

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Shinzaburo Sumida (SS)

December 6, 1979

Interview by: Mike Gordon (MG)

Notes: Comments in brackets [] are by the transcriber. Inaudible words or sections are identified by ((?)) in the transcript. This transcript has been edited to remove pauses, repetitive phrases and false starts.

SS: I told you on the telephone. That's such a long time ago. Those experiences, [pause] I cannot recall vividly, but anyway...if I can help you, why certainly.

MG: I really appreciate it, with you giving me the time. I had a little bit of difficulty getting stuff on the war...

SS: Did Mr. [Hitoshi "Hank"] Sato mention other name too?

MG: Well, I had read his article ["Honouliuli: Oahu's Little-Known World War II Internment Camp," March 18, 1976] in the [*Honolulu Star-Bulletin*]. It was from 1975, '76, and that's where I got some of the names from it. I went in, and talked to him, just to see what he had to say. I talked to him, about a week or two ago.

SS: Mine is different from others, so, you'd better interview some other persons, too.

MG: Oh yeah, I would consider that, in my opinion, kind of shoddy research, if I only did one, and based the whole thing on one.

SS: Oh, okay, because everyone has their own feelings. Go ahead. Ask what—what do you want to know?

MG: Could we start with a brief biography, if you could? Just sort of tell me a little bit about yourself, like where you were born?

SS: Well, I was born [December 29, 1914] in Hawaii. But when I was about three years old, our family went to Japan. Well, naturally I tagged along, and I finished the grammar school and high school in Japan. In 1932, I returned to Hawaii, and then I went Mainland [U.S.A.], four years of college. Then, in 1936, I graduated from college in the Mainland, and I went to Japan again to enter university. That was 1937. And in those days, well, I had a dual citizenship. So when I lived in Japan, I was Japanese citizen and I had to take a physical. I did, only as conscription in Japan. And I was "B" or something. That means I was near-sighted. So usually, I wouldn't be taken into the Japanese army. Usually. But in June 1937, the very year I took the physical, this Sino-Japan, eastern half, and they started drafting all the...[starts to laugh] all of us, see? So I was put in the army in 1938. And I was in the Japanese army for two years. Exactly two years. Well, I had a high school education in Japan. I had military training in high school, so I was a candidate for officer, and I passed all kind of exams and I became an officer's candidate. And I went to

officer candidate's school for six months, and by the time I was discharged, I was a second lieutenant. In 1940, [pause] in 1940 January, after two years, I was discharged, and I went back to school again. I was at the university first year [when] I was drafted so I went back again.

But, [pause] my uncle [Daizo Sumida] had business here. They didn't have any children; so he adopted me, see, to [pause] carry on his business. So, in December in 1940, between their relationships, I mean, United States and Japan kinda had a...you know. So, I came back in December 1940. And I got married in '41. That was September. And December, [snaps fingers] they bombed Pearl Harbor.

MG: Were you...you working here [Honolulu Sake Brewery and Ice Co.] then?

SS: No, I had another business downtown. And, well, maybe they were checking everybody in those days, the Japanese, and they knew I had served in Japanese army, so December 24, I was pulled in. First the immigration station. Of course I was taken to the Dillingham Building and they asked all kinds of questions, but they knew I served in Japanese army, so...I spent about ten days there. Then I was sent to Sand Island.

MG: And from there?

SS: From there, 1942, February, we were shipped to Camp McCoy, Wisconsin. We're the first—we're called the "First Boat," see? We're the first ones sent to the Mainland. [Quietly] About how many was that? About a hundred. Anyway, I'm guessing a hundred. I know, anyway a number of people, but mostly issei. And about [pause] fifteen or twenty nisei.

MG: They took you right off to the Mainland?

SS: Yeah. We were on the Mainland. We're shipped to the Mainland. We got there about March. It was cold then. And March to May, we're at Camp McCoy, Wisconsin, then we're shipped to [pause] Camp Forrest. Camp Forrest, that's Tennessee. May to August, we're there. Then, we're shipped to Camp Livingston, Louisiana, I think. We were there about one month. Then about eighteen of us, all of us citizens, nisei, were shipped back to Sand Island again. '42 August. They never...why they even need a big camp there? [Laughs]

MG: My impression of it at first was—and correct me if I'm wrong, please—was that it was, first, people were taken to Sand Island...

