University of Maryland, College Park

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

on the

ALLIED OCCUPATION OF JAPAN

Interview

Subject: Faubion Bowers

Place: The Bird Room, The Kennedy Center, Washington, D.C.

Date: July 22, 1982

By: Marlene Mayo

Q: Mr. Bowers...

FB: Call me Faubion.

Q: All right, Faubion. I want to say at the start that there is a previous interview that was done by Beate Gordon, years ago. About 1960, I would say, for the Columbia University oral history project. But I thought that your experience in the Occupation and your reputation in the Kabuki theatre and in writing about Japanese drama and indeed East Asian theatre generally, all of that was such that we should probe a bit more and find out more about your experience and more about your background.

FB: If there’s anything left, mine it.

Q: So, I would like to begin as Beate did and go back and find out where you were born, where you grew up, a little bit about your family, your early interests.

FB: I was born in 1917 in Miami, Oklahoma, but Tulsa was sort of my home base. That’s where I grew up. My mother, of course, wanted a girl, which is why she picked this name, Faubion, which could be anything -- as I turned out to be anything. And my mother was very interested in opera, and as much as I disliked her, and as much as I’m relieved -- it’s like a mill stone removed from around my neck that she’s dead -- I do owe her a debt. And it’s taken 65 years before I’d sort of admit it. But she did take me
to hear Tetrazzini in Muskogee, Oklahoma. And she took me to Kansas City, where I heard Mary Garden and Melba in Faust. You know, that’s astonishing. And Pavlova. I even saw Pavlova as a child. I think the most determining factor, though, was something that I did on my own, which was to go see the Denishawn Dancers, Ted Shawn and Ruth St. Denis, and all that Orientalia and it absolutely flipped me.

Q: Was that in your teenage years, or when, when you saw the Denishawn.

FB: Bare teenage, 12, 13 of age, I guess I was. Where was I... oh. In Junior High School, there was a teacher who had been born in Japan. She taught French. And it was the first time a foreign language had ever been taught in Tulsa. And she had been born in Japan and had some sort of pictures of Japan. And that kind of turned me on, because I was madly in love with her and I was her pet pupil. And you know, there’s nothing like that Junior High School crush on a teacher and the teacher liking you a lot. So that turned me on to Japan. And I read everything Lafcadio Hearn ever wrote. And this is Junior High School. Well, anyway, Oklahoma was pretty barbarian in those days. And being called Faubion was bad enough, but being sort of an arty-tarty type was much worse.

Q: And your father wasn’t living then?

FB: No, they were divorced. He was an insurance salesman and then later became a tax collector. My mother was a school teacher. And so I got out of there as fast as I could. And I graduated from high school very early, when I was 16, and went straight up to college to the University of Oklahoma, because I was deeply interested in music. I wanted to be a musician. I fancied I’d be a composer, which was the nuttiest thing. It shows children just aren’t in touch with the reality of themselves. And I wanted modern music, advanced music.

Q: Did you play a particular instrument?

FB: Piano. And that summer at the University of Oklahoma, Old Dean Holmberg, whom – the music hall is named after him now – Holmberg Hall. We called him Humbug, naturally, and he was a humbug. He had the most extraordinary quality – no matter what hour of the day or night, he could wake up or he
could be walking down the street, and he never had a watch, but he always knew exactly to the second what time it was. It was sort of like perfect pitch. I never knew anyone like that. So, he was offering a course called, “History of Contemporary Music”, and that was right up my alley. Already I was a Scriabinist, Scriabin was my baby. I’d sort of discovered him because, you know, he was crazy and a sex maniac. And he started all this multi-media stuff that’s now so in vogue – all these light shows, he was the first to conceive of those things. Actually doing music and lights at the same time and many other things. Anyway, you can read my book on Scriabin for all of that. And so old Holmberg, who was a violinist, just played the Messiah for us and we sat there. And after about the third week, I said – he wasn’t even Dean then – I said, “Professor Holmberg, when are we going to get into [Darios Mio, and Enniger] and Scriabin and all of those things I’m interested in?” He said, “Modern music? Why? Listen to this dominant ninth chord! [Hengel] was modern!” You know, we laugh now. We laugh now, Marlene, but I assure you that as a 16-year-old child that was a traumatic experience and it turned me against academe totally. I was embittered. And I got out of Oklahoma as fast as I could and I hated anything academic. And to this day, I’m very nervous about it. I’m totally self-educated. I did go to Columbia and flunked out. They call it drop-out.

Q: To the college?

FB: Yes, in New York. Paul Robeson was a classmate of mine in Russian. And my teachers were terribly distinguished and all of that. And I made A+ in music, A+ in Russian, A+ in French and 0 in History of Contemporary Civilization, F rather, and in Physics and all that. I just didn’t understand them. I tried. I truly tried, but I flunked out because I just couldn’t cope. I couldn’t learn. I was very slow in blooming, not sexually, but academically. To this day, I can’t add and subtract. I couldn’t learn how to take tests. I had to love whatever I was doing. So after flunking out, that hurt me very much too. I hated myself and all that. So I went to France, and there I discovered myself. I was totally happy. I was totally accepted.
There was no snickers over my name. It was assumed that I was an educated, young American man who played the piano rather well.

Q: And this was in [Poitiers]?

FB: Yes, [l'Université de Poitiers]. I played in every small town in France and got mixed notices.

Q: How old were you when you did this?

FB: 19.

Q: 19.

FB: And then I came back. And of course the Scriabin thing was burning inside me. And, at that time, the Juilliard Graduate School of Music, you couldn’t pay tuition, if you tried. It was all scholarship. And, I’ll tell you an interesting thing -- in those days, all the teachers were very, very great. Carl Friedberg was there, who was a pupil of Brahms. And if I was playing the Brahms concerto, or something fancy like that, I could stop Mr. Friedberg in the hall and say, “Mr. Friedberg, how should this passage go?” and he would say, “Well, Brahms played it this way.” And my teacher was Alexander Siloti, and this is why I went to the Julliard – S I L O T I – because he had been a great friend of Scriabin’s. And his wife was madly in love with Scriabin, and so forth. And I’d hoped to learn a lot about Scriabin from him. But he was 80 at the time and quite gaga and he would tell you all kinds of things. One reason why I’m nervous about this oral history review is because I’m not sure that my memory is accurate and I’m not sure how much of a liar I’ve become over the years. For instance, Siloti would say (he was a pupil of Liszt), he would say, “Oh, when Liszt played the Campanella in that [_____] D sharp, his fifth finger would always land right in the middle of the black key.” Well, I know that’s not true. But, so. Anyway, all the teachers were great and there wasn’t a decent pupil in the whole bunch. Eugene Liszt, who’s the world’s worst pianist. And, now, the teachers aren’t celebrities or pupils of anybody celebrated. And yet, the Julliard just pores out master pianist after master pianist. They all play the same, but they’re all marvelous. Ok, that’s enough of music.
Q: [Now there’s a string player.]

FB: Mostly from Japan and Korea.

Q: Korea and Japan, right. So how did you get this interest then in going to Indonesia?

FB: Oh, well, I heard Javanese music. There was a great German musicologist called Hornbostel.

Umlaut over that “o”. Who was sort of the first. [Baron de’lounge] had been the first to put Arabic music on the map, and Hornbostel was the first to put Asian music on the map. And he made some primitive recordings of it and I came across one of the Javanese things. And once I heard the Javanese gamelan, I just thought it was the greatest music in the world. Just like Debussy, in that colonial exposition of, when was it, 1899 or something like that? ’97 was it? Debussy heard the gamelan and that changed his whole course of music. He was writing like Massenet until then. And then he started writing his whole tone stuff. And also, it influenced Rodin very much. Rodin saw the Cambodian dancers and he said, “Never has the human body done such things!” So, I thought, since I was a musician, I couldn’t envisage any other field for me. God, how narrow-minded and innocent one is in those days. I thought I would go to Java and study Javanese music. So – this is something that I’m very ashamed of – I walked out on the scholarship – because I was so unhappy. Everyone placed faster and better than I did. And Siloti was useless as a teacher. And I was unhappy, and particularly after France, where I had bloomed. I was not really very happy in America. I’m a natural-born [deassignee]. Oddly enough, I’m ending my last days in America. So I borrowed $750. Tried to go third class. In those days, white men were not allowed to travel third class on Asian ships. So, I went second class on a boat; there were no planes going across the Pacific from Seattle. And it was a Japanese ship, from Seattle to Singapore. And it was sort of a tramp freighter. It wasn’t a freighter, it was really very nice. The second class passengers were middle class, respectable people. Missionaries, a lot, and people going out to visit sons and daughters in the diplomatic service. Except there weren’t any women in the diplomatic service in those days. The Japanese invented the concept of tourism. Think of those Hiroshige travel prints – everyone travels.
And think of Kabuki, where you have these michiyuki – it’s always travelling. And think about the Kabuki actors here in Washington, they’re always sight-seeing; that’s all they do. And that and go to dirty flicks.

So the Japan Tourist Bureau already was a marvelous organization. And this is 1940, March. The boat docked in Yokohama. And thirteen days later, the boat left from Kobe for Singapore. And so they gave you a free train ticket and all you had to do was meet the boat thirteen days later, which is brilliant. And in my case, of course, the vaccination really made me immune or the contagion caught me. I just fell in love with Japan and I was battled and angry at it, because it was the first time I’d been in a country where I couldn’t read the signs or speak the language. And being a cheeky little fellow – I guess I was 23 at this time. If I was born in 1917 and this was 1940, I must have been 23, 24, something like that. So, I just stayed on and in order to live, I sold my returning ticket. Not only my ticket to Singapore, but my return ticket to America. I hate travel, I just like to live. Like a tree, I just start putting my roots down instantly. You move me to New York and I never leave it. You move me to Tokyo, and I never leave it.

Q: So this was in Tokyo. Before you settled in Tokyo, did you take advantage of that pass and go to several places?

FB: I stayed in Tokyo. I’m the most ignorant person about Japan in the world. I’ve never been to Hokkaido, and it took the Occupation to get me to even go to Kyushu.

Q: What was the atmosphere in Japan in March of 1940. If one were to read diplomatic dispatches, of course, it would be ominous warnings. If one were to read military intelligence reports, the same thing. What was it like for you coming in?

FB: Well, it was absolutely marvelous. The Japanese were incredibly polite and very nice. And the reason I learned Japanese so quickly was because there were no foreigners to talk to, except for the diplomatic people. Those stuffed shirts, I still can’t stand them. I couldn’t even stand them then.

