joined up, and they assigned us as a Rifle Company. But in my position, I wasn't assigned to the Rifle Company because being a jeep driver. But the other boys that was assigned to the 57-[mm] guns, or the mine platoons, they were all assigned to that Rifle Company. So they became Rifle Company. Or litter bearers. Bring out the injured people, yeah.

MK: You mentioned litter bearers and in that rescue of the Lost Battalion, there were many lives lost, huge casualties.

WY: Casualties, yeah.

MK: What kind of personal losses did you experience? You know, among your friends or enlisted men that you knew.

WY: Not very much on my part because the only time I ever went up to the front is when I would deliver hot meals or mail. But that was mostly all in the forest. And, in my case, being in the Headquarters Platoon, I was more in the rear portion of it. Fortunately I was in that Headquarters Platoon. So I hate to say it, but I was very fortunate that way, assigned to the Rear Headquarters Platoon.

And just like General Dahlquist, you know, (chuckles) he would come and check on the boys up in the forest, and he would tell—being a general—he would stand behind the pine trees and said, "Hey, get up and move on to the other rifle company." This is what I was told. And, from what I was told, even his aide was kind of—got involved with a shell that's coming in. And the general said, "Hey, we better get out of here." So, they would get out, but the boys are still remaining over there, and advancing. But the high-ranking officers, (chuckles) when they see that they're in a danger zone, they would pull back. And here my thinking is, if you're a leader or general, you're supposed to be at the head of it, leading the men, tell the men, "Hey, follow me, and go up there" and then lead the way. But no, they would say, gosh, you know, when they feel they're in danger, they'd pull back, get away from it.

So if I, today, when I'm thinking about what we went through, and we lost with that many men, the casualties of eight hundred, just to rescue two hundred twenty-one boys of Texas Division, gosh, I would have called General [Dwight] Eisenhower and tell him, "Hey, this general is taking advantage of the manpower. Sacrificing all the men over here just to rescue that many. Let those boys fight

their way out." But of course they don't have anything to fight out, and they're separated, yeah? But that was a big loss for the 442nd. So soon after that, we were sent down to southern France, licking our wounds and everything, and then get the replacements from Camp Shelby to build up the manpower because you cannot use any other men from the white outfit to build our regiment. Got to be all strictly Japanese American. So you ladies back home not producing enough manpower.

(Laughter)

END OF SIDE ONE

TAPE NO. 44-8-2-05; SIDE ONE

MK: Okay, we were talking about the Lost Battalion, and if you can repeat for us the things we just had you discuss.

WY: Yes. Like I was mentioning to you, that general of the 36th Division, Texas division, would be up on the front line observing to see how we are doing on the rescue mission of the Texas battalion. He would be up on the front line standing behind the pine trees, because this is all pine forest, and observing his accomplishment with the 442nd. And, it's cold, and the boys, some of them of are in the foxhole, and, of course, trying to advance as much as they can. And he would, from what I understand, from what I was told, is that he would point to the boys in the foxhole, "Hey, get up and make a move on it." And actually, I suppose, the boys would follow the orders and just crawl up and advance little by little to rescue the Lost Battalion. And, from what I was told, is that because there's a lot of shells being thrown at the 442nd in the forest, and some of the shell fragments would get close to the general or the general's aide that's behind him, and they get kind of cold feet, too, and they would retreat themselves and get away from that area.

My interpretation as of what I think today, if you're a general or a leader, you're supposed to be in front of the group of the boys and direct the boys to, "Hey, come on follow me and move on." But looks like it's not, and all the boys are taking, you know, all their casualties. And my opinion is that if I was an outspoken guy, if I had a phone and communication with the supreme commander of European theater, General Eisenhower, I would have called him up and said, "Hey, what's wrong with this? Here, we have taken a lot of casualties, and the leader is supposed to be leading the front, but no, he's retreating and trying to get away from it." Gosh, I don't know what kind of leaders we have, that's my opinion. Because here, the boys are taking their

own initiative to advance, and try to get the enemy and knock 'em down so we can progress to rescue the Texas boys, and here we ended up with almost two or three times as many casualties as compared to the two hundred twenty-one Texas boys that we rescued. So that's a heavy casualty. And I think that---probably the general thought that we were expendable, but we're not that expendable because we cannot have any other white boys to replace the lost ones that we have. And another thing too, for humor, probably the ladies back home should have (chuckles) produced manpower, but they can't keep up with it. That's a long way to go. But that's my opinion about what I think today. Yeah, our leader should be up front and lead the men or put up an example.

MK: And then I think you mentioned something about, you know, your upbringing and what you were taught to do in this kind of situation.

WY: Yes.

MK: What do you think influenced you folks to keep on fighting?

WY: Yes, because, you see, like the way we were brought up, our folks, from the Orient, they came to Hawai'i, tried to make a living for themselves, and we were brought up properly. Not to bring shame or disgrace to our family, or to the neighbors, or even for the community. So, if you do go to the front, I know you have a mission where you cannot back out. It's a tight mission that you're going, so I think that's the reason why we were so much in demand by General Mark Clark from the 5th Army. He always thought about us, and he wanted us to come back to his outfit back in Italy because we can accomplish the mission. And some of them made a comment saying that the 100th and the 442nd never stepped back, always go forward and accomplish the mission, regardless of how hard it was.

So, we had no choice, but we were "brainwashed," shall I put it that way? Well, on our upbringing, that when you start something, accomplish it, no matter how difficult it is. You know, go to school, learn as much as you can, don't play around, and then that is something nobody can take away with you if you have a good education. So that was part of our upbringing, do as you were told, don't talk back to my parents (chuckles), and then do the job, and do it--use your own common sense--and then accomplish the job.

MK: So that carried over into your wartime . . .

WY: Yeah, carried over to. . . . Yes.

WN: When you said earlier that you were on the back line . . .

WY: Yes.

