

Tape No. 44-9-1-05

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Hichiro Matsumoto (HM)

Honolulu, O`ahu

March 3, 2005

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

WN: Okay. Today is March 3, 2005. And we're interviewing Hichiro Matsumoto at his home in Honolulu, O`ahu. The interviewers are Warren Nishimoto and Michiko Kodama-Nishimoto.

First question we want to ask you is when and where were you born?

HM: I was born in Kalihi, 1918.

WN: What was your father doing in Kalihi?

HM: At first he worked for that fertilizer company. We used to call it bonemeal. And a few years later, we moved just about a half mile away and my parents went into farming, flower farming. And that's where I spent most of my life, in Kalihi.

WN: What does a flower farm look like?

HM: Well it was about two-and-a-half-acre size and you name it, we had it, we raised it, yeah. Rose, carnation, gladiola, forget-me-not, and all that. And it was a lot of work, even for a kid.

WN: What kind of work did you do?

HM: Well, since I was a kid then, we just did what my parents told us to do. And they always have something for us to do. So I never was unemployed. (HM and WN chuckle.)

WN: How many brothers and sisters did you have?

HM: I had, with me, five boys and a sister.

WN: And what number were you?

HM: The last.

WN: Oh, the baby.

HM: Yeah.

WN: Okay, tell me about your father. Where was he from?

HM: My father [Hirotarō] and mom [Tsugi], they were from our old country Japan, Kyushu, Kumamoto. That's Kumamoto-ken, Kamimashiki-gun, Oshima-mura. That's something like when you say if you come from California, you say, "I come from LA [Los Angeles]," or, you know, wherever. San Fernando Valley, something like that.

WN: So they're both from the same place? Father and mother?

HM: Well, they from the same state, Kumamoto. But *mura* [village]. You know, you say *mura*, different town, yeah.

WN: You know what year they came to Hawai'i?

HM: I don't know. I don't know, somehow, but we never did talk about that. So they were both from Japan.

WN: When your father came to Hawai'i, do you know where he started out? Did he start out in Kalihi?

HM: As far as I know, it's Kalihi, yeah.

MK: You know, you mentioned that he worked for the bonemeal fertilizer company.

HM: Right, right.

MK: What kind of work did he do there?

HM: I don't know. But got to be manual labor. Because almost all the workers, they worked with their hands then.

MK: And then, you know, you mentioned that your family had a flower farm, yeah.

HM: Right.

MK: Two-and-a-half acres. And try and tell me what kind of work had to be done on the flower farm?

HM: Yeah, lot of work. We had a lot of work. We had to dig up the ground, no equipment then. You get your pick, and you dig. And then you cultivate the ground, you plant whatever flower you're gonna grow. And that was a continuous thing,

from a little baby plant or whatever; we used to call it *nae* [seedling], then, Japanese-style *nae*. You work at it, like fertilizer, you pull the weeds, all that. The flower, you know, it grows up, and you cut it, and send it to the market. After that, you till the soil again. The rose took really a lot of time. Because what we used to do, the flower families, we call 'em *kumiai* [association, guild], sort of. And we used to buy it from the Mainland, it comes by the barge, by the ship. And then we used to go down to the pier and pick it up. And so much went to our family. And then the rose stems, the day it comes in, you plant it and you got to water it. So sometimes, ooh, just about all night. You up from for the first day anyway, at least, to get that rose to get started. And that was a lot of work. And after it grew up, it start to get leaves, the bugs used to come at night and eat the leaves. Because anytime when you bring the rose to market and then sell it, if the leaves are eaten by the bugs, it's not worth too much, yeah. So us kids got to go out in the night with lanterns. We used to either smash 'em with our finger or put a pan underneath the lantern, put kerosene, and then as we pick the bugs, we threw 'em in the container to kill it. And that was, so many nights I worked, we used to do that. That was the rose.

And gladiolas was another thing. You plant it, the bulb, you plant it, it grows up. And if the flower grows sideways, the flower—I mean the, what do you call that?

MK: The stalk?

HM: The stalk, yeah. It goes this way [sideways], no matter what, when the flower blooms, it's gonna go up straight. And then to keep it straight, what we had to do was go in the [*haole*] *koa* bush next door, and cut, you know, stem like this, and stick it in the ground to prop it up to keep it [gladiola stalk] straight. That was plenty work, too.

MK: So for roses you had to do plenty work; gladiolas, you had to do plenty work.

HM: Oh, yeah.

MK: How about the other flowers?

HM: Every flower need care no matter what. But the roses and the gladiolas took more time, more care.

MK: And then, how about irrigation?

HM: Oh, yeah. Irrigation was, we had the water line from the city, plus we lived right near a river. And the thing is,

my dad bought a pump. You know, imagine, he bought a pump and we used to get the water from the river.

MK: How did you carry the water from the pump to where the flowers were?

HM: No, we had a irrigation system. We used to have a ditch, you know, so wide and so deep, where the water runs through. And every so many, say about fifty feet or whatever, we used to dig a sort of small well. And we used to put a box in there to sort of, where you can shoot that in the can, yeah. And that took work, too, because every once in a while, the box used to collapse, you got to put a new box in. And the side of that ditch gets *limu* [algae]. You know what *limu* is, eh? You got to scrape it off. So, so many jobs we get. (Chuckles) You know the more I'm thinking about it, more work, you know, we used to do. And the kids, our friends, used to come down to our farm and play, see. "What the heck, these kids coming around here." We're working and they're coming around.

(Laughter)

They get places like the parks to go. But I guess they run out of games or whatever, eh. So they used to come around. And some kids are good kids. They used to help us, you know.

(Noise of garbage truck.)

WN: We'll wait little while.

HM: Yeah, yeah.

HY: Wait till the rubbish truck goes by.

(Taping interrupted, then resumes.)

MK: We were talking about your flower farm. And these kids would come down to your farm and play while you're working?

HM: Yeah, yeah, yeah. (Chuckles) So, like, my mom used to grumble not to them but to us. She say, "*Nani, kono?* They got nothing to do. What? Go come down here when you guys busy working."

(Laughter)

Well, you know how parents are, yeah.

MK: And, you know, this working on the farm, was it all year round?

HM: All year round. Like, we get five days of work, we get five days that we would get school, English school. About two o'clock, you out of English school so we used to go to Japanese[-language] school. Saturday morning was half-day was Japanese[-language] school. We go home, we got to work in the farm, whereas all our friends, my friends, they at the park. And Sunday, all day we used to work.

MK: And, you know, you mentioned the farm was two-and-a-half acres.

HM: About. Approximate.

MK: Where was the farm?

HM: Kalihi. You know where that bus terminal is down at Kalihi?

MK: Mm-hmm [yes].

HM: From that area, you look toward Diamond Head, it's about half a mile toward town. We had several farms over there. And the "Antone Joe" dairy, was there, too. ["Antone Joe" was the nickname of Antone Joseph, the owner of a Kalihi dairy.]

MK: Oh.

HM: Yeah. We were right next to the dairy, very close. And then you go further up, further up towards town was O'ahu Prison [presently O'ahu Community Correctional Center, on Pu'u hale Road].

MK: And, you know, you mentioned that there were several farms. What other families farmed near you?

HM: What do you mean? The names?

MK: Yeah.

HM: Well, had one family, Sakamoto, but they went to- I don't know what year was it-the whole family went back to Japan. And another family came in was Maeda. And had one Ohata, had Itaoka. And that's all I can think of now. Oh, Takami.

MK: And all of these flower farms, were they always Japanese or other. . . .

HM: Was all Japanese people. (Chuckles) Yeah, yeah.

MK: And, you know, you mentioned the *kumiai*, what did the *kumiai* do in those days?

HM: Well, we used to call it that Flower Growers Association. And then, like, I mentioned that we imported the rose stalks from the Mainland. The *kumiai* would get together and then they order as one, you know. And then when the boat comes in, we used to share, yeah. And then we used to, the high point for us was that once a year, we used to go picnic on a Sunday. That was a big event for us because all-day play for us, eh. (Chuckles) Oh, you know, when the Japanese people go they bring a lot of *bentō* [boxed lunch], yeah. Boy, that was something. And then at the picnic, get races, get sumo, and all that. And every participant gets something, prize.

WN: Where was the picnic?

HM: Usually we used to come toward this side, Niu Valley side.

WN: Oh.

HM: Those days it was all *kiawe* [algaroba] bush. We have some pictures of that, but I don't know where it is now. I have some, my brothers have some, and it's all distributed all around.

WN: How many families were in the *kumiai*?

HM: I don't know, because where we stayed, had some. And further, Kalihi Kai had some. And upper Kalihi, had some more, too. So I don't know exactly how many. But I know it was something.

WN: But then the families in the *kumiai*, did they have the same kind of work? Were they all farming families?

HM: Yeah, yeah. All raised flowers.

MK: And this *kumiai* was mostly for business, not for social things?

HM: No, (chuckles) work. They're business, right.

MK: And, you know, you mentioned that your family would take the flowers to market.

HM: Right.

MK: Where would they market their flowers?

HM: Well, I know had florists in Pālama and Liliha, but not way up Liliha. About School Street area, you know, Liliha Street, yeah. And near 'A'ala Park or someplace around there. But all on this side, though, say about fifth

district? [For apportionment purposes, the island of O'ahu was divided into two voting districts: the fourth and fifth districts.]

MK: Oh.

HM: Yeah, yeah.

MK: And then, too, what did you have to do to prepare the flowers for market?

HM: Oh, well, that was another thing. That's hard work, too. (Chuckles) You get up a little earlier in the morning, you go out pick some, pick the flowers. And you got to tie [i.e. bundle] it up, you know, like that. And then my dad used to bring it to the florist. The early days was horse and buggy. Imagine. Yeah, horse and buggy. And then after about, in the 1920s I think, my dad bought the first car, Ford, you know, Model-T Ford. So that was a big deal for us, you know.

(Laughter)

WN: You mean to what? To ride in a car?

HM: Oh, yeah. Before that it was a horse and buggy, yeah. My dad used tie up the, you know, the horse to the buggy, strap it up, and we used to put the flowers on the buggy. We used to put 'em out over here. He'd come home and put the horse in the stable. And I was thinking, "Oooh, that horse has a really good job." After that, he was free for the day already.

(Laughter)

You know. Every morning, he pulls the wagon, yeah. My dad comes home, put 'em in the stall. And every day we used to cut grass for feed the horse.

(Chuckles) Another thing is, you know the horse make doo-doo, eh. That's a very good fertilizer.

MK: Oh.

HM: We used to spread that. We used to spread it on our flower plants. So nothing went to waste.

MK: And then, yeah, I'm wondering how well was your dad doing with the flower farm? You folks were doing okay, you think, or hard time?