Q: Did you have to register at the Embassy of anything like that?
FB: No, not at all. I was the only tourist in Asia. And there were no fellow tourists. And no Americans and no English for me to waste my time with in speaking English. So I had to make Japanese friends.

Q: Now you mentioned in your interview with Beate the school that you went to. It was not Naganuma School, or did it...

FB: No, it wasn’t Naganuma School. It was the Nichigo Bunka Gakko – Japanese Culture School. It no longer exists and it was primarily created for missionaries and there were about two people in the class. And it was one of those early experiments where everything was in Japanese. And do you know the hardest thing for me to learn without English was “to”. She would say “empitsu to mannenshitatsu” and for the life of me I couldn’t think what “to” was. “Anata to watakushi” -- what the hell is that! And finally I caught on or somebody whispered, “It means ‘and’”.

Q: Was there just one teacher?

FB: There were several teachers.

Q: Did they try to help you to read, write, and speak all at the same time or did they focus on speaking.

FB: Mostly talking. Mostly talking. But the writing was sort of gently thrown in. But in those days, it was assumed that no foreigner could ever learn Japanese. Let alone read it or write it.

Q: So at the end of this one year, you knew some kana and some kanji?

FB: Oh, yes. Well by the end of the year, I could read a Kabuki play.

Q: You must have worked very hard.

FB: I did. I did. All my languages are earned languages.

Q: Were there many hours a day spent in this class?

FB: Yeah. It was easily two hours in the morning and two hours in the afternoon.

Q: And just the handful of missionaries with you.

FB: A handful of missionaries.
Q: So then, you learned enough to read a Kabuki play, but you also learned how to speak fairly fluently. And you went out and, what, used it in shopping, used it going to the theatre, used it...

FB: Well, with my friends. And Japan has such a marvelous system of tachimi, of standing room. You buy a short, you buy a very cheap ticket and you can see just the play you want to see. You know, Kabuki runs from 11 in the morning to 10 at night. And you can just see what you want to see. And I liken it to this – that in this way you can get a perfect opera. Supposing you bought standing room for the first act of Boheme, and then for the second act, Tosca, and for the third act, Butterfly, you would have the perfect Puccini opera. And, you know, the program changes every 25 days at the Kabuki-za, and it still does. So that I would go and see 25 times in a row some of the great things I wanted to. In fact, that was a great lesson in Japanese. And it amuses me now, the Japanese language has changed so much that my Japanese is very old-fashioned and archaic. But it was archaic and old-fashioned even then.

Q: But it’s workable for Kabuki-za.

FB: Ah, yes, yes.

Q: How did you find your way into the Kabuki theatre first?

FB: By chance. I just wandered in. I thought it was a temple and just wandered in and saw it. And there again, that same stubbornness. I didn’t who was a man, who was a woman and I didn’t know what was going on, but I knew it was something great. And I must tell you, to the discredit of my countrymen, and white men in general, in those days, occasionally a foreigner would wander in, buy a ticket out of curiosity, and they would giggle every time an actor crossed an eye. They looked down on it.

Q: Was this the Kabuki-za near Nishi-shinga?

FB: Tsukigi.

Q: Who were the great actors?
FB: Do you really want to know?

Q: Yes.

FB: My favorite was the [15th of Ziomon].

Q: 15th of Ziomon?

FB: 15th. And of course the [6th Kitagora] and then the [11th Niziomon]. Niziomon was the [Uziomon’s] stage wife. He was murdered.

Q: I didn’t know that.

FB: Big scandal. Just like – who was that actor? -- Mitsugoro committed suicide by eating the liver of fugu, blow fish. And it’s a lovely way to die, because it’s like hemlock. First your feet go to sleep, then gradually it creeps over you. Then finally your brain goes to sleep. If you ever want to commit suicide, get some hemlock or a whole lot of fugu liver.

Q: Did this happen while you were there?

FB: No, all that happened later. And they were all my favorite actors at that time. And then I was crazy about [Shika]. Well, [Fukutsukegi] was, who now is the national living treasure [Utaemon]. And I was crazy about Kikonutsuke, who is now the national living treasure of [Baiko].

Q: Oh, you saw Utaemon back in those days.

FB: Under the name of Fukutsuke.

Q: Fukutsuke.

FB: By the time I got back in the Occupation, he was already promoted to Shikan. And now he’s THE Utaemon. So, I know these guys. For 42 years.

Q: You mentioned that you didn’t get to meet any of the Kabuki actors.

FB: No, I didn’t. But I collected their autographs and their photographs. And, you know, they had [Kuwairo] in those days – imitators. And they would walk along the street and had their own special
whistle like everything else. So I would stop and toss them a penny or two. And say, “Imitate Uziomon! Imitate Uziomon!” And these Kuwairo could imitate any Kabuki actor marvelously.

Q: Were you at all interested in politics?

FB: Not in the slightest.

Q: So that the impending war or the problems in East Asia, the Sino-Japanese War, were not of particularly great interest?

FB: Well, the answer to that is rather complicated. You see, I saw the approach of the war totally from the Japanese eyes. And I was totally pro-Japanese. And I fought the entire war. I was decorated twice. So my patriotism is hardly... And I ended as a Major, so my patriotism is certainly unequivocal. But I was totally pro-Japanese. And it fascinates me to see the revisionists. Now sort of revealing how anti-Japanese Roosevelt was and how this was a fomented war, an excuse to get into the European thing. And certainly I remember so clearly the day that all scrap iron was stop being sold to Japan. And then I remember the day, some months later, when all oil was stopped. Well, the minute you do that, they had to go to Indonesia to get oil. And the minute you stop the scrap iron they had to work doubly hard in the iron mines of Manchuria. And I could see how we were putting pressure on them. But you see, living in the Japanese, they didn’t want war at all. And my friends would say, oh please, you Americans, don’t make war. And I’d say, please, you Japanese don’t make war. By the time I got back to America in September 1941 and everyone said, do you think there’ll be war? Do the Japanese want war? I said, absolutely not, there will be no war. They don’t want war.

Q: But you did decide to leave Japan around about March of 1941?

FB: Right, because the pressure became too great. The tri-partite axis had been signed and the pressure against Americans was just awful. Did I tell Beate that story about the flag in the bureau?

Q: I don’t think so.
FB: It was one of the most important experiences in my life. The whole business of being a foreigner -- and I hated foreigner towards the end, towards the beginning of 1941, towards the end of my stay -- was something that taught me democracy or humanity in an immortal way. To be the equivalent of a black in the South, to be the equivalent of a Jew in the Midwest, to be the equivalent of an unwanted person, to have people ashamed to be seen with you in public, that teaches you... I mean you learn what the underdog is like in a way that you can read about in books, but this happened to me. Two things -- one is on the day that the tri-partite axis agreement between Italy, Germany, and Japan was signed, at last the beer halls were allowed to open -- in those days, we were rationed. You see, the China incident had gone on for 15 years, and the Japanese were sick and tired of war. And the strain on the Japanese was unholy. It was horrible. We had to eat whale meat once a week, which I love, by the way. We could not have hakumai, pure rice. We couldn’t. It had to be mixed with mugi. Wheat is it? Or it had to be mixed with satoimo or potatoes, yams, and things like that. In the fanciest restaurants, you were allowed one bottle of beer or one jyoshi of sake. Well, on the occasion of the signing of the Axis agreement, the beer halls were allowed to stay open until 9:00 or 10:00 or something. Terrific! And so wow! A chance to get drunk and to drink. So, it was jam-packed with soldiers, because virtually every young man in the country was under arms. And a very nice Japanese came over to me and we started talking and he handed me one of those little miniature Japanese flags and I was so touched. It was such a nice thing to do -- a flag from a soldier, you know. And a few minutes later, he went back and rejoined his friends, and a few minutes later he came back and he said, “Could I have that flag back?” And I said, “Why?” And he said, “Well, I thought you were German and I learned that you were American.” So that really hurt, that really stung. And, then of course, my best friend was a kid called Hasegawa, and, you know, he took me to Kamakura, and he took me to Kyoto, and he introduced me to the Yadoyas, Japanese inns in the countryside. And it was sort of a private guide. He learned English from me and I learned Japanese from him -- one of those little arrangements. And one night at my
geishiku – I lived in a geishiku for students – for $10 a month, with two meals included and it was lovely.

His mother called up and said, “Where is my son?” And I said, “Well, I have no idea. Two days ago, we had a cup of coffee on the Ginza and said goodbye and I haven’t heard from him.” So then I started panicking, I started worrying. Oh, and this was the moment, the first time my Japanese was totally fluent. So I decided to go to the nearby police station near Shiba koen, and I went there and explained that a friend of mine was missing and did they know anything about it. And it was just amazing. I could just hear myself, it was like a stranger talking, but everything just zoomed. You know, there comes that moment in learning a language when suddenly you can dream in it. Suddenly you can say what you really want to say. So they took me up to the Kempaitai section and there was this nasty man. He was like a frog, and he was testing me to see how much I knew. And he would write characters and ask me to read them. And, you know, I was conceited enough to show off and read them. And he said, “Are you a spy?” But at any rate, a week and a half later, my friend Hasegawa called up and said, “I can’t see you, but I must tell you to set your mind at rest, I’ve been in jail. And they interrogated me.” They didn’t hurt him or anything, but they interrogated him. One, why was he not wearing staple fiber, sufu, ersatz suits, paper suits, which all the Japanese were wearing? And his father had died and these were his father’s hand-me-downs and they’d cut them down to fit him. And they also said, “Why do you see this foreigner? He’s an American spy and why did you climb up that hill behind the Great Buddha in Kamakura? Were you observing ships on the outside?” So, more and more, things like that happened and it just became impossible to be there then.

Q: So your deep cover was to be a student of Kabuki?

FB: Yes. Of course, that’s the way it must have looked.

Q: So then you did leave for Indonesia?

FB: Which was then the Dutch East Indies.

Q: You must have heard a little more about the Japanese down there.
FB: And then I got into trouble down there because travelling third class – I was the only foreigner who had ever travelled third class there. At that time, I could wrangle it from Japan down to Surabaya because the Japanese are more sensible then. So, because my Indonesian was very weak at that time, I just studied it a little. And because I was very poor, I went to a Japanese inn to stay, because it was cheap and I was comfortable. And that, of course, just scared the Dutch to death. And it turned out that that Japanese inn was the center of all Japanese spy activity – which it was, I didn’t know. So they said, “You’ve got to get out of this country within twelve hours.” So I left.

Q: The Dutch?

FB: The Dutch.

