University of Maryland, College Park

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

on the

ALLIED OCCUPATION OF JAPAN

Interview

Subject:  Key Kobayashi
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By:       Marlene Mayo

Q:  Mr. Kobayashi, could we start the interview by learning something about you, your background, your family, where you were born.

KK:  Yes. I was born in Fresno, California, and not in a hospital because I was a premature baby. I was born in a hotel. My father was a hotel owner-operator. So I was born in March 1922, two months premature. And when I was born, my parents tell me that I never cried, and they'd spank me and they couldn't get me to cry. They called a Japanese physician. He came over and looked at me and he said to my father, "He's hopeless," and he packed his bag and went home. My father was really upset, so he consulted another Japanese physician. And this second physician said, "There is a chance." Anyway, as you can tell, I survived my birth.

My father had purchased this hotel, oh, about seven or eight years after he had arrived in California.

Q:  Where had he come from in Japan?

KK:  He came from Kanagawaken and I guess the best way to identify the locality is that he came from a village right adjacent to the famous Japanese agriculturalist. So he came over and then at that time
when he came over, I have an older sister and an older brother. They are about eighteen and seventeen years older than I. So they were left in Japan with my mother and my father came over first. Then my mother joined my father, and I was born in Fresno.

Q: Was your mother also from Kanagawaken? Did she grow up close to where your father did?

KK: Yes. She came from a family of Yonayama, so her maiden name was Yonayama. Now it so happened that the Yonayama and Kobayashi families had three offspring marrying each other. So I have an uncle whom I lived with later who was actually the brother of my mother, and his wife was the younger sister of my father. So it was an unusual situation in the case of the Kobayashi and Yonayama family.

Now getting back to Fresno, my father died when I was about two years old, so my mother decided to go back to Japan because her physical condition was also unsatisfactory. And so she took me and my father's ashes and we went back to Japan when I was about three or four years old. And while in Japan, my mother became seriously ill, so my sister who lived in Fresno and also my brother, who had joined our family in the same year that I was born, my older sister was already married and she sent my older brother, to Japan. And it was her instruction that he was to bring me back to California and that she would raise me. So after my brother arrived in Japan, in Kanagawaken, my mother passed away.

But one interesting episode that I can still recall of my first visit to Japan was that we lived in a country area and my relatives were raising
silkworms. So to this day I can sometimes recall at nighttime the silkworms busily eating the mulberry leaves and listen in the middle of the night when everything is quiet and there you hear the sound of the silkworms chewing on the mulberry leaves. So I think that was one of the distinctive impressions that I still have on my first visit to Kanagawa.

So my brother brought me back to Fresno and I was just old enough to start public kindergarten.

Q: So you started kindergarten in Fresno back in the United States? And then you continued to live in Fresno?

KK: Yes, I started kindergarten. But just to let you know the problem I had, and I guess it was common to many of us niseis of that period because our parents did not speak English. So at home I spoke nothing but Japanese, and in kindergarten for the first time we were exposed to an English-speaking class. But at the same time with our nisei friends we would converse in English, so it was the beginning of a bilingual family and school atmosphere that we grew up in. And in the case of Fresno, there was also a private Japanese language school, the Japanese language school that I attended after public school every day, which was sponsored by the Buddhist Church in Fresno. So I would come home, say, around three o'clock from public school and then from four to five I would go to a Japanese language school one hour a day Monday through Friday. And here also the instruction was completely in Japanese naturally because our teachers were all iisei like our parents, had no English language training. And so we had Japanese textbooks. We had textbooks that were used by the children in Japan, so we started with books like saying that had ana, mani, that type of text.
And we never translated because everything was given in Japanese and we answered in Japanese, we wrote in Japanese. So there was no need for translation, which was a factor that made it sort of difficult when in my case I took Japanese language classes at the University of California where there they made us translate from Japanese into English, where in our case we could understand the Japanese but we were unable to make that exact translation, word-for-word type, that was necessary for written translation.

Q: Since you were a youngster and having to go to school an extra hour every day, did you have any resentment about this or was it just natural and normal and you looked forward to this?

KK: Well, I think in the case of the community where I grew up, since all of us were in the same situation, we didn't realize that we were missing out on what some of our, say, our non-Japanese friends were doing, although we found this out later, say, in high school. But at grammar school, especially like in Fresno—I stayed there from kindergarten to third grade when I was nine years old—I did not encounter any of that type of resentment of having to go to Japanese school. In fact, I kind of enjoyed it. The Japanese language teachers, incidentally, were the old school where they were strict and they expected us to listen to them and the discipline was very keen. So I think we all just grew up under that kind of situation.

Q: Where did you spend your high school years and who else in the family helped to raise you?

KK: In my case, like I mentioned earlier, I lived in Fresno until 1931. And in 1931, because of the economic situation, I was moved and accepted by my uncle, who lived in an area called Cortez, which was about eighty miles north
of Fresno, and the post office was Turlock. But it was unusual in the sense that Turlock is in Stanislaus County, Cortez was in Merced County. And actually this grammar school I attended was a school called Ballico Grammar School, which was about three miles from my uncle's farm.

Incidentally, Cortez was a Japanese agricultural community that was set up by about twenty to twenty-five families that came from Japan. And as I look back, I think most of the families--I shouldn't say most, but quite a number of the families came from Fukuiken. A couple of them came from Yamanashiken. I think my uncle was the only one that came from Kanagawaken. And there were quite a number also from Hiroshimaken and Fukuokaken. And the reason I mention Hiroshimaken especially is that later on when I met one of my relatives, they kidded me because they said my Japanese had a Hiroshima dialect in it. So you can understand why the Japanese speech pattern that we picked up was in many cases determined by our friends that spoke. And naturally we spoke the dialect of our parents.

Q: You continued then to use Japanese and also to study Japanese when you moved in with your uncle?

KK: Yes, more on a limited basis because we were in a farming community. Therefore, our services at home were more vital at say harvest time. We had grapes. I think we had about eighty acres of grapes of different varieties, ten acres of Seedless Thompson, which is what they make into raisins. And the other grapes were various kinds of wine grapes that we had. So we were expected to help on the farm, but even in this country community, they did hire a Japanese language instructor. And he taught us--well, "us," I should say, the elementary age students went to Japanese language school every
Saturday for half a day in the morning. Well, the high school age went on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday nights. So they would go for about two hours on those three nights a week. So depending on our age, the younger ones, we went half a day on Saturday and the older ones went three nights a week. That was how we—and here again we used the Japanese language textbooks.

Q: This extra training then of yours, or additional training, was primarily language. Or did you have what we might call history or culture courses?

KK: It would be strictly language because what we had was a the textbooks. But at the same time, our teacher would have, oh, thirty minutes or so of what we called "story-telling time." And now that I look back, what he did was read the Japanese magazines of that period and tell us some of the interesting stories that he happened to read in the latest monthly magazines that he had sent from Japan. So in that respect we were sort of exposed to the Japanese thinking on how we should behave in family, respect for elders, to study diligently and then also conduct ourselves in a way that we would not bring shame to our family or to the community. So I think that type of moral indoctrination was applied to us in a more or less natural atmosphere.

Q: Were you at that time aware of a bicultural living experience? Were you playing baseball? Were you having other kinds of encounters with Americans of other backgrounds?

KK: Oh, yes, at grammar school, at this Ballico Grammar School where I attended from third grade to eighth grade, was a four-room brick building. We had two classes in each room. Here we would play soccer, baseball and basketball. And then later on as we grew older, by the time we were in high school, not
only did we play on the high school team sports, but also we had a separate team. Like the Cortez would have a baseball team with all nisei boys, and the high school that I attended, the adjoining community was called Livingstone. Livingstone community is also one of the oldest Japanese agricultural areas, and that was started by--I think one of the prime movers of that community was associated with the former ambassador.

So we had some very interesting and intense rivalry between say the Cortez nisei baseball team and Livingstone team. So that was one way where we did participate in American sports. But at the same time, it so happened in our area we had kendo fencing. So we had an instructor come down from Stockton on a weekly basis. But before he came down, the way they exposed us to kendo was that a team of four instructors came to our area, and they stayed in our area for one week. And for one week, every morning we got up at five o'clock, had kendo practice from 5:30 to 6:30, went home, went to school, came back again that night from say 7:00 to 9:00 for additional kendo practice. And this was an intensive kendo training period for one whole week, which was used to get us started in the art of kendo. Once that one-week course was finished, then on a weekly basis we had a younger--well, I'd say he's an older nisei, say in his mid-twenties, who was maybe about nedam or sundam, second- or third-degree kendo, would come and train us. And then along with that, naturally we had a kendo group going in Cortez, another one in Livingstone, another one in Stockton, another one in Lodi. So we had what we called a San Joachim Valley Kendo Tournament. So on those occasions, they would be most likely a whole day affair. So we would usually gather in Stockton because that was the most populous area
as far as Japanese residents were concerned. So we would have a kendo
tournament there, and we would participate, I guess. They were broken up
into three age limits: yonan, shonan, and sanan. So we went strictly by
age, and that was how we were matched up. And then in the meantime we
were given our various degrees:
And then we'd be and so on.