HM: I think, yeah, I think so. I think we did all right, yeah. Always had plenty food on the table. Because we raised flowers, but we raised vegetables, too. So I think the one thing we bought was fish. You know the *sakana* [fish] man used to come sell with a wagon. And then the meat we had to buy. Pork was bought. Chicken no problem. We used to raise chicken. And eggs no problem 'cause we had a chicken coop around the house.

WN: I guess you had to buy rice, too, yeah.

HM: Oh, yeah, yeah.

MK: And then the land that your father farmed, was that leased land?

HM: Rent.

MK: Rent land.

HM: Yeah.

MK: Who owned that land?

HM: From what I gather was the Wilcox family. I think that was the Kaua'i Wilcox, I think, you know they had a very prominent family in Kaua'i, that's Wilcox. That's why the road that we lived on was Wilcox Lane.

MK: And, you know, I was wondering what was your mother's work?

HM: Her work, besides taking care of the house, was, I tell you, she did everything. You know we had five boys and my dad, six. And those days was, young kids like us had the short pants. But my brothers, they wore long pants. And she washed 'em on the washboard. She *sentaku* [laundry]—oh, yeah, no machine. And besides that she worked in the garden. There was always jobs for do. And, you know, our house was very, very, old. When we moved to that house where we used to live, was termite-eaten.

MK: Oh.

HM: Yeah. That type of home was common those days.

MK: What did your house look like?

HM: Oh, have a picture in there, something like that there. You know, it's a small house and as the family grew, they keep on adding rooms. So some houses were long, you know they had a lot of kids.

(Laughter)

Yeah, that's true.

WN: And then how many of you slept in one room?

HM: Well, we usually slept about two, two to a room. And them days the rooms were small, you know, no such thing as bed. We used *futon* [bedding]. You know, you leave it on the floor and as you get up, you *tatamu* . . .

MK: Mm-hmm, fold it.

HM: . . . you put it away, you stack it up, yeah. That's how it was.

MK: And you know, I noticed that your father died in 1930 or '31.

HM: Yeah, yeah.

MK: You were twelve or thirteen, around there?

HM: Yeah, approximate.

MK: When your father died, what happened then? What happened to your family?

HM: Well, we just continued because my oldest brother was in the twenties already. Say, if I was twelve, he was twenty-two. So he left school after sixth grade, I think.

MK: So your family managed with the help of your older brother.

HM: Oh, yeah, yeah.

MK: And what happened to the farm when your dad died?

HM: Well, we took over, yeah. We just continued without him. No more choice, so.

MK: And you know you mentioned that you were the last one of seven children, right?

HM: Yeah.

MK: How was it? You know, how was it growing up in a big family?

HM: Well, the only thing I can say is I was the baby (laughs) of the family (MK laughs). I think now, when I think back,

it was pretty good though. You get no blame when I used to  
. . .

(Laughter)

And I still remember we used to go to a playground. I think I must have been something about ten, I think. I used to make trouble and then, you know, the other kid beat me up. So I go to my older brother, eh, point, "That's the guy who wen lick me."

(Laughter)

So now he get good licking. Oh, that's how it goes with the family before. That's why you got really advantage to be in a big family.

WN: What about, you had two sisters, yeah?

HM: Yeah.

WN: And what did they do around? Did they help in the farm?

HM: Well, I have one sister living now, well, she's *da kine* regular, after she grow up, she got married and she had to go out, yeah. And one other sister was sort of a, not delinquent, but not too well, yeah.

WN: And did each of you have a specific job that you did out there?

HM: No, no, no, no. You did whatever you were told to do.

WN: But as the youngest, did you have different kind jobs as compared to your older brothers?

HM: Oh, yeah. I mean, the job was lighter job, eh. Like pulling weeds or something like that, anybody can do that. And every night, every night, we used to water the plants. You know, the flowers need water. And we had the five brothers and my dad. And we used to get a rack made of wood, put all our water cans on that, you know, trough sort of. And my can was small because I was small.

(Laughter)

Yeah, I remember that well.

MK: I was wondering from what age did you have to go out to help the farm?

HM: You know, as far as I can remember, from *yöchien* days.

MK: From kindergarten days?

HM: Yeah. Whenever you can do something, you was out there.

MK: And then I know you spent a lot of time working, but what did you folks do for fun?

HM: Fun, well, when you have a family, within the family, you have fun. You find (chuckles) something to do.

MK: Like you mentioned, there's a river nearby.

HM: Yeah.

MK: Did you folks play?

HM: Oh, yeah. That's where all us kids learned to swim. We used to tail the older guys, yeah. What they used to do was just grab you and throw you in the water. That's where you swim or sink. (Laughs) Yeah, so that's what we did.

WN: How deep was the river over there?

HM: Huh?

WN: How deep was the river?

HM: Shallow. Only at some places was little deeper, you know, yeah. That's where we used to go swim. And that kid days, what we used to do was, we used to *hadaka*.

MK: Naked.

(Laughter)

HM: Yeah, that's it. Actually, from home to the river, near, see. Running to the stream, we taking off our clothes already.

(Laughter)

Because what we used to say was, "The last one in the water was a little baby." (Chuckles)

MK: Oh.

HM: Remember that. Yeah, yeah, yeah. That's why everyone used to go fast and dive inside, yeah. And as you grow older, you know, you kind of be sensitive, eh. "Eh, you got to get swimming pants or something." (MK chuckles.) So what we used to do was old pants, we used to cut it short. No can afford swimming *da kine*.

MK: So at the river, you folks would swim in the river. Would you folks catch . . .

HM: Yeah.

MK: . . . shrimp or fish?

HM: Yeah, 'öpae [shrimp], 'o'opu [goby], we used to catch. And I think it's, we never get sick, but you know we used to get this, find old gallon can or five-gallon can. We used to put water to cook, we used to cook a fish in there, then eat. We never did get sick. (MK chuckles.)

WN: You used to make fire over there?

HM: Yeah, you can make fire anyplace. You just get stone, eh, put that can, I mean, the bucket, whatever. Get wood anyplace.

MK: So you used to get 'öpae and 'o'opu.

HM: Yeah, other fish, too.

WN: How big were the 'o'opu?

HM: Depends, usually they're small.

WN: About what, five inches, six inches?

HM: No, that's extra big, that. Usually they're small. 'Öpae was good.

MK: How about *hihiwai* [fresh water snail]?

HM: What?

MK: *Hihiwai* . It looks like . . .

HM: No.

MK: No more?

HM: No, what that again?

WN: You know the shell, look like 'opihi [limpet]? They hang around the . . .

MK: Freshwater 'opihi.

WN: They hang around the rocks. You folks didn't eat that?

HM: No nothing. That is seawater, eh?

MK: And then how about like, you know, we would hear kids in the old days used to make up their own games.

HM: Yeah.

MK: What did you folks do?

HM: We used to play *alavia*. We had a beanbag we used to hit. And we get the *peeowee*.

MK: *Peeowee*?

HM: Yeah, and the broomstick. (Chuckles) We used to play that. So we never used to get money to buy a football or baseball or things like that.

END OF SIDE ONE

SIDE TWO

HM: We used to go to the playground. Then they used to let us have the ball or whatever, you know, we used to play. And then we used to play [with] that [Bull] Durham bag, yeah. Yeah, we call *alavia*.

MK: *Alavia*?

HM: Yeah. What we used to put? Grass or something in there. And some guys, they used to put stone inside. Ho, we used to . . .

(Laughter)

Eh, guys, like *kölohe* [rascal] guys, you know. I tell you.

WN: Some people used to put *kiawe* bean inside.

HM: No, [*haole*] *koa*.

WN: The [*haole*] *koa* bean?

HM: Yeah, yeah. Yeah, but that nothing. Kind of sore, but nothing. Used to put small stones inside. Sore!

(Laughter)

HM: I tell you.

MK: That's real *warukozo* [rascal], yeah?

HM: Yeah.

(Laughter)

HM: Any group, get some guy, (laughs) no matter what.

MK: And then what school did you go?

HM: My whole family went to Kalihi Waena [School], from my oldest brother to me, the last one went Kalihi Waena. And after Kalihi Waena *pau*, we went Kalākau Intermediate School.

MK: And then when you look back on your Kalihi Waena days, what do you remember most about your elementary school days?

HM: *Chee*, that's close to seventy years [ago], you know.

MK: Yeah.

(Laughter)

MK: Like teachers or classmates or what you learned, what do you think of first?

HM: Well, when I think those days, the kids were good, I would say very good. No back talk to teachers or whatever. And never, during my school days, never, never did hear or see a parent come to school, talk to a teacher or talk to the principal or something. What the teacher said was law. And to me, I think, that was very, very good. Today the teachers cannot touch the kids. How can you get discipline like that? I'm pretty sure at home that parents would whack the kid. (Chuckles)

MK: So in your days how were the teachers?

HM: Well, had strict ones and some lenient ones there but as a whole, they were on the serious side. I was a young kid, but that was my thinking.

MK: And then Kalihi Waena, what *kine* kids went there those days?

HM: All local kids. Japanese, Chinese, Portuguese, Hawaiians, and I don't think had one *haole* kid—oh, had one. Yeah, that time I lived in Gulick Avenue, you know. But those days *mezurashi* [uncommon], yeah. You get one *haole* kid, eh, really stand out, yeah. (MK and WN chuckle.) Yeah.

And talking about this one girl. Anyway, this was—a few years back, I went to our McKinley class of '37 reunion.

And then I met one girl, she's from Kalihi Waena School, too. And she said she lived in the same house till today. And I still remember her name, too. You like I tell her name?

(Laughter)

MK: So after you finished Kalihi Waena, you went to . . .

HM: Kalākaua.

MK: And what did you think of Kalākaua?

HM: Well, you find out that, you know, that's the first time I experience, you meet a lot of kids from other schools. You know, like Kalihi Waena, right through the same old kids, yeah. Like when you go to Kalākaua, they come from Kalihi Kai, Lanakila, and all the places. It was something. That's a new experience for us, yeah. And then, hey, I don't know why, but it was so common to see after school, kids fighting. But then days the fighting was all right. They fight with only their hands, you know. You get shiner at the most. (Laughs)

MK: And then by intermediate-school time, you know, you got all kinds of activities, yeah. Got sports . . .

HM: Yeah, yeah.

MK: And club things. For you, did you get to do that kind of thing?

HM: I had to go home, work in the garden. That was my thinking then. When I grow [up], I say, "I'll never be a farmer." Because not fair for the wife and for the kids. The man of the house I no care what, he got to work, do something. Farm or whatever. But if you're a farmer, your wife got to work day and night. And the kids got to work. So that's one thing, I kept my promise though.

MK: That's why Keith didn't end up a farmer, yeah.

(Laughter)

HM: He never get enough of it. But I got to admit, he get a nice yard, though.

(Laughter)

WN: So when you were going Kalihi Waena School, and then after that you had to go Japanese[-language] school.

HM: Yeah.

WN: And then you had to go work. So what was like your typical day? Like, well English school was from eight o'clock to. . . .