WN: . . . and then you said that, "Oh I'm ashamed to say that I was in the back line," but what made you say that?

WY: Well, you see, I'm fortunate, looking at the standpoint where the frontline boys are always facing the enemy, and they get shot at, and they're out in the cold, always digging a foxhole to protect themselves. And here, I'm in the rear end, in other words, I'm connected with the Antitank Headquarters Platoon, and with the CO [commanding officer] in that group, with the mess sergeants, mail carriers, and a comfortable location where we don't need to be facing the enemy or anything like that. But we can hear the artillery shells coming over. But still, we were much safer than the frontline boys. And because the frontline boys—they're probably about five yards or ten yards away from the enemy, which you don't see at times, and you get shot at if you're not on the alert. So they were always in a precautionary situation. But us, we're aware of that front line, too, but we have enough time to protect ourselves, or get in a protective position. So, I'd say, I was fortunate that way.

WN: Would you have wanted to go up to the front line?

WY: If we were ordered to go, I guess no choice but we have to, because the other boys are up there too, and we don't want to let them down. So I would go up front.

WN: The reason why I asked, I don't think you should feel ashamed that you were in the back as opposed to the other boys in the front.

WY: Yes, but it is, when I say I was fortunate to be on the rear, I feel kind of a little bit—faced to a person that I know that was on the front line all the time. So, I don't want to brag myself that I was in the 442nd or any outfit, and they are the ones that I take my hat off. The ones that were directly facing the enemies. So they are the ones that they really fought. They suffered the most. Yeah.

MK: And, you know, as you mentioned, the 442nd rescued the Lost Battalion. And then after that, went out to. . . . Well, they have what they called the Champagne Campaign . . .

WY: Yes.

MK: French Riviera, Nice, Menton, what do you remember about that part of the 442nd in Europe?

- WY: Well, for our company boys, the Antitank boys, we felt really happy that we were going-back-home like feeling, when we went back down to southern France. Because we were attached to the 517th Paratroopers, and we knew the boys in 517th and familiarized with like Nice, Cannes, Monte Carlo, and Menton, so we felt relieved to be happy that we're going back down again, whereas we don't have to be on the front line anymore just waiting for the replacements to come in to build up the strength. And we had a lot of occasions where we can visit the towns and all that from the past. So more of a recuperation like, for the outfit.
- MK: And how were your relations with the civilians? I never asked you about your observations on the civilians in France.
- WY: Yes, the civilians were---the French people are very nice. In fact, I got to know this one family, the Millo family in Nice, and they had a photography shop over there. And the family members, they're last name is Millo, and Charlotte. Charlotte was the owner of the photography shop. Of course carried, I had a photography camera, and picked up the films from them, or had the films developed by that family. And we became fairly good, close friends. And the father and mother is elderly people, and the mother, she was handicapped, she had problems with her foot. And then they invited me to have dinners in the house about two or three times. But every time I go down, in Nice, I make sure that my--every vehicle carries a five-gallon container of gasoline. All right. So I had that thing filled up before I leave because the officers and other people go down to the city for the get-together, or their regimental headquarters are down there. Okay. So while I'm waiting for the officers to get through with their meeting--it takes about an hour, hour half, or probably longer--I would drive over to their house. Their house is behind--this is in the city--so I would go over there and then give them the five-gallon can of gasoline, tell them, "Hey, do you have any empty containers? Fill 'em up." Because hard to get petroleum or gas for their cooking utensils. And then we'd stop and talk, converse with the family members. And then I would go. Or if I had some rations that I think that they can use, like cigarettes, or chocolate, or some other things, I would get a bag, pile it inside my bag, and give all to them so they'd be happy. So, I have pictures of that family, too. Very nice. So we got to be close friends.
- MK: And then I think you shared with me some of your Antitank buddies somehow capturing a submarine in the . . .
- WY: Oh, yes, yes. Well, this happened over in Menton. Menton has a little yacht harbor and, of course, a little portion--

sand banks, too. And one day, the 4th Platoon was assigned down in Menton guarding that harbor, and I think the 1st Squad was the group of men assigned where that harbor light is, at the entrance of that small harbor. So, they call up the Platoon Headquarters, 4th Platoon, Lieutenant Rogers's platoon, said, "Hey, there's a submarine coming in the harbor." Just curiosity, all they saw was this plastic dome just above the water surface, and they could see an outline of the small submarine. In my interpretation, I think that was a long torpedo suicide submarine, I think. And from what we gathered, is that there was a light American cruiser assigned offshore, about two or three miles offshore, and every day they would shell the German position on the Italian side. So they must have gotten the idea, "We'll get that light cruiser, American light cruiser," and they go out and try and destroy that cruiser. I think something must have happened to his navigation instruments. (MK chuckles.) So instead of going over to get the cruiser, no, he came back. Probably his mission was before the sunrise, and then he won't be caught coming toward the cruiser. So he returned, but he returned to our harbor at Menton instead of his base in the Italian side. And so I went down to deliver the mail with the mail clerk, they told us what's going on. So we drove up to a certain point and then we stopped and looked at what it was, and, of course, part of the submarine was stuck on the sand dune, and they got the boy out, was a young German fella. But to get the dome dislodged, they had to look for some sort of a tool to get the screws around the dome. Then once that was accomplished, they got the German sailor out from that submarine and then they took him in as prisoner. But we saw that submarine over there, and we hopefully be careful so that Germans cannot see us from the hills. So that was kind of exciting. We were about the only (chuckles) army that ever captured a navy submarine.

(Laughter)

But it's a small boat, I have pictures of that.

MK: That's an event to remember.

WY: Yes, and so the 442nd captures one submarine (chuckles). But that wasn't publicized too much, but it came out on the *Stars and Stripes* army newspaper.

MK: And then after that, you folks went to France, again, to northern Italy, . . .

WY: Yes.

MK: . . . what do you remember most about that part of the war?