Q: Because I wondered if American authorities were also warning you to go back to the United States.

FB: No. Well, I mean, Americans had all been told, “Leave Asia.” So that’s why there were no Americans. So I got on this little boat and the boat went from Surabaya to [Sumilan] to Milan and then to [Botelia]. And suddenly in [Botelia] it occurred to me to call the American Consul, who was a terribly nice man called Dr. Foote. He was a quite cultivated fellow. So I called him up from the boat and said, “I’ve been sent back to America. And I haven’t done anything wrong. I’m not a spy.” And he said, “They told me that you were free to go anywhere you wanted. This is anti-American. If you were English, they would give you the run of the country.” And he protested it, so I disembarked and was free to go wherever I wanted. But then the pressure in Dutch East Indies was very great, because Rotterdam had already happened. And the Dutch would say, you’re an able-bodied, husky, young American, why aren’t you back in American training to come into this war to fight against Hitler. So that became so difficult. So I finally did come back to America and then got drafted in two weeks.

Q: So you came back to California?

FB: No, I came back to New York. New York has been home ever since I was sixteen, seventeen. You know, base of operations.
Q: You were drafted before Pearl Harbor?

FB: Yes. I was drafted in September 1941. And Pearl Harbor was December 1941. And it took the Army an entire year to find out that I knew Russian, Malay or Indonesian, and Japanese. And they were desperate. And you see any white man – and they didn’t trust the Nisei – and any white man that would go to Washington, to the Pentagon or whatever, and say, I can say, “Ohayo gozaimasu”, or I was born in Japan 30 years ago and came when I was three months old back to America – they were immediately commissioned. Started out as a 2nd [Lieuy]. I was a private. But finally, after about a year, somebody discovered my qualifications, my MOS, I think it was, which was on the records from the very beginning. You know, they want to know everything about you and I tell them everything because I’m a very open fellow. And they immediately, Major Dickey, a very, very nice man and a very good linguist, came all the way to where I was stationed, I forget where it was, Bragg or somewhere. No, no, he flew me to the Presidio to have a language examination. And the minute he heard my Japanese, instantly I was placed in the Language School, which was then at the Presidio and then went to Savage, which was near Fort Snelling. And there were a great many Nisei. All the teachers were Nisei. And there was Major Swift, a BIJ, a “born in Japan”, who really spoke and read Japanese marvelously. Well, he was one of the very few. He was sort of the head of the unit.

Q: So you were first at the Presidio on San Francisco. So this is different from the Navy group that was at Berkeley.

FB: Yes, that was the Navy group and totally different from Boulder.

Q: And so you were in the Presidio group that was moved then to Camp Savage?

FB: It was just a hand full of people. There were only four white men there. Jurgen Jorgensen, who was the son of a missionary. Mad Adams, who was also the son of a missionary. Charlie Fogg, who had studied Japanese as a pastime. And me. And that’s all. All the rest were Nisei.

Q: And what kinds of materials did they provide you?
FB: [Naganuma]. Then they moved us bodily, wholesale to Savage. Savage had been an old man’s home and it was dirty and lice-ridden and we had to clean that off. And it was out of town, sequestered, and we were supposed to be secret, sort of. This was known as intelligence. And there we were studying. There would have eventually been a riot. Those poor Nisei. Not only had their homes been sold dirt cheap. Not only had their gardens and vegetable orchards and whatnot been despoiled and bought up in California, Oregon, and all that West Coast area, but here they were, some of them were remarkably good linguists. Certainly they were better than any of the white men. Certainly better than me. And drafted and privates and all of these asinine 2nd Lieutenants who didn’t know Japanese at all were running around. So Colonel Rasmussen made a test case of me because I was so brilliant and so forth. And he went to Washington and he got a direct commission for me. And I was the first person ever in the American army to be commissioned on the basis of linguistic ability. To move from the ranks to officership or officerhood. And once – you know how the Army works, you know better than I do, you live in Washington – once, there’s a precedent, then regardless of race, creed, or color, you can do it. And it was in nick of time, because those Nisei were ready to explode. Enough was enough. But to take all this shit from these stupid white men. And also, do you know that in those days, Nisei, Japanese Nisei, were not allowed in public swimming pools in California?

Q: I didn’t know that. No.

FB: It’s true. Public swimming pools. So, as soon as I was commissioned, then within six months, all the top Nisei were commissioned, too. And quite rightly. Many of them ended up as Colonels and are still in the army. Well I guess they’re retired now, I’m so ancient.

Q: I have managed to interview one of the Nisei who was involved. I don’t know if that was at your stage, but maybe a bit later. Major John Aiso.
FB: Oh, Aiso was one of my teachers at Savage! Yes, I thought him a pompous ass. He later became a judge, you know. And very important. A marvelous linguist and a very good disciplinarian. I mean I didn’t like it because he was the big cheese of the Nisei. But he was a civilian, you know.

Q: When he was your teacher. He ended up, I think, a Major in Military Intelligence in the Occupation. It was a short time.

FB: In the Army? Well just last night I had dinner with Tsukayeda, who was with the State Department for a long time. He was absolutely a marvelous teacher.

Q: Was he your teacher?

FB: He was my teacher, too. I learned an enormous amount [______]. Now he is sort of my ideal. Because he’s a pure American, you know. Pure Nisei. So his Japanese was learned. It was not native to him. And that, to me, even today is the ideal. He has a slight accent. He doesn’t read totally fluently. But he can read anything and he can say anything. It’s beautiful Japanese. That is my goal. I would love to have Japanese like that. And also to be as good looking as he is.

Q: This is fascinating, because I’ve been trying to get Tsukayera to sit down.

FB: You must tell him that I did and talked a lot about him. He’s fascinating. You mean he refused to do this?

Q: Oh, no, no. He’s interested. He’s a very reticent man.

FB: Oh, but he’s a sweetheart. Oh, he’s the nicest man in the world.

Q: He subbed for me about a year and half ago, teaching at the University of Maryland, when I took a semesters leave of absence.

FB: He’s so intelligent and so learned.

Q: So you were in a very small class. This would have been in 1942-43? For about 10-12 months?

FB: No this was ’42, ’42. And it only lasted about, I should think, 3, 4, 5, not more than 6 months, and then I was sent over to Australia. To ATIS.
Q: Since you already knew some Japanese, they weren’t trying, were they not also trying to tell you about Japanese history and culture, but strictly language?

FB: Mostly heigo. Military language.

Q: And was this combined with any kind of intelligence training?

FB: No. None whatsoever.

Q: So it was strictly language and military terminology.

FB: Right. And nothing of intelligence at all. We weren’t taught how to interrogate prisoners. It was just assumed that we would know how if we could say, “Bu” in Japanese, we would be able to say, “How many men in your battalion?” But given no intelligence training at all. And no cultural training. It was strictly targets and...

Q: This is backtracking just a little bit, but I did want to ask you what you were doing or how you heard about the attack on Pearl Harbor.

FB: For the life of me, I...

Q: Don’t tell me you’re one of the few people who doesn’t remember.

FB: I don’t remember at all. I remember when Germany invaded Russia. And I’m too ashamed to tell you my response to that. Because I’m a very different person now than what I was then. I know that I was in Fort Bragg in artillery when the news came over. I can remember what other people said. One friend of mine said, “Oh dear, that means we’re going to have to bomb all those pretty little paper houses.” But I had no reaction. I was absolutely firmly pro-Japanese. And I don’t think I was smart enough to realize the destructiveness and the devastation that war meant. I don’t think it was real to me. And I can tie that in with later – one time when I was up at front, I had to plead to get there because as a linguist you were considered very precious and they wouldn’t let you go to the front, and I wanted to, I rather wanted to die, I expected to die. Anyway, it was Mount Tambu in New Guinea and the soldiers, the wounded, started coming back. And the only water we had, we would suspend our
hose. We had little tents and four poles and to get water – and it rained in the jungle all the time, as you know – and we would hang our helmets at each of the four poles and then the water from the tent would flow down and that would be all the water we had. And when the wounded started coming back, I’m so ashamed to tell this story, there was a soldier and naturally we were short of beds. So my bed, there were two beds in this tent, was preempted for the wounded, which of course I didn’t mind at all. And he asked for a drink of water and my first instinct was, I’ve only got one helmet full. And I will never forgive myself. That was my first reaction. I can justify it by saying, I’m sure the doctor said to me, his stomach had been blown away, don’t give this man any water or anything. But that’s not true. My first instinct was, me first. I want that damn little pale full of water. And, also, when I saw the blood, to this day, it just looks like a pretty little picture. Red is sort of pinkish in my mind’s eye, it isn’t blood colored at all. I totally blocked the whole thing out. I mean, the picture’s there, but it’s absolutely false coloring. I remember the green of the tent. I remember the look, beard unshaven, the kid was. And I had no feelings, none whatsoever. Now if I were to see it, I would just faint. But it was just amazing how heartless I was.

Q: Well, I seem to recall you said you wanted to go to India, but they sent you to Australia to join ATIS?

FB: Yes, I asked for India. That’s right. I’d forgotten that. Well I blotted that out, because later I married an Indian and that was a big mistake. So, you know, they sent me to Australia. Obviously, because the Japanese was useful. Because all of us Japanese were trained. And then a year later, all of the Boulder graduates came. Their Japanese was terrible, but they were all intellectuals. And life became really quite charming.

Q: I did want to ask you about Rasmussen. He’s the one who set up the whole training -- military intelligence training, language training -- at Savage?

FB: Marvelous man. His Japanese wasn’t very good. Dickey’s Japanese was excellent. Marvelous.

Q: Was Dickey a career Major?
FB: He was a West Pointer.

Q: Oh, a West Pointer. Do you remember his first name?

FB: Major Dickey.

Q: Just Major Dickey. And Rasmussen had learned...

FB: Kai Rasmussen.

Q: I think his daughter was just a little bit ahead of me at Columbia after the War. Anne Rasmussen.

FB: And I think she became rather distinguished. She did something...

Q: She’s now married to a man who is involved with the Corcoran Gallery here in Washington. And she’s also the economic advisor to Mayor Barry.

FB: Who’s Barry?


FB: Is she black?

Q: No. no.

FB: I mean Barry is a woman.

Q: Barry, a man.

FB: A man with the name of Marion. Is he black?

Q: Yes.

FB: That’s right, because Washington has black mayors.

Q: Yes, but a woman is challenging him for it.

FB: A white woman?

Q: No, a black woman.