Q: Did you enjoy that a lot? Were you good at it?

KK: Yes. In fact, I was lucky, I think, in a sense that we went to a Central
California Kendo Tournament, which was this time held in Fresno, my former
home. And there we went for a two-day tournament. And at that time
naturally the team from San Joachim Valley—that was our group—went. We
had one from Central California, we had one from Sacramento area, and then
we had one from the Coastal area, Monterey-Salinas area. So we had quite
a large tournament there, and I think in my class I defeated seven opponents
in a row. So I was awarded one of the ribbons for being an outstanding kendo
artist for that tournament. And to this day it was quite interesting that
I did have good luck in kendo. And I think I went up to and then
I dropped kendo activities, so I didn't progress any further than that.
But that was the thing that I remember mostly about my Cortez and Livingstone
years because from Ballico Grammar School I graduated and went to Livingstone
High School and then stayed there for two years.

Q: And when you were in Livingstone High School, did you have your mind set on
any particular kind of a career? Did you know that you would go to college
or could go to college if you wanted to?

KK: Yes. When I first started high school, I was interested in medicine and
naturally one of the foreign languages I wanted to take was Latin. But as you know, in some of these community high schools, they do not teach a foreign language every year. I happened to start in the year they were offering German, and in my sophomore year I would have been able to take Latin. So to take the full advantage of a foreign language training, I started to take German and never got around to taking Latin. But at that time I was considering going into medicine.

Q: During your high school years, did you have any particular problems with discrimination against Japanese in California?

KK: No. Actually I should go back to my elementary school, Ballico, because there our school, I think like the Ballico School had maybe sixty or seventy students in all because I remember the class ahead of me graduated four students in their class. And in our class, it was a large one; we had twelve students in our class. But our non-Japanese friends were either of Portuguese ancestry or Caucasian. But their family had either come from Texas or Oklahoma, so we had quite a rambunctious group of youngsters. And there were also some families of Italian descent. But now that you mention it, I can't recall anyone making any discriminatory remark about our ancestry. We got along quite well. Naturally we had our childlike fights occasionally, but it was just a person-to-person type altercation and not because of our racial descent or anything.

But on that one, now that you ask me the question, I think there was a more intense rivalry between the Japanese students and the Chinese students in Fresno, in the city where I lived up to when I was nine years old. And I don't know to this day—you see, this is where I'm talking about 1926 to 1931—
as far as I can tell, I don't think there was any war going on between Japan and China. But I guess it was just the intense rivalry type situation that existed between Chinese and Japanese. We were all American-born, but at the same time, the Chinese students also went to the Chinese language school. But differing from other cities, we didn't even have any basketball games or baseball games between them where in some cities, the Japanese teams did play Chinese teams. But in Fresno, as far as I can remember during the time I was there, we never did. But I know some of the fights we had I think was more or less Japanese versus Chinese students, rather than Japanese versus Caucasian students or Mexican or black students.

Q: You mentioned 1931. Did the atmosphere severely change for Japanese after, say, the Manchurian Incident? Were you very much aware of that in California during your high school years, a little bit later?

KK: In 1931, even after the Manchurian Incident, no, we didn't feel it although in trying to recall my years in Cortez, I did remember one of my older friends, a nisei friend, took me to Sacramento. You see, like in Cortez we never met anyone of Chinese ancestry. And in Sacramento I happened to go to a place where I met a Chinese adult for the first time, more or less, on a real close basis since I left Fresno. And now that you mention it, I guess I felt a sort of an anti-Chinese prejudice that had been instilled in me which I didn't realize until I met this man because my older friend kidded me on our way home. He said, "I noticed you were kind of surprised or shocked when I introduced you to my Chinese friend."

And I said, "Yes, that's right." And I think there must have been this subtle indoctrination of anti-Chinese prejudice feeling that had been implanted in us, but I didn't realize it until I met him. But even then I have never
experienced any real fighting or argument with persons of Chinese ancestry. It's just that I was sort of shocked to see here there's a Chinese person and I had, I guess, been indoctrinated with so many Japanese propaganda about anti-Chinese sentiments that I must have absorbed it without realizing.

Q: Returning to your high school years again, you say you were interested in medicine at one point and something happened to change your mind?

KK: Well, yes, in the sense that when I was interested in medicine--this was the time I was at Livingstone High School. At that time when I was living with my uncle, my older brother had been working with a Japanese mercantile company called Nippon Dry Goods stationed in San Francisco. And he had the Midwest area as his area for salesmen coverage. So he had lived in Chicago for a while and also Minneapolis for quite some time. Then he happened to be reassigned to the San Francisco Bay area, so he selected Alameda to live. So when he came to live in Alameda--I guess this was around 1938--he asked my uncle to let me live with him in Alameda. So I left Cortez where I lived with my uncle. Incidentally, my uncle's name is Yonayama and he was the older brother of my mother and his wife was the younger sister of my father. So I left Cortez and I went to Alameda. At Alameda I started in Alameda High School. Now here the high school situation was much more different than Livingstone in the sense that I'm going from a rural to a city school. And also in a rural area, there were quite a number of students of Japanese ancestry where in the city area, we were a very small minority. And there were also Chinese students in Alameda High School. But here I was exposed more to Caucasians, for instance, but here again, all the years I went to Alameda High School, I don't recall being
subjected to any anti-Japanese discrimination on a personal basis.

Incidentally, Alameda High School is the alma mater for a famous band leader of that vintage, Horace Hite. And there was some famous baseball player, I think, Dick Bartell of the New York Giants was a graduate of that high school. So with that type of background, I was quite—being also a baseball fan myself, I liked going to school in Alameda.

And at Alameda now, when you asked me if I changed from going from medicine to something else, I continued my German language classes. And I guess I was still interested in medicine, but that was something that changed later on. So I did graduate from high school in Alameda in 1940.

Q: And you went immediately to university and college?

KK: Yes. It just so happened in my senior year my brother decided to leave Nippon Dry Goods and start his own linen shop in Berkeley. So he started his linen shop I think in the spring of 1940 because I remember commuting from Berkeley to Alameda to finish my senior year. So when I graduated from Alameda High School, which was in June of 1940, I applied and was accepted for the fall semester at the University of California in Berkeley. And since I had already changed my residence to Berkeley, I was in walking distance to the campus. So that was when I started my college.

Q: You must have been a good student in high school to make the step so easily into Berkeley.

KK: I guess I was fortunate in a sense, but one thing I'd like to mention is, as you know, my name is Key, K-e-y. But I forgot to mention that my Japanese name is Keokazu, and that was what my father named me. And when I went to first grade in Fresno, my teacher asked me for my name, so I said "Keokazu
Kobayashi." And she shook her head and she said, "That's too long. What do your friends call you?"

And I said, "Oh, they call me 'Key.'"

And she said, "Okay, your name is Key." And so she gave me—she said, "You spell it K-e-y." That was when, I guess, I first adopted my name, K-e-y, Key as my name and I have used it ever since.

The reason I went back to my name, Key, K-e-y, is at the time when I graduated from Alameda High School, Mills College for Girls in Oakland sent me an application to apply for their school. I was quite tempted to fill out the application and see what they would do when I arrived at the campus and they found out that I was not a woman student. But too bad I never kept that application or the offer from Mills College because it certainly would have been a wonderful document to have at this time. Although with the modern operations these days, it's not so difficult to change from one to the other these days.

Q: We've arrived at 1940 and 1941. Where were you when you heard about Pearl Harbor? Were you shocked? What were your feelings, your family's feelings?

KK: Yes, I can quite distinctly remember because that was what; December 7th, Sunday, when the Pearl Harbor attack occurred. We were preparing for our semester final exams at that time and I was at the library at the University of California. And I remember coming out of the library, walking to my home on Derby Street, which was I guess about a 25-minute walk. And as I was walking down, I heard shouts of "Oh, Pearl Harbor has been bombed." And so by the time I came home, my brother and my sister-in-law were there and we turned on the radio and found out that, much to our shock, Japan had been
reported bombing Pearl Harbor. So it was really a traumatic experience for all of us and we were immediately shocked and dumbfounded. And we just wondered what would happen to all of us because we knew, being of Japanese descent, that we would be placed in a very trying position.

Q: But you did not anticipate anything like internment or relocation centers?

KK: Oh, no, we didn't.

Q: How soon did you find out that that would happen to you?