WY: Well, once the regiment was built up to its full strength in southern France, all the replacements came from the Mainland. Because when we left Camp Shelby after the basic training and the full training, we left the 1st Battalion back in Camp Shelby to be used as replacements. And just like when we were having training and the 100th was in battle in Italy, at the beginning part of the war, their battle, they have a few casualties, and naturally, you need to have manpower, so they would call back for the boys whoever want to go over to Italy as a replacement. And like I mentioned about Lieutenant [B.] Takagi, so he went over. Oh, the other person was Lieutenant [Saburo] Maehara that was assigned to our company. And he was killed towards the end of the war. But anyway, so, the 1st Battalion was a replacement group, and I think they were assigned with the number, what? Battalion 171, I think, that's what . . .

MK: We can check.

WY: Yeah. Something like that.

So, after we were back to strength, General Mark Clark requested us to come back to Italy. I guess he must have called Eisenhower to have the 442nd back to Italy again, to join up with the 5th Army. So, we pulled everything up from the south of France, went to Marseilles, got on the troop ships with all our equipment, vehicles, and everything. Then we went back to Italy and landed in Leghorn, and then we went up north to assign the 92nd Division. Come to think of it, 92nd Division was at Leghorn, too. And that was a colored division, so they assigned us to that division. And then assigned to break open the Gothic Line. That has been established for about half a year, and the 5th Army never did advance after that, since they established. But they asked the 442nd to sneak behind the enemy line on the west coast of the Gothic Line. And they climbed up that long, steep, vertical mountain at night, and by morning, they were up there. And then they were asked to start off the campaign. So that broke the back of the Gothic Line. Within an hour, and then everything started to fall apart on the German side. So within two days, they break loose, the Germans gave up and they started to retreat.

So, as far as I can remember, we advanced, our company were advancing toward the Po Valley. So as we were going into the Po Valley, northwest of Italy, that's all farming country, lowlands, flatlands. Then the war was, on that part of the country, northern Italy, Austria. The Germans surrounded. For us, that was the end of the war over there.

And we kind of settled down a little bit until they assigned us to Ghedi Airport, northern part of Italy. The

5th Army assigned us to take in all the German prisoners or equipments because they were told to surrender and come down to Ghedi Airport, part of Austria, they were in that area, and part of northern Italy. So we processed the Germans. So we collected all their weapons and equipments, the horses and mules, and their trucks, tanks, medical supplies, communication equipments, and all that at Ghedi Airport, and they were stockpiled out in the field in the hangars like that. So we were in the pup tents next to the Ghedi Airfield, and the boys were assigned to do all that. Because, after all, that's a big German army coming in to Ghedi Airfield to give up all those equipments.

So after that was done, then we were transferred up to the northern part of Italy in Lake Como area. Lecco and Lake Como area. That's a beautiful country. Northern Italy is beautiful. It's a big lake, and the people are different, too. My thinking of Italians were all from (chuckles) Italian Mafia, gangsters, and everything. But northern Italy is more—the people up there are more white people. Upper-class people. And the homes are all nice, too. Beautiful country, I love that part of Italy. (Phone rings.) Excuse me.

(Telephone rings. Taping interrupted, then resumes.)

MK: And so you're up in northern Italy and then the war came to an end?

WY: Yes.

MK: As the war came to an end, what were your immediate thoughts about the war ending?

WY: Well, all of us, we felt good that the war has ended in Europe. So we said, "Well, I guess we don't have to go over to the Pacific side," because (chuckles) oh boy, that would be a terrible thing. But we felt so relaxed now that the war has ended in Europe. So we can relax and all that. But while we were resting in the northern part of Italy, in Lake Como area, the group from Camp Savage, the military MIS [Military Intelligence Service] group, they came over and they wanted to recruit the boys who were capable of speaking Japanese, read and write Japanese language, they wanted to recruit us. And made a proposition: whoever is going to volunteer to go and join up on the MIS side—because the war was still going on in the Pacific with Japan—and the proposition was that whoever volunteered to go into MIS, they would give the Island boys a thirty-day furlough back to Hawai'i. And then after the thirty-day furlough, go back to Camp Savage to take up probably two, three months of training of the MIS, or Japanese-language

school, and probably they'll be shipped out to the Pacific area. So, you know, that was something that was taking place, and they did. Some of the boys went and joined up with that.

And here, we were shipped from Lake Como down to Pisa, where that leaning tower is. Okay, so the war was over for us in the European part, so we're down in Pisa, assigned over there, and taking care of the German prisoners. And they were doing the laundry work for the Quartermaster Corps in Pisa. So our camp was right along the river, and the boys were just sitting around doing nothing but take the prisoners from the stockade in Pisa. Because we had the weapons carrier, we can load up the German prisoners, take them down to the Quartermaster Corps laundry, where they do all the laundry for the American soldiers. And then we would come back. So we were sitting over there.

Meantime, the war, of course, ended in Japan. Now, the next question was that, who's going to be discharged because the war in Europe and Pacific is over? Well, naturally, all of us, everybody, no matter who you are, in the air force, army, marines, they all want to go home, the war is finished. Well, to solve that problem of who's going to go first, they had the point system of eighty-five points. And some of the boys in our group, the 442nd, 100th, like the 100th side, the old-timers, they had enough points that you were in the army for so many months, how many months overseas, so they calculated on that basis. So some of the boys qualified for that, and then they were sent home. And in the meantime, majority of us, we had one-point difference, eighty-four point (chuckles), so we just have to wait for that group to go home. So once that was established, then we were all ready to go home. So the best part was that whoever remained back, especially the replacements because they have low points right? So they were asking, "Hey, any of you want different ranks, first sergeant, buck sergeant, or anything, it's wide open. We all going home, and here we have to fill in." So they were giving out, asking boys, "Hey, what rank you folks want?"

(Laughter)

So the boys that were replacements, oh they were lucky to have the different ranks, that means you get bigger pay right?