SS: Um-hmm [Yes].

MG: And they sort of...you know, so well, "Okay, you can go home," and "You're going to the mainland," and "You're going to go out to Honouliuli," and then...

SS: Uh-uh [No]. That's one year. But...about one year later.

MG: But that was the thing I wasn't sure of, was how long did Sand Island exist as far as...you know, I'm sure it must have taken a while to build it. The rest of the other camp, so....

SS: Oh yeah. At the beginning, there was no buildings, you know, so all those guys had to pitch their own tents.

MG: What? At Sand Island?

- SS: Sand Island. The beginning. Yeah. Now, when I went there, in February, you know, in January '42, was nothing but tents, see. But when we're shipped back from Mainland in August, I saw a huge—they had wooden buildings—three of them, over there.
- MG: Who had built them? Do you know? Was it the people that were interned? Or the military?
- SS: No, no, no. I think military. Yeah. So then, those who wanted to evacuate to a family camp in Mainland, uh, went Mainland. They start ((on the coast??)). You know, they want those who want to join their families. You know, the family, they want to get them sent to a Mainland relocation camp.
- MG: The whole family.
- SS: Right. But I didn't look at that. Then, '42, around November, they moved to Honouliuli.
- MG: Yeah. Out *ewa* [leeward Oahu district] way. Were you folks the first people to go there?
- SS: Yes.
- MG: I mean was that—it had just—
- SS: We...we were the first ones.
- MG: About how many were you? [SS starts to laughs] Can you remember?
- SS: There were two hundred, I guess.
- MG: Really?
- SS: Yeah. A hundred fifty or two hundred.
- MG: Were they—you said that the people that went to the Mainland, they went with their families and all. Were the people that were all over here, they had families here and they just decided that they would stick it out by themselves?
- SS: That's right, or had the new ones. You know, they were still pulling every month, you know, there were a few.
- MG: Had to have someplace here.
- SS: We had a barracks. Barracks, but—one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight—eight to ten people in one shack, see? The double-decker. The wooden-building and put in a bed. Yeah? I think it would...a hundred fifty or more.
- MG: That's a lot of people.
- SS: Right. Then, I was there 'til '44, I guess...'44 November when martial law lifted in Hawaii. Then, [pause] well, wrong ((??)) [draws a breath] those undesirable citizens, why they...
- MG: Undesirable? What would you define as undesirable citizens?
- SS: Well, like—the interview, see? They ask all kinds of silly questions. And [laughs] ((?? those who didn't make it))! Well, like in my case, [resumes speaking in a conversational tone] they knew I had served in Japanese army, so what, whatever I said, I

was undesirable, see? So, '44 November, ninety-nine of us, roughly about a hundred of us were shipped to Tule Lake, California.

MG: They sure spent a lot of money, didn't they? Just to get back and forth?

SS: Oh yeah. Really, they spent silly money but...ever heard of Tule Lake?

MG: Yeah. Tule Lake, that was where...

SS: They're all there. California people were relocated to a...but when I went there, more than 20,000 people there. So, '44 November, 'til the war ended, '45. I was in Tule Lake.

MG: When the war was over, then you just came back?

SS: No, not right away though. '45 August, war ended, and December, we're shipped back.

MG: To?

SS: Hawaii.

MG: Can you perhaps describe, what it was like at Sand Island? You said there were tents at one point, and then the small barracks that they had built.

SS: When I was there, Sand Island, there were no buildings. Only tents, and there were ten...eight people or ten people moved in one tent. We slept on an Army cot. Very uncomfortable.

MG: Cold? December. [Chuckles]

SS: Oh yeah. But the...was cold there but the climate didn't bother us. [Drums his fingers] The only thing was the commander, at that time, was very strict.

MG: Such as?