HM: Two o'clock, about that.

WN: Two o'clock.

HM: Yeah.

WN: And then you have to go Japanese[-language] school.

HM: Yeah.

WN: And then how far was Kalihi Waena to the Japanese[-language] school?

HM: Oh, maybe, you walk it was about a mile and a half or so, I think. Well, everything used to be before was walk. No such thing as riding car. Your parents [not] going take you, pick you up, and take you anyplace. Everywhere you went was you walked.

WN: So you walked to the Japanese[-language] school?

HM: Yeah.

WN: Now how was Japanese[-language] school for you?

HM: Oh, I enjoyed Japanese[-language] school.

MK: What Japanese[-language] school did you go?

HM: Kalihi Japanese[-language] school. It's, you know where Kalihi Union Church is?

MK: Uh-huh [yes].

HM: Just [Fort] Shafter side of that, on Kam[ehameha] IV Road. Just about a block in from, I think, King Street.

WN: How would you compare English school with Japanese[-language] school? You said you liked Japanese[-language] school. Did you like it more than English school?

HM: Well, not more but in a way I like Japanese[-language] school because it's short, only one hour, yeah.

(Laughter)

WN: But what about like discipline, was it more strict?

HM: Oh, yeah! You cannot beat Japanese[-language] school for discipline. You know that schoolteacher used to get a pointer. Ho, you talk in class, [get hit] over the head. And not one of kids went home, tell their parents that. Because (chuckles) they go home and tell the father that, the old man give 'em another whack.

(Laughter)

HM: Yeah. They were strict, you know. So all my friends, today, they say that's a really good thing because keep them in line, you know.

WN: And what kind of a student were you, English school and Japanese[-language] school?

HM: I wasn't a very good student. But I never caused any trouble, though. My parents never need to go face the teacher, never did.

WN: Did you get whacked?

HM: Of course.

(Laughter)

HM: Once, this was Kalākaua days, this *wahine* [girl] go report to the teacher that some boys, you know, *wen* go bother her. And the vice-principal came in our room, you know. She named the people, yeah, the kids who *wen* bother her. I was one of them. And he call us, the vice-principal call us in front of the class, with a stick, yeah. Everybody, bang in the 'ōkole [buttocks]. You know how sore, I tell you. That's the only time I got whacked, and which I never do. The teacher named me, he no care, yeah. I tell you not fair, they no even ask us nothing. Boy, I tell you, you try getting whacked like that. I still can feel 'em. (Chuckles)

WN: So after Japanese[-language] school, you walked home?

HM: Yeah, yeah.

WN: So you didn't have any time at all to play or anything?

HM: No, no.

WN: So about what time did you get home?

HM: Well, took me about, at the most about half an hour to get home. So my parents knew what time I should be home, yeah.

MK: And then going back to Japanese[-language] school, lot of AJA's, they tell us about *shūshin*.

(Telephone rings.)

HM: Oh!

MK: What was that for you at Japanese[-language] school?

HM: Yeah, them days, how would you [define] *shūshin*?

MK: Ethics?

HM: Yeah, yeah. For me, that wen sink in after I grew up. Them days I used to think, ah, *shūshin* teacher lecturing us again. This and that, this and that. Get kind of sick, but the more you think about it, yeah, how true that is.

MK: What did they lecture to you about?

HM: Well, especially, I wasn't too good a student. So what (laughs) I wanna say to you, it's kind of hard. You've been to Japanese[-language] school, yeah?

MK: Yeah, yeah.

HM: You had *shūshin*?

MK: Ah, sort of. You know like *oyakökō* [filial piety].

HM: Yeah, yeah.

MK: So I was wondering, your time, what did they tell you, you know?

HM: Yeah. But, another thing, not too much on the inside [points to head], too, yeah.

(Laughter)

WN: What about things like the emperor, did you folks have to stand up in front of the emperor's picture or anything like that?

HM: No, no. *Chee*, now you get me thinking. I wonder if we had his picture in the room, you know, *Tenno Heika* [emperor] picture, yeah, because a lot of homes had, you know. Our home had, too.

MK: So did you folks celebrate the emperor's birthday?

HM: No. We, just that regular national holidays, yeah.

MK: And then finally, when you *pau* Kalākaua, you went to McKinley.

HM: Yeah.

MK: How was McKinley for you, high school already?

HM: Yeah. I was sort of on the *otonashii* side, yeah.

MK: Mmm. Quiet side.

HM: Yeah, yeah, yeah. So. . . .

MK: What kind of program did you follow? What kind of classes you took?

HM: I wasn't a. . . . Oh, I just took whatever to get by, let's face it.

MK: I know that your older brother Walter. . . .

HM: Yeah, he's the smart one in the family. No fair. He get all the brains.

(Laughter)

MK: So I think the last time you were saying your mother wanted you to go UH [University of Hawai'i], too, huh.

HM: Yeah, yeah, yeah. But, I mean, if you ain't got it, you ain't got it. But I think I sort of made up a little bit. I think I turned out to be a pretty good father. And she [looks at wife, Janet] knows I turned out to be a good husband. Yeah. (Laughs)

MK: Yeah, yeah. So at McKinley you had regular courses.

HM: Yeah, enough to stay in school.

MK: And then, when you graduated from McKinley, what were your plans?

HM: No more. (Laughs) I wasn't the ambitious type.

MK: So, what did you do after graduation?

HM: Well, I worked in the farm for several years, you know the family farm, yeah. And then, I think after two years, I went out work as a carpenter. Like, those days, you want to be a carpenter, always had openings. Like almost, not almost all but majority of the carpenters was Japanese then.

MK: How come you went into carpentry?

HM: Well, you got to do something, yeah. And I tag along with another brother. I went with him, so.

MK: And then those days, how do you become a carpenter?

HM: Well, you be a helper, yeah. The journeyman carpenter tell you do this, do that, bring this, and all that. Mostly what they did was labor jobs, carrying lumber, dig hole, and all that.

MK: So sort of like apprentice, *minarai*?

HM: Yeah.

MK: So in the beginning, what companies did you work for?

HM: Oh, the first company I worked for was Otsuki.

MK: Otsuki.

HM: Yeah. And then I worked for Murata. I worked for Kimura. And then days, the bosses were mostly Japanese people. And they on the older side and most of them used a lot of [spoken] Japanese. So, in a way, I had advantage on that. At least I can understand. I couldn't speak too well, but at least I can understand what they say. So it was a big help.

MK: And then how did they teach you to be a carpenter?

HM: (Laughs) *Chee*, hard to say, no? You just gotta. . . .

WN: That's a on-the-job training kind? On-the-job training? You just go along with somebody?

HM: Yeah, usually. They tell you do this. Naturally, pounding a hammer just comes natural to you, right? Anybody. At home, you do that as a kid. When you saw something, you know how to do it. But as you go work for somebody, you gotta cut 'em to certain length and this and that. Then, you know, you gotta tape it off with that rule or whatever. And it's a lot of common sense. It's not that you do something wrong so you go break the lumber, whatever, you know. And the bosses, they *koraeru* [patient], eh. Yeah, yeah. So not too bad.

MK: So okay if you make mistake?

HM: No problem.

(Laughter)

MK: What was the pay like for carpenter?

HM: I was lucky. I started with two dollars a day. That was good, you know. I know my older brother that I followed, when he started, it was dollar a day. And that was nine hours, plus Saturday, all day. Imagine, was it Dale or Lara, a couple summers ago, she came back—oh, was Dale, I think. She said she's getting, how much? Ten dollars an hour? No, more than that an hour. I tell 'em, "What?" I tell 'em one-month pay.

(Laughter)

Was Dale, yeah? I think it was Dale, I think. But anyway.

MK: Your granddaughter was getting better pay than you used to get. (Laughs)

WN: She was getting more in one hour than you got in one week.

HM: (Chuckles) Oh, yeah.

WN: One week, yeah. (Chuckles) You know, you said that after you finished McKinley, you went and you were working on the farm, yeah. And who was running the farm at that time, your oldest brother?

HM: Yeah.

WN: Yeah. Was there anytime when you thought maybe this, I know you said you don't want to go farming, but did you ever think, "Chee, this is what I'm gonna be doing?" Or did you have that choice at all, to work in the farm permanently?

HM: Yeah. As far as leaving the farm, I can leave anytime I wanted because I was on the low man on the totem pole. They can do well without me. I don't know. Somehow you just get in line and you follow your older brother. You do this, do that, eh. That's how I went into carpentry. Not because I liked it. I had to do something.

WN: Do you remember how much you got paid working on the farm?

HM: No, nothing.

WN: Oh, nothing. (MK chuckles.)

HM: You eat. *Shee*.

(Laughter)

WN: Well I thought maybe your brother, you know, would pay you or something.

HM: No, no. Well, my mom used to give us spending money, yeah. So whenever we want to go movie or . . .

MK: So she gave you *kozukai* [allowance]?

HM: *Kozukai*. But not steady now. Like today, oh, the kids get so much a day.

MK: Oh, so not allowance?

HM: No more.

MK: No allowance.

HM: When you need 'em, you ask 'em. The good part was we used to get whatever we asked for. That's why we used to go to a lot of, you know like the district used to get this theater, Kalihi Theater. Weekends, oh, we used to like go there. Get plenty the cartoons, comedy, (laughs) all that.

WN: How much was that, to go?

HM: Well, the early days was nickel. And then later came ten cents, huh?

WN: Well, I'm glad you had some time to enjoy that.

HM: Yeah, at least we went there. You know, talk about money, not too long ago, Lara, I don't know, she bought something. She had to buy something so, you know, I gave her some money. (Chuckles) Afterward, she had a loose change, I tell her, "Keep it." Had only about fifty cents or seventy-five cents.

She said, "What can you do with this much?"

(Laughter)

HM: So she returned the money to me.

(Laughter)

Them days even a quarter or something, big for us, you know.

MK: Mm-hmm.

HM: We used to get nickel, used to buy plenty things. Yeah, *crackseed*, ice cream, or whatever, *shave ice*. Now whatever change, they think it's nothing.

MK: And then I know that after you worked for several contractors, you worked for several [private] companies, you ended up working a [federal] defense job.

HM: Yeah.

MK: For the Pacific Naval Bases . . .

HM: Yeah, right.

MK: How did you get into that?

HM: Well, you go to the job site and you apply for work. Because those days was, you want to work, get plenty work for you.

MK: So, how did you hear about the defense job?

HM: In the papers or whatever. Everywhere you go they talk about defense job. And the pay was so good compared with the private contractors. Whereas when the-*chee*, usually when you work for a private contractor, they pay you by the hour, too, yeah. But this, well, we worked for the first Pacific Naval Bases, the cheapest pay was, they start you off with eighty cents an hour. And that was more than double our outside pay. So anybody can see, why not go work for the navy?

MK: And then what kind of work did you do?

HM: Building.