(Laughter)

But we were only concerned with, "Ah, (claps) we going home already, we want to go home." So the ones that remained back, they were given out the ranks.

MK: How many points did you have?

WY: I had eighty-four.

MK: Oh!

(Laughter)

WY: So majority of us had eighty-four points.

WN: Now when they were asking for the MIS volunteers, did anyone ask you? Were you asked?

WY: No, they asked the whole company, if anybody wants to volunteer for the MIS, well, sign up for it.

WN: Did you think about it?

WY: No, I didn't think about it. My part is done. I want to go home (chuckles). Why should I got the Pacific Islands? Or eventually, we didn't know about that.

WN: I'm wondering, the ones that you said there were a few who did, sign up for that. Do you know what kind of motivations or reasons they gave for doing something like that?

WY: I guess some of them had the feeling that, "Oh, we're going to have a thirty-day furlough back to Hawai'i, hey, that's a good deal, too." So they took advantage of that, and then, of course, they don't know how long the Pacific war's going to last. But the funny part, the joke was on us, because the boys that came back from the furlough for thirty days, the war ended, during that time, with the Pacific (laughing). So, when I caught up those—I came back in December, and I got discharged January 3, of 1946.

WN: So it never crossed your mind to join the MIS?

WY: Yeah, so the boys that (laughs) came back for it, you know, they were laughing at us, they say, "Hey, good, we were discharged before you guys."

(Laughter)

WN: Oh, I see.

MK: We'd like to end here, and we'd like to continue on Friday.

WY: Oh, okay. Oh, my watch is what, 9:30 (chuckles), I didn't wind my watch.

(Laughter)

MK: Oh, and he's a watch repair person!

(Laughter)

WY: Nine-thirty (chuckles).

MK: Why don't we end here.

WN: Okay, so let's end here.

END OF INTERVIEW

Tape No. 44-10-3-05

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Shiroku "Whitey" Yamamoto (WY)

Honolulu, O`ahu

March 4, 2005

BY: Warren Nishimoto (WN) and Michi Kodama-Nishimoto (MK)

MK: Okay, so this is an interview with "Whitey" Shiroku Yamamoto. This is session number three on March 4, 2005, and the interviewers are Warren Nishimoto and Michi Kodama-Nishimoto.

And Mr. Yamamoto, good morning.

WY: Good morning.

MK: And, as I said, a little bit earlier, my first question today is, as you went off to war, what did your foster parents give to you as a message on how you should be during the war? Or how did they influence you in comparison to how you were influenced by your Japanese background?

WY: Yes. They haven't said too much, from my recollection at that time. But I think they understood, like the Japanese family members, that when you do go off to the war--this has been repeated several times in the past--is don't bring shame to our family, or to the Japanese American population here in Hawai'i or even on the Mainland, or for our country for that matter. That don't bring any shame. And my foster parents, being *haole* people, I think they understood because they've been here on the Islands for several years in the educational field, so I think they were in the delicate position not to say something to misunderstand or misinterpret it. But in the back of their mind, they were concerned about my welfare, so they mentioned that when you go overseas, please take care of yourself, be very careful, and we want to see you come home safely, also. But as far as other things, they haven't said too much. But I understood, I think I was old enough to see their point of view, because being *haole* foster parents.

And from my neighbors that I grew up together, we were all--in fact, for the schools, students were mostly Japanese

Americans. So when some of my classmates joined up with the army, I took different angles to find what the best feeling that I created for myself. So, I felt, I think it was a duty to go. The rightful thing to do is to join up, volunteer, and go join the army.

MK: And, you know, I guess you came back safely, as your foster parents had hoped.

WY: Yes.

MK: And you returned to the Islands in about January 1946.

WY: Yes.

MK: And when you came back, you came back to Leilehua High School. How was that for you?

WY: It was a happy occasion, like the rest of the boys, to be home again. And, of course, I came back with the rest of the boys just before New Year's, or just about Christmastime. From Europe, across the country, and we landed here in Honolulu just before Christmas. So, being holiday season, and the boys are all jubilant about being at home, and Christmas, so they just said whenever you check in, just take your days off till after New Year, you come back to Fort Kam[ehameha], where we were assigned. And when we came back after the holidays, on January 3, I was discharged officially. And the reason why I was returned to Leilehua instead of Big Island, is because my foster parents were assigned to Leilehua High School as a school principal. So that's where I came back to. And I started on my education in high school. The nice part about the Board of Education, they gave us one year of credit for being in the service. For the boys, some like myself, we didn't finish high school, but they gave us one-year credit in high school education. So, in my position, I was in the eleventh grade because I left school when I was [tenth grade] to take care of my dad when he was really sick before the war. And that time before I got into the army, I was working already, instead of going back to school. Then I joined the army, more interrupted that way. So I went back to high school to finish up the high school education. But then I was more like transferred to senior class, so I was able to finish the senior class as a high school graduate in June.

MK: And when you came back to school, what kind of adjustment was it for you? You know, having come back from the war and having been out of school for so long?

WY: That's right, it was kind of difficult for me to get back in the wagon again, to have the feeling of doing a lot of serious studies. But it took a little time to get to it, because I was able to complete the school, senior class school.

MK: And also, being an older young man at that time, how were your relations with these younger students?

WY: I haven't got too close to them. I guess the other students realized that I was a couple of years older and being a veteran coming back to school, so I feel as if probably they were reluctant to associate with me. And, of course, I would usually hang around the office because there's nobody else about my age, talking to the school administrators or the clerks that were about my age, or older. And they wanted to know more about the war situation in Europe and want to ask questions, which I kind of reluctantly said too much about it. And I don't think I want to repeat those things as a veteran. And I guess they understood.

MK: And, in those days, about how many of you were there at Leilehua who had returned from the war?