SS: Well, we had nothing to do, so we used to weed or, [pause] well, we got to something to do to kill time. So they're weeding, but there's no...weeder or anything, see? Some people made his own weeder [breaks into a chuckle], from, for instance, a broken spoon or...but even the smallest item, they called it a "weapon," see? So, if somebody had one, and the guards find out that some certain person had...a what? [Chuckles] a "weapon," what-they-call-it?

But we...all lined up. We had to line up in the outside camp [pounds with his hand] and they stripped us. And all they searched...searched, [pounds his hand] the commander, was really a...that commander was really a strict person.

MG: Do you remember his name by any chance?

SS: Hah. He was—he was—yeah, he was a customs officer. Yeah.

MG: Oh? He wasn't in the military?

SS: Well, he was...yeah. He was [Army] Reserves, see? So when it broke out, he was activated. Yeah! All of those things I forgot! He was a mean guy. We used to...remember his name, but [laughs]...You see...food, you know, he was standing by the garbage cans and then we had to see him off before we dumped the whole garbage when it went down...Just like we're wasting it, the food, you see. Sometimes, it was very unpleasant in the beginning.

- MG: What if you didn't like some food? What kind of food was it? Did you cook it?
- SS: Well, food...yeah! We had to cook it because [small snort] we had no army mess or anything. The only thing was—the first group was mostly issei. It was elderly people, and most of them were [pause] storeowner, or [laughs] schoolteacher, or, was...anyway, had no experience of cooking. [Laughs]
- MG: So things came out a little bit maybe burnt more times than others?
- SS: [Still laughing] Was delicious! They were the men who were cooking, but the food was terrible at that.
- MG: Was it Army rations?
- SS: Yeah. One time, we had turkey, once. The roast turkey was supposed to be shipped to the Philippines for Christmas but when the Philippines was overrun by the Japanese, well, all the food was salvaged. [Pounds the table] So we had...[Starts to laugh]
- MG: The turkeys were hanging around Sand Island for a while, but not too long.
- SS: [Chuckles] Only once.
- MG: Did they collect all the spoons and forks and whatnot?
- SS: Everything. They were counted. Yeah. When it was chow time, one guy just handed over the spoons, and how many, and afterwards, they count. [Raps his fingers several times] Even if one missing, oh! A tempest.
- MG: Then they lined again?
- SS: Yeah. Right.
- MG: Was it the same at the other camp too?
- SS: What camp?
- MG: As far as counting the silverware.
- SS: Only Sand Island.
- MG: Not over here?
- SS: No, not over there. Was more lenient, the camp. Was in '42, after Midway, where the activity was kinda, you know, lenient. At the beginning was, oh yes.
- MG: By the book.
- SS: Hysteria among the military.
- MG: What were the rest of guards? Were they as strict as the commander at Sand Island?
- SS: Pardon me?
- MG: Were the rest of the guards as strict as...
- SS: No, no, no. No, only this guy. Commander. Was really...
- MG: Were the guards...can you remember where they...
- SS: Guards are local. I guess that most of them were local. The University of Hawaii kids, I guess. Or National Guard.

MG: From the ROTC?

SS: Yeah, yeah. Some of them, I guess.

MG: There was...oh, there was the Hawaii Territorial Guard. Were they...?

SS: Probably. We had no way of knowing. They're way up in the tower.

MG: Didn't have any conversations with them.

SS: No, no.

MG: So you were sort of just...sitting back and...

SS: Yeah. And the assistant to the...as I told you, the commander was a local. The assistant was a local, too. [Pause] ((??))

MG: Did they...

SS: Not too bad lieutenant.

MG: Were you allowed to have...any news from the outside? Hear anything?

SS: No. No.

MG: No newspapers filtered in?

SS: No, no, no.

MG: While you were Sand Island, did they ever give you any reasons? Telling you anything...any reasons why you were there, or why you were being kept there? What was their official statement? Given any official statements?