MK: Building.

HM: Yeah.

MK: What kind of stuff did you folks build?

HM: Well, usually them days was big jobs because you building, usually it was concrete jobs, you know, barracks, things like that. We did some woodwork, but not too much. We did woodwork for make the forms for concrete, yeah. But mostly it was for the navy so whatever the navy they do is big scale, yeah.

MK: And so what parts of the island did you work then for the navy?

HM: Oh, usually about Red Hill. They have the underground fuel storage there [i.e., Red Hill Underground Fuel Storage Facility].

MK: So you worked on that?

HM: Oh, yeah. In fact, when we were working the Waipahu tunnel, that's the same thing, storage, yeah. From then I went into the army. That was March of '43.

WN: So when you were working like for the navy, did you, at that time, feel that, "Oh, this is building up." You know, did you get an idea about war at this time?

HM: Oh, war was all over, oh yeah. That's why there's a lot of, the tunnel job, day and night, continuous. Until then, the fuel was, I think, this was an open area, all tanks here and there. So because of war, they put it underground.

MK: So did you have a feeling that something was going to happen?

HM: Oh, yeah. It was just a matter of time.

WN: So there were others then, I mean, they hired you, but they probably hired a lot of other people, too?

HM: Oh, plenty. And plenty came from the Mainland.

WN: Oh, yeah?

HM: Oh, yeah.

WN: So job was plentiful at that time?

HM: No excuse. As long as you go look for a job, there was a job for everybody.

MK: You know you mentioned a lot of guys came from the Mainland to work.

HM: Yeah.

MK: At any time, you worked with the Mainland guys?

HM: Oh, yes, at times.

MK: What was it like working with Mainland guys? First time you working with so many *haoles*.

HM: Yeah, yeah, yeah. I mean, the ways are different. How you work, too, is, for us it was different because we were so

used to working with local people, yeah. Even local people, Hawaiian, Portuguese, Chinese, Korean, whatever, their ways are almost same in Hawai'i. Yeah, that's a big difference.

WN: We have to stop here. We can either continue with another tape or end here and we take up from . . . We got you just about . . .

MK: Why don't we end here?

END OF INTERVIEW

Tape Nos. 44-21-2-05 and 44-20-2-05

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Hichiro Matsumoto (HM)

Honolulu, O'ahu

March 17, 2005

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

[NOTE: Also present at interview were HM's wife, Janet Matsumoto (JM) and Holly Yamada (HY).]

MK: This is an interview with Mr. Hichiro Matsumoto on March 17, 2005, at his home in Honolulu, O'ahu. And the interviewers are Warren Nishimoto and Michiko Kodama-Nishimoto. And this is the second session with Mr. Matsumoto.

Okay, first of all. Go back to December 7, 1941.

HM: Mm-hmm [yes].

MK: When Pearl Harbor was attacked, what were you doing?

HM: That Sunday morning—the attack was right after eight o'clock, I'm pretty sure it was. Because we were working—that was a Sunday morning—and we were building the concrete crusher, the defense job. And as we went up the conveyor belt—what do you call that bridge or whatever that goes to the rock crusher tower?—we saw planes, plenty planes, flying in formation, coming from the north side, Kahuku end of O'ahu. And before you knew it, they were circling Pearl Harbor. The raid was on, they started

bombing Pearl Harbor. And at first, we were thinking, "It's kind of funny being a Sunday morning that early, and then so many planes flying." But before you knew it, the bombs start falling on the ships and Ford Island. Then we think, "Who the hell," you know. And then some guys said, "Oh, Japan plane," because they saw the red ball [rising sun insignia] under the wing. And then everybody got excited.

And then no work was done. You know, when a war's going on, something like that, you drop everything and we went up to the main area of Red Hill. And then, all us local boys, and then plenty *haole* workers from the Mainland, from there, we saw the bombing of Pearl Harbor. And the bombing lasted for some time. Planes keep flying, drop their bomb. And another wave came, they dropped their bombs, too. And that they, simultaneously, they attacked Hickam Field, which is close to Pearl Harbor. And (honking in background) Wheeler Field was bombed, too. But that, we heard later from the reports. But it's something, really, you don't want to see.

MK: Mm-hmm [yes].

HM: But like the Japanese say, things like that, "*Shō ga nai.*" You know, "*Shikata ga nai.*" What do you call?

MK: And, like you were saying, *shō ga nai*, can't be helped.

HM: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

MK: You know, nothing else can be done.

HM: You know, Michiko, you make it so easy. (MK laughs.) Right.

(Laughter)

MK: And I was wondering, when did you sort of get the official word that, yeah, it is Japan bombing Pearl Harbor?

HM: Well, something just. . . . I mean the radio was going on, and then when you see something like that, you, more or less, can make out for yourself. And they dropping bombs. I think one of the first ships they hit was [USS] *Arizona*. And that ship was sunk in, ooh, no time, with all that sailors being on the ship, being a Sunday morning.

MK: And, you know, after you realized, "Oh, it's Japan bombing Pearl Harbor," how did you feel as a Japanese American?

HM: Some guys said that they kind of felt ashamed, you know, your people coming here and they attack Pearl Harbor, especially it was a sneak attack. But I didn't quite feel that way, being an American. Because I was in the twenties

already, I was just about a full-grown man, and so that's about it. So, and then, like come back to *shō ga nai*, they our people, but different country.

MK: And then, how did your parents feel?

HM: Who?

MK: How did your parents feel about the attack?

HM: I had only my mother because my dad passed away already. But the thing is, I know she took it bad. Because let's face it, they're the old people, their mind and everything is, you know, the old country style. And when we—after that—when they called up volunteers [for U.S. military service], we had five boys, and all five volunteered. She didn't question us. Because I know for myself that quite a few families, the mom told the kids, "Why did you volunteer?" So that, I'm really glad that my mom didn't ask us that question.

MK: And, you know, before we get into the volunteering part, . . .

HM: Mm-hmm [yes].

MK: . . . (noise in background) I was wondering, right after the war started, how did it affect your life? You know, the war started. Anything changed, what things changed for you?

HM: Well, not too much changed. But the only thing, every night we had to stay home. You cannot go out. But one thing I was glad—I'm glad, I mean—I never get girlfriend yet.

(Laughter)

Because how many guys my age, you know, the age for getting ready to get married, yeah. What they going to do? Those poor guys, they say, oh, they cannot go here, they cannot go there, and all that.

(Laughter)

MK: And then you mentioned that five Matsumoto boys volunteered.

HM: Right.

MK: What are the names of your brothers that volunteered?

HM: The oldest, Susumu, the next one is Walter, and then came Tsutomu, Matao, and myself.

MK: And what was your reason for volunteering?

HM: Well, Michiko, please don't laugh now. Being an American, I was, like I said, I was grown up already. That's one of my duties. And before this volunteering came up, I was called by the draft board, the number two draft. But I got deferred because I was working the defense job, Red Hill. So, if I didn't get that, if I was working outside [i.e., for a private company], I would have been drafted right before the war. But, like I said, I was working for the defense job, so in March of [19]43, when the volunteer came up, I volunteered and we were accepted.

MK: And, of the five brothers, how many were accepted?

HM: All five of us. No, no, (chuckles) erase that. Three, three of us, yeah.

MK: And how come the two were not accepted? (Phone rings.)

HM: I don't know, that's the army. Why they weren't accepted, I don't know.

MK: And you mentioned that when you folks volunteered, your mother never asked why you volunteered.

HM: No, she didn't ask.

MK: But how did she react, though?

HM: Well, she wasn't too much of a talker, so I guess she kind of *damashite* [became silent]. And our conversation, when I'm talking to her, too, some things is kind of hard to explain. Yeah. But I think she understood why.

MK: So she understood, and then she just kind of just took it. Just . . .

HM: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

MK: And then after you volunteered, before you went to Camp Shelby, what were you doing before Camp Shelby, on O'ahu?

HM: Well, I was working the Red Hill defense job. So I worked the defense job for about two or three years before I went into the service.

MK: And then you went in the service, and did you go Schofield [Barracks] or . . .

HM: First. After we were. . . . We went to Washington Intermediate School. That's where our local draft board

was. Board number three. And we were told that they were going to let us know if we were accepted or not at that get-together at Washington Intermediate. No, but that day came, as they call you, you went on the truck, army truck. They had all the trucks ready for us. Just go in the truck and took us down to Schofield. That was it. But some guys, I don't know how they knew that they were being accepted. They brought, you know, small hand bags, I guess their toilet articles or things like that. But the majority of us just went on the truck and we went Schofield.

MK: So you folks were taken to Schofield and you had no chance of telling anybody or getting your things together before going?

HM: No, we just went to Schofield and we stayed there for about—of course, they clothed us and all that—and we stayed there for about a week, I think, before they shipped us to the Mainland. But we went home for a one-day pass before we were shipped over.

WN: You know, you said that you were deferred, yeah, because you were a defense worker.

HM: Right.

WN: What about your four brothers, I mean they were all draft age, right?

HM: We all, in fact, for the draft, I was supposed to be the only guy drafted until then. But them, I don't think they received any draft notice. Maybe later, you know, their turn would come. But up till then, I was the only one.

WN: You were the youngest though, right?

HM: Yeah.

WN: Yeah. I was wondering, were you the only one working defense job at that time?

HM; No, my two other brothers working defense job, too.

WN: Oh, they were working defense, too.

HM: Yeah.

WN: Oh, so that's why they probably weren't drafted either, right?

HM: That, I don't know.

MK: And then so, you were Schofield, you got a one-day pass. And when you got that one-day pass, what did you do?

HM: Well, go home and then (chuckles) enjoy a good old mom cooking. Mm-hmm [yes]. Like I said, no more girlfriend so you get no place to go.

MK: So at that time, did you know that you were going to go Mainland pretty soon?

HM: Oh, yeah.

MK: And, on that trip to Camp Shelby, you had to go on a boat from Honolulu to San Francisco. Then you went to Oakland, then you went on a train . . .

HM: Right.

MK: . . . to Hattiesburg.

HM: Correction. We got on the train and we took a northern train route and we went to Chicago. And from Chicago, we went down to Camp Shelby.

MK: And how was that trip for you?

HM: Oh, that was really something. Day and night, day and night, you're sitting on the train. And the food they give you is, well, you don't exactly call it "food" because something they only pass out to GIs. Sandwich and only bread and butter or something like that. You sleep on the train (chuckles). But one day, what we did was, every so often, the train would stop in an open area. And what we would do was, everybody would get up, do some calisthenics and run around. Run a little, you know, that really helped. Instead of being on the train for twenty-four hours a day.

WN: You had a mattress to sleep on?

HM: No, on the seat.

WN: Wow.

HM: No more that comfort, (chuckles) no. On the train seat, yeah, you sit, or whatever you want to do. You want to lie down in the aisle, up to you.

MK: And then how was the boat trip from Honolulu to West Coast?