WY: I don't think any other veterans were in high school at the time, Leilehua. I think I was the only one. Because the boys, my classmates from Laupāhoehoe High School, they were already seniors at that time. And since I didn't finish Laupāhoehoe High School, and, like I mention again, I left the school at tenth grade, so those boys already finished their high school education. If they got their one-year credit for it, that's automatically they got their high school diploma.

MK: And then after you graduated in 1946, what did you do?

WY: We took a trip to the Mainland during the summer before I started at Stout Institute in Menominee, Wisconsin. And when September came, I enrolled in Stout Institute and went for one semester and decided, well, this is not for me. And I left Stout Institute.

MK: And while you were at Stout Institute, what were you studying?

WY: Stout Institute is an industrial arts school. At that time it was a private institution, it wasn't under the state of Wisconsin. And we had an enrollment of about eight hundred students, and mostly was veterans. In fact, there was a big influx of the veterans going to universities and other schools. So it was mostly eight hundred people. Of course, today I understand they got about four thousand, five

thousand students because the state took over the institution. They're run by the state of Wisconsin.

MK: How did it come about that you ended up going to Stout Institute in the first place?

WY: Well, I was more mechanically minded and Stout Institute. . . . When I was going to Laupähoehoe High School, we had a shop teacher—carpentry class—by the name of Mr. Spinola, and he's from Hilo. And, those days, to be a high school industrial art teacher, was mostly—well, shop teachers, as far I know—and carpentry is involved. Most of the high schools. So, that's what I figured would be kind of interesting, with my foster parents being educators. So, just to satisfy them, that probably I'd continue with their traditional occupation. But when it comes down to reality, I guess that wasn't for me, so I left Stout Institute.

And I had almost four years of GI Bill of Rights educational benefit. So without disposing that, I went over to Minneapolis, St. Paul Veterans Administration (VA) to take aptitude tests. (Telephone rings.) I'm sorry, that's okay. And the result of that aptitude tests came about, is that what I best qualified for was commercial art or mechanical skills in small things. And they asked me if I want to get involved in any of those two, they would correspond with schools that will teach you artistic commercial art or anything in that line, or some precision. And they recommended I should try watch repairing because that's a very small precision mechanical work that I'm well qualified, according to their tests. But when they corresponded with different watchmaking institutions like Elgin, Waltham, Bradley Tech, and couple other places, but they were all filled for the next two years, so they won't be able to accommodate me immediately. And they came across one down in Missouri where Jimmy Dale, he was the owner of a watch-repairing school for the State of Missouri. But they had such a small group of students, only about eight or so, this only for the state of Missouri, so the VA [Veterans Administration] encouraged him to expand the school so the veterans can apply, and start training those veterans as watch repairing. At that time, when I first went down, we started off with a class of about eight, nine, ten of us, but it was located above the grocery store in a small makeshift class. Everybody built their own wooden bench, and that's all you required for watch repairing. But the Veterans Administration furnished the textbooks, the tools, and the test equipments, and everything for the benefit of the veterans. And that, you get to retain or keep it for yourself. That was nice about it. But as the enrollment started to trickle in, so we were out of room. And they worked out with the Veterans

Administration and Jimmy Dale, where they had the national guard armory, about a mile out of the town of Albany, Missouri—and it still is in existence. And by the time I left the watch-repairing school, that was about year and half after going to school, we had an enrollment of about one hundred three students and four instructors teaching us. And in that class, they had three ladies taking up watch repairing, too. That was something unusual, but that's all right, they're capable of doing it, too.

So after finishing graduating from the watch-repairing school, I went back up to Stout Institute where Mr. Nelson Anshus had a jewelry store. And, of course, when I left, Mr. Anshus asked for me to come back and work for him, which I did. And Mr. Anshus has very nice family members, and they really accommodated the island boys. Because they understand we're so far away from Hawai'i, we won't be able to go home for Christmas vacation, so they entertained the island boys a lot, and they were very nice people. So I worked for him for about three months. Yet there was lots of GI Bill of Right[s] privileges, so I told Mr. Anshus and they encouraged me also, "Yes, if you're in this field, try and take up some other courses in line of the jewelry field."

So, I went back to Minneapolis at the Veterans Administration to get some advice and information where there's any schools that can teach about jewelry manufacturing, stone setting of the jewelry. So they said there's one over in Newcastle, Pennsylvania. So I went over there after corresponding with them. They were able to accommodate all the veterans, and most of it was all veterans that applied for it. So, I used up all my GI Bill of Rights at that school. That took me almost couple of years, so I learned jewelry manufacturing, stone setting, and also they had an engraving class. The instructor was Walter Phelan. He was an outstanding hand-engraving instructor.

So, after that was done, I returned back to St. Paul, Minnesota, and worked for Lawson and Jensen diamond wholesalers for about three months. I was gone from Hawai'i almost four years, and this was in January, I decided this cold climate is getting to be a little too cold (chuckles) for me, so I returned to the Islands, thinking that I would probably open up a jewelry store myself.

MK: Before we get into your return to the Islands, I want to move back a little bit and ask you about the time you were on the Mainland getting all this training. When you first started your training at Stout Institute, and then later on went to Albany, Missouri, and later on you went to

Newcastle, Pennsylvania. I'm wondering, during all that time, how were you received and treated as a Japanese American so soon after the war?

WY: Well, among the veterans, it's no problem, they understood. After explaining our situation, and what they went through the war also, so they were very sympathetic toward me. And, of course, in Newcastle, we had another Hawai'i boy, Onouye, from Community [Jewelry Company] here in town, they opened up a jewelry store. So he took up the same courses as I did. But the people there are very nice, too. And I stayed in a home—an elderly *haole* couple, they were formerly retired farmers so they were very nice, and we socialized and we had our fun.

But I kept myself busy. After going to school, I had free time so I worked at the Castleton Hotel as a pots and pans, what you call, occupation? (Chuckles) Because my experience with KP [kitchen patrol] duty in the army, that I'm well qualified (chuckles). Then, after that was done, they promoted me to be a dishwasher (chuckles). Of course, there's a pay increase.