SS: No. [Pause] In my case, when I was taken to the Dillingham Building, the FBI headquarters, the Army captain questioned me. And then, when I was...from the Immigration Station, like, um...that's the ((??)) I was Sand Island, otherwise, I was gonna to be a full ((??)). You have hearing, sort of a hearing, about five persons. [Pause] I don't know who they were. I didn't know who they were. But they ask you all kind of questions. "If a Japanese Army land in Hawaii, what would you do?" Or they...ahh... "Do you wish Japan to win the war?" [breaks out laughing] Or something all like that! There's that questions they ask you. But in my case, like, "You serve in Japanese Army?" Well...[pause] well, I didn't know what to...I didn't serve voluntarily. But you became an officer. That's means voluntary. In that case, you know, what. I said, "Sure." I was...I was inducted in the army but I didn't want to spend my life as a private, if I had a chance to become officer. Why, I took it, see? Something like that.

MG: Your case would seem to more clear-cut than others.

SS: Right.

MG: As far as military reasons.

SS: Right. Right. Yup. Actually, mine's different than others. There were about three, four other persons, who were serving in the army at the....

MG: In the same thing?

SS: Yeah.

- MG: Of the other people that had not had these clear-cut reasons, so to speak...
- SS: I don't think so. No. Well, they used to welcome Japanese training ship, or they helped the Japanese consulate goings on for the teaching of Japanese language. You know, the Japanese language teacher school and the other ministers.
- MG: Did they ever question, ever wonder why they were there?
- SS: [Very quietly] I don't think so.
- MG: [Quietly] Okay. Were you allowed to see any family members while you were at Sand Island?
- SS: Ah, not at the beginning, but the relocation didn't start yet. Actually we had to talk with the counselor of the families. At least, they allowed, I guess, they allowed the visitors. Then, when we were in Honouliuli, we had privilege of receiving visitors, every other week.
- MG: Can you recall what the reunions were like?
- SS: Well [pause].
- MG: Somber? Or...
- SS: Well, we had a mess hall. And the half of the camp, every other week, one half of us, they allow to meet family, so we all gather in that mess hall. Then the family comes. We just sit and talk.
- MG: Talk story?
- SS: Sit around.
- MG: How you're feeling?
- SS: Yeah! [Laughs at length]
- MG: Were they allowed to give you anything, I mean, like clothing?
- SS: Clothing, we had all of that. GI stuff. I think that we had the military clothing, though.
- MG: When you were at Honouliuli, and for that matter, when you're at Sand Island, things like clean clothes and whatnot, was that...did you...
- SS: Oh yeah. We had the soap issued by guards. And you know the razor blade?
- MG: So you could...yeah, it wasn't a weapon?
- SS: Well, by that time, you got to return it. Yeah, it's expected.
- MG: Weeders and the razor blades?
- SS: [Laughs]
- MG: I was going to say, if they let you have razor blades, but they wouldn't let you have a weeder! [SS laughs] You figure that one out! [Both laugh]
- SS: That's concealed weapon. [Starts to laugh]
- MG: Okay. So you could shave then.
- SS: Yeah.

- MG: No one grew any beards.
- SS: Right. Some people did. Purposely.
- MG: Well, purposely. I mean if they wanted to shave.
- SS: Yeah.
- MG: And they had showers. Bathrooms to wash it. Same at Honouliuli?
- SS: Yeah. Um-hmm [Yes]. Honouliuli is more lenient. Once a week, they opened up the shop. I mean, what-you-call-it, canteen. A supply shop. We call it a certain name that I forgot. So we could purchase cigarettes or their soft drinks or whatever. We used to earn ten cents an hour by working.
- MG: What would you do? Clean camp?
- SS: Yeah. We used to have a work detail and go up the mountain to cut the trees.
- MG: Cut kiawe and whatnot?
- SS: Yeah. They had whatever.
- MG: Wherever they took you to?
- SS: Yeah, so...[quieter] I think there was ten cents an hour, I guess.
- MG: That's a figure that I've heard too. I mean...I remember reading it in the article.
- SS: We usually in the morning, those that want to work, we would assemble in their office, and we'd go out and just...stay out for hours, see?
- MG: Did you have a choice? If you felt like sleeping all day, you could stay home and sleep?
- SS: Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah. Those who wanted to, could sleep in the camp.
- MG: You mention before at Sand Island, that you wanted something to do. When you were at Honouliuli, was the work kinda of a popular thing? Something to do, to occupy yourself? Did they have a lot of people show up?
- SS: [Thumps hand] Like me, I want to buy cigarettes, so I guess to get the cigarette money, I got out, see?
- MG: How much were cigarettes?
- SS: In those days, one carton, dollar-fifty or something. Not too bad. Not like nowadays. And for recreation, there's not too much recreation, but we had softball.
- MG: How often?
- SS: Anytime I want. I mean...not working...well, mostly working hours in the morning, see? So, most usually in the evenings, we used to play.
- MG: They had a lot of softball teams if you had a hundred fifty people there.
- SS: Yeah. And some of them were playing cards. And some were gambling. [Starts to chuckle] Some moonshining.
- MG: Oh, really?
- SS: [Thumps hand] Oh, yeah.