FB: A black woman? Dissension in the ranks. Rasmussen. Dickey did all the work, but Rasmussen it was his concept to build up quick, because Dickey and Rasmussen, if I remember correctly, were career
officers who had gone to Japan strictly to learn the language, but that was a very primitive program in those days.

Q: The Army program.

FB: Yeah. And they just sent their military attaches. Hopefully, they’d pick up some Japanese. There was nothing formal about it. That’s why, when the War broke out, there were only 25 Americans who could speak, read, and write Japanese.

Q: I did come across a report that Rasmussen wrote about this, but it’s very impersonal. [Just one thing after another]. So I was quite interested in his own command of the language and then what he would try to do to improve the teaching of Japanese to Americans under those very intensive circumstances.

FB: Well, he was an excellent man. Well, of course, I’m speaking from prejudice because I was a goldmine to him and he was a goldmine to me because he protected me and did get me commissioned.

[END OF FIRST PART, which corresponds to side one of cassette one]

FB: …which got me out of KP duty and latrine detail and things of that sort. And even if his Japanese was on the weak side, he was a career officer and he knew how to organize and he created the Presidio. He created what became Monterey – the Japanese section of it. Excellent man. And there was no nonsense about him. I was never intimate with him, but I know that there was a very nice man underneath all that. Because Mashbir, Colonel Sidney Mashbir, he made cement and was a sort of a rich businessman. And all I think of when I think of Mashbir is that funny red hair which he combed in such a way – he had hair rather like me, in a way, except his was very rough and mine is rather fine, but everyone always thinks I have a wig on and he looked as if he had a wig on, and it was his real hair because it was soaked with dandruff. [That’s all right, come in. No, that’s all right.] Mashbir was just full of shit. He was a big blusterer and he was in love with MacArthur and he was so intoxicated at being a
colonel and being the head of this secret intelligence unit in Indooroopilly, which was a suburb of Brisbane, Australia. But I got along very well with him, but I really didn’t like him.

Q: What sort of work were you assigned in ATIS?

FB: Well, in the beginning, there was almost no work, because, you see, we had no documents and no prisoners. But as the tides of war went against the Japanese, they were very foolish and often they would only half-burn their documents when they evacuated a camp or half-bury them. So that we began getting a whole lot of documents in. And then, finally, all this suicide business, “It’s better to die than to be taken prisoner”, the Japanese very quickly caught on to that. And so we started getting prisoners. And then we got busy and documents would come in. They’d come in great bundles and barrels. And we would work day and night, day and night, translating them. We were the eyes and ears of the Army. All according to what we translated, we would know what to bomb, where they were going, and what their intentions were. And one time we captured the most important code book of all, which turned the tide of the Coral Sea Battle, because with that code we knew exactly what was going on, where ever ship was, and intercepted every message and just bombed the hell out of them. And, the Japanese, it took them a couple of weeks to change the code.

Q: What about the prisoners of war? Did you ever interview any of them yourself?

FB: Oh yes.

Q: Was this for purposes of trying to determine what their morale was or just strictly military information?

FB: Oh no, no. It was strictly military information. To find out what unit they were, how many people there were, what was going on. So that we would know, have a picture of the other side. It’s like waltzing, isn’t it? You have to know what the partner, what the guy who is leading you, is doing. Your enemy is your leader and you sort of follow. If they say that 10,000 men are expected in our unit or,
oddly enough, 3,000 men were called away for no reason at all, then we know that they’re retreating or they must be somewhere else.

Q: So you weren’t involved in psychological warfare?

FB: No.

Q: Strictly military intelligence.

FB: Oh, one thing I did, when I was at the front with Australian troops. The only way I got to the front, you see, was by being with the Australians, because the Australians wouldn’t trust a Nisei. And they had to have a linguist, but they wouldn’t have it. So I talked Mashbir into letting whitey go. So that’s how I got there. And I was eager and delighted to be at the front because the fleshpots of Brisbane only go so far. What was I going to say about that? I’ve lost my train of thought.

Q: Psychological warfare. What seems to have triggered that?

FB: So while I was at the front, some leaflets were sent down by the Australians. I can’t blame the Americans for this. And it had to go through me, because I was to distribute them to our troops, the Australian troops and American troops that were nearby. And it said, “Men, remember you are not fighting a human being, you’re fighting a yellow-bellied animal”. And I said, I’m not going to distribute these because it will inspire fear in our troops. The Japanese are just like us and the men will fight better if they know that they’re fighting another human being and not a supernatural animal. And so I just threw them away. That’s as close to psychological warfare as I ever got.

Q: I’m interested again in Mashbir because he did subsequently write a book and he went on into the first few months or so of the Occupation before MacArthur or somebody decided he was dispensable.

FB: No, I think the truth of that is that there was nothing for him to do, and so he wanted to get back to his cement-making business. I really don’t think that they disposed of him.

Q: I’m still trying to figure out whether this rich business man guise of his was the real thing. He was making money out of business or that, then again, was a cover for his military intelligence.
FB: I don’t know. I know that I knew him very well and I know that any CIA hanky-panky never crossed our minds. He was a rich businessman and was very patriotic. And I was surprised.

Q: And his command of Japanese was fairly good?

FB: Terrible! Oh, impossible. Oh, impossible.

Q: But he was in charge of ATIS?

FB: Yes, but, you see, what you need is an administrator. I mean Dickey’s Japanese was great; Rasmussen’s wasn’t. Mashbir had very punk Japanese, but he had me, he had John Anderton, who was the top linguist. He was a lawyer; nasty man. A lawyer in San Francisco. I guess he must be dead. He married an Australian woman called Sheila. He was about our top linguist; he was better than me.

Q: And was he the one who really decided on assignments?

FB: Oh no! Assignments? No, it was Mashbir who would say, you do this, you go there. Everybody do all these documents. Major Shelton was the biggest force. Major Shelton was half Russian, half I don’t know. He was in the Australian army. Married to a Portuguese. And brilliant. He was half Japanese.

Q: Because I was going to ask you whether you ran across any Australians who had good command of Japanese.

FB: Major Shelton. He was in charge of our division really. And he was a perfect, flawless linguist. He could read anything.

Q: I wondered if the Australians were as panicked as we were at the start of the War because we didn’t know the language.

FB: More than we, because they had fewer.

Q: What about – you’ve just referred to MacArthur one or two times in passing. In that period, 1943, 1944, on into 1945, you were in Australia. You must have...


Q: What was your sense of MacArthur? You were in the Army.
FB: He was totally remote. We never saw him. It was like the Japanese in the Occupation. He was just a mythical figure that we heard about.

Q: Were you reverent to this far-off figure or he was the great General at this time?

FB: One didn’t have much feeling. One knew he was a big shot, quite a celebrity. The Marines hated him and would fight with the Army about him, but we knew that he bombed, over-bombed, before any troops ever went in. So he was protective of us. But, no, we thought in terms of Willoughby, who was the G-2. We didn’t think in terms of MacArthur. He was too remote.

Q: Willoughby?

FB: Willoughby. We called him, “Sir Charles”.

Q: Sir Charles. Did you know him in this period in Australia?

FB: Well, I saw him perhaps once or twice. There again, just as we were dying to get Nisei commissioned, we were dying to have a Nisei wounded, so that we could, not we, so that they – Willoughby, Mashbir – could distribute some decorations. Because Nisei morale was naturally very low. So fortunately, Kuzaki, who was the silliest of all the Nisei in ATIS, got wounded in the [Hopoy Sector] in New Guinea, which is a place called Hopoy. In his citation, he got a big silver star for getting wounded in the Hopoy Section.

Q: Did you have Nisei with you in Australia?

FB: Always.

Q: Who were from Camp Savage?

FB: Oh, yes.

Q: Was Bonner Fellers down in Australia?

FB: Well, of course he was, but I never met him.

Q: You didn’t meet him at that time?
FB: Not at that time, but I did know him in Japan. I loved that man. I know he was a reactionary. I know he was a stop the goal flow. He wasn’t a John Bircher like that ass, [Larry Bunker], who happily is dead, Bonner was a gentleman and he was pro-Japanese. He had Japanese friends and, like me, the first thing he did when he got to Japan, was to send crates of food over to them. And I used to take my K-rations and the first days of the Occupation, all we had was K-rations, and I took them to all my friends. And it was the first candy, the first sugar, that five-year-old kids had ever tasted. Five years of life without a piece of candy. And milk, you see, one reason why the Kabuki actors all loved me is that—most of these actors that you see at the Kennedy Center today, they were nurtured on my milk. Because, you see, during the bombings, one of the terrible effects is if you’re a woman having a baby in a hospital and there are air raids, the milk absolutely stops. And there was no powdered milk. No formulas, so I would just take crates of this powdered milk and the mothers were able to feed their babies.

Q: Let’s then move on into your Occupation experience. You were in the Philippines, and from New Guinea you went to the Philippines. Do you remember approximately when you went to the Philippines? Was it after Manila had been taken or before?

FB: No, it was immediately after the fall of Manila. So we rushed in as soon as Manila fell and we were stationed at the Santa Ana Racetrack. And, naturally, there were acres of documents. All the bank records, for instance. All the Japanese bank records fell into our hands. And all of the Bataan stuff and the past history stuff. And all of the Japanese exhortations to Jose Laurel, was it? And their problems in keeping the Filipinos under control and trying to woo the hearts and minds of the Filipinos. They had lots of problems. Those were fascinating documents to do. It is said...Roger Pineau, you know, is writing a book on the Occupation...and he says that I was involved, when the surrender party flew down with the green cross, wouldn’t the Americans pick green, which is impossible to translate into Japanese because aoi, it’s midori or aoi, so if you say “green”, it could be blue. So finally we had to settle on [kusa iro], the
color of grass for the cross to be painted on their ships, so it wouldn’t be bombed. They say, and we wrote a surrender document in terrible Japanese, and they say I was involved in that writing, but I don’t think so. It was Senki or Yamashiro, a sweetheart of a man, and Bagnall. You know, Bagnall is here.

Q: I don’t know him.

FB: J. Bagnall. Oh, you should talk to him. He’s in the State Department. Dick Finn knows him. He was in on all of that. One of our very best linguists.

Q: Writing these documents?

FB: Writing, translating our English into Japanese for the Japanese to take back for the Emperor to sign. And we refused to say “jin” for I for Emperor.

Q: Mashbir writes about that and he gives himself credit for catching that and alerting MacArthur to the fact that it just would not be appropriate for the Emperor.

FB: Yamashiro.

Q: Yamashiro.

FB: Known as Senki, who’s still alive in Japan. He was our top Nisei. My God, that kid’s Japanese was supreme and we all depended on Senki. He covered for us.