KK: Let's see, I think the first notices must have come out around March that--

I've forgotten the exact date now, but the Sixth Army under General DeWitt had marked certain areas of California as certain type of security zones and also informed us that we'll be placed into camps. So the university students, we were placed in a dilemma because we wanted to finish our school year, if possible. In my case it would have been a second year. And naturally, the seniors were quite worried because they wanted to get their bachelors degrees. But in my case, because of our family circumstances, I think I withdrew from the University in April of 1942 to join my sister's family in Fresno. And the reason I did that is that my brother decided that he would go to an area outside of Fresno, in a rural area called Reedley, where my sister-in-law's family lived. And he would join her family unit and be with them, so that was where I split from my brother and I rejoined my sister's family in Fresno. And there I was back in Fresno where I had grown up and at that time, I guess it was April, we were placed into the WCCA, Wartime Civil--I'll have to get the name--camp, which in this case was in the Fresno County Fairgrounds.
Now Fresno happened to be in a peculiar situation in the sense that those that were within the Fresno city limits had to be evacuated into these what we call—I'll get the name later on—these camps, and those that lived outside the city limits, where my brother and sister-in-law's family lived in Reedley, was called the "White Zone." They were not subject to the initial evacuation order. So here we were in an assembly center, barbed wire fences enclosing us. We look outside the fence and we could see some of our friends in their truck garden farms just outside the fence. And actually their time for the evacuation came a couple of months later, but for that interim period, it was sort of ironical. Here all those that were city residents of Fresno were placed in this barbed wire fenced compound and our friends just living outside the city limits were able to keep on working on their farms.

Q: Could we go back just a little bit. The period from December the 7th, 1941 to April 1942, was there a marked change in your treatment at the University as a student, that is your Caucasian friends or acquaintances? Was there tension, hostility, or was there a great deal of sympathy with your plight?

KK: Actually, the campus community was very understanding. Our fellow classmates had no resentment against us, and I can remember to this day an economics professor, Ira Cross, in one of his economics classes sympathized with the situation that we were in and mentioned to the class at large that we should not be treated as an enemy. So the college community was very good. But I do recall on the way from campus going home there was this one woman. She was a very odd character, and I had seen her before because she used to come to our linen shop just to browse around. She had a dark, well, real black
dress with a black hat and the best way to characterize her would be like she would be a typical candidate for a Hallowe'en witch. The only thing she did not carry the broom with her, but that was the kind of image she projected. I don't think she recognized me when I was coming home from the University, but we happened to meet on the sidewalk going the opposite way. And she looked at me and she said, "Why don't you Japs go back where you came from?" And then she spit on the sidewalk. That was one incident.

Another one was I guess there were about two boys and they were about ages 10 to 11, and they saw me and I didn't know that. But they looked at me and they made that sound of using a machinegun. They said, "Oh, here comes a Jap. Dadadadadada," as if they were shooting the enemy. Those two, I guess, were the two unpleasant anti-Japanese incidents that I personally experienced. But on the whole, I was certainly not exposed to any other anti-Japanese discrimination practice at all.

Q: How long did you stay in Fresno, and where were you placed after that?

KK: The Fresno Assembly Camp, that was the name. We got there in May and then in the meantime they said the assembly camps were under the jurisdiction of the Sixth Army. They were preparing what they called more permanent camps further inland, and eventually they prepared 10 more Relocation Authority camps. And the one that we happened to go to was in Hela River, Arizona, which is about 50 miles south of Phoenix. And here again, it was sort of a quirk in the sense that the entire Fresno Assembly people were scheduled and did go to a camp in Arkansas called Jerome. So all our Fresno friends went to Jerome. The only reason our families and several other families did not go to Arkansas was that for families that had members with
a history of respiratory disease, particularly tuberculosis type disease, were allowed to go to Arizona. And my sister at one time did have some respiratory disease, so we opted for—or rather my brother-in-law, who was the head of the household, opted to go to Arizona. So we went to Hela and there, in my case, I stayed in Hela from October 1942 to January 1944.

Q: What was the experience like for you? How did you spend your days? You'd been a college student. Now what did you do?

KK: In the Fresno Assembly Center, I volunteered to work as a recreation leader. So they had some bats and balls or volley balls and nets, so each morning I would go to either the baseball diamond or the volley ball net and wait until the group of youngsters came. And then I would help them get a game started. And I think we got paid $12 a month, and we worked on a five-day basis. So each one of us, there were friends of mine that were college students that taught elementary classes for the other younger students. And there were others that worked in administration and also in the kitchen, mess kitchen, preparing the meals. Others worked in the warehouse supplying the food that was being delivered to the camp for our consumption. And there were others that worked in we called them a "canteen" store where they had some candies and cigarettes type available for purchase.

Q: What happened to your family's property and what happened to the linen store?

KK: In the case of the linen store, my brother had just rented the place, so what he did was to liquidate the inventory he had. Fortunately, we did not have that much tied up, so he sold it. But in the case of my sister, her husband, my brother-in-law, was a man named Nesioka Mitsuru from He was one of the few that actually owned and operated a movie theatre.
So in his case I think the movie theatre was turned over to some third party and left there. So the only other thing he had was his house, and his house, I guess, was just vacated. I don't know what arrangements were made, but I guess the Government interceded and provided someone to rent the house and also operate the theatre etcetera. So that was the way the property of my brother and my brother-in-law was handled.

Now in the case of my uncle who had this 80-acre vineyard, like I mentioned earlier, Cortez was an agricultural community, about 20 to 25 Japanese families, and they had organized a Cortez Growers' Association, similar to the Grange. And so the Cortez Growers' Association, I think, was turned over to the operation of another third party and eventually the farms were also occupied, primarily by families that had come to California from Oklahoma. So they worked the farms during the absence of the Japanese owners, and when the war ended, my uncle did go back and farmed his own farm again.

So in the case of the farmers, I think in Cortez, out of the 20 some odd families, only one family actually--or two families actually--decided to sell. One moved to Denver and the other one went to another camp, but both families did not return to Cortez after the war. But most of the other families all returned back to their farms.

Q: During your Hela River experience, did you continue to speak Japanese to some of the iisei? And you were draft age; did you have some sense that you might indeed be involved in fighting the war?

KK: Japanese language instruction--I should go back and say--when I was at the University of California, I did apply/Japanese language and the nisei were
placed in the intermediate class.

Q: There was Japanese language at that time offered at Berkeley?

KK: Oh, yes, there was, and our instructor was Professor
And I guess in our class there were about maybe 12 or 14 all niseis and
three.

... girls, and I guess about nine or ten fellows. But I still remember
Professor really delighted in teasing the girls and asking
them difficult questions. But at the same time, they were the ones, I
think, only got A's. So the boys felt we were being discriminated. But
that was some of the interesting sidelights.

Q: Were there any Caucasians in your Japanese language class?

KK: Not in our intermediate. There was one in the beginning, the lower level
one. But the class that I happened to be in happened to be all niseis.
And to give you an example of the background, it's interesting because
depending on the locality we came from, our Japanese level varied. Broadly
speaking, the students that came from certain parts of Southern California
were very weak in Japanese. The students from San Francisco
were very strong in Japanese, also the students from Florin and Sacramento
were also strong in Japanese. Also I think, if you break it by religion,
the niseis from Buddhist families were stronger in Japanese than children
coming from Christian families.

Q: That's something that we didn't discuss very much. What were the religious
inclinations of the families that you grew up in, your brother, your sister,
your uncle?
KK: Right. In Fresno, where I started school, my brother-in-law was a Buddhist, so I went to the Buddhist Church. So I grew up with many friends from Buddhist families and there were, I think—I had friends also went to Christian churches. But I think, now that I look back, there was more a sense of feeling of a gap between families with differing religions in the sense that families of Buddhists tend to socialize among themselves, families of Christians socialize among them. So there was that type of sort of factionalism, so to speak, that existed because of our difference in religious background.

Q: You must have been one of the good Japanese language students then if you had some of that Buddhist background. You were already very fluent.

KK: I guess in my case I happened to have the advantage in the sense that my brother and sister had received schooling in Japan up to their teen age. So when they came to this country, their Japanese was very good. So when I spoke to them, they always spoke to me in Japanese. So I grew up speaking to my elders always in Japanese and I would only speak to my peers or my younger ones in English. But I can still remember the time when I was raised by my sister, I would interpret for my sister and my nephew, my littlest nephew. I had three nephews. One was about two years younger, and the other was about four years younger, and the other one was about eight years younger than me. But oftentimes I remember interpreting for my sister and her son. Between my sister and her sons, it was kind of interesting that to serve as an interpreter, even within the same family.

Q: How long did you stay in Hela River? What were the circumstances of your leaving that Relocation Center?
KK: Getting back to the question about signing for the draft--I'm sorry I didn't mention it, but you see, I have my registration certificate for the equivalent of a draft card. And this is dated June 30, 1942. At that time--let's see, in 1942 I had turned 20, I was aged 20, and so we did sign up for the draft. But we weren't concerned about being drafted into the Army because some of our older niseis had been drafted prior to Pearl Harbor Day. Many of them were being discharged and sent back into the camps with us or sent back to the family. And some even came back into the camp in the Assembly Camp or in the Relocation Camp. So the period of 1942 especially there was no concern. Later on when the movement started to form an all-nisei regimental combat team, which eventually became the 442nd Regimental Combat Team, they did come to recruit in our camps to volunteer for this unit. And that was the time I was in Arizona, Hela River Relocation Camp. To me that didn't appeal, or I didn't feel that I was willing to volunteer for that type of service, so although agewise I was eligible, I did not.

Q: Any particular reasons you'd like to go into?