MG: You had your own moonshine?

SS: Oh, yeah. But it's...funny thing. One night, some guys were making so much noise, see. [Chuckles] Well, the guards didn't know what was going on. What we used [breaks out laughing] the moonshine. Everyone was all [making gestures, laughing hard]. So many guards came into the camp and they searched every barracks! [Laughs]

MG: Was that the end of the moonshine?

SS: Well, they start again! [Chuckles]

MG: Was it good?

SS: Oh, most of them got diarrhea. They had pineapple...they made it from pineapple juice. That was bad. They had diarrhea right away. And grape juice is all right. They smuggled in yeast from outside, when visitors bring yeast or something, you know.

MG: Visitors were allowed to bring stuff in there, on the weekends?

SS: Well, they search, but they're not going thoroughly search. They could bring it in, though at that time. As I told you, when we were in Honouliuli, everything was so lenient now, so we could bring in tools to make uh, toy, you know, for the kids or...

MG: Crafts?

SS: Yeah. Could be. So [pause] wasn't too bad.

MG: You mention the guards being down there. They came and searched it. Were the guards more...were they still apart from you at Honouliuli than they were at Sand Island?

SS: There was a camp right there, right by our camp. There was...

MG: The prisoner-of-war camp, yeah.

SS: Ah-h, the soldiers stationed there. In those days, they didn't bother us because we didn't bother. And our commander was a very...a very nice guy.

MG: Was he from here?

SS: No, local. The commander at Honouliuli was local boy. Spillner. The sergeant was a Mainland guy. Loveless. He was a nice guy. Mainland boy.

MG: This is out at Honouliuli.

SS: Yeah, yeah. Uh-huh. So we played softball against the guards.

MG: Who won?

SS: They won. [Laughs]

MG: Really? Were they softball players? [Pause] While you were at Honouliuli, were you told anything about the war outside? I mean, at that point were...

SS: Well, we heard from the families. Right.

MG: Any newspapers?

SS: No, no newspapers. Yeah.

- MG: Did you request from your family when they came over about what was going on outside?
- SS: Oh, yeah, yeah.
- MG: [Pause] When you were released, what was the first thing you did? Or wanted to do? Was there anything you really wanted?
- SS: Hmm.
- MG: But even when you were at Honouliuli, was there anything you really wanted to have? Something?
- SS: Well, [softly] the first few years...[laughs] you know that...the first year was really long, you know. But after the first year passed, second year, [thumps hand] third year, [thumps hand] it wasn't too bad. But the hardest [thumps hand] was the first year. Of course we missed the family, you know. Especially when we were sent to the mainland and then sent back. So, [pause] it wasn't too bad.
- MG: Were you worried about your family?
- SS: No. [Pause] They were doing very well. I was fortunate. But some of the older issei were shipped to the mainland on the first boat, and some of them worried so much about family. I don't blame them. So, some went out of mind, you know.
- MG: Oh wow. That's sad.
- SS: Yeah. They worried about family. In my case, my wife and my mother were living together. So it wasn't too bad. They had children and relatives and so, well...
- MG: There wasn't so much concern, that everything was going down the soup because they...
- SS: Right. Um-hmm [Yes].
- MG: [Pause] Let's see. Let me switch really quick. [Stops interview to turn the tape over]
- SS: Now, I recall those incidents. While you...it's funny, you forget about all of those hardships. You recall only you had fun. Of course, we played softball and all good things we remember. But those really unpleasant memories just fade away. It's funny.
- MG: Perhaps unconsciously, you try to push them away...
- SS: Yeah, yeah. That's right. I think so.
- MG: But I noticed, you know, you laugh about some of the things you're telling me. [SS starts to laugh] Did I tell you, to be very honest with you, when...I was kinda nervous about coming because I said, "Yeah, I wonder what..." you know. "Is it going to be really hard?" Is it hard?
- SS: What we're doing? This interview?
- MG: Yeah.
- SS: This is about the third time, I guess.
- MG: Really? Because I was wondering before I came, you know, this is a personal hardship in someone's life. I mean...