Q: I have been wondering about that for a long time. About that particular little anecdote of Mashbir’s.

FB: Well, it’s true. I mean, it’s true, it was an atrocious document.

Q: There was the advance group that came from Japan.

FB: Right. And they took back our Terms of Surrender. And then, of course, they rewrote the whole thing.

Q: And so then you were chosen to be in the advance landing party with Colonel Tench.

FB: I loved Tench, too, another West Pointer. Very nice man. But those stories are famous, aren’t they. I’m sure you’ve got all that.
Q: Well, I’ve read something by Colonel Tench himself and then there was a little bit that you’ve told Beate about how you were chosen to go in on August the 28th. And then you mentioned a little bit about the sorts of things that you did at [Sugitu]. But I’m not sure that you mentioned your own – yes, you did – your own landing.

FB: Oh, yes. Yes, I did.

Q: And the Japanese had prepared some oranges, orange juice.

FB: Orange juice. Tench thought it was poison. So General Arisue. Have you read General Arisue’s memoirs?

Q: I know about him, but I haven’t read them.

FB: Well, you must. They’re very important. Very important. He was a friend of the Mussolini’s, which they hid from us. But on the basis of having been a friend of Mussolini, the -- what do you call, the imperial general staff of Japan? -- thought he would be the ideal man to get along with foreigners. Arisue and I became fast friends. I remember one day he came running in and said, “There have been three rapes and four jewelry shops have been broken into.” And I said, “Oh my goodness.” He said, “What are you going to do about it? It’s falling apart.” So I rushed it over to someone who immediately got in touch with MacArthur and MacArthur said that the penalty for rape is death. And so when I told him that, Arisue stood on a table in front of the whole imperial general staff and said, “Death penalty for rape! And they were so happy.”

Q: Because this is really rather important in the history of American censorship activities in Japan. Apparently, there has been some suppression of misbehavior by American troops when they first moved in. Generally, one reads that we were very well behaved and the Japanese were very careful and very well behaved, too, [and they were passive], so this kind of thing was kept to a minimum. Some of the newspapers reported misbehavior. And they were immediately censored for reporting it. So there was misbehavior.
FB: Yes, indeed there was. In fact, the 11th Airborne under that ass, General Sween, who later became Head of Immigration Services, their behavior was so bad and they treated the gooks like nothing, that they were shipped out of Tokyo entirely and out of Yokohama and sent up to Sendai in the North, where they discovered marijuana growing wild. And that was the first drug bust.

Q: Do you know anything about the 11th Airborne?

FB: I hated them.

Q: Where they had been prior to coming into, where they had...

FB: They’d done the Nadzab parachute landing, all the parachute landings they had done. They had quite a valorous record. They were tough and wore paratrooper boots.

Q: But this order from MacArthur, had the desired...

FB: Effect on the Japanese. Yes.

Q: But also on the American troops.

FB: No, not really. No. What conquered the American troops... It was just fascinating being in the Occupation. After four years or five years of propaganda and being told how horrible, the Japanese were, we were filled with hate. Even I began to feel a little hate, you know. God knows, I felt superior, too, for having won the war, which is another thing I’m ashamed of. It was amazing to see all these people burning with revenge, wanting to destroy the gooks. And within a week, they were just eating out of the hands of the Japanese. Presents. The exchange of presents. The freedom of the women. The women who would do anything for a chocolate bar and a pack of cigarettes. You could have all night. And these kids, you know, who had never known love, they’d never know devotion even in their families. They’d never know this sort of sweetness of Japanese muses, as they call them. Short for musume. It took two weeks and the greatest gook-hater in the world became a pro-Japanese lover.

Q: Did they use the term gook back in those days?

FB: Oh, yes. That’s where it started.
Q: That’s where it started. Now, you were already a Major and after helping with the advance landing, is that when you asked is [Gozaemon] still alive? Was that the question?

FB: Right, because at all times like that, like war is very boring, it’s just months of doing nothing and then suddenly a battle. And at formal occasions like that, nobody knows what he’s doing. Everybody’s confused. We landed with the wind, instead of against the wind, and the Japanese thought this was some kind of sophisticated new kind of aircraft that would do such a dumb thing. Instead, we were nervous. And the pilots didn’t know what they were doing and didn’t trust the Japanese windsock, which showed them which way the wind was going. So, you just sort of stand around. Because things aren’t organized. Nobody knows what’s happening and you stand around. The press was over there in the corner and I, being a journalist myself, I’m always drawn to the press. And I’m certainly not going to stand by and be boring. And here I am back in Japan, my beloved country, after all these years. And the one thing that was on my mind was [Gozaemon] still alive. And then also the papers all published my autograph and I would write “Bowers” [in shosa]. Because they’d never known a white man who could write.

Q: You’ve sort of indicated to me your feelings, your first impressions as you were coming back into Japan since 1940, was there a great deal of devastation around Mt. Sugi?

FB: Well, Mt. Sugi was just an airport. It was ghostly to see. This was our order -- that the engines of all airplanes to be removed and set beside the airplane. And it was uncanny to see all of these...it was like...I started to say charred bodies. It was like dismembered corpses. And that was very strange. And the other strange thing was that the Japanese had ordered total security around there. Hundreds of Japanese to protect us. Because, you see, we were guinea pigs. If one of us had been killed, the third atomic bomb, which we did not have, would have been dropped. And they all had their backs to us. Tench thought that was rude. And I must say, it seemed rather odd to have everyone with their backs to us, because we were very sensitive. But it was so that they could see any danger coming towards us.
What’s the point of being at salute to us when you’re supposed to be protecting. I mean, you
don’t...The Secret Service man doesn’t stare at the President and smile. He has his back to the President
doing his business. But I do want to say, when one got into Tokyo, it was just tragic. There were no
buildings. I couldn’t even find where my old [geishiku] was. There was nothing, nothing left. I mean,
the Daiichi Building and some of Marunouchi was still standing.

Q: Where was this old [geishiku] located?

FB: Narimon. Right next to Shibakoen. Now it’s most elegant, fancy district. All kinds of fancy offices
are there. I remember the smell. It’s incredible how people without soap and with water problems,
obviously, from the bombing, they begin to smell. How worn all the clothes were. And how slumped
everyone was. You see, without tobacco, without liquor, without coffee, without tea, even without
[effusion tissans], the human being is basically rather depressed person. And living at subsistence levels,
only what – 800 calories, where it takes 1200 to live. Everything was slow and bent and dull. Sad.

Q: What about street noise or sounds?

FB: None! Dead silence! Dead silence. And ghostly because only the [godowns], those little iron safes,
were left. It was like a vast plain with just little bumps of family safes. The iron things that hadn’t
burned.

Q: What about at night? Where there any neon signs that went on? Or what did they do...?

FB: There was no electricity.

Q: Swinging lanterns or...?

FB: It was jet dark at night. And even before the War, you see, there was no petrol really, no gasoline.
And all the buses were charcoal-run, run on charcoal. And it was horrible sitting in summer in the back.
You just roasted to death. Well, even there was no more charcoal to run things. And there were no
cars. Nothing.

Q: Were you present on August the 30th when MacArthur came in or was it your job to set it up?
FB: No, I was busy cleaning up the Embassy and getting it...

Q: You were already into that task?

FB: Well, they didn’t know what to do with me. I got decorated for that landing because, you know, those two days were marvelous. Everything went beautifully and smoothly and utterly friendly. And Tench rose to the occasion and within 12 hours, he knew the Japanese weren’t our enemies. And so we had no problems. And so they didn’t know what to do with me. I mean, that had been the plum assignment that everyone wanted -- to be the first man to land in conquered, defeated Japan. So they didn’t know what to do with me, and so Mashbir thought, well he’s the perfect person to set the Embassy up. Because, Grew, Ambassador Grew at Hawaii when Roosevelt ordered MacArthur to come and see him, which, MacArthur hated being told what to do. Grew was sitting next to MacArthur at dinner in Honolulu, and he said, “General, when you get to Tokyo, all of my possessions are safe in the basement of the Embassy, and the Air Force had had instructions not to bomb anywhere near the Embassy. And they’re all yours. Just the whole house. It’s a beautiful house. Just do what you wish with these things.” So, my instructions were to recreate the Grew house, as it was. And then later, one of the nasty things that happened was, Grew sent Max Bishop, who later became the Ambassador to Thailand, a whole State Department contingent came out because they had heard that one ashtray of Grew’s had been stolen and that an autographed photograph to Grew. And that damn photograph said, “To Ambassador Grew, Fondly, Franklin D. Roosevelt”. And it wasn’t stolen at all. The ashtray may have been stolen by one of the honor guards. They didn’t find it. But it was a [fairyland]. And MacArthur was livid and he called me late at night and said, “Pack up everything in that damned Embassy. Grew’s reneged on what he said to me and...” So everything was packed up in two days and sent back.

Q: So there were no Foreign Service Officers on the scene when you went to the Embassy? That must have been very, very early.
FB: Oh no. There were just a bunch of Swiss living in the apartments downstairs. The Embassy is still in my name, you know. I own that Embassy. I received it from the Swiss.

Q: I see. MacArthur was in Yokohama for a couple of weeks, before he went into Tokyo.

FB: Right. September 7, he came into Tokyo for the flag-raising ceremony and saw...

Q: And you’d already done all of this by September the 7th.

FB: The place was gorgeous. And he liked it very, very much and was very nice. And that’s how I...they didn’t’ know what to do with me then, so I became...Bonner, Bonner Fellers, said, “Take over my job as Assistant.” What was I, Military Secretary to the CNC. Because Bonner was a right nice man. And he wanted to get back to real life in America.

Q: He was setting up media control at that point.

FB: In America?

Q: No, I mean in Japan. There was a censorship operation being set up under Thorpe.

FB: Oh yeah?

Q: And under Bonner Feller there were also some media controls that were taken over by Civil Information & Education Section. Where did stay when you were setting up the Embassy?

FB: In the Embassy. You know, the Embassy residence is on top of the hill. At the foot of the hill, there are two apartment houses with full floor. Three on one side, four on the other. And I was in the best one, the ground one. I had the only double bed in the whole Embassy compound.

Q: So you didn’t stay in Yokohama? You went straight to Tokyo.

FB: No, no, I went straight into Tokyo.

Q: There must have been very, very few Army personnel at that point.

FB: Well, we had just a few guards.