KK: Well, I think initially, when you come down to it, I still felt bitter about being placed in the Relocation Camp and to me I thought it was really asking too much of us where here we were in university, living a normal American life, and then they put us in camps and not only put us in camp--and I think at this point I should mention, being niseis, we were Americans of Japanese ancestry. Now we felt, or many us felt that our parents, who were born and were Japanese aliens and were ineligible for citizenship--they were unable to be naturalized for Japanese aliens and also, in the case of
my family, my brother and my sister also, and my brother-in-law fell in this category. So did my uncle. But for us that were American citizens, we felt that we were really being discriminated in a sense that when the time came, they would treat us just like they treated our parents who happened to be Japanese aliens. And I still remember I had one cousin. He must have been in his early forties, and he was sort of a rabble-rouser type person. But he needled me all the time. He said, "Here you claim you're American citizen but look, when the war breaks out, the U.S. Government treats you just like us, meaning Japanese aliens. And that was the kind of needling we had received from some of our older co-Japanese iseis that I was still unable to feel that I would be willing to serve in the military service for this country. That was through my period of being very bitter about being discriminated in the sense that being an American citizen and still being placed in camp, primarily for enemy aliens.

Q: And you continued to feel this way through 1943, 1944?

KK: I guess, as I stayed in the camp and in my case I happened to work at the local community hospital. I started as a messenger and then when the vacancy came, I served as a hospital timekeeper, keeping records for the nurses aides, the doctors, the rest of the hospital staff. So I kept busy that way, and in the meantime one of the easiest and fastest ways to get out of the camp was either to go to college or to find employment outside. And in the case of myself, here I was just about 20 or 21. I wanted to finish my college, so I applied for schools and in the meantime, my brother had relocated to Denver working as a domestic for a family in Denver. And he urged me to try to go to Colorado School of Mines because
that would be in, I think, Boulder or Golden, just outside of Denver. So I applied there and I also applied to Missouri School of Mines because one of my friends had gone. And it seemed that the mining schools were more willing to accept us than say the regular state universities. So eventually I was accepted at Missouri School of Mines in Rolla, and I left camp in January 1944 and started the spring semester at Missouri School of Mines. And while I was at Missouri School of Mines, here again you asked me about changing from medicine. When I was at University of California, I had shifted from medicine to commerce, or now business administration. It was primarily with the intention of graduating and working with my brother in expanding his store. So that was why I changed my major.

Now when I went to apply for Missouri School of Mines, I wasn't seriously considering becoming a mining engineer because I didn't think I'd like work down in the mines or anything with mining. But it was just primarily to get out of camp, and so while I was in Missouri School of Mines, I received my notice to take a physical for the Army. And in, I guess, May or June of 1944 I went to the Jefferson Barracks outside of St. Louis to take my Army physical. The upshot was that I passed my Army physical, but let me relate an interesting experience while I was at Jefferson Barracks because Rolla is I guess about 50 or 60 miles outside of St. Louis. So we were placed in a bus early in the morning while it was still dark. And we got to Jefferson Barracks, and when we got to Jefferson Barracks, it was still dark. So while we were waiting for the doctors to start our physical exam, dawn broke and I looked through the window of our Quonset hut, and I saw a big body of water. I looked up and I said to my friend, "Gee, what's
this big body of water out here?" And the fellows looked at me and they said,

"That's the Mississippi River." So that was my first look at the Mississippi River from an Army barracks, Jefferson Barracks. So to this day I tell my children that the first time I saw the Mississippi River I didn't know what it was.

But the other thing at the Army physical was that while we were being tested for various things, we heard the doctors and nurses bustling around and later on we asked them what was all the excitement. And they said, "Oh, didn't you know?"

And I said, "What?" Stan Musial, the St. Louis Cardinal baseball player, was also going through taking his physical for the Army, but unfortunately, I never had a chance to meet him in the hospital, so to speak. So I missed my chance to see Stan the Man.

So after I took my physical and finished the spring semester, I received my I-A classification which meant that I was eligible for the draft, that I had passed. So I thought to myself, "Here I'm at Rolla. If I'm going to be drafted in the Army, I might as well go back to camp and stay with my sister until they get me." So I went back to camp, I guess in the summer of 1944 and stayed in camp awaiting my draft notice. In the meantime, in the camp—you asked me earlier what I did—besides working at the hospital, I was active with another group of fellows that had prepared a baseball diamond. We happened to be in a compound where we were at the southeast corner of this compound. So right outside the compound was a vacant area, so we cleared that area by ourselves and made it
into a baseball field. So that was where I really learned and enjoyed baseball because in Arizona we could play baseball 10 months out of the year. So at Hart Mountain I guess we played about maybe seven or eight games, and there one of the impressions I got was that a nisei soldier stationed at Camp Savage, I guess, was in Hart Mountain Camp on home leave. I met him and then I learned about the Military Intelligence Service Language School. So when I came back to Arizona--oh, they also came to Arizona camp, I think a nisei sergeant came to recruit linguists for the Army Language Program. And here again I learned about this program, so I with decided, well, my Japanese language background, I might be eligible.

Q: Did you have any sense that you were much more fluent in Japanese than a lot of other nisei?

KK: No, I don't think so because, you know, the fellows that I went around with, we all spoke Japanese. And I think it's our age factor that--just below us, because the reason I say age factor is my nephew is two years younger than me, but his language capability really drops, where I think we were about the last group that had this close contact with the iisei or were more or less brought up that way in a Japanese-speaking atmosphere.

So when our team came back from Hart Mountain, I waited for my draft notice and sure enough, it came and I reported to Salt Lake, Fort Douglas, Salt Lake, to get inducted. And here it was strange because remember I said when I was in Fresno Assembly Center, most of that group went to Jerome. Well, some of them came to Fort Douglas to get inducted in the service, so I met some of my friends there.

Most of the fellows at Fort Douglas did not go to the Japanese Language
Program. They directly went for the basic training, I think to some place in Florida. There were just four of us—I say four of us; there were maybe four out of 20 or 30 that were there—just four of us went to Fort Snelling in Minnesota. And so we reported just in time for Thanksgiving Day dinner at Fort Snelling, Minnesota, and this was Thanksgiving of 1944.

Q: Did you and your friends think it ironic now in 1944 the Army could trust you enough to draft you? What had changed in the attitude of the Army?

KK: Yes, I guess I began to realize that the U.S. Government did what it wanted to suit its own needs, and they didn't care too much about even the rights of a citizen at that time. There again, although my cousin that needled me before was not in this camp—he went to another camp—I could still visualize that if we had been in the same camp, he would be the first one to say, "Why do you want to serve in an army or for a country that put you behind barbed wire? And to me I guess, by that time I had more or less gotten over my initial bitterness and I had a change of heart. And I felt that in the long run, because the ultimate choice would be, all right, when the war ends, I still have to decide whether I'm going to live in this country or live in Japan. And I felt, given those two choices, I would still like to live in this country. So if I'm going to live in this country, well, I guess in overcoming my initial bitterness, I would serve in the Army, and I did.

Q: Were you starting to hear stories at that time in 1944 about the all-nisei units in Europe?

KK: Gee, now that you mention it, I don't recall. I think indirectly, in a sense then, there were friends of mine—I didn't have any real close friends but acquaintances that were becoming casualties in the Italian campaign.
And I would hear from a friend of mine that he said, "Oh, Joe Such-and-Such or the family of Joe Bonata, he died in action in Europe" or some place. And so we were gradually getting news of that type in the summer of 1944 when I went back to camp, waiting for the draft. So by that time I guess we were aware of the experiences our nisei volunteers were having in Europe.

Q: What happens next now in your military career, your initial military career?

KK: So we reported to Fort Snelling on Thanksgiving Day. Now November 13th was the day I was inducted into the Army at Fort Douglas. So the second week I was already in Fort Snelling. So on Saturday following Thanksgiving Day was my first inspection I was subjected to at Fort Snelling. And here I was lined up, I thought spruced up, everything, shoes shined, and here comes the company commander, and it was Lieutenant Spark Matsunaga. He's the current Senator from Hawaii. Here Lieutenant Matsunaga came up to me and looked me up and down and he told the sergeant, "Take this man's name. He needs a haircut before he could go on pass." So I had to rush to the barber shop after the formation and get my hair cut and then go to the First Sergeant for my pass to Minneapolis. But that was my first experience with Lieutenant Matsunaga, and now that I've been here in Washington, D.C. since 1956 and I've met, first he was a Congressman from Hawaii and later on he's currently the Junior Senator from Hawaii. But I often kid him about gigging me for my first inspection, and naturally he doesn't remember me, but we have a good joke between the two of us right now.

Q: What was the nature of the training that you received in this Military Intelligence Service Language School? Could you tell me about the classes
and about your daily routine, the curriculum. Did you have mainly language training or did you have training in intelligence work per se?

KK: Actually, to give it in a chronological sequence, in November after I reported to Fort Snelling, the school had been going on all this time, and the next class for us didn't start until February 1945. So in the meantime, those of us that had just joined the Army, we were sent with the group of Fort Snelling graduates who had just finished anywhere from six to nine months of their Japanese language class. They came out as mostly technicians fifth grade. That's a corporal rank. So we went with them to Fort McClellan, Alabama for two months basic training. And so for two months we were in Alabama, and that was where we learned about the M-1 rifle, map-reading, the routine basic training that's given to all Army recruits.