HM: Oh, that was. . . . Anyway, from when we went, when we left the U.S.A. Mainland, we left from Camp Patrick Henry, Newport News, Virginia. [HM is talking about the trip from

Virginia to Europe] And at night, we boarded the *Liberty* ship. You know, the *Liberty* ship is a small boat. Mostly it was built for World War II, for troops. Troop movement. So, what they did to us was, we went on the ship, we went down in the hold, only so big an area. And then the bunks were so, something else. You get one post here, you get one post here, and get about five, six, beds like that. You know, the hammock type.

MK: Mm-hmm [yes].

HM: And all so close. So had guys snoring, this and that, you can hear everything. So the light sleepers couldn't sleep. But I was a pretty good sleeper, sleep was all right for me. But I'm not a good sailor. So I think only once, I went up the galley for food. All the time I was in bed, you know, throwing up. And had guys worse than me. And the boys were all our friends, being all local guys, so they used to bring back food for us.

MK: So the trip from Shelby to Europe was hard, that ship . . .

HM: Well, it was---that was---let me backtrack a little.

MK: Mm-hmm [yes].

HM: From Hawai'i to Mainland, we caught the *Lurline*. It was a luxury ship, then. Yeah, you know, all the tourists, yeah. And then from the Mainland to Europe, we caught the *Liberty* ship. Twenty-eight days. (Chuckles) And the thing is, the toilet. That's something. You know they get that metal trough. So long, you know. And then in between, they get wooden board. For, I guess, two is for one feet, and the next one, so on. And when the ocean is rough, the water goes up like this, eh. So when you sit in the middle, it's all right. But both ends, when the ship comes this way, the water comes up to your 'ökole [buttocks]. All get wet.

(Laughter)

Anyway, after a while, we adjusted, we got used to that. So that, the guys will never forget that.

WN: Was there anytime when you said to yourself, "Why the heck did I do this?"

HM: From the first day. From the first day we went to Schofield, I said to myself, "What did I get myself into?"

WN: And were your brothers along with you? Your brothers?

HM: No, no, no, no.

WN: Just yourself?

HM: Yeah. I mean, with all the other boys. Because, I mean they put you here, there. Yeah.

MK: And then, so, when you went to Camp Shelby, what company were you in?

HM: Well, when we went to Camp Shelby, the first company I went to was Company C. But the thing is, after a few days—you know, they reorganize or whatever—I went to Company F.

MK: And then, you know, at Camp Shelby you have Mainland Japanese . . .

HM: Oh, yeah.

MK: How were you and the Mainland Japanese?

HM: Well, the thing is, I did get along with them. Of course, not everybody same like—you back home, would be the same thing. Yeah, but as a whole, took us a little time to get to know them. Their ways are different too, eh. And the way how they talk, different too, eh. And when I come to think of it, I think they had a harder time understanding us, than we get to understand them.

MK: And then you were saying their ways were different.

HM: Oh, yeah.

MK: What was different about their ways?

HM: Well, just for instance, like say, when we go out, pass like that, to Hattiesburg. You know, from Shelby, go out, back, come home. Lot of these Hawai'i boys, when they come back to camp, they used to buy something. You know, give the hutment boys. But the Mainland guys was a little different, they were more on their, I don't know, closer—how do you say it anyway? But the Hawai'i guys was more free-spending. So, they [the Mainland boys] were good guys, too, you know. Yeah.

MK: And then when you were up there, you have all these *haole* enlisted men, you know, at the camp, too. And you have officers. How were you with them?

HM: But the one thing was, we had our whole regiment. We were in one area. That's why within our area, we hardly saw any *haoles*. They had their own area, too. And our area was the 442<sup>nd</sup> area. It was regimental so it was a kind of big area.

So the only people we saw was Japanese guys, so just like you stay in Japan.

(Laughter)

The only *haoles* was the officers. Although we had quite a few Japanese [American] officers. But the big majority was *haole* guys.

MK: And then people, they tell us about when they went to Camp Shelby and Hattiesburg, first time, they noticed how black Americans and white Americans were kind of separated. What did you think of that, what was your experience with that?

HM: I'm pretty sure you heard of the old saying—Hawai'i Theatre, for instance—you know, the top seats, they used to call it "nigger heaven." *Chee*. Anyway, before I went to the service, before I went away, all the time I lived here, I just thought, "Oh, just they call it 'nigger heaven,' that's all." But when I went to Shelby, we went to a movie, then it hit me that that's where only the black people, "nigger heaven." And they had their own entrance to go up. Whereas us guys, we're considered white, yeah. (Chuckles) So we went through the main entrance. When we go to restaurants or anyplace, had separate [facilities for] white and the black people.

MK: And then being, you know, Japanese American, and being in the South, how did the civilians around there treat you folks?

HM: Yeah, it took a little time. Like say, for instance, these Japanese boys, after the camp, I mean, dinner at the camp, a lot of the boys will go to Hattiesburg to have a "decent" meal. (Chuckles) And the people that ran that restaurants, ho, they were really happy to see the Japanese boys. After a while, now. Because when they went to the restaurant, they eat the best food, and they tip, too, you know. Whereas a lot of these *haole* guys, when they went to the restaurant, they go only for coffee or something. So, I guess they were satisfied with the army food. So that made a lot of difference. So, like if you were to go in a restaurant, the first thing, they used to come to the Japanese boys, serve them because that's where the money was.

And we used to go to clothing store because they issued us only three pairs of underwear now. Three pairs of underwear. And then, usually other size yeah, usually big.

(Laughter)

So we went to Hattiesburg and we used to—oh, I'm pretty sure almost everybody went to the clothing store to buy underwear. In the early days, was hard to find that small size. But after a while, any time you go, they had for you. Yeah. So I think they really appreciated the guys. They spent way more than the *haole* guys.

MK: So you folks boosted the economy of Hattiesburg then.

HM: Right.

(Laughter)

WN: Did you folks go in—when folks went to town, did you wear your uniform?

HM: Oh, yeah. That's the only thing we get to wear, Sage [WN's nickname]. Day and night, day and night, you get your army uniform.

MK: You know, and you said like, "The underwear was too big." How about all the other clothes that the army gave you?

HM: Was worse because underwear, you can hide 'em, eh. (Chuckles) The shirt sleeves were so long. And in the early days, they used to give us canvas leggings, you know leggings you put here, eh. So Japanese boys—like mine, I was on the not-too-small side—the small guys, the leggings come so long, used to come up to here. How can they . . .

(Laughter)

WN: Came up to the thigh?

HM: So what they did was, they used to bend [fold] it over. And then the rifle, too. With the M1 rifle, you attach the bayonet. The short guys, when they attach the bayonet, their head over here, the bayonet this high. Where you find an army like that, the rifle and bayonet more tall than the soldier?

MK: How about shoes for local guys?

HM: How to what?

MK: How about the shoes for the local guys?

HM: Oh, local guys, plenty guys, they get the whatever size, triple, you know, triple-E or what, that was common. You know, wide. (Laughs) *Lū'au* feet.

(Laughter)

MK: So, you know, the army gave you folks food, they gave you clothing. How was the housing?

HM: Oh, was adequate. We had barracks. Twelve to a barracks, each squad had a barracks. And they had a coal heater, you burn coal. Both ends of the hutment. So wintertime, we used to shove coal in there until the last guy that goes to bed, it was sort of his duty to fill 'em up for the heater to last. But when comes to one, two o'clock, it's all burned out. It was cold, wintertime.

MK: And how was the weather at Camp Shelby, how was the weather for you?

HM: The thing is, it seldom rained. So it was—like wintertime, it was cold. It didn't snow though, was cold. But otherwise, it was all right. Dry. Camp Shelby, we never see grass. It was all sand and dirt seems like. All compact, you know. The only thing we saw on the ground was pine needle.

MK: And then how was the training? What did you folks do for training?

HM: Well, that's. . . . I think for almost everybody, was something new, that kind of training. Get up in the morning, march out to that field with the training area. And then we used to take calisthenics, things like that. Come back for lunch, go back out after lunch. And about five o'clock I think, came back to camp. Training is, more the early days, we used to go to the rifle range and all that. But after I don't know how many weeks of basic training we had, after that, we used to go out in the forest problems, field problems. That we enjoyed more because you don't have to shave or things like that, you know.

MK: And then what were these field problems?

HM: Well, the thing is, it was just more for the officers, seems like. Like us guys, we used to just take orders. And they tell you, go there, go there, this and that. The *kurushii* [difficult] part was you're hiking. Day and night you hike. Which helped, though.

WN: What kind of shape were you in when you volunteered and went to Shelby?

HM: Oh, I was in good shape, I was a young man, yet. Mm-hmm [yes]. And then, the thing is, like our bunch of boys, almost all single guys so we used to go up to the park. We

used to play football and baseball and things like that. So we were in fairly good shape.

MK: And, you know, when you folks were not training, not drilling, or not doing the problems, what did you folks do for fun?

HM: We'd go to the PX [post exchange] to drink beer. (Chuckles) Because, I mean, almost all the time was you training over there. Mm-hmm [yes]. Like Saturday, we'd knock off a little early. And Sunday you were free all day. But Monday through Friday, morning to night, was training, training.

MK: So how much beer did you drink?

HM: Well, *chee*, ask me something easier to answer.

(Laughter)

MK: Okay, how about playing cards?

HM: Oh, yeah, that was popular. But not too much because your pay was [low]. Because some get—I wonder, we had fifty dollars a month or something. And then from there, we had to pay our insurance, pay our laundry. So whatever you got was about—you were lucky if you get twenty dollars a month.

WN: What kind of insurance?

HM: Your life insurance.

WN: Oh. You had to pay for that?

HM: Sure.

MK: Was it required?

HM: No, no, option. But almost everybody took that.

MK: And then, you know, with the money that you folks had, like you were saying, you could go buy beer at the PX, you could go eat at the restaurants in Hattiesburg. Were any of the soldiers sending money back home to their families?

HM: I don't know. I think some did. I think was the other way around. More guys asked (laughs) the home people to send them money.

WN: I just wanted to back up. You know, you were working defense job, making pretty good money . . .

HM: Oh, I thought was good, yeah.

WN: So what did you think that, you know, to leave this life and this type of—doing this kind of work and volunteer?

HM: Well, that was, I mean, it's something that you got to do. Well, that's how I felt.

WN: And then when you had to tell your boss, was that easy?

HM: No. In fact, he was glad to see some of us guys go.

MK: And then you were saying that some guys would write home for money, yeah?

HM: Right (laughs).

MK: I was wondering, when you folks were in training, how much communication there was between home and over there?

HM: Well, the thing is, you wrote letters, yeah. That's about it. And then days, 1943, 1944, so you can imagine took quite some time for the mail to go back and forth, you know, yeah.

MK: So between you and your mother, would you write letters from Shelby?

HM: Oh, yeah. I used to.