Q: Who were advance into Tokyo itself.
FB: And to some of the Honor Guard to sort of protect the Embassy. To protect me. And all of the old staff came back. And I rehired them all. I had two cooks, one Japanese cook – I mean, they were all Japanese, but one western-style cook and one Japanese cook. And every day, the provisions man, a Sergeant, would come around and say, “How many chickens do you want? How many hams do you want? And so forth. And I would just order enough for a regiment and send it all to my Kabuki friends.

Q: Were you given the names of any friendly Japanese or cooperative Japanese to search out?

FB: No.

Q: They came.

FB: They came. They came on their own. The minute the War was over, they came back and said, “I used to cook for Mrs. Grew, I used to cook for so-and-so who lived in this apartment.” And I said, “Yes, you’re all rehired.” And they would bring their friends. And, please, when you write about this, make sure the Japanese paid for the Occupation. They paid every penny of that Occupation. And the Occupation spoiled more foreigners than anything I know of. Because suddenly we all had servants, we had maids, we had everything. We had houses. We had everything. And the Japanese paid for all of it.

Q: Can I continue to ask you a few more questions?

FB: Oh, I love it. I love it. Cause I don’t know what to say.

Q: There are questions having to do with your duties as Military Secretary and anything you might want to say about that setup and then later getting on into censorship. I want to make sure that I get that story.

FB: No, my function was...I just...if you wanted to see MacArthur, the Chief of Staff was on one side.

MacArthur’s office was here.

Q: Sutherland was still there?
FB: Sutherland. I had nothing to do with him. I was on this side. Bonner Fellers’ place. And you came and made an appointment. And my instructions were, “Don’t let anyone see him. Don’t let anyone see the old man. Try to keep people out as much as possible”. So I’d say, “No, he’s busy. No you can’t.”

Q: And you, at this point, became acquainted with Bonner Fellers and you quite liked him.

FB: Well, it was Bonner who put me...oh, yes, I loved Bonner. Well, he was pro-Japanese, like me. Very nice man.

Q: I did get out to the Hoover Institution last May, I think it was. And Bonner Fellers has left about 14 boxes of materials.

FB: Oh, that’s a gold mine.

Q: Yes, yes. And so I think I’m quite interested in his understanding of Japan, the Japanese. He didn’t tell, in those records, about a tour of duty that he had there around about 1929, 30 or 31.

FB: That’s when he made his Japanese friends.

Q: Michi Kawai, I think he met her at that time. She was one of his great Japanese friends. Were you aware...?

FB: You mean, Kawai? Not Nagai? Yeah, that may be. I never knew her.

Q: But were you aware that he knew Japanese and that they were coming to see him?

FB: He kept it a little bit quiet, but I did know it. Because he and I were the only one who...we would send the MacArthur car to pick up our Japanese friends, so they’d be absolutely safe and come and feed them in our house. But we never mixed socially in that way. My Japanese friends came and dined at the Embassy with me. His friends came. And I never knew who his friends were and he never knew who my friends were.

Q: Because he wrote a rather important memo. It’s now been published in a few obscure places. October the 2nd, on the Emperor’s situation. He wrote it and gave it to MacArthur.
FB: He’s the one who set that up. The Imperial Household got in touch with him, saying that the Emperor would like to come and pay his respects. He conveyed that message to MacArthur and MacArthur said, “It’s about time.” And MacArthur also said, “However he wants it arranged, it doesn’t matter where. And the Imperial Household said, “Secrecy is the one thing we ask.” And he said, “Alright, then a secret place would be to come to the home, not to the office. “And, so, very secretly, he came. And Bonner called me up and said, “How’s your Japanese? Is it good enough for a high-powered situation?” I said, “Sure.” He said, “Ok. September 26th, we have our date.” And our instructions were to show the Emperor all deference. And we saluted. I took the Emperor’s hat and MacArthur said, “There’s Major Bowers here who can interpret for us or would you prefer another interpreter? And the Emperor said, “I would prefer my own interpreter.” And MacArthur said, “Fine.” So he, the interpreter, the three of them went, and we never knew what he said.

Q: Yes, we’re all still trying to find out.

FB: Well, the Emperor said...

Q: Yes, I’ve seen an interview in the New York Times a few days later. So that one has a general impression of what went on.

FB: But the crux of that main thing was about war criminals.

Q: War criminals, yes.

FB: Yes, he said I take full responsibility for this. And please, my men did...Tojo and all the bunch.

Rather than have all of this long drawn out punishment of them, I am here.

Q: Did you hear? I mean, even though this was a confidential and a private interview, was there immediate rumors as to what might have been said?

FB: No, nothing. Absolute dead secrecy. Nobody had a clue. It was only years later, I found out about that.

Q: What about the picture that appeared rather soon?
FB: Only two pictures were taken. And MacArthur said only one picture in the camera, sort of, he wasn’t sure of it, so one more.

FB: And Bonner and I, as you know, he came with his whole Imperial Household, all the top people, and so we all spent the time talking in the little room.

Q: Sitting it out.

FB: And chatting away.

Q: This was already September the 27th or something like that.

FB: September the 28th, 1945.

Q: [JEF] Japan Time. Since you were military staff secretary and still at the Embassy, were you there when the [POAD] people started to arrive? George Atcheson, Jr. and some of the Foreign Service Officers?

FB: Oh yeah, he hated them.

Q: John Emerson, [___] Bishop, Perry...

FB: MacArthur hated them. He said, “Huh, they don’t know what to do with those damn pinkos, so they send them to me.”

Q: Was he referring to George Atcheson, Jr., too?

FB: Yeah, and [Service] and all the rest of them.

Q: Oh, [Service]. That’s right. I forgot [Service] was one of them, too.

FB: But he was most forgettable. But Atcheson worked his way into MacArthur’s mind and MacArthur respected him and depended on him.

Q: He was more a China man, than a...

FB: Well, of course. He said, “They don’t know what to do with these pinkos, and they send them to me. Yeah, I don’t want ‘em.” But Atcheson did very well. Atcheson was sort of a colorless, defective
type of man. Tragic death, wasn’t that? And, you know, his last words were when they informed him
that they were going to ditch at sea, he said, “Well, it can’t be helped.” That’s marvelous, isn’t it.

Q: Now John Costello has told me that the foreign correspondents in Tokyo were after the censorship
people to stop these Kabuki performances…”

FB: That is absolutely true.

Q: And so, he knew that if he got you to be the censorship officer, and you cleared something, that it
would be ok. That the heat would be off him; the pressure would be off him. And, so, I just wanted to...

You have talked to Beate about the Military Secretary activities, but there were a few things I thought
that we might still be able to learn about how you were recruited into censorship. Do you remember
approximately when... was it still in 1945?

FB: It was when Earl Ernst, who was the censor who banned e-

Q: Did he know much about Japanese theatre?

FB: Absolutely nothing! And he was the one who banned all this stuff.

Q: Was he trained in Japanese during the War?

FB: Not at all!

Q: How did he get the censorship job?

FB: Because he was a Professor of Drama at Hawaii.

Q: Of Western drama?

FB: Of Western drama. He’d never seen Kabuki. He hadn’t even heard the word. Just the way, how did

Marquette end up being Head of Economics Section?

Q: One of the Bataan Boys.

FB: Yeah, exactly. How did Willoughby, who was an ambulance chaser in Manila, how did he end up

Government Section? What did he know about government? Nothing! But if you had drama
experience, ok, you’re sent to the theatre. And at that time, we thought we would change the Japanese.

We thought that we would democratize them. And Earl forced the Japanese to put on the Mikado, which they did and it was a total bust. Because he thought that would demystify the Emperor. And the Japanese just thought it was a weird fairy tale.

Q: Do you recall approximately when this was? I couldn’t tell from the Beate Gordon interview.

FB: Oh, don’t ask me about time! Oh, let’s see ’45, ’46. This was ’47. I was with MacArthur only for a year and a half.

Q: For a year and a half as Military Secretary?

FB: Yes. Well, and then I went, no, I went to the Allied Council for Japan, because they wanted...that’s where my Russian came in.

Q: Ok. That wasn’t picked up too clearly then. I see. And so then that was 1946. And what were your duties with the Allied Council of Japan?

FB: Nothing. I just sort of sat around and translated the Russian messages.

Q: Were you still working for Bonner Fellers at this point?

FB: No. Bonner Fellers had gone home.

Q: He’d gone back in early ’46.

FB: Yes.

Q: Uh huh. So, what was the administrative setup for you? I mean, who were you reporting to?

FB: A State Department type, whose name I don’t remember at all. A slender faggot. I don’t remember his name. One of those...

Q: [_____]?

FB: Yes, it must have been. Tall and slender. Older man. No particular experience. Maybe from China. I don’t know.

Q: So the Allied Council for...
FB: Well, MacArthur...

Q: What you were doing -- interpreting and translating or...

FB: Yeah, theoretically and I had some title. I don’t even remember ...

Q: It was [_____] with ATIS.

FB: No, no, no. I was completely free of ATIS. From the moment I did the advance party thing, I was no longer with ATIS. I was a star.

Q: And you were still in uniform when you were with the Allied Council?

FB: Oh, yes. Definitely. Definitely. And MacArthur’s instructions were nobody on the Allied Council of Japan was to get one foot in any way. They’re out here to make trouble and I want them squashed. Quashed. Killed. And it was just a scandal. It was one of most brazen things I’ve ever known in my life. They were open meetings. And Americans of the Occupation would come and simply hang their head in shame at our bad behavior. [McMann Boyle] wrote about all of this.

Q: Yes, yes, I’ve read his book. So, then you were pretty much free in 1946 then to reestablish your Japanese friendships, go to the theatre, such as it was, whatever it was...

FB: Oh, even from 1945 I was. I mean, nothing could stop that.

Q: And MacArthur was very good. Because, you know, there was a lot of pressure from religious groups saying stop all of this fucking around. And MacArthur says, “They keep telling me to stop this Madame Butterfly. You can’t do that!” And that was very wise of him, because who ... And whereas that ass Hodge in Korea wouldn’t even allow Koreans to ride in a jeep. You’d be arrested. I mean, the Koreans would be arrested. And MacArthur never fell into traps like that. And he wouldn’t touch Korea with a ten-foot pole. He said, “They keep asking me to go over there. I wouldn’t set foot in Korea. They just want me to bail ‘em out of a mess that the State Department’s made.”

Q: Well, then, had Ernst stopped Kabuki performances before you became a censorship officer?

FB: No. After he became a censorship officer, that’s when he stopped the performances.
Q: So this would have been some time...

FB: This was September 1945.

Q: He stopped it that soon?

FB: Absolutely. And one day, he says he didn’t do it, but, you see, we made the Japanese do everything. Everything was done in the Japanese name. But you know the famous story of MPs and Japanese police walking in in the middle of Koshiro’s Terakoya, the very show I did a television film of, which is going to be shown nationwide August 2nd. It was shown...

Q: No, I don’t know that story, so...

FB: They walked in and at the head inspection, they just walked on the stage and said, “Stop it”. And it put the fear of God in Kichiemon and Koshiro. In Terakoya. And, then, a few days later, [Shoshiku] had a press conference saying that Kabuki would be banned because it’s feudal and only dances would remain. At which point, Baiko, who was still Kikunosuke, applied for a job in a bank. And Kichiemon was ready to commit suicide. So, I didn’t know...I mean, when I read that the Japanese had banned Kabuki, I knew perfectly well it was some ass of a 2nd Lieutenant. Later I knew it was Ernst. So, I, being MacArthur’s Aide, called a press conference at the Embassy and said the Japanese are very foolish to do this. After all, [Kumagaijina] is a great anti-war play. So, then, the Japanese Kabuki world absolutely fell in love...Sharaku and Baiko came and called on me. And so, then – I’m marvelous at public relations – then, I decided to make a friend of Ernst. So I found out who the censor was.

Q: I see. I see.

FB: So, I talked to him and he was adamant.

Q: So, he believed in what he was doing.

FB: Yeah. Now these gooks have got to do the _Mikado_ and _All My Sons_ and all those things. And, Kabuki, it’s all feudal. And I’ve never seen it, but I know it’s feudal. Head inspections; it’s disgusting.
Q: Did they stop other kinds of performances, not just Kabuki, but other kinds of theatrical activities of the Japanese that you know of? Or was it strictly Kabuki, that was most suspended?

FB: Mostly Kabuki, but anything that had to do with head inspections, sacrificing of children, selling of women into prostitution. The whole range. And so I would have the actors come over and I would have Ernst come and that didn’t work. He still wouldn’t allow it. But finally, I talked him in, and Kichiemon talked him into OKing [Kumagaijina]. And then, Earl wanted to get back to his real job at Hawaii in the Drama Department, because they’d held the post open. So the minute he left, was going to leave, I said, “I would like to take over censorship.” He said, “Very good. Good idea.” So I resigned from the Army, and became a civilian at half-pay. And became the censor and then just OKed everything. And it took me one year to OK everything.

Q: Now, this was 1947 already.


Q: 1948? As late as 1948 that you...early ‘48...

FB: Oh, no. 47! Yes, in ’47. Well, or ’48, because I left Japan in ’49, after having OKed all of the Kabuki.

Q: Had you met John Costello before you became the censor through Earl Ernst or that was later?

FB: Through Earl Ernst. And when I approved Chushingura. Of course, I used my [part] for very selfish reasons. I would make the Japanese do all-star casts, saying I’ve got to make ensure the supreme artistic integrity. And it was simply that I liked Baigyoku in Osaka and wanted to see these all-star things. And I went down in Japanese theatre history books as the golden era of Kabuki, because I forced these... I forced two things: one, that those selfish old actors would let their sons have starring roles and revived Wakatei Kabuki, young people’s Kabuki. That’s why these people are all kind of fond of me because they got to do starring roles while their fathers were alive. And also these all-star casts, which were simply glorious. But that was purely selfish and that was a misuse of power, actually. And when I OKed Chushingura, Life magazine came over to me and said, “Oh, oh, this is a change of policy in the
Occupation. What’s all this about?” I said, “It’s nothing. It’s just all-star casts. Don’t’ make a stew, it’s hard enough to get. I’m putting my neck out enough this way. And just you... They all wanted to look for trouble. And all wanted ... And the basis of it is, I kept telling the Occupation, I said, “The first thing the Japanese are going to do the minute that we get out of here -- no Occupation can last long -- is to put on all these plays. So why not let us be the merciful victors. And say, “Look, we let you do all of this, so there’s no forbidden fruit at the end of the Occupation.”

Q: I’m just curious. How did you find the costumes and the stage effects and things like that? Were the costumes kept in good condition during the War or did a great deal have to be done to restore

FB: They were all just there and waiting.

Q: And the audiences?

FB: Oh, jam packed, so they made plenty of money. During...

[End of Tape 1, Side 2]

FB: ...were paid the highest income taxes of any company in Japan. Because that was before Sony and before the steel industry and before the motorcar industry and television and so forth was revived. So they made a lot of money and there was gold thread for the costumes and so forth, so no stinting of that.

Q: Did you know if any of the performances back in that era were filmed?

FB: Yes, Moritsune jinya, which is my favorite Kabuki play was filmed and the Mombusho has those archival films. They’re terrible films, because all of the film was defective. And Kumagai jinya was filmed with three cameras and was to have commercial release, but one of the lens – everything was defective in Japan – one of the lens was blurry, so it could never be released.
Q: What about the censorship policy generally? It sounds to me as though you must have come in about the time that we were going from pre-censorship to post-censorship, or relaxing a bit in our controls.

FB: Well, I think we were gradually seeing that, A. We could not remake the Japanese nation, and B. The Japanese had to be on their own feet, that we could not import food for them, and that they must be allowed to... You see there was the big fight in Washington. There was Archibald MacLeish, who wanted the Emperor hanged. And there was some other people. And Grew and [Dooman] were for saving the Emperor and for relaxing towards Japan and so was MacArthur. And MacArthur once, just out of spite, announced – it was the first and only time he ever talked to the Press Club in Japan – and he said, “The Occupation should end right away.” And that threw the State Department into a fury, which is what he wanted to do, because he hated the State Department. He said, “Those coffee-drinking diplomats get us into wars and the Army has to do the dirty work.” And he just said that he had a niece she was very happy in Japan and didn’t want to budge. He was like me. He never wanted to move once he got someplace. But that was very unpublicized. It’s funny what is never publicized. You remember, “We will bury you.” Khrushchev said, “We will bury you.” He didn’t say that. I was there at the time. What he said was, “Communism eventually will bury the capitalist world.” That’s all. And also, I heard this on television, I saw Khrushchev and I saw his mouth say this, when someone said, “Now that you have planted your flag on the moon, do you feel that you own the moon?” And he said, “The moon belongs to the whole world.” And that I have never seen printed in the paper in America.

Q: This was what...on his visit to the U.S.?

FB: To the U.S. Immediately after. They were the first to land on the moon – not a man, but...and they planted the flag. The Soviet flag’s still up there. And, yet, how magnanimous do you think an American President would say, of course that the moon belongs to Russian, as much as to America. Never. We’d say, “Well, ur, that’s under consideration.”
Q: Could I just ask a little bit more about this censorship outfit? To whom did you ...

FB: Arthur Mori, a Harvard graduate and a very cultivated Nisei, was my boss in censorship, as he was Ernst’s boss.

Q: I see.

FB: He had theatres, movies, everything in the entertainment world. I just had theatre, under him. And he was so nice. Arthur Mori, must be.

Q: And did you have extensive manuals that you had to go by and a lot of paperwork to do or...

FB: No, we hired a staff of Japanese who could write English a little bit to summarize all the plays and then we would stamp, put a censor’s stamp on those plays, “Ok”, or we would delete references to revenge and so forth.

Q: Were there some new productions for which new translations had to be provided or...

FB: Well, yes, there were new plays. Kabuki are you talking about?

Q: Yes, Kabuki.

FB: Well, no. They were all the old plays.

Q: All the old ones, uh huh. But I mean, reviving some that hadn’t been done for some time.

FB: Well, yes. Another thing I did was to make them do Toshi kyogen. Complete plays. You know, not just Act 5, which Kumogaijin is. I said, “Do the whole thing” and so that meant that certain long acts of an hour and a half, say, that had been in [vicissitude], that hadn’t been performed in years, would be revived. But the texts were all there.

Q: It must have been quite a sacrifice, then, for the Japanese to find the money to come into Kabuki in those days. Or was it as expensive for them then, given the standard of living, as it is now?

FB: It’s still expensive.

Q: Very, very expensive.
FB: And inflation was rampant. It’s like New York. We’re in a terrible recession, depression, in New York, and yet Kabuki played to packed houses at $40 per ticket. Where did that money come from? It wasn’t all just the rich.

Q: What about Noh in those years?

FB: One left Noh pretty much alone, because it was so old. And in those days, and nobody went to Noh, except old men, just as old ladies went to Kabuki. Noh wasn’t interfered with. That was one good thing about Ernst.

Q: Now you left Japan in 1949.

FB: ’49 and went to China.

Q: Oh. I wanted to hear at the end, just to get a few general impressions, moving away from your censorship activities. Do you have anything to say about the behavior of Occupationaires, of Americans in Japan in that period, and the GIs.

FB: It was appalling. Appalling. The GIs were lovely, because they all shacked up. And they were no problem, but it was particularly, the Occupation went to hell as soon as the women started coming. When the women started coming.

Q: The American women?

FB: The American wives and the WACs and all of that. Because that’s when demands became unreasonable on the Japanese. Although I’m feminist, I must say, I do have this criticism of them. And the arrogance, I even myself was arrogant. And Kon, Hidemi Kon, a man I don’t like, who was the head of Japan Foundation, just now retired, he wrote a book in which he said, it was interesting to watch Bowers turn from a humble seeker after knowledge, once he became intimate with Kichiemon, and Rokudai, and Kitagoro, to see his arrogance grow. And I think he was right. I’m sorry to say. But arrogance was just something... And Konue said it so marvelously, even though he committed suicide in October of ’45, he said, “This Occupation. There is something so very strange about it. This excessive
bravado on the part of the victors. And this horrifying civility on the part of the vanquished. And it was true, the Japanese were crawling around us and we were...We really thought we had won the war. Now I know the world turns. I mean who won the War? England didn’t. America didn’t. It’s Germany, Japan.

Q: Well, did you find many other Americans involved in one way or another with the Occupation, with SCAP, interested in Japanese culture?

FB: Oh yes, well it made everyone...this whole...yeah...well one marvelous thing was, there was one man, I wish I knew his name, he was in charge of keeping the GIs entertained.

Q: Who would that be? That’s interesting.

FB: A very, very nice man. Douglas or Don or something like that. And he and I got together and we decided once every month or two months or three months, we would have a Kabuki play for the Occupation. And that is what started this vogue for the Kabuki.

Q: Kabuki for foreigners.

FB: Kabuki for foreigners. And we would fumigate the theatres because the Japanese were considered to be bug-ridden. And no Japanese would be allowed on those nights. And it would be all foreigners. And that planted the seed for today. You know, we’re sold out here. 42, 35 years later. It’s that slow process of education. It was my book, which was the first. Then Ernst’s book. It’s steady propaganda. And then all these whippersnapper teachers in Maryland and so forth, Kabuki classes. All of that is now just meant standing-room only for Kabuki.

Q: Did GIs come to these performances...?

FB: Absolutely.

Q: ...in uniform?

FB: Absolutely.
Q: Was the military presence very apparent in Occupied Japan? There were maybe 200,000 troops or so scattered throughout the country and I just know to ...

FB: No, it was just spotted – tokoro, dokoro.

Q: Maybe they wore civilian...

FB: No. No. Lots of uniforms, but you never felt...because the Japanese outnumbered us. You saw them. You knew they were there.

Q: You mentioned in passing, when you were talking to Beate, Donald Nugent’s name. I wondered if you knew him at all.

FB: Colonel Nugent? I didn’t know him at all. I didn’t have any respect or feeling for him at all.

Q: You didn’t know him in the war in New Guinea or anything?

FB: No, not at all. And I just knew stories that I heard from Walter Nichols and things like that. When, “How many Christians are there?” And Nugent would say, “Send us back. Find some more Christians.” Like body count in Vietnam. Things like that.

Q: Now what made you decide to leave Japan in 1949? It sounds as though you were having a very, very interesting time.

FB: Well...oh, you didn’t let me finish the question.

Q: Oh, I’m sorry.

FB: All of the present-day Japanese scholars go back to the Occupation – Donald Keene, Seidensticker, all of those big boys now. It was the Occupation that introduced them to Japan, really.

Q: Yes, I’ve talked to Seidensticker.

FB: He’s a nasty man, isn’t he?

Q: And just a few months ago, talked to Keene.

FB: Keene’s sour...

Q: Well, Seidensticker’s become very low-key now and very informal and...
FB: Oh, really. Maybe his success has improved him.

Q: I first met him when I was a graduate student in Japan and I was scared to death, but not now.

FB: Success has improved him, because he was just a prick.

Q: I used to read his...He wrote the columns in the, was it, the Yomiuri. And they were very acerbic and I was scared to death when I met him.

FB: You know he’s the best translator in the world.

Q: Fantastic.

FB: Fantastic. I can’t stand him as a person, but I must say, his translations are just exquisite.

Q: Now, he seems to be working on a history of Edo on into Tokyo. And I don’t know if he’s doing any translation now, but... It is amazing, the number of scholars, of Japan and of Japanese literature and theatre, that go back to that.

FB: The Greeks say, “War is the father of all things.”

Q: But again, Vietnam and other wars, the Korean War, those wars have not produced the interest in Japan that the Pacific War did.

FB: Well, Japan’s a greater country. I mean, Vietnam is a pimple on nothing. And Korea is a fifth-rate country. But Japan is a very great country.

Q: And the Japanese seem to want to live there.

FB: Yes.

Q: Not as much emigration from there as from the other countries.

FB: No.

Q: Is it alright then to return to this question, you decided to leave in 1949?

FB: Because I was in love with the woman I later married.

Q: Oh. Uh, huh.

FB: And she wanted to take a slow trip through Asia.
Q: I see.

FB: And learn about Asia, because she was one of those Indians that knew nothing about anything, except her own self. And, so I said, “Sure”. I’m a very weak fellow. So, we went to China.

Q: Just about the time that Mao Zedong took over then?

FB: Well, yes, that’s why we left China. As a matter of fact, everywhere we went, he took over. Just a month or two after we left.

Q: But then the final question then here it’s the obvious one, I know you’ve been back to Japan since then. I don’t know that you’re first time back since leaving in 1949, I don’t know if you recall. It was in the ‘50s?

FB: I...14 years I didn’t go.

Q: For 14 years you didn’t go back. So it was after the Olympics?

FB: Yeah, I didn’t go back until after the Olympics. I completely forgot about Japan. And then the Kabuki actors got together, the five great stars, got together and said this is 14 years Bowers has not been in Japan. So they invited me for the Royal treat. So I went back then and by then, I was a television producer. And I did [_____] hell, now that I’m going there... Well CBS said, “Since you’re going there, do some shows.” That’s how I became a television producer. So I did some television shows. And then I’ve been back, you know, every three or four years since then.

Q: So then It must have been then an astonishing change, if you went Olympic or post-Olympic. That would have been around 1965, ‘64?

FB: Yes, something like that. But it was very gratifying to me. It was my great joy. These people that had not even enough to eat. I used to take sandwiches from the Embassy to the Gaku-ya of the Kabuki-za. And to suddenly see them having more than I could ever dream of – and multimillionaires, every last one of them. With chauffeured cars and all the petrol gas in the world and food galore. I think it was my greatest joy to see that they were living like the princes they truly are.
Q: And Tokyo itself?

FB: Tokyo was so beautiful. The best architecture in the world. I just revel in all those...I just love the zaibansho. I think it’s a masterpiece of a building. The Japanese hate it. They say it looks like a cold prison. But I love it. I love Japanese modern architects.

Q: Well now, looking at your own life, would it be safe in saying that one year, ’40 to ’41, was pretty much of a turning point.

FB: It was a determining factor.

Q: Not the Occupation so much?

FB: Not the Occupation at all. What the Occupation was to Donald Keene and Seidensticker and Ivan Morris and all of the big boys, my year alone in Japan with the Japanese, when they were still rickshaws and still geishas and Yanagibashi still existed and the Sumida-gawa was not a roadway, that is what changed my life. It made my career in the army and it also made my career in Kabuki, because I’m not like Seidensticker and Keene, whom I hold in contempt for living off of Japan as a shishi no shinteishi mushi, That famous line, “The maggot within gnawing at the heart of the lion”. Living off a greater thing and referring to the Taira clan. You get that in Kumagai tanai because Midoroku, the old stonecutter, having saved Yoshitsune, who became the Minamoto enemy and saved Yoritomo. He is the shishi no shinteishi mushi. He is a maggot within the lion heart of the Taira clan, for having saved the very men who destroyed the Tairas. But that’s gotten a little far afield. But living off of Japan, which is so big and great. I have never lived off of Japan. I mean after all, my last book was on Scriabin and Russia. It’s a country I’m devoted to.

Q: I promise this is my last question. I’m not asking you to be an historian of the Occupation, but just to give me your sense of that period in your life and as far as you are a student of Japanese history and culture, your sense of that span of time. You were there when a new constitution was written, when war crimes trials were going on...
FB: Ridiculous.

Q: ...when the Zaibatsu were being dissolved...

FB: Ridiculous. Ridiculous. And look at every Prime Minister since then.

Q: I’ll let you finish with whatever comments you’d like to make then.

FB: The Occupation was a joke. In retrospect, it did nothing. The War was good, because it wiped out all of the factories, so that everything had to be new. So that whenever I do a show at CBS in New York, the cameras break down, the equipment breaks down. Whereas, everything goes smoothly in Japan, because it’s all brand new, thanks to the War. But the Occupation was a myth. It was a dream in which a whole lot of people became intoxicated with their own power. Seidensticker to this day is arrogant and truly dislikes the Japanese and feels that they’re inferior. It’s like, if you’re a Southerner, you will go to your grave feeling there is a difference between you and the blacks. You can’t help it. Even I have it. And all this, “Some of my best friends are black” and there is that scar-dust, that terrible inequality. And to think that I, the individual, won the War, is most destructive. It is so false. And all of these people, who are little people, the Occupation was composed of very minor people. Who, out of the Occupation, ever became important in his own right? Keene and Seidensticker because they became the world’s best authorities on the subject. Paul Ellicott became the president of SCM, but, we were... Sam Stratton became a congressman, but on the whole, we were very small people. And to think that we could change Japan was stupid. The Occupation was nothing, and it’s totally forgotten. The Japanese don’t even remember it.

Q: What impression would you like to leave us with about MacArthur? Since you were associated with him a little more closely...

FB: Well, I adored him, because he was a magical man. But he was out of his time. And, there are no more Churchills. There are no more de Gaulles. There are no more Stalins. And there are no more MacArthurs. And it was the last of a breed. It was a heroic breed, but they were, at least MacArthur
was, affected, and a paranoid -- a paranoiac? -- a paranoid. He thought everyone was out to get him.

And, sure enough, they did, because a paranoid always proves, you know...

Q: A self-fulfilling prophesy?

FB: Sure. I mean the definition of paranoia is that you’d really be willing to have the atomic bomb explode, just to prove that you were right. And, although I was intoxicated with him because he was a magical person, and very grand and great man. He was petty and frivolous. Frivolous isn’t the right word. But he was petty-minded and he was conceited. Really believed in God, which I knew was a nutty thing. And...

Q: Do you think he was trying to Christianize Japan?

FB: He would not have been adverse to it, but he did nothing about it. I mean, he’s not that big a fool. I mean, he was caught up in his own rhetoric. He said things that just didn’t make sense. Like, “These Japanese have heard the Sermon on the Mount. They will never be the same.” Well, what the hell does the Sermon on the Mount mean? When I was doing a book on the Occupation, which I never did, finally, because the subject is A. not important enough and B. it was too vast and elusive for me. I wrote to Vincent Sheean. I wrote to Billy Graham. I wrote to everyone, saying “What did MacArthur by that statement about the Sermon on the Mount?” And every one of them answered, “I do not know.” The humble shall inherit the Earth. Blessed are the peacemakers.

Q: Do you think that MacArthur had anyone around him who was...

FB: Who would talk to him truthfully? No.

Q: ...a first-class mind or quality? Whitney? Willoughby?

FB: They were all the scum of the Earth. Scum of the Earth. Whitney was a German. Charming socially. And perhaps clever in his job, but he had this Communist... he found spies under his bed. He was sick as MacArthur. And MacArthur was determined, A. to prove his greatness at any cost, and B. to destroy the Russians in whatever way he could.
Q: Well, I know I’ve kept you very long this morning, but I want to thank you very, very, very much.

FB: No, not at all. It’s just that when one talks about these things in retrospect, it’s very hard to say the right word. It’s very hard to say precisely what one means. And the MacArthur thing is another chapter in my life that I’m ashamed of, because at the time I was so in love with him that I thought whatever he said was just magnificent. And that was the point of my Esquire article – that how mistaken I was because I thought, I thought being under the mantle of this great man, I, too, was great. We all were corrupted by someone else’s grandeur. And it was a false grandeur. The glitter was tinsel, but it sounded awful good. Ok. I’ve talked too much.

[END]