So after that training was over, we came back. The graduates were sent to their assignments overseas or some stateside. But one platoon of us that was just in the Army waiting to go to school started class in February of 1945. Now before we were assigned to classes, they gave us tests. So we were grouped into sections, depending on our Japanese language skill. Fortunately or unfortunately, they placed me in one of the higher--there were two classes that were the highest and I was in one of the two highest classes. So there were about maybe 20 students in our section. To give you an idea, I guess in our section I'd say out of 20, maybe half were from Hawaii. And by and large, the niseis from Hawaii were very strong in Japanese. In fact, I guess our English was stronger than theirs, but their Japanese was stronger than ours. So we were in that kind of situation.
And the reason I say we were in the two highest classes, I've forgotten, maybe there were about enough students to go into say 20 classes, 20 sections, and we were one of the two top sections. Our two sections finished the program in six months. The others took nine months, so that would give you an idea as to the difference in our background as far as Japanese skill was concerned.

Now we covered the same text. We did in six months what the other class did in nine months and as far as the curriculum is concerned, I can't recall what kind of textbooks we used. But I know we had to translate from Japanese military books that were used as textbooks in the Japanese Army. We'd translate from Japanese into English, so it was primarily building up a vocabulary. All our instructors were niseis and some kibe niseis, you know, the niseis that were born in this country, were educated in Japan, and had come back to this country.

Q: Were you being trained to be both translators and interpreters? There was emphasis on reading Japanese. Of course you already knew how to speak Japanese.

KK: No, there was no emphasis on speaking. It was all reading.

Q: This was strictly reading?

KK: Strictly reading, and there was no special classes of Military Intelligence or anything like that. It was primarily giving us a vocabulary in military language, so to speak, primarily for, I guess--now that I look back, since this was 1944 or early 1945, and it was still, you know, combat--our primary mission would be to translate captured Japanese documents in the combat area. So that was our primary program, prepare us for translating
Japanese documents although naturally interrogation came. But there was no special classes for showing us, okay, you take a prisoner here and you ask him this and this. There was no training of that type. It was all just from books.

Q: Were you all nisei at Fort Snelling or were there some Caucasians being trained?

KK: Yes, I'm glad you mentioned that because/a real sense of discrimination in the sense that let's say there were, well, say 1,000 students. And I'd say maybe 90 percent were niseis, but we also had say five percent that were Caucasian and five percent that were of Chinese ancestry. Now the discrimination that I mentioned is that at graduation time, I forgot, so many percentage of the graduates received what we call Staff Sergeant rating, another percent, depending on I guess their class and their record, got Sergeant. And even the lowest graduate received what we call T5, a Corporal rating. But the Caucasian students all came out as commissioned officers, Second Lieutenants. And incidentally, although I didn't meet him at Fort Snelling, but I saw him was... .

Among the Caucasian students there, I don't think I recall meeting him but I know there was this fellow named Leon Hervitz. And the reason I remember Leon was that after the war, we happened to be at Columbia at the same time in 1950/1951. But while we were at Fort Snelling, the nickname Leon had earned was being the "Congee Kid." So he was quite known for his proficiency in learning the Japanese vocabulary. So just to let you know that that was one of the things that I think bothered us that we got in the Army and yet we're still subjected to being treated as secondclass citizens
because here they give Second Lieutenant commissions to non-Japanese, but the soldiers of Japanese descent, we were just given the enlisted men, non-commissioned officers.

Q: That leads me to another question. May I ask if you felt any qualms about being trained to do intelligence work against people of your own ancestry?

KK: No. In my case I had no qualms or misgivings because--let me put it this way. At the very outset of Pearl Harbor time, and I think it was because of my kendo training to some extent, but here again in the kendo training I did not mention, but contrary to popular American thinking, actually kendo or Bushido naturally was a way to instill the spirit of the samurai to Americans of Japanese descent. But our kendo teachers at the very outset, they never encouraged us to be loyal to Japan. Their emphasis was, "You have Japanese blood in you, but you are all Americans. You are citizens of this country. What you should strive for is to become good and responsible American citizens." So I think that was the kind of indoctrination we received at that time when I mentioned when we were in Cortez when they gave us an intensive one-week kendo training. And I think that may not be properly appreciated by the non-Japanese in this country because they immediately associate Bushido with Japanese militarism and therefore, ipso facto, those that took kendo were also trained to be pro-Japanese, but that was not the case. And the reason I mention this is that the top Japanese leaders that were initially on the FBI watch at this time or were arrested at the very outset, many of them were, I think, involved in the Kendo Association, Judo Association, Buddhists, and naturally they picked former veterans of the Japanese Army and they were a
prime target group. But as far as my case was concerned, our kendo training was to train us to become good American citizens.

Q: By the time you finished your training at Fort Snelling, the war was over, wasn't it? Where were you on V-J Day?

KK: I was trying to recall where because August 15th I think we had just about finished our formal course. And I don't know whether I'd graduated or not, but to this day—I guess I must have been at Fort Snelling in Minnesota because—and the reason I say that, I don't recall exactly, but I remember some of my friends had gone on leave and they were in Chicago. They said they really enjoyed themselves celebrating V-J Day, and I know I certainly didn't experience that. So I think I was in the fort at Snelling at that time. But it was a big relief for us that the combat, the fighting part was over, and we were all wondering what kind of assignment we would get.

Q: What kind of assignment did you get when you finished?

KK: In our case we graduated in what we called "the August class of 1945."

There were 500 of us niseis, which was the largest class that ever graduated from Fort Snelling. And I should say some of the graduates remained to be on the faculty. Our group, we went from Fort Snelling to California, and there we got on a ship called USS Storm King. And the reason I remember the name is I still have my mess card from that time, and you could tell from the number of perforations that I didn't take all my meals while I was on the ship. But we went from, I think, San Pedro to Eniwetok, and then from Eniwetok we landed in Manila.

Q: I noticed on that card that it said "Key Kobayashi." I noticed one of your other cards had a different given name for you.
Key

KK: Oh, yes. My full name is Keokazu Kobayashi, but I should mention that I was not always legally Key Keokazu Kobayashi. And the reason is, remember I said that I was born in a hotel. My father reported my birth to the then secretary of the Japanese Association in the city of Fresno. And as you could tell, he wrote my name in Japanese characters, Kobayashi Keokazu. Keokazu is the cune reading. The reading could be Seiichi. So my father reported my name in Japanese. The secretary romanized my name as Seiichi Kobayashi and reported it to the Vital Statistics Office in Sacramento, but I did not realize this until after Pearl Harbor. And the reason was that after Pearl Harbor, they urged those of us with birth certificates to obtain a copy from Sacramento. So lo and behold, when I asked for my birth certificate, they sent me a birth certificate saying my name was Seiichi Kobayashi. "Full Name of Child: Seiichi Kobayashi." And my father is listed as Motojyo Kobayashi, my mother as Chio Yonayama. And my address at that time was 1435 Kern Street, Fresno, California. My father, according to this, was 42 years old and my mother was 36. And my father's occupation is given here as hotel keeper, and my mother was listed as a housewife.

So I had registered for the draft as Key Keokazu Kobayashi, as my draft card here indicates, and joined the service as Key Keokazu Kobayashi, Serial Number 3986066. So when I got to Fort Snelling, I checked with our Army Legal Officer and he said I would have to find someone that knew me at my time of birth. So fortunately, the cousin that had been needling me all this time happened to be relocated with his wife and was working at a Japanese restaurant in Minneapolis. So when I approached him, he offered
to sign an affidavit claiming that he knew me at the time of my birth and that Key Keokazu Kobayashi was the same person as Seiichi Kobayashi. So I had my name legally changed from Seiichi Kobayashi to Key Keokazu Kobayashi.

Incidentally, that also brings up an interesting episode in my life because later on when I was serving in the Army, we had to initial everything. And when I stopped to think, I'd have to write KKK and everyone would say, "Oh, Ku Klux Klan." And that was one stigma I wanted to avoid as well as simplify my initials, so I took my signature as far as initials was concerned, I called myself $K^3$. So everything I initial nowadays is $K^3$ and not KKK.

Q: I'm glad you were able to make the name change or they might have drafted you under a different name. Did you anticipate that you might be sent to Occupied Japan when you were on that ship going across the Pacific?

KK: Yes, I think, now that you mention about the USS Storm King that we were traveling, I recall spending one night on the ship with about three of my close friends and we were wondering where we would go. One of my friends said, Well, after knowing so many nisei girls, he's going to find a Japanese girl for his wife. I didn't say anything and I just thought, "Well, that's an interesting thought. I never thought about going to Japan for spouse-hunting." But that was one of the personal sidelights, so to speak, that we talked about.

Q: Did you feel that Japanese girls would be better as wives or Japanese women as wives than nisei women?