WN: You got promoted to dishwasher, but what were you before that?

WY: A pots and pan. Yes. When the chef do a lot of cooking, to clean the pots and pans. They pass it over to me to clean it up so they . . .

WN: Dishwasher was like a promotion?

WY: Yeah, more like it.

(Laughter)

But there's a lot of hard work on that dishwashing. Of course, it's all done by machinery, automatic. But when they have a banquet like that, oh gosh, you have to work hard and fast. But the dishwashing machine took care of all that, but I had two other ladies to help along with it, so we got it all done at night. But it was nice to be in that kitchen, because you have the privilege to eat—in the bakery section, the ladies were nice. They'd say, "Oh, Whitey, if you want to have some dessert, pies or cake, help yourself."

And then like the cook, his name was Bob, he was a Polish fellow, and he told me, "If you want to drink milk, just go inside the walk-in icebox and help yourself with the drink."

I guess I was doing my good job, so I guess to continue with my good job, he gave me the privilege (chuckles) to take advantage of that.

MK: And then where was this hotel?

WY: In Newcastle, Pennsylvania. So I was pretty well occupied till about nine, ten o'clock at night. So after school at three o'clock, I went down, got my free meals, then do the work, and help the janitor to clean the kitchen, also. There was a colored fellow, he was very efficient person. I learned something about how to use a mop and get it well done, you know, cleaning up the kitchen. He was a hard-working fellow.

MK: And then I'm curious, you talk about GI Bill benefits, how much were you getting from the government under the GI Bill?

WY: Gosh, I don't know how much I was getting, but a lot better than when I was going through the war. Because they furnish the schooling supplies, the tuitions, and everything. And then they gave you cost of living, I don't know how much it was, probably about fifty dollars or so per month. But just enough so that I can carry on the work.

WN: Do you remember a lot of paperwork?

WY: No, there's hardly any paperwork in my education in the trade. Just go to school, do what you could, and the instructors will grade you according to your workmanship.

WN: Well, no, I meant paperwork to get GI Bill benefits.

WY: No, we worked together with the Veterans Administration, not with the school, but with the Veterans Administration.

MK: And then during those years that you were going to school, I think you mentioned that at one time, you also worked after school as a janitor at a Chevrolet dealership?

WY: Oh, that was down in Albany, Missouri, so it's about the same thing. At the end of the day at school, then I went down to Dolan's Chevrolet garage, or Chevrolet dealers, then I did the janitorial work after the workmen are gone for the day. And weekends, sometimes I do a little extra work to catch up with the work. So that way I was well occupied, instead of sitting idle. Those days we never had TV, so it's a lost cause. You don't know what to do. But we used to get together among the students. We'd talk stories, talk about our studies. So, it was interesting, but we get

too much time on your hands. I'd rather be doing something like that to make a little extra expenses.

MK: And also, I'm kind of curious, how big was the town of Albany, Missouri?

WY: Oh, it was very interesting, because Missouri is so remote, the closest town would be St. Joseph, Missouri, southwest of Albany, Missouri. And Albany, Missouri is up on the northwest portion of the state. It's a farming community, so I would say about five thousand population in that community. And the interesting part is that, every Thursday night, all the farmers used to come into town to get their supplies, or equipments, or parts like that. And, of course, they like to get together with their farmers friends and talk stories, or, I guess they're interested about the business of farming. And, of course, being the only Orientals walking down on the street, if I have the time, they would stop and ask questions about me, in a friendly way. The farmers are very nice, and I enjoyed talking with those people, too. For an example, when they ask me, "Where are you from, and how come you spoke English so well?"

I said, "Well, we have public schools where I come from, in Hawai'i."

So, they asked, "Where is Hawai'i?"

I guess the farmers are so remote, they're not city people. So I'd say, "You know where Pearl Harbor is?"

"Oh, yes, I know."

"Well, that's where I come from."

So, that was it. But I enjoyed in the small community, because people were very friendly, nice. And once we get to know them, they say "Hi" to me.

WN: I'm wondering, was it to your advantage to be a veteran? After the war, being a veteran, did that open up some doors for you?

WY: Yes, certain instances, yes. Being a veteran, they accommodated a special treatment, I suppose. Because this is still fresh in peoples' mind that you just came out from the war, and they tried to be nice to the boys or help the boys out. So, yes, I had the privilege being a veteran. So even to get a job. . . .

Or when I came back to the Islands, thinking that I might open up a jewelry store, but doing some research, there were too many jewelry stores or watch-repairing shops here in town. They were just working ten hours a day, or twelve hours a day to just make a living. I said, I guess this is not my business, why should I have to suffer? Meantime, Hickam Airfield had that advertisement looking for instrument technicians for aircraft work. So I applied for it, and I was taken in—I was surprised—but the reason was that because I had the watch-repairing knowledge, going to school. And, being a veteran, they gave us privilege to sign up. But they accepted me right away. This was back in 1951, when the Korean War started, so they wanted to build up the air force, and they need more aircraft instrument men. But I had no experience about aircraft instrument. I don't think there is any aircraft instrument schools, but I was fortunate they had technicians in the instrument shop at Hickam, and they always have a manual. Any type of work that you do, they have a technical manual that you can learn from. And they tell you how to repair, how to check it, and how to test with the equipments. So that was, I'd say, strictly in the line of precision work and comparable to watch repairing, which is very precision. And the inspectors are very strict in that, and I don't blame them, but if the aircraft instrument is not accurate, probably the poor pilot or the flight crew might end up somewhere else.

MK: So how long did you work at Hickam?