- SS: Yeah, yeah. I agree that it's a personal hardship, but as I said...you know, as the years pass by, why you, [breaks out laughing] why, you subconsciously, you try to push away all the memories, the hardships. I don't know. But there is still the meeting, you know. They call "internees," especially the...issei. Yeah, they have a gathering. Once a year.
- MG: People from the camps out here?
- SS: Yeah.
- MG: When is that?
- SS: It's sometimes this month. I never attended those meetings, but the...old folks...a chance to get together and [breaks out laughing]. Mostly, older generation.
- MG: Hmm. Do you know anybody I should talk about that about that? That I might be able to find out a little bit more?
- SS: There was an ad in the paper, Japanese paper, when they were going to meet. Both of them. Either *Hawaii Hochi* or the *Hawaii Times*.
- MG: But I don't read Japanese.
- SS: I know. Maybe I can look up here. I could look up here. But mostly Japanese-speaking people though.
- MG: Oh. That would pose a problem. So...well...that was one of the avenues. I was still going to talk to some of the people at the newspapers and you know, see if they could point me in any direction. I didn't know about that. That would definitely be something I would want to see...check out.
- SS: [Quietly] The internment, you know...
- MG: I know. I would think someone would probably think I was prying.
- SS: Yeah.
- MG: I don't mean to sound like I'm prying. [Pause] Did you find it hard when you were returning to the community, when you came back to Hawaii?
- SS: Well, not really.
- MG: Did you change anything in your lifestyle?
- SS: Ah-h...no.
- MG: It was almost as if you'd...well, I don't want to go a little bit prying, but that's too...[SS begins to laugh]
- SS: It was a long trip! [Laughs]
- MG: A long trip. You know, interesting thing, in some of the...in reading some other stuff, on the mainland experience, people had said they considered it...I believed they said...they considered it "a vacation."
- SS: Some of them. Some people. I know, because they were mostly farmers and they were having a hard time. Yeah. The things were just picking up when the war broke out. They were having hard times. The worst...once they were in camp, well, they didn't have to

worry about food, and clothing, those stuff, you know, at least you can eat three times a day.

MG: As long as you didn't worry about your freedom.

SS: That's right. But...yeah. But they were all family together or living together.

MG: In your case...is that the same for you? Did you consider it a vacation? Or?

SS: Of course not. You could figure, well, I was a victim of circumstance! [Breaks out in a laugh] But, I was in Japanese army and that made me, you know, think...I had to bear it, you know. I couldn't do anything.

MG: At that point, was your loyalty towards the United States or towards Japan? Or were just waiting?

SS: Well, it's more...[pause] loyal to Japan in a sense.

MG: Really? [SS laughs at length] Did that cause any problems with the guards?

SS: I didn't go...to extreme.

MG: You didn't advertise the fact.

SS: No, no, no. Someone did though.

MG: Excuse me?

SS: Some of them did. They changed too late. There was a pro-Japanese group. And they were somewhat...ah, [pause] demonstrating at the camp, you know. They run around the camp...that's too extreme an idea, but I don't know. However...

MG: Makes life interesting.

SS: Do I stay quiet in there? Wait until the war was over. Especially I got to think of the family! [Laughs]

MG: Are you a U.S. citizen now?

SS: Sure, I am.

MG: Wait. Because you had a dual citizenship...

SS: Yeah.

MG: And you can just choose whichever one you want, or?

SS: No, no. Unless you expatriate or either you, you give up American citizenship. Otherwise, they can't take away...unless you...well, you can have [both talk]

MG: They can't take it away, yeah, unless it's something extreme like that.

SS: Yeah.

MG: So you're still a dual citizen then?

SS: No, I'm an American citizen. Family, children, all born in Hawaii. They're American citizens.

MG: Do you think that the United States was justified in doing what they did?

- SS: Well, of course, now we are in justice. But in those days. [pause] well...there was someone asked me, you know, university students, just like you, "Why didn't you fight for your right? You were American citizens." You know, now, everybody feels that way. And you can do it. But in those days, oh-h, you forget it. You can't. You can't do anything.
- MG: Attitudes were different, eh?
- SS: Yeah. Totally different.
- MG: It would be a tougher fight. You know, almost an impossible fight.
- SS: Impossible. Nobody would take our case. But...
- MG: Because when you think about it, you know, so much...so much of the, you know, the feeling of...of fighting for my own rights type of thing, nowadays, you know.
- SS: Um-hmm [Yes]. Nowadays, yeah.
- MG: On the, you know, verge of the '80s, everybody said that. But if you go back...
- SS: Yeah, forty years ago. Mm-mm [No]. That was really unthinkable! [Laughs softly]
- MG: Yeah, unthinkable. Sure. [Pause] [Quietly, probably to himself] Let's see. [Louder] You know sort of jumping back a little bit, on the day that Pearl Harbor was attacked. Where were you?
- SS: Well, it was Sunday. I was at home. I was in home. At that time, we were living in Kaimuki, way up in Kaimuki. And...being Sunday, we got up late, before seven. Early in the morning, about seven o'clock, seven thirty over there, we heard all kind of noise, you know, towards Pearl Harbor way. But we figured, oh, they're having maneuvers, something. You know, oh boy, they're doing it even Sunday; they're doing it on weekends. We didn't anything about until about eleven o'clock! We turned on the radio, and then we found out. So...
- MG: What was your feeling at that point? Were you shocked?
- SS: We were shocked, but I thought it wasn't that...ah, some other country. Not Japan! [Laughs softly]
- MG: Really?
- SS: Yeah [still chuckling]. I mean, I didn't dream that the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor. [Laughs] Then, my father was picked up. Many men came, [pause] my father went first. [Pounds table] Very day.
- MG: Came to your house?
- SS: Yeah.
- MG: Was it?
- SS: Two of them. Two or three of them, I guess. They came and...
- MG: Them? Being military? Or just regular police?
- SS: Uh, no. They were in civilian clothes. They were FBI, I guess.

MG: How old were you then?

SS: Twenty-eight. Twenty-seven, twenty-eight.

MG: If we had to, I could add it.

SS: Yeah. I'm sixty-four, going to be sixty-five now, so...

MG: You're sixty-five now?

SS: I'm going to become, end of this month. I'll be sixty-five.

MG: Oh. Happy Birthday. I'm twenty-one.

SS: Twenty-one, hmm. I was going to school, yeah.

MG: It was the one piece of story that I got from Mr. Sato's article, and maybe we've kinda gone over a little bit. You had said that you felt an injustice was being done, but that justice was out of your reach.

SS: Yeah, it's funny.

MG: Could you elaborate on that a little bit? That's sort of what we're talking about, attitudes and...

SS: Yeah, yeah, yeah. That's why I'm concerned, I told you, about the stories. Anything I tell you, you know.

MG: Is that the general feeling in the camp with everybody else, that you could just...

SS: And the...mostly, they were mostly Japanese nationals, issei.

MG: Were they feeling more loyal to Japan then?

SS: Most of them.

MG: Was there this feeling in the camp, then, that there was this...well, when it's all over, they're going to let us go and we're going...you know, they're going to cross the United States, et cetera?