KK: In my case, at that time I had no strong preference. I had a couple of nisei girls that I was very fond of and would have married, I guess, if circumstances had permitted. So I didn't feel that way. But when we got
to Manila, we were assigned to the Allied Translator Interpreter Section, and our campsite was the camp and a racetrack. As you know, a racetrack is oval, so our offices where we worked were under the grandstand, and we had to walk clear around one end of the racetrack and on the opposite end there were tents where we were quartered. Now from our tent quarters to our grandstand, we had to walk around the outside of the racetrack, but in between there there was also a Japanese PW (Prisoner of War) camp situated. And we had to walk right by it and they were behind barbed wire. But one thing that really surprised me was the healthy condition of the Japanese PWs. Here they were walking in shorts but from the waist above, they were all plump. They seemed more well fed than we were and being Manila, they could went topless, so to speak, so you/see then they were suntanned and they were in excellent physical shape. And here we were in army fatigues and eating GI food. An interesting sidelight I'd like to mention here is that we had our mess kits, so we would go from our tent, go up--our mess area was also near the grandstand--go through the mess line, eat our food, wash our mess kits and come back. We used to do this every meal. Now there was one real adventurous fellow from Hawaii and as we passed the PW camp one night, he noticed they were cooking rice over there. So he ducked under the barbed wire fence, went in and ate with them. And he waited until we finished and when we were coming back again, he came under the barbed wire and joined us and then boasted to us that we really missed a tasty meal because here he had Japanese rice cooked Japanese style and here we were getting GI food that didn't meet our tastes. So I was surprised more of us didn't go under the barbed wire fence and eat with the PWs. That was one of the
interesting sidelights of that episode.

Q: Can you tell me something about the Allied Translation Interpreter Section that you were assigned to? What was the setup and how did you fit into it?

KK: Yes. Actually it was more or less like in an Army rear command area, so they were primarily training us to be translators. And as you know, war had ended, so there was no immediate urgency as far as translating captured documents. But to give us the practice, they would assign—we were, I guess, grouped into teams of about maybe two officers and about eight or ten enlisted men. The officers would receive the documents and then they would pass it out to each one of us. Then we would translate the documents into English and here again we had our and that we'd use and also I think each one of us became very good users in so we would know practically what page to open up for a certain But that was how we spent our time in Manila.

Q: What kinds of documents were you given at this stage to translate?

KK: I can't visualize what they were now that you specifically ask me, but most of them, I think, were handwritten order type documents that went from one command level to another command and that we had to translate them. But like I mentioned, you know, since the war was over, it was just a routine practice type thing. So we didn't get very enthusiastic about that kind of work.

Q: How did you happen to get then assigned to Japan if....

END TAPE I, BEGIN TAPE II
Q: How did you happen to get then assigned to Japan itself?

KK: I think that's an interesting story, and I have to check with my company commander. And the reason I say that is while I was stationed in Manila, since I was a staff sergeant, I was selected to be a platoon leader, and my company commander was a Lieutenant Charles Terry. He had just come from Texas, Camp Walters. He was an armored tank officer, and he came over, so he was my platoon commander. So I worked with him, and we got along very good. I liked him and I enjoyed working for him.

Now the reason I say it may depend on him for my assignment as a platoon leader is that when I looked to see the assignment that our class, our section, got—remember I said there were two sections of us? I'd say 90 percent of the two sections remained in Manila to work on the War Crimes Trial. So many of my classmates of our section in fact stayed there and worked on the War Crimes Trial. And I think of the two sections, one went to—maybe two went to Korea and I'm about the only one that went to Tokyo. The rest of our class remained in Manila. And the reason I say I think it was because of my platoon leader is that after our unit left Manila in November and we arrived in Tokyo, we got assigned to our regular units. And what they did was each floor was a detachment, and we happened to be on the sixth floor, so we were called the Sixth Detachment. My platoon leader became a detachment commander and he asked me to be his first sergeant. I said, "No, I think I'd rather go back into language work than do Army command type work." Because I didn't like the idea of being a first sergeant and having to look after all these fellows I know that are going to be living a pretty wild life in Occupied Japan. So I ended up being assigned to a
technical translation team where we had, I guess, two officers. Now these officers are nisei officers and there were maybe six enlisted men or eight enlisted men.

Now remember I mentioned that when we were graduated at Fort Snelling none of the nisei became commissioned officers. In the meantime, for our nisei graduates that had gone overseas earlier and served in the combat area, quite a number of them were offered a chance to accept battlefield commissions. So by the time we got to Manila, there were some nisei that were commissioned as second lieutenants. So it was only through that way that the niseis became commissioned officers. Well, not only that way, but there was the other way where those that had been accepted and gone to the regular OCS, Officer Candidate School, at Georgia were commissioned second ordinary lieutenants as any other regular/commissioned officer. But for the MISLS graduates, most of them received their commissions as more or less like battlefield commissions after V-J Day overseas.

Q: Were there any special preparations for your assignment to Japan? For example, did you know anything about the initial Occupation policy that MacArthur was supposed to be following? Or you were just going along with your Army assignment?

KK: At our level, we never knew what the Occupation policy was. The only indication or knowledge we had was reading The Stars and Stripes or The Nippon Times. I think, as far as the Occupation policy, at our level the Japanese were more knowledgeable than we were. And the reason I say this is that I had relatives in Kanagawaken, which in this case was in Odawara,
just outside of the city of Odawara. And I went to visit my aunt, the younger sister of my mother, who knew me when I was there earlier when my mother had taken me there. But it just so happened in the neighboring village I had a friend of mine named Yosho Takahashi, who was a kibei nisei that had been born in California, went to Japan, came back to California and then because of his health, had to go back to Japan in 1941, just before the war broke out. So he was in Japan when the war broke out, but because of his physical health, he was not drafted until just about the time the war ended, his health had recovered and he was slated to be in the Army. But all this time he had stayed out because of ill health, but he had recovered sufficiently. And I met him when I went to Odawara and I guess he was about 12 years older than I am, about 10 or 12 years older than I.

He asked me one time when I visited him, here I was a member of the Occupation force, GHQ [General Headquarters] shoulder patch, and I went to visit him and he asked me, he said, "Gee, the Occupation is being paid by the Japanese Government. How much is the Japanese Government going to have to pay you fellows that are in the Occupation?" And that was my first exposure to the idea that the Occupation expenses would be paid by the Japanese Government. So the GI's at our level, we had no idea what the Occupation policy is as far as General MacArthur was concerned. The only way that we were affected was fraternization policy, or non-fraternization policy. They would say, "All right. From here on, GI's cannot fraternize with Japanese women." The other way would be certain areas because of the food situation, critical food situation, GI's were not allowed to eat in Japanese restaurants. And here again is, I guess, twofold. Not only was
the food critical and needed for the Japanese, but also the sanitation factor.

Q: You arrived in Japan in November?

KK: November 1945.

Q: In November of 1945, and so the Occupation had been under way for a couple of months. You hadn't been to Japan since you were about three or four years old. I'm very curious about your feelings and your emotions at the moment of arrival back in Japan. What were your observations of Yokohama, Tokyo, the Japanese people, their morale, and you as a nisei coming to Japan?

KK: We landed in Yokohama and we got off the ship and by truck we were taken to Tokyo station. From there we took the Kehing line to Tokyo station. Along that road I vividly remember looking out the windows and seeing nothing but devastated buildings, just flat. You'd see shacks standing here and there and especially around Kawasaki, too. It was all just flattened area. And then it was quite a shock because, well, when we got off at Tokyo station and started to walk, which is only a block and a half to our quarters which was the NYK, And here right in the middle of here were these tall buildings all intact. Not one of those buildings had been damaged, and so in our case we took our baggage and went into the buildings.

But here I should digress and mention an interesting episode because after we got into our building and they told us which floor to go and which room we were assigned to—we were all billeted here in this one building; I think it was about a seven-floor building. Eventually the seventh floor was our mess hall and we were billeted on sixth and fifth for enlisted men and
I think the fourth floor was for officers and I forgot what the second and third were. But the ground floor was for our offices.

The thing that I'd like to mention now is that during one of our duty assignments, we had to handle the baggage that came to the doorway and being a staff sergeant, I was in charge of, I guess, about four enlisted men, moving the baggage from the lobby to the elevator. And it was another team's duty to take it from the doorway up to the lobby area. The reason I'm making this distinction is that George Lenson, the China-Burma-India veteran—I think he was a first lieutenant at that time—was in charge of the first unit that had the responsibility of moving the baggage from the doorway to the lobby. And I was responsible for the team from the lobby to the elevator. As we started working, I don't know where his men went, but they disappeared. So he came up to me and he said, "Sergeant, I want your men to go over to the doorway and bring the baggage and put it on the elevator." And to this day I don't know/I got away. Here I was a staff sergeant and a lieutenant was ordering me, and I told the lieutenant, I said, "My orders were to move the baggage from the lobby to the elevator. We're not about to go to the doorway." And he was shocked; here I wouldn't obey his order. But like I said, eventually his men came back, so they moved it. But now that I look back, that was really cause for insubordination. I've never mentioned it to George Lenson, but I guess maybe he'll find out about it now.

Q: Did you have any strong feelings or emotions about being back in Japan, just as someone of Japanese background and Japanese ancestry, that you were occupying the country or part of the occupying army, most of whom would be Caucasians? I wonder if you had any reflections at that time
KK: There were some experiences in which I really sensed the unique situation that nisei GI’s in the Occupation were placed in. And let me give you an episode of the kind of experience we had. First, or shortly after we got to Tokyo, about three of us, all in GI uniforms, were riding the trolley in Tokyo. And as we got on, we inched our way inside and it was pretty crowded. We noticed three or four Japanese middle-aged women looking at us, and they were saying, "Gee, they have a GHQ patch and must be part of the shinshugo, but they have Japanese faces." And they were puzzled, they couldn’t understand how a member of the Occupation Forces could look like a Japanese. We overheard them; we knew exactly what they were saying, but we didn’t make any comment. But just at the time when the trolley came to our stop, we had to brush past them and we politely asked them, "

The women looked at us and they heard us speaking Japanese, and they were just shocked. They didn't know what to say and by the time we just got off and laughed to ourselves. But it brings out the part at the outset of the Occupation. They were really puzzled to see members of the Occupation because they thought the Occupation were all Caucasian members. And to see Japanese faces was—and along with them, I have to admit now that I was really used by some of my Japanese friends, not knowing the full reason. Because one day this friend, Yosho Takahashi that I mentioned, the doctor of that area called on me at the NYK Building and asked me to accompany him to another, I think it was a bank building, in
a couple of blocks away. So I said, "Okay," and he did not explain to me why he wanted me to accompany him. But we went into the building, and he knew where he wanted to go, so we went to the office. I did not interpret or say anything. I just went along him, just accompanying him on this trip. Anyway, the upshot was later I found out that this bank company had custody of the doctor's private automobile. The automobile that the doctor had had been taken over by the Japanese Government during wartime because of the shortage of automobiles. And this doctor eventually found out after the war where his car was kept. So just by having me accompany him to this place and asking for the return of his automobile, he got his automobile back like that. But he never asked me to say anything, so all I did was accompany him. But just my presence with the doctor really impressed these bank officials and influenced them to give the car back to the owner. So that was an interesting experience that I had, that I was being utilized and I didn't know it.

Q: In November and December of 1945, what was your impression of the morale of the Japanese people? You mentioned the rubble and the devastation and you mentioned something about the food problem and sanitation. Do you have any other recollections or impressions of the life of the Japanese as you could observe it from the outside?

KK: Yes. I think one of the most tragic sights I saw when I got to Tokyo was on a nice day we would go walk along the Ginza. And the thing that really struck me was the Japanese veterans in their army uniforms were on the sidewalks kneeling, shining shoes. Here was our counterpart but because being part of the defeated country, that was the best they could
do, and the food was short. There were no jobs for them, and here they were lined up, one next to the other, shining shoes. But at the same time, I have to admit, now that I look back, that I don't recall any GI's really gloating over the plight of the defeated Japanese. In fact, that was one of my concerns, now that I recall. When we landed in Japan, I thought, "Here I'm going to Japan to the country of my parents." And I felt that the Japanese people would really resent having one of their countrymen, so to speak, come into their country as part of the Occupation Force. That was one of my fears that I had, now that you ask me, when I first landed in Japan. But the times that I did meet strangers, Japanese strangers, they welcomed us with open arms and especially when they found out that we could converse with them in Japanese. They felt a close identity with us and treated us very favorably and kept asking—one of the favorite questions is, "What is democracy?" because that was, I guess, the favorite catchword, so to speak, after the war that Japanese realized that one of the reasons United States won was because it was a democratic country. And they thought they had to know what the secret of democracy was.

Q: What kind of answer did you give to them?

KK: That was very difficult because I said, "Gee, I can't explain to you what democracy is." And they said, "Sure. You must know because you lived in the United States." And I said, "No, I really couldn't." And actually, now that I look back, I often wonder if I told them about my wartime experience of being sent into a camp as an enemy alien and then later on being drafted into the Army and then being sent overseas and say, "Okay, that's what a democratic country will do," whether that kind of lesson,
so to speak, or moral would be appreciated. Because to me, I still have a
difficult time trying to define democracy, especially to the Japanese that
were so brought up under the emperor system and the concept.

Q: Did you think that your fellow GI's, the Caucasians, were behaving well at
this early stage of the occupation, things were going along nicely, given
the circumstances of an occupying army?

KK: Yes, I think on the whole the GI's behaved very well. I've heard of stories
where they mistreated Japanese girls, maybe robbed the storekeepers, but on
the whole I think they were minor. But speaking of mistreatment, I think---
let me tell you an interesting episode. One of the propaganda gimmicks
used by the U. S. Army during World War II was to print Japanese 10 yen
notes. The color was just like a Japanese 10 yen. I forgot, Empress

I think was on there and the coloring, the texture of the paper
was just like a real Japanese yen, the size. The only thing, on the back
it said, "Before the war this 10 yen bought (a), (b), (c), (d). Because of
only the war, you could/buy (e), (f), (g)." It was typewritten, excellent prop-
eganda material. These bills were, I guess, dropped by our bombers because
when you hear about air raids, all you hear about is incendiary bombs. But
these propaganda bills were dropped over there. And I could testify to that
because after we got over there, one of the most popular commodities that
the Japanese black market wanted was cartons of cigarettes. And naturally
when you sell cartons of cigarettes, it's a quick transaction. And here
we were located in NYK building, right next to the Palace Grounds. Palace
Grounds, as you know, is a park area. It was a favorite area for black
market U.S. GI's to sell their cigarettes. So I still remember one of my
roommates, nisei, came home one night with a wad of these 10 yen bills. He turned them over and these were the propaganda leaflets that our U.S. Army had dropped. And was he mad!

Q: That's a wonderful story. Could you now tell me a little bit about your responsibilities and your duties in this Allied Translation Interpreter Section?

KK: Okay. In my case, I was just—like I mentioned earlier—translating, a member of a technical translation team. And we had to translate mostly scientific experiments that the Japanese Army conducted. And to this day the one document I vividly remember, because I had a real hard time looking up some of the Japanese vocabulary, was some experiment that the Japanese Army conducted concerning underwater explosion. But outside of that and maybe another document which mentioned a Japanese stomach medicine, like it's—they had the Japanese word. It's like trying to translate Bromo-Selzer. Here you have the word "Bromo-Selzer." Right? And here, that's a Japanese medicine's name, but I didn't recognize it as a proper noun. And I thought it was some noun or something that had an equivalent in English, and I had a dickens of a time. Finally when I asked one of the Japanese local employees, they said, "Oh, that's the name of a medicine." Once when I found out, it was over, but until I got to this stage, I must have spent hours trying to find out what the name of that Japanese medicine was.

So it was that type of translation, but more than the official translation, my non-official duties I felt more interesting in the sense that we would be translating at our desk and a GI would come walking in the door
and beckon to one of us. So we would go over and ask him, "Yes? Can we help you?" And this GI invariably, one after another, brought a love letter from a Japanese girlfriend. And so we'd translate the love letter for him and invariably it was like the case of Madame Butterfly where the GI had received his orders and he'd have to go back to the States, and the girl was writing how much she loved him and how much she was going to miss him and hoped that they would get together again. I don't know how many of those kind of letters we translated for these GI's that brought them over to us.

Q: I see then that the non-fraternization policy wasn't exactly observed?
KK: No, I sure was more observing the breach.

Q: Could you describe more the setup of ATIS, how large an organization you were involved with, the nature of the work that was being done?
KK: Actually, at our level I'm afraid I can't give you any overall picture because since we were--like in my capacity, I was just a team member. I don't have the overall picture other than when I look at a GHQ telephone directory of that period, I can identify the units. But I was not in the position because I spent from say November to June of 1946 and all I did was in the translation. Now I can tell you some of the kind of work that my other roommates did, like one was involved in an assignment of collecting documents and books. In fact, here at the Library of Congress we have the books that his team went and brought back from the libraries and offices or agencies that had that.

Q: Was he nisei, too?
KK: Yes.
Q: All of the men in your team were nisei?

KK: Yes, they were all niseis. We had nisei officers, too. But on that one, the one that went to collect documents, what happened is--this is later on. I found out that the Occupation was stripping the libraries of the Ministry of War and the Army and the quasi-Japanese Government like the South Manchurian Railway Company, because we have those books here in the library now. From the stamp seal I could tell who the former institution owner was. Now this roommate of mine had to go to these places, bring back the books, identify the books and then ship them back to the United States. Now that, I think I know the team leader was a Caucasian lieutenant.

Q: Do you know why this was being done, why these books were being confiscated?

KK: No. At that time we had no idea other than because you do what you're told.

Q: Yes.