WY: I worked for seven years at Hickam Airfield, until the Korean War ceased. And being the least seniority, I was one of the first ones that they discharged from the work. Clarence Au, which is my friend, good friend of mine, we had the least seniority, so we were asked to leave. But at the same time, Lockheed Aircraft Company came to the Islands to open up major overhaul facilities here at Honolulu Airport. And they took over the naval docks, where they did their aircraft major maintenance. And at that time, the docks were not being utilized, so Lockheed came in, and they got the facilities from the navy, so we did most of the work with Lockheed Aircraft. Those aircrafts, it was Lockheed four-engine propeller type, three tail, with a big dome on the back of the fuselage, on the top of it, and that was all radar equipments. And we were in that Cold War period, and we were concerned with the Russians coming . . .

END OF SIDE ONE

SIDE TWO

. . . across the Pacific. And, of course, this is probably confidential, but now it could be past that stage, but their mission was to fly between Guam and up to the Alaska Aleutian Islands as a frontline surveillance duty. And Guam was the base for it. But all the major work that needs to be done on the aircraft, they would fly the aircraft to Honolulu, and all the major work is done. So aircraft instrument is one of them. Besides that, other things like radio communication, accessories, engine buildup, working on the aircraft, sheet metals, all those things, so it's a major overhaul facility down at Honolulu Airport. So I was with Lockheed Aircraft for seven years, too, when the mission was ceased or ended.

MK: I'm curious, were there other veterans who were also employed by Hickam and Lockheed in those days . . .

WY: Yes, lots of them. A lot of veterans.

MK: Had many of them gotten their training like you under the GI Bill?

WY: No, because it comes to aircraft, by working on the job training more so, let's put it that way, they gained experience. But like engine buildup on the aircraft, hydraulic systems, sheet metals like that, I guess they go to schools. Like vocational school was teaching sheet metal things. Probably they may have had engine buildup, aviation classes over at Honolulu vocational schools. But aircraft instruments, no, we don't have it. That's one difficult thing.

MK: And then after Lockheed, what did you do?

WY: Well, fortunately, I was able to work for Aloha Airlines. Aloha Airlines called to—they realized that Lockheed was closing down—so they naturally, the airlines going to pick the experienced skillful tradesmen. So, I was called by Aloha Airlines if I would like to work for them, I was very fortunate. Andy Yamashiro, he was the head of the maintenance section, so I had an interview by Mr. Yamashiro, and I was accepted with Aloha Airlines. And I worked with the instruments shop, under that condition, for twenty-two years, and that's where I retired.

MK: And in those twenty-two years, what would you say were like the major changes you saw in your work over those two decades that you worked for Aloha?

WY: Well, there's a lot of changes on the aircraft itself. When I first started working for Aloha, we had the propeller engines. They just phased out the DC-3's, or C-47 in military form. Those were propeller-type aircraft. And they just got the jet combination, propeller and jet combination, I couldn't think of it right now. And not too long after that, it went into a full jet aircraft, and we had that British 111, because Hawaiian [Airlines] came up with Douglas jet, so Aloha had to compete. And they were able to get that BSC or British aircraft 111, and that's how we started.

But the instrument system have changed a lot, too. In the old days, it was more mechanical instruments, huge compared to what it is today. And today's, when we changed over to jet aircraft, it's mostly avionic type of—electronic type—of aircraft instruments. So all the things are more small, and I can see it helps a lot because the equipment doesn't take up a lot of space in the aircraft, plus it's lighter, and they have better load capacity for the aircraft. They can haul more passengers or more cargo that way. Less of the weight of the equipment.

And, like you take an example, the old time, you take a fuel quantity system on the aircraft, they had the floating type transmitter on the wings of the aircraft. Most of the wings are fuel tanks. And you start off from the very tip of the wing, they have just a small volume of fuel. As you come toward the fuselage of the aircraft, the fuel tanks are larger, so your float transmitter gets larger. You know the toilet tank in the bathroom? They have that floating—the old-fashioned time? That's how it looks like, it's the same thing. So, as the fuel is full, the float is up there, but as you use the fuel—the aircraft use the fuel—it drops down to the bottom of the tank. Then the next big tank will take over, and then it goes through the process about two or three tanks. So it tells you the full amount there, and then the third tank will tell you the empty portion of the instrument. That's all mechanical things.

Today, they have just one tube that they call the capacitor unit. That's all. There's no moving parts in it. It's just the fuel itself gives the transmission into the cockpit, and the cockpit gauges just this small, as far as I can think of it. And all your amplifiers and everything in the aircraft indicator, and that small. Before they had the transmission, and then down in the fuselage, they had the amplifier, big box like this, to transmit the signal over to the cockpit. And the cockpit gauge was about this big, and that's it. But today it's all solid state, it's really compact. So all you need is one capacitor, no moving parts,

and aircraft instruments in the cockpit has that two little items. That's an example for it. Times have changed, yes.

MK: And so after twenty-two years at Aloha, you retired?

WY: Retired, yes.

MK: And I'm going to move you back a little bit and I want to know about your marriage. How did you meet your wife, Amy?

WY: Oh gosh, that was way back in my school days (chuckles) on the Big Island, yes. I met her down at Laupāhoehoe High School. I was transferred from John M. Ross School, intermediate—not intermediate, elementary school—to go to intermediate school down at Laupāhoehoe High School. So, I'm one extreme end of the community, and my wife is the other extreme opposite. And where she comes from is called 'O'ōkala community, that's 'O'ōkala Sugar Company. And where I come from is Laupāhoehoe Sugar Company. But that's the extreme end toward Hilo, and she's more toward Honoka'a side. And we go down to Laupāhoehoe High School in that district. So that's where I got to know other students from different areas. And one of the attractions was my former wife—I mean my wife (chuckles). But I should have said former students.

(Laughter)

Oh boy.

(Laughter)

MK: Your present wife. So you met Amy in high school.

WY: Yes, about tenth grade. After tenth grade, yes.

MK: And what I'm curious about is, before the war, were you still very close before the war?

WY: Yes. I guess when you're young and you take interest in the opposite sex, (chuckles) I guess they call it what? Puppy love? (Chuckles) But that's really sweet.