SS: Well, some of them went to Japan.

MG: Expatriated?

SS: Expatriated. Yeah. Uh-huh.

MG: Well, the ones that stayed in the camps were still pro-Japan?

SS: Oh yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

MG: Yeah. I can't really think of much else. Oh! I know one thing that I did run across recently. Maybe you can help me. Have you heard before this, before Pearl Harbor, anything about a mass internment on Molokai? Were there any rumors of this?

SS: That I heard in...we were in Sand Island. The rumors. It's funny. We have no...real communication but still, somebody heard something from [breaks out laughing] all kind of rumors.

MG: The grapevine, so to speak.

SS: Yeah, I heard about it. On Molokai. Was...

MG: While you're in Sand Island?

SS: Um-hmm [Yes].

MG: Yeah, because I had remembered...

SS: Before the war, I don't know anything about that. As I told you, I came back a year before the war broke out. Well. We had time to ((??)) everything. Yeah.

MG: Yeah. It was just for a time. Because the thing I remember, I've been looking through a lot of newspaper clippings, you know, up at the University of Hawaii in one of the libraries. There's a thing called the War Records Depository. They have all kinds of clippings and I've been trying to find mention of the camp and things like that. It's really scarce. But one of the things that did come up, was mention of Molokai...

SS: Oh, I see. Yeah, yeah.

MG: As an internment center, so to speak. But it was only just a rumor. But I was curious if you heard about that.

SS: Come to think of it, yeah. I heard of about it, but in a sense.

MG: Did they give you an I.D. number, too, when you were in the camp?

SS: Oh sure.

MG: Tags or just a number?

SS: Number. And uh, [pause] I don't know. My number is 60.

MG: Sixty? You can remember? Wow.

SS: Something "Civilian-something-something." There's abbreviation, the rest. "Civilian-something," you know, then "60." That's what...so I figured, I was...it's already, list was made before the war broke out. They were all checking, I guess. They had the list. And then, and as soon as the war broke out, they start taking...people in. But, this people, my father was there too. They figured Sumida ((-san??)), I mean, my father picked up. And...Monday. Wednesday! I guess Wednesday...

MG: After Pearl Harbor.

SS: After Pearl Harbor. It's about three days later, a couple of guys came into the office, you see. And one of them said, "I want to see Mr. Sumida." "I'm Sumida," see? But why I was not the..."Can I help you?" "I want to see Mr. Sumida." I thought he meant my father. And so, "Oh, my father was pulled in on Sunday," you know. This guy was shaking his head. "Why? You all right?" Mmm. They go back, you know.

MG: Confused. [SS laughs] And they were after you!

SS: [Chuckles] Yeah, they were. Yeah, come to think of it.

MG: You bought a little more time, sort of...

SS: Time. Right. But the 24th, when they took me, they mentioned my name. Not only our family name, but the first name, last name, everything. That's the way it is. That was the end.

MG: I'm curious. What was business that you were working on? Yeah. What was it? Sake, too?

SS: Who lesale. Or...import. We import. We used to import Japanese foods and distribute. Wholesaler. This is only manufacturer side.

MG: This is only sake?

SS: Yeah. But we had another business, wholesale. Food goods. And I was working there.

MG: Any comments you'd like make? You don't think we discussed? Anything come across your mind?

SS: [Quietly] Well, I hope it never happen again, that's all. [Breaks into laugh]

MG: You ever...ever go by the camp and look at it and...see it again? Ever have...

SS: What for? I don't [chuckles] want to see it. [Pause] Well, I guess that I was able to bear those things because I [drums fingers] was in Japanese army, for two years. So, I'm used [breaks out laughing] to...I guess, I was used to...

MG: Military life?

SS: Yeah. So. Most of the hardships, I could bear it. That helped a lot! [Chuckles]

MG: Well, thank you very much.

SS: Right. Thanks. [End of interview]

Transcribed and edited by Arlene S. Ching, Japanese Cultural Center of Hawai'i Resource Center volunteer,
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