MK: And what did you write about to your mom?

HM: That, you know, the training, and this and that. What life was like being in the army, being away without her home cooking and all that, you know.

MK: And then your mom is Japanese, so how did she write or. . . .?

HM: No, she didn't write. I used to write to my—in those days, my sister-in-law was home, see. So, mm-hmm [yes].

MK: So you wrote to your sister-in-law and she could share that . . .

HM: Yeah, right, right, right.

MK: . . . with the rest of the family. And, you know, your brothers were in the service, too, at that time.

HM: Right.

MK: How much contact did you have with them?

HM: Hardly. Because we were at different places.

MK: I know that, you know, you were with the 442<sup>nd</sup>, yeah?

HM: Mm-hmm [yes].

MK: You were Company C, then Company F. Then, maybe about February 1944, maybe around there, you were chosen as a replacement, yeah?

HM: I went to the 100<sup>th</sup>, yeah.

MK: Yeah.

HM: This was February, I remember, yeah.

MK: How did you hear that you were chosen to be one of the replacements?

HM: Oh, your company clerk will let you know, yeah.

MK: And when did you hear that, when did you hear that news?

HM: Oh, yeah. When we were in the forest, cold—the reason that I remember is was cold. So must be wintertime, yeah.

MK: I know the first time we talked with you, you told us the story about how, you know, you had been training and you were tired, and then they called out your name.

HM: Mm-hmm [yes].

MK: Can you tell us that story (HM laughs.) how you heard?

HM: Is it all right—video, what I say? (Laughs)

MK: If you feel comfortable telling us the story.

HM: Well, that's the only way I can express myself.

MK: Yeah.

HM: Anyway, it was, I'd say, about maybe two, three o'clock in the morning, winter. Cold and we had a problem, we came back to camp. Everything blacked out, so you can just hear guys, you know. I was bed down already, I was cold, and I hear this guy calling names out. They called me, "Matsumoto."

I go, "Yeah."

He said, "Saddle up." "Saddle up" means pick up your gear, see.

So I told him—and catch me by—you know. Come to my mind—I told him, "What the fuck you want?" Well, that's the army's language, let's face it. We don't say, "Oh, what do you want?"

(Laughter)

And the guy said, "Get over here, get your ass over here," you know. He said, "You're going back camp."

I told him, "What for?"

He said, "You're going to replacement 100<sup>th</sup>."

Oh, really, my heart went down like that. On the first day in camp, they kind of preach to you that, "This is your core squad," yeah. Your platoon and your company. "You've got to get along good and fight together as a machine." And then all of a sudden, they tell you they pull you out and you're going someplace else. Oh, that really shocked me.

So, to be honest with you, I'm not the kind that use that word, F—the "F" word. Because I think, especially *da kine*, like, you don't hear a kid using that word, eh?

WN: I don't know. (Chuckles) Yeah, I don't know.

HM: No, because I don't think I ever used that word at home or elsewhere. Because I try to, you know, keep away from words like that.

WN: But the guy must have irritated you or something for you to use that word.

HM: Two o'clock in the morning, you freezing your ass, (chuckles), and you hear this guy call you. Oh, you're not going to think and say. It's just going to come out. (Chuckles)

MK: And then, how did you feel being selected to be one of the replacements?

HM: I don't know. Anyway, what the word was, all the "deadheads." They picked the deadheads to go, see. I was thinking, "I never give my sergeant a bad time." And my older brother, yeah—he was in the 442<sup>nd</sup>, too—that guy is just the opposite. *Kolohe* [mischievous], you know, *kolohe*, that's what he was. You know, and he wasn't selected to go overseas. So I think, "What the hell goes on?"

WN: And at that time, were you aware of the 100<sup>th</sup> and what took place?

HM: Oh, yeah. And in fact, you know—this is going fast forward, but—while we were in France, southern France, we were in Nice. My brother, the one just above me, he's a *kolohe* guy. So we went to, not "we," but he and his friends went to town. They raise hell. Drink up and raise hell. And the MP [military police] station called the 442<sup>nd</sup>. You know, telling them to send somebody to pick up the 442<sup>nd</sup> boys, bring them back to our area. And my other brother, he was in charge of that—what do you call?—you don't call it CP. But anyway, he was in charge of that sort of . . .

END OF SIDE ONE

SIDE TWO

HM: . . . anyway . . .

MK: That would be Walter . . .

HM: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

MK: . . . he was an officer, yeah?

HM: He was back in camp, he was acting CO [commanding officer] of that group, see. So he went down with some boys to pick the *kolohe* guys up, bring them back. And he goes over there, he goes to the brig there, "Who the hell is there?" My other brother.

(Laughter)

That's the *kolohe* one. Yeah, that actually happened, you know. One brother picking up the other guy, yeah. And to me, to this day, I said, "That's the guy that should have gone 100<sup>th</sup>, not me."

WN: You know the other guys that he called out . . .

HM: Yeah.

WN: . . . were they kind of *kolohe* guys?

HM: I guess so. Because look, any time MP pick up guys, that's *kolohe* guys.

WN: No, but the guys, when you got picked to join the 100<sup>th</sup>. When you were at Camp Shelby.

HM: Oh, I see.

WN: We're going back now.

HM: Yeah, yeah.

WN: Were they *kolohē* guys, too? I mean . . .

HM: Well, supposed to be, yeah (chuckles).

WN: I mean, did you guys look at each other and say, "Eh, how come you got picked? How come I got picked?" Or anything like that.

HM: The thing is, several times, I met my sergeant when I was at F Company's reunion. But I never did ask him why I was picked because I don't want to spoil things after so many years. Because that's a hard thing to do, you know, pick guys up and. . . But that's the truth.

MK: So you were pulled out of the 442<sup>nd</sup>, sent to the 100<sup>th</sup>, and what company were you assigned to with the 100<sup>th</sup>?

HM: A.

MK: And, at that time, where was the 100<sup>th</sup> fighting when you joined them?

HM: Anzio. Anzio is a port city. And the U.S. were holding—they were on the defensive then. They were dug in until the next push or something like that.

MK: And, you know, at that time, what was your job? You were with Company A, what was . . .

HM: Well, that's the infantry, so, being a rifleman, hard to write up the job description on that.

(Laughter)

MK: Used a rifle.

HM: Yeah, right. And your pick and shovel for the foxhole.

MK: So when you joined the 100<sup>th</sup>, they're at Anzio. First time you're going to be way at the front, yeah?

HM: Yeah.

MK: How was that first time that you're out on the front?

HM: Scared. Anything beyond you is supposed to be the enemy. And everybody, I don't care how good soldiers they were in camp, when you go in combat, it's altogether different. Because when you go in combat, you don't know who's going to take a shot at you. Besides, usually the movements usually at night. Because you don't want to move during the day because daylight they can spot you right away.

MK: And so, you know, you're in combat. You're going to be shot at . . .

HM: Oh, yeah.

MK: . . . and you also have to shoot. When you look back at that time you were with the 100<sup>th</sup>, were there times when you felt you were really in danger?

HM: Oh, all the time. Because the scary thing was—rifle or machine gun, I mean, you can more or less observe, you see. But the mortar, artillery, they're coming from up, [then] down, you know. That was the scariest thing. The mortar, especially. It's so quiet [at first]. You know what a mortar is? And then when it comes close to you, then you can hear the flutter sound or whatever. Oh, was really terrible. The explosion. Mm-hmm [yes].

MK: And in those days, what could you do to protect yourself?

HM: Find shelter wherever. Like, facing a machine gun is scary, but you lie down, you're pretty safe. But the mortar, no, because it's coming from up.

WN: Did the basic—the training that you got, basic training, was that adequate?

HM: Well, I think so. But everybody was in shape. I mean, just about everybody. In camp, training time, we used to get long hikes. Usually, we used to walk in the morning. We used to leave camp after breakfast and come back—that weekend, at night, we used to walk back. That really helped. And the thing is, during camp, the *kolohe* guys used to make *shibai* [feign injury], they say oh, they cannot walk, this and that. The medics used to go pick 'em up, see. You know, with trucks or jeep.

Nobody did that overseas. You don't want to be left behind yourself. The boys go forward, you *gamon shite* [endure], you follow them. That's the most scariest thing to do, only yourself in no-man's country.

WN: What about in the training, you know, learning what to do in certain situations, you know. Was that adequate?

HM: Yeah. But no matter what, you cannot compare training and actual combat. And actual combat, to me, is a lot of common sense, too. Like a lot of times, us guys if we going from here to there, we'd kind of go down, you know, make a small target. But when you really stop and think about it, could be nobody there, and yet you're just being so careful. Because dark, you cannot see anything.

MK: And because you're a new guy that's being brought up to the 100<sup>th</sup> that had already seen battle, did the 100<sup>th</sup> guys give you any advice?

HM: Oh, yeah. That was a big, big help.

MK: What kinds of things did they tell you?

HM: *Chee*, that's another hard question. Well, anyway, the first thing is, they tell you, "Don't try to do more than what you're supposed to." You know, don't try to be a hero. And always been on alert; and always keep your gun in shape, ready to operate, you know, ready to use it.

This is a good example. This was, we were Casa Del Poggio, it's way on the Italian side. We're going---usually when we bed down--on a defensive position--usually when we bed down in a foxhole, you get everything ready. Your rifle at the side, loaded, everything, your shoes on. And had this guy next to me, he took off his shoes. I told him, "Hey, what you going to do?"

He said, "Oh, I'm going to sleep."

And then he had a bazooka. You know, the early days the bazooka was one piece. But after, they came the kind you fold 'em for easy carry. And then his gun, still folded yet, see, nightfall, when he's going bed. I told him, "Hey, you not going to fix your gun?"

He said, "Why?"

"When the enemy comes, you think in the dark you can fix it up, put the gun together, and put your shoes on?"

(Laughter)

Had that kind of guys, you know. Really (chuckles). I mean, things like that you know you train, but common sense is going to tell you to be ready. I still remember the gun, still like that [unassembled]. (Chuckles) No more shoes. But he came back, though.

MK: You know like when you were first shifted to the 100<sup>th</sup>, you said that you were with them for less than a year, yeah?

HM: Mm-hmm [yes].

MK: And during that time—like, you said that guy came back—but . . .

HM: No, I mean he came back . . .

MK: After the war, yeah . . .

HM: . . . after all *pau*, came back.

MK: . . . he survived, yeah. He survived.

HM: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

MK: But when you were with the 100<sup>th</sup>, were there any guys that you got really close to but didn't make it?

HM: No, not exactly that. I know what you're driving at. Because the sergeant tell all the guys, C Squad guys that, "Don't get too close because you don't know what's going to happen" and things like that. But I didn't experience it. All of us, we got along fairly well. Of course, you lose some, that's part of war.

WN: How did the 100<sup>th</sup> guys accept you when you came as a replacement?