(Laughter)

So off and on we corresponded, not seriously. And when I came back from the service—we corresponded when I was in the service, too.

MK: How frequently did you folks correspond? During the war years?

WY: Well, depending on my mood (laughs). But I had my interest in her a lot. Because I suppose she was a very lovely lady, and right now I always tell my wife, "You so *yasashii*, you know, you have a nice clean heart." And being attractive lady, or girl at that time, for me she was attractive, so I wanted to continue with my relationship. So we corresponded during the war. Of course, when I returned from the Mainland on the GI Bill of Rights, we got close to it, and then we finally tied our knots, committed ourselves to live together, and then here we are. We're still about fifty-three years plus of marriage.

MK: And I think I'll ask some closing questions then. You know, when you look back on the war, how do you think the war has affected your life?

WY: I have a better understanding about our country, and I think, traveling, we did a lot of traveling, and I came across other people from other countries or while I'm working down at the Army Museum for the past sixteen years after I got my retirement from Aloha Airlines. I met up with a lot of people, and it broadened my outlook. Another thing that helped is the TV program that we have every year, I mean every day. So my life is very worthwhile living. And I always mention to some other people and say I think our generation are very fortunate to see what has taken place in American history, for that matter. It wasn't too long ago, about two hundred years ago or so, our ancestors from the European country came across the country on covered wagons. In the early days, before the Revolutionary War, how our forefathers worked hard for their freedom to better ourselves as a whole to run our country. And also sacrificing to retain that freedom is so precious to me, and I guess to all of us, that I think we should, if we have to go to war to protect our country, I think it's our duty to uphold, no matter how. . . . Like in our case, the Japanese Americans were interned at the relocation camps. That's one unfortunate thing, but still there's a lot of good things that came about. Even the people on the Mainland, Japanese Americans, they sacrificed, they lost a lot of things for—very heavy. But I think we all suffered. But there's a lot of good things that come about, and I think it's more precious. We feel that we have to preserve what we have and protect as much as we can so that future generations, like our forefathers, or our parents told us, "Go to school, learn as much as you can, so that you can better yourself, or for your community, for the country." And I guess we'll be capable of getting along with one another or with another country. So I think my mind has broadened that much, to appreciate what we have today, and preserve it. Just like what our forefathers, or our parents have told us, "Get as much

education as you can and fulfill your duty for your own community, and for the country itself, too."

And I even come across these visitors from Japan while I'm working down at the Army Museum. I kind of joke around and say, "Oh, we fought against each other, we were enemies one time, but look where you are today. You know, you people are well off. Good thing you fought against America. If you fought against other countries, probably you won't have that privilege as what you have now." But there's a lot of good things that came out from the war. Look, you take the aircrafts, the TV programs you have, and domestic—take appliances, I always tell them, something that's simple for them to understand. You have TV, you have ice box, your washing machine. If it wasn't for the war, I guess all those good things not here. Probably you might be going back to your good old washing by hand, cooking, you don't have microwave oven, or anything like that. So, on that basis, I'd say there's a lot of good things that have taken place. Not for our country, but for everybody throughout the world. Of course, there's a lot of unfortunate things in this world like the third-world countries, but I think our country can help those countries. We may have a lot of controversy among the politicians or the people within our country, but eventually, I think it's going to be a better world than what it was. Yeah, it takes a long hardship where we want to have the other unfortunate people, that they could better themselves by our help. So, I think I am fortunate to see all these things happening.

And like I mentioned about two hundred years ago, with the covered wagon, people came from the old countries to better themselves, but where we are today, we can. . . . Men have landed on the moon, and they're going to the Mars. Probably we might be able to live on those planets just in our lives. So I think we can foresee that our generation—my feeling is that, I think I am one of the fortunate ones to be alive today, to see all these things happening.

WN: I know you said, when you came back and you were one of the older students at Leilehua, and then you said that they were asking you questions about the war experiences, and you were reluctant to talk about it. And then when we first met, you said that, "Chee, I never talked too much about these things before, now I think it's important." Why do you think it's important now to talk about your experiences.

WY: Yes. I feel as if what we have talked with the interviewers like yourself, you're the second generation or so, and I could see, and from what I had the input from other people, young and old, that history is so important. And realizing

that, I said, "Well, why don't I express myself about my feeling of being a veteran and, oh, a personal life." Because the younger generation would like to know. For that matter, *Hawai'i Herald* came out with an article, just yesterday we received that *Hawai'i Herald*, and there was a small article about Mitsuo Akiyama from Hilo. He was a company clerk in our Antitank Company, and the granddaughter wrote an article about her grandfather, Mitsuo Akiyama, and I can see she wished that she could have asked a little bit more about what he went through, and she would like to know about the past generation. So, I feel, I think I'm doing the right thing by contributing whatever you people want to know, to help for the future generation about what we went through. That's why I'm beginning to open up and come out freely. And if there's anything I can contribute, I'd be glad to do that. Because not too many of us going to be alive before too long. And once all of us are gone, it's too late. So I think I should wholeheartedly contribute as much as I can to explain about our experience. I feel that way now.

WN: We have about five more minutes of tape, is there anything you'd like to say?

WY: Well, I hope . . .

WN: You said it all?

(Laughter)

WY: I said it all, yes. But I wish some other boys would be glad to contribute some more of their experience, too. And I hope you have all the luck. And I think if the boys see what I have done, and take part in it, this will be a good thing for the future generations, yeah. And you people are working so hard, I congratulate you people for taking your time out and doing all this work, and doing the research, compile all these things for the good of the other younger generations. Congratulations.

WN: We congratulate you for a life well lived.

WY: We work both ways.

(Laughter)

MK: We thank you, Mr. Yamamoto.

WY: Yes.

MK: I think we owe you more thanks than anything else, so thank you very much for sharing your life experiences and your wisdom. You shared your wisdom with us.

WY: Well, you're welcome.

END OF INTERVIEW