

JAPANESE CULTURAL CENTER OF HAWAII
VOICES OF INTERNMENT
ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Seiya Ohata (SO)

December 1, 2014

Interview by: Mel Inamasu (MI)

Note: Comments in brackets [] are by the transcriber. Inaudible words or sections are identified by ((?)) in the transcript. This transcript has been edited for readability.

MI: Okay, so I know you told me your story, I have an idea about what happened to you. One of the things I'm really interested in, maybe you can talk about that first, is the trouble with losing the house and how you had to fight to get it back, what you had to go through to get it back.

SO: My home first?

MI: Your father's house.

SO: Okay.

MI: And then after we go through that, we can just go anywhere. You can talk about anything. I just want to be sure that...

SO: Let me, let me ask a couple of questions. This particular thing is primarily focused on my father and our family? So it's not me and my service, okay?

MI: Okay.

SO: No, is that correct? Am I on the right track?

MI: Actually both, both but I want to make sure that I get the story about the house first. Then we will go back to you.

SO: Okay, okay. When war started, when the war started, my dad was immediately, immediately taken in by the police and jailed.

MI: ((?))

SO: He had hardly a chance to finish his meal and he was, when the police were there, [and] took him into jail. His condition, position was not that of an internee where he was relocated. He was actually