HM: Gee, that's hard to answer. I think all right because their attitude was pretty good. But this thing that bothers me and the other replacement guys was, some of the guys, they resented us because their thinking was, their unit get smaller, they're going to be shipped home. That never happened. Always get the reserves coming up. So, anyway, on that part, only a small, few guys used to tell us, "You guys came, so we cannot go home." That's not so.

MK: And then I know later on, the 100<sup>th</sup> became part of the 442<sup>nd</sup>, yeah. How did you feel about that, when the 100<sup>th</sup> became part of the 442<sup>nd</sup>?

HM: Well, I mean, it didn't affect us in any way, I think. But it was nice to have them together with us. They were the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, so we had three battalions of local boys. Well, when I say "local," I mean the AJA boys, local and the Mainland boys.

MK: And then I know that later on, you folks had to move north, you folks going up the Italian coast, yeah. Places like Suvereto, Belvedere, . . .

HM: Mm-hmm [yes].

MK: . . . Sassetta, you went all the way up Arno River, Florence. In those days, what were the conditions like as you folks kept on moving and moving and moving?

HM: When you say the conditions . . .

MK: Yeah.

HM: . . . you mean that . . .

MK: What was it like for you, that time?

HM: Oh, it was really, really tough. Because every movement you made, from here to there, was—with the 100<sup>th</sup>, I'm talking about—you're walking, you're hiking. Day, night, day, night. Of course, in-between you're resting, this and that. Get your rest area and this, but it's not easy.

WN: What was the terrain like? Was it hilly, or flat?

HM: Oh, yeah. Because that war in Italy was mostly in the mountains. We very seldom had combat in the flats.

MK: And when you say like "combat"—this is a hard question for me to ask—but, how did you feel when you had to go into combat, when you know that maybe you have to kill someone?

HM: Well, the first thing when I volunteered, that was in my mind already because I'm volunteering for combat, yeah. So more or less, you kind of train for that. Maybe it helped me a little. But as a whole, we all did, all us boys did pretty well on that. Because of *haji*, yeah.

MK: Shame.

HM: Yeah. I mean, you don't want to turn back, huh. Because all of us, I think it was just about the same. Of course, had extremes on both sides, yeah. But otherwise, I think was like that.

MK: And then as you . . .

HY: I think we're running out of tape.

WN: Yeah, change tapes.

END OF TAPE ONE

TAPE NO. 44-21-2-05; SIDE ONE

MK: Okay, this is the second part of session two with Hichiro Matsumoto on March 17, 2005.

And we're talking about your time in Italy, yeah. And I was wondering, what do you remember about the civilians there in Italy, at that time?

HM: As a whole, the Italian people, I mean, the people that we met, was on the poor side, let's say. And they were nice people.

MK: What do you recall about your relationship or contact with the local people?

HM: Well, the thing was, as a whole, the U.S. soldiers are on a kind and thoughtful side. Because the boys were always giving them—the kids especially—things. Candies, chewing gum, or something like that. So we had no experience with the wealthy people because usually, we were out in the mountains, in the countryside.

MK: And I was wondering, how was the food? You know, when you folks were moving from place to place, how did you folks manage with the food?

HM: We always had food. The C ration or K ration or the B ration. But we never did starve. Yeah, that was something. But complain, yeah.

(Laughter)

I mean, naturally, even some of us at home, we're complaining.

WN: What was the best food you had?

HM: Well, the thing is, even overseas, Thanksgiving and Christmas, they used to serve turkey. That was a real treat. They took care of the men here. And this is something. While we were in Sospel, that's southern France. This was on Thanksgiving, we were stationed at a schoolhouse. We were on the second floor, and then this ground floor had another—our boys, but another company. I forgot who they were. So their food came in. and from upstairs, we'd look down. Thanksgiving dinner, they had turkey. And us guys, upstairs, our mess truck never come

yet, so we're looking down at that. They're eating, *chee*, that's how we find out that's how the Italian people feel when we eat and they come, you know. I think we didn't get to eat turkey that day because either the mess sergeant or the captain *wen* goof off saying that it was too dangerous to get the truck to come to our area. Well, they had their reasons, you know. For the safety of the boys, or I don't know.

MK: You felt deprived, yeah?

HM: You ain't kidding

(Laughter)

MK: Mmmm.

HM: Had a lot of incidents that—I mean, after you guys go out, I think, hey, this and that, this and that. But . . .

WN: But the C rations, or the K rations, how did you folks eat that? You open the can and eat from the can?

HM: Oh, yeah. That C ration now was, you know, in a sort of a Cracker Jack box, that size. And they had cracker, they had the cheese—which I don't eat—and something like devilled ham or whatever. And that's the K ration. C ration was they come in pork-and-beans can or something like that. And B ration was a little bit better because that you usually have when you break, in a break area, for several days you stay one area where the mess can cook something. Whatever they can get together. So, you survived.

MK: And then were you folks able to kind of improvise local Hawai'i-type food?

HM: Hardly because how can you get—you hardly can get anything unless you go to the farm area and then get *tamana*, head cabbage, things like that. What we did was, no choice, but we go steal some, eh. (Chuckles)

WN: What about like chickens?

HM: Yes, sometimes. That's big deal when you get chicken.

MK: And then when you get the chicken, how was it prepared?

HM: (Chuckles) Just over the fire. Yeah. And nobody grumbled, that's something really *mezurashii* [uncommon], eh?

MK: You folks really *gamaned* [perserved], yeah?

HM: Yeah, *hontö* [truly].

MK: And then, we know that later on, you were again pulled out, you ended up being with the 232<sup>nd</sup>.

HM: Yeah.

MK: How did that happen?

HM: That, my brother, he did that, yeah.

MK: And how did you feel about that?

HM: Well, I felt both ways. One way, engineers, way better life than the infantry. But leaving the 100<sup>th</sup>, I felt like *chee*, all the guys I get to know, and this, like that. But maybe that's one of the big reasons why I'm here today, I went to the engineers which is much better than the infantry.

MK: And when you joined the 232<sup>nd</sup>, where were they?

HM: That was outside of Marseilles, Aix. A-I-X. You know, small place. And that place was rain, rain, rain. And you know you pitch your tent—see, I'm a new guy there—all the other guys, they from the company, they paired up already, yeah. Two to a tent, see. Pup tent. And I'm the only guy so I'm the only guy who's going to sleep in the pup tent. Rain day and night, rain day and night. So the tent collapse on me because the pegs. The ground is so muddy, so soft, you know, just give away. Ah heck, I just stayed in there until the rain let up. No sense of going out, all muddy and getting wet. I stayed in there.

WN: So you said that was your brother who helped, you know, who had a say in you switching to the engineers. Why did he do that?

HM: Well, I think he'd like to see me live a little longer or something like that, huh?

MK: And so, when you were brought into the 232<sup>nd</sup>—outside of Marseilles—and, I guess, after that there was Bruyeres and . . .

HM: Yeah, that's going up north.

MK: Were you part of that, too?

HM: Oh, yeah.

MK: So, as the group moved into Bruyeres, Biffontaine, and eventually rescued the Lost Battalion, . . .

HM: Mm-hmm [yes].

MK: . . . you were with the 232<sup>nd</sup>, yeah. So what were you and the other 232<sup>nd</sup> guys doing? What was your job in those campaigns?

HM: Well, that Bruyeres area was a lot of work for the engineers because you got to improvise bridges and things like that. And a lot of these forests, so get a lot of big pine trees. What the Germans did was, as they retreated, they used to blow the trees down all over the road. So what the engineers had to do was, go up there and remove the trees with a power saw or whatever. And that was a lot of work. And this making temporary bridges and things like that.

And one incident was with the—what do you call?—Caterpillar. What do you call that, earth mover or something. You know in front of the Caterpillar they get the big shovel [bulldozer]. So what they did, anyway, while they were working on that road, had land mines. So they exploded and the Caterpillar was out of commission. So what the engineers did was—cannot move that, too damn heavy—make a temporary bridge over that so the vehicles can go over. Things like that. And that wasn't too easy because you're making a lot of noises. And the Germans, the enemy, is still there, you know. So every once in a while, when you hear the shell falling, you got to go for cover, yeah.

WN: Did you guys carry any firearms?

HM: Oh, yeah.

WN: But not rifle though, right? You had rifle?

HM: M1, we had what gun you're assigned to. Some had the carbine, a little smaller. And majority is the M1, yeah.

WN: This is as engineer?

HM: Yeah, yeah.

WN: So how do you work with the M1, or with the weapon?

HM: Well, depends. You would sling your arm, or, usually you put 'em on the side. Because those guys [enemy] are not right there. If they're going to come, going to take them a little bit time to come. But with the shelling, that was from way back, they can shell, so.

MK: And being a carpenter in civilian life, and working in military defense before the war, were those skills useful and used by you?

HM: Oh, yeah, yeah. Making bridges and things like that. Mm-hmm [yes]. Of course, your finished product is not as good as doing it at home, but you did a lot of work, yeah.

MK: And, you know, when you go into battle, what's the sequence? Do the engineers go before the infantry, clearing . . .

HM: No, usually it's the infantry. But at times when the infantry gets bogged down, the engineers used to go sweep the mines on the road, or the roadside, they sweep the mines. And that is when nobody in front of you but the Germans, the enemy.

This is---I'll never forget this story, this was in France. This was in a forest, Bruyeres, in a forest--our 2<sup>nd</sup> Platoon was ordered to go scout, do some scouting. Patrol forward, no man's land. And on the way back--good thing we never met any resistance--we came back, our platoon sergeant--this is real, now--he's not quite back to our line yet, engineer's. On the roadside, he stopped, he's making *shishi* [urinating]. In the frontline now.

(Laughter)

Everybody see that, "What the hell?" I'll never forget that. Anybody who was there, they'll never forget that. And that sergeant, just a couple of weeks back, he passed away. He was ninety-four when he passed away. So he must have been in the mid-thirties, you know, when that happened. He was a real--Japanese say, "*nonkina*." (Laughs) I tell you.

(Laughter)

MK: So he was real laid back . . .

HM: Yeah, yeah.

MK: . . . easygoing guy.

HM: He was a really nice guy. I mean, when I saw that, I just said, "Wow, this guy." That's why I say, after all that, nothing bothered him, that's why he lived to ninety-four.

(Laughter)

MK: So, you know, all through the French campaign then, that's what you were doing with the 232<sup>nd</sup>.

HM: You're right, you're right.

MK: So, helping build bridges, helping clear roads, . . .

HM: Yeah.

MK: . . . checking for mines. Did you folks also destroy things? You were building things, . . .

HM: Yeah, yeah.

MK: . . . how about destroying things as you . . .

HM: Well, we never had the experience destroying things because the U.S. Army was always pushing forward. You destroy things when you're pulling back. Like bridge laying, you destroy the bridge because you don't want the enemy to come, you know. So, being on the offensive, we never did experience that. Blowing up bridges or roads, things like that.