KK: And not the reason why. So that was a kind of interesting assignment that one of our classmates did. And the other thing that's a sidelight is that just to show you--you said we weren't observing fraternization. Well, I happened to also be involved in a case where I tried to cover up. The cover-up involved, since I was a room leader, I was responsible every morning to report the presence or absence of any of my roommates. I think in our room there were 11 of us, and this particular incident, on one particular weekend one of our nisei roommates did not show up for our Monday morning roll call. So when I made my morning report, I lied and I said everybody was present. Tuesday morning he still hadn't come back, and I did it again. Wednesday morning he still didn't come back, and I still reported him present.
But around Wednesday at ten o'clock I received a note from a Japanese student at my desk, and on the note it said, "Get me out of here. I'm in jail and the Provost Marshall won't let me out." And here is our absent nisei friend. He had been outside after curfew and the Provost Marshall had picked him up and put him in their compound. So I immediately took the note and went up to our company commander and explained to him that our friend is in the custody of the Provost Marshall. So the upshot was that he was released and got out, and my penalty for falsely informing the presence of my absent roommate was that I was detailed to a movie night cleanup crew where we had to set up the chairs and take away the chairs for the weekly movies that we had for a month. So that was a case where I got burned, so to speak, because I was covering up for my friend. To this day, I guess, if I had to do it again, I still might do it. But that was the incident that I had about coverup.

Q: Were there any other incidents that you were involved in during that six months in Tokyo?

KK: Yes. The other one was quite interesting in the sense that when I got to Japan—remember I mentioned that I was in Hela River. One of our friends there originally from Hiroshimaken wrote to me and said their oldest son is in Japan. Now the oldest son actually was born in Hawaii, went back to Japan at an early age and lived with his grandparents. I grew up with his two younger brothers and we played baseball. So I was very close to the family, so when I got to Japan, the family wrote to me and said, "Look him up." And one way you could find him is that their cousin, who had the same family name,
worked at NHK as a secretary. So I went to seek this man and sure enough, he was there. So when I met him, I went to visit his home later on in toward and I met the son. His name is Kenji. So I met Kenji. Now Kenji and I became very good friends because he was about two years younger than I am. But he was at that time attending Kao University, and he had been a former kamikaze pilot. In fact, he showed me a photograph of himself with a samurai sword, in his kamikaze uniform. And he said it was fortunate for him VJ-Day came when it did because a couple of days later he would have been on his last assignment. So that was sort of the case.

Now in his case, as you can tell, when we changed clothes, you cannot distinguish Kenji from me if we were in GI clothes or Japanese clothes. So one day we thought we'd give Kenji a treat--Japanese male visitors were allowed to come to our room--so we put him on in a GI uniform. And he went through the chow line just like any one of us. I guess that must have been quite an experience for him, because here he was an enemy pilot, so to speak, now dressed as a GI because he went through the line with all of us where we picked up our food and then sat at the table and enjoyed our evening meal. And I thought afterwards, you know, naturally the guard on duty could not identify, distinguish us from GI's or Japanese citizens. So he went in just like one of us, and I thought that was one of the most amusing incidents we had.

Q: How did he enjoy your GI food?

KK: I think he was really nervous about being detected and I don't think he had that kind of leisure to really appreciate the menu, although he later said he was really impressed with what he called the "quality," which we
don't agree, but he thought we had quite good food. And I think in terms of the critical Japanese food situation in Japan at that time, it's under-
that standable where people are on a near-starvation diet would certainly appreciate the portions that we were having at our mess hall.

Q: Were you able to travel about a little bit in Japan? Did you have weekend passes?

KK: Yes. A couple of my friends and I, we decided one time to take a trip out to Kyoto because we had some friends assigned out there. And I think it must have taken, oh, 18 hours or so, if I remember correctly. But the interesting part on that is we got to Kyoto in nighttime, so it was dark, and we ended up in finding a Japanese which was okay. And we got in, billeted. Next morning when we came out of the and walked a little while, we found out that we had been billeted in an off-limits area in Momoyama area. Because certain areas of Kyoto had been designated by the Provost Marshall as off-limits, but here at nighttime we didn't know. So we just went into this and found out that we had slept overnight in an off-limits area, so that was kind of amusing.

But then a continuation of that Kyoto weekend was that I had a cousin that lived outside of Naglia. So while we were in Kyoto and my friends were sightseeing, I took this side trip out to Naglia to a place called Omenatu which required changing trains at Naglia and taking this other trunk line. And here again, the only trains to this destination I wanted to go to were all off limits to Allied personnel. So what I had to do was I got in this train and fortunately it was real crowded and I took my cap off and I kind of bent down, although I'm five
feet four inches. I'm not too tall, so I could mingle with the Japanese, and once they saw just my face and my head, the Military Police couldn't identify me as being a GI. So I did sneak a ride to I think it was Kouminatu and then I met my relatives, my aunt and my uncle, and talked to them until about two or three o'clock in the morning. Then I caught the train back at six o'clock and when I got on the train at Naglia to get back to Kyoto, I had to ask one of the Japanese students to wake me up when I got to Kyoto. So I went to sleep because I had stayed up all night and the early morning talking to my aunt. So when the train came to a stop, I looked outside because the student was getting off and he shook me before--but he didn't tell me it was Kyoto. So I thought, "Gee, I guess he's waking me up because he has to get off." And I looked out for the name of the station and I couldn't see any station. By that I time I thought, "Gee, I'd better get dressed and get ready to get off because it must be near Kyoto." The train began to pull out of the station and lo and behold, just as the train left the final sections of platform, I noticed a sign that said KYOTO. And I said, "Oh-oh, if I stay on this train, I'll have to go to Osaka." So I dashed to the rear of the car and tried to get back on the platform, but the conductor said, "No, it's--you're too late."

I said, "Where's the next stop?"

He said, "Osaka."

I said, "I've got to get off."

He said, "No, you can't get off."

So I looked outside and then I just jumped overboard. And I think it was primarily because I was still groggy from just waking up that I did.
this because when I jumped off the train, the train was just maybe going about 20 or 25 miles, just picking up speed. So I did roll over on the track and when I got up, the shock of what I did really got to me because I know my knees were shaking and I couldn't stand up, and I had to sit for a while. Then finally I composed myself and got to the station and I joined my friends. But to this day when I think about jumping out of the train while it was still leaving the station, it's something I guess I wouldn't have done otherwise.

Q: What was the condition of the Japanese trains and transportation at that time?

KK: The Japanese trains were in fairly good condition. The windows were all intact. And one thing really remarkable about Kyoto—as you know, Kyoto was never bombed. So when we got to Kyoto, that was one thing that really distinguished Kyoto from Tokyo, Yokohama and Kawasaki area because that area had been devastated except for the districts. So in Kyoto we saw everything intact, and we even took a side trip to Nara to feed the deer there. And here again it was so much like Japan of prewar days, so we enjoyed our visit very much.

Then the other interesting sidelight was one weekend we went up to Niigata because one of our friends was assigned to Niigata Military Government. And incidentally, being with an all nisei unit like we were at the Military Language School was an advantageous experience for us because once we got to Japan, we were scattered. And so invariably in some city or some military government unit we had a friend that we knew or at least a mutual friend that would still take care of us when we got there. So
when we got to Niigata, we met one of our friends there and I think that was where I made some acquaintances which later on developed in my receiving—I forgot—10 or 15 Japanese swords. Because the Military Government had gone around and confiscated the swords. So when we came back from Niigata and I was stationed in Tokyo, these GI's that I got to know in Niigata were coming through Tokyo on the way home. And they had brought back swords that they had obtained. They didn't want to bring them all back to the United States, so they just dumped about 10 or 12 swords and they kept maybe one or two and went back. And of those swords, I gave them away because I wasn't interested in collecting swords, but I did bring two back. And one of the two swords I subsequently gave to John Lane when I was at Columbia University, and I think John may still have that sword.

Q: I was very interested in your remark that down at your level you weren't much aware of the policies of the Occupation. But were you generally aware that there was this great effort to redesign or change or reform or reorient Japan and you in a way were a cog in that operation? What was Stars and Stripes all about? What were you reading in Stars and Stripes?

KK: Stars and Stripes, I guess, their primary interest was sports news in the States. And we didn't read it with too much attention on what the Occupation policy was. But I would say maybe we were personal ambassadors of democracy in the sense that when we got on the train, especially if there were Japanese women standing, we would give up, relinquish our seats for the Japanese women. And the Japanese men would look at us out of the side of their eyes
as if to say, "What are those GI's doing giving their seats to Japanese women?" But that was sort of the training we had received in this country when the time I was living in Alameda and Berkeley and commuting by bus, we relinquished a seat for the women passengers. So it came to us as being natural. And on the train, I guess, was about the only time where I saw some Caucasian GI actually order a Japanese man to give up his seat, not for himself but for a Japanese woman. And here you saw a very embarrassing situation because the GI was doing what was more or less natural in the United States. But he was definitely going contrary to Japanese practice where in Japan the Japanese men were not hesitant about remaining seated while the women passengers are standing. So here he had to relinquish his seat and a Japanese woman was very embarrassed about taking the seat. Because here the GI was forcing her to take a vacated seat when the man was still there. So that was a kind of interesting personal sidelight of democracy in action, so to speak, if you might praise about, not democracy, but as far as U.S. practices of giving a lady first treatment, which to the Japanese meant democracy. Because if it's done in the United States, then it's a democratic practice.

Q: What about the Japanese woman in this case? Did she make some kind of a polite bow or nod?

KK: Yes. She was very hesitant about accepting the seat, but it was only after...

END SIDE I, BEGIN SIDE II

It was only after much strenuous urging by the GI that she finally thought she'd better take the seat to placate him. So I don't think the woman was appreciative at all.

END OF INTERVIEW