MK: So, even after you folks used your road or the bridge that you built, you folks weren't the ones destroying that later? You folks were mostly building.

HM: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

MK: And then I know that later on, you folks were in the Champagne Campaign.

HM: Oh, that was life. (MK laughs.)

MK: Your face lit up.

HM: Oh, everybody. You know, that was in Nice. You folks heard about Nice, yeah? That's a resort area. The GIs, we stayed in hotels and things like that. You sleep in beds, the comfort of beds, and all that. Up till then, we slept on the ground. Everybody enjoyed that. And every night, we used to go in town, raise hell (chuckles). That's why I was thinking, I think the MPs—you know, get MPs, yeah—I think they dreaded the Japanese boys coming in town. Yeah, the guys make *iran* [unnecessary] enough trouble, yeah (chuckles).

MK: Were you folks any worse than the other guys there?

HM: What do you mean when you say the "other guys?"

MK: The non-Japanese ones. You were just saying . . .

HM: No, no, that's because . . .

MK: . . . how they dreaded the Japanese ones.

HM: . . . Michiko, I cannot tell you that because when we used to go, usually with our boys, see, we very seldom met these other *haole* boys. And that's one thing good, these local boys was, we used to stick together. And then when trouble happens, they used to help one another. So the other guys never get chance. You know the other guys, you figure like say, for instance, picking on *haole* guys. They come from, say, New York, Nevada, or Louisiana, or wherever, so they don't know each other. The only thing they know is they're in the same outfit. Like Hawai'i guys, it's different. We know them from back home. And you get Kalihi, Pälama, or something like that. Say, "Eh, the guy is one of us." Everybody jump in. (Laughs) So, that's how it was.

Had a lot of unnecessary rough fighting. Because if you're the type that, well—I was on the side that I kept away from trouble. Because you always can keep away from trouble, you just go the other way. The troublemakers, they go looking for trouble, you know. As simple as that.

MK: And, like, the Champagne Campaign was so different from the real hard times, yeah?

HM: Oh, just the opposite.

MK: And, before we move on, you know the 442<sup>nd</sup>, they worked to rescue the Lost Battalion, yeah. That was a hard time.

HM: Oh, yeah. That was wintertime, too. Cold, a lot of pine trees. And what the men were afraid of most was the tree burst. You know, tree burst is the artillery shell hitting the pine trees, big trees, and it explodes. And all the branches and things like that fall. That injured a lot of boys.

MK: And in the rescue of the Lost Battalion, what were you folks doing?

HM: Well, then we were in the other area. So what we know is when we see the report of this and that.

MK: And so, like, when you would read the reports or hear about what happened, how did you feel?

HM: Oh, I felt we were glad that we weren't there. Mm-hmm [yes]. But—what outfit was it that they rescued anyway? Had . . .

WN: Thirty-sixth. Oh, that was the Texas.

MK: Yeah, the Texas.

HM: Yeah, must have been Texas, the 36<sup>th</sup> [Infantry] Division, then.

MK: Yeah.

HM: Had more boys got hurt rescuing them than the guys that were rescued. Don't put this down. I just want to let you know now, since we're on this subject (chuckles).

WN: Oh, why don't we . . .

MK: Oh, you can tell us later.

WN: Later, later.

MK: Don't tell us on tape. Don't tell us on tape.

HM: Oh, okay.

MK: Yeah, don't tell us on tape, yeah.

HM: Oh, okay, yeah, yeah.

MK: So we'll move on. And then, you know when. . . . Oh, I should ask you about, how was it with the French people? How were the French people and you folks?

HM: They—something like Italian people, but, to me, was very hard to converse with them. Because French is much harder than Italian. My way of thinking. Because the Italian language is something like this Hawaiian or Japanese. How you spell words or how you read things. Like French is very hard, the pronunciation and all that. So what a lot of us boys did was just, you know, give 'em chewing gum or whatever, chocolate things like that. But carrying on a conversation is really hard.

MK: I agree.

HM: Huh?

MK: I agree.

(Laughter)

And, you know, when the war finally ended in Europe, how did you feel?

HM: Oh, we were happy. Really, really happy. Because there was a rumor going around that the 442<sup>nd</sup> was going to be sent to

Japan. And we dreaded that. We don't want to go over there. And those guys, they say, kamikaze guys, eh. So when the rumor died, and when they announced that we're going home, that was really something.

MK: And then you were discharged in 1945 . . .

HM: Yeah, right.

MK: And when you came home, how did your family react? How was your homecoming?

HM: Well, it's not like what you see in the movies.

(Laughter)

What I remember what my mom told me was, "Oh,"—you know, she said, "                     *itte modotta*." And one thing she told me was, "Go around the neighborhood and tell the lady—mother, especially—that you came home." That I came home. I mean, I came back in one piece, yeah.

MK: And then for you, you came home and. . . . How was it for you? Here you are, you're a veteran coming home from war. How was it for you, getting back into regular life?

HM: I never felt any different, though. So not that I cried or anything. Nothing special.

MK: And then when you came back, where did you live?

HM: Oh, Kapahulu, yeah.

MK: And what kind of work did you find?

HM: The first thing what I did was, since being a veteran, I went to work Fort Shafter as a supply department. You know, those things like that. And only a few months of that, and then they had an opening for a firefighter at Shafter. So, we went. What made us apply for the job was, every other day you're off.

(Laughter)

You try to take the easiest way out, eh? But I never applied for that. You know, they used to call "fifty-two-twenty" or something like that? For, you can get so much a month. Without working, now. I never did go for that. Plenty of our boys did. For one year, they'd loaf. But every month, they'd get so much. They used to call "fifty-two-twenty" or something like that. For fifty-two [weeks] you can get twenty dollars a week, or twenty dollars a

month, or something. Yeah. Because after, when I came home and I was discharged the latter part of December of [19]45. In 1946 I worked January, and February, I went back work, look for work already. So I wasn't loafing for long.

MK: And then, so you worked Fort Shafter, and then after that, what did you do?

HM: From Fort Shafter, I got laid off, being a low-pointer. So I went back to my old trade, carpenter. Working for the contractors.

MK: And, about 1952, you started at Barber's Point?

HM: Yeah, I went back. In fact, you see this house right here? Used to get one young guy, about my age. He was working at the shipyard, Pearl Harbor [Naval Shipyard]. So he told me, "Hey, Hichi, where you working?"

I told him, "Oh, contractor." Private contractor.

He said, "Go apply shipyard, they're hiring a lot of carpenters." And shipyard is good because it's civil service, you get [paid] vacation, you get sick leave and all that. So I applied and I got the job. And it's a good place to work for. Get vacation time and all that. So I stayed, I worked for the navy until I retired in 1980.

JM: In 1979.

HM: Huh?

MK: About 1979 or 1980.

HM: Yeah, so I've been retired for twenty-five years. Imagine how long. More long than her [points to Holly Yamada] living.

(Laughter)

HY: Oh, thank you.

(Laughter)

MK: And then you got married in 1947 though.

HM: Right.

MK: And after you got married to Janet, you lived at Kapahulu, and then you lived at Hälawa.

HM: Mm-hmm [yes].

MK: Tell us about that Hälawa area you lived in.

HM: Oh, then this Hälawa Housing we went to was former navy station, where the sailors used to live. They had a barracks-type building. We stayed there for about two-years, I think. And then I built this place. So we came here in December of 1950.

MK: And then that Hälawa Housing, was it mostly vets that . . .

HM: Yeah, yeah.

MK: So, after the war then, how closely did you stay with vets?

HM: Oh, till today. All my friends were in the service together. Because somehow I lost contact with my Kalihi friends. Because like the old folks, *hanashi ga awan* [nothing in common to talk about] with the old [friends], you know.

MK: Conversation don't match anymore.

HM: Yeah, yeah, yeah. And then they live in Kalihi, I live in Kapahulu, so. And whenever I went back, which I did, once in a while, I had to catch the streetcar, too, so. So gradually, you part.

MK: And your close friends are all veterans.

HM: Yeah.

MK: And I know you have two children. Keith, who was born in 1948; Coleen, born in 1952.

HM: Right.

MK: You know, what do you want your children and grandchildren to know about you and the wartime?

HM: Well, let's see, I didn't want too much. I only wanted the kids to be good citizens. You know. Because I try to be a good citizen. I don't know if I was, but I think I was on the little bit good side. (Chuckles) So I'm very happy that---what Keith is doing now. And my daughter, well, she's married and she's living on the Mainland, and she has a place of her own, too. So. And my *kawaii* [lovely] wife, eh. (Chuckles)

WN: Hmm, let's see. When you came back from the war and your mother said to go to the different places to say that you're home, do you remember any kind of reaction that they had for you?

HM: No. Like I say again, they're reaction is not anything like the movies you see, you know. (Chuckles) Oh, they were polite. So that was in 1947, I came back. And our really old-time friends from Kalihi—because I was born and raised in Kalihi until I was about twenty-years old. So, I mean, I know the new people in Kapahulu, but not too long.

WN: And a lot of veterans came back and then they went to school under the GI Bill. And, you know, you didn't. But I'm just wondering, did you ever think about maybe getting more education or training under the GI Bill?

HM: Yeah. But, as I told you that, when I finished high school, yeah, I took tests for go UH, but I failed. So that's what really discouraged me. So I least I said, not *shö ga nai* [cannot be helped], but, I mean, not everybody is fit to go college. So what I did—I think the next best thing was to look for a job and, you know, try to raise a family, no?

MK: And then when you look back, you know, you think about the war years. How would you describe how the war affected you and your life?

HM: But, the thing is, going into the army and serving Uncle Sam, that helped a lot finding a job, too. You being a vet and you get better, more safe from being low man on the totem pole. At least you get a better chance to stay at a job. That's a hard question to answer, you know. (Chuckles)

WN: If you were to meet someone going to, say, Iraq or Afghanistan today, what advice would you give them?

HM: I don't know what to say. Because our days and today, combat and things like that, everything is so different. I mean, I'm not in a position to give them advice. The only thing they can do is, you know, common sense, yeah.

MK: I'm going to ask you one more hard question. You know when Keith was growing up, yeah—as a young man time—they had the Vietnam War.

HM: Yeah. Vietnam War was the [19]50s yeah? No, Korean War was in the [19]50s. Vietnam was in the [19]60s.

MK: Yeah. And so, you know, Keith that time was high school . . .

HM: Yeah.

MK: . . . and early college. What were your feelings at that time for Keith, you know, because they had . . .

HM: All that time, I was thinking that, *chee*, I hope that war wouldn't continue. Because, I mean, if he was going to be drafted, you cannot do anything about it. Of course, you can protest, but that's not what the father did.

WN: Okay.

MK: I think . . .

WN: I think we're *pau*.

MK: We can let you go. (Laughs)

HM: (Chuckles) Oh, thanks.

MK: All *pau*.

HM: Thank you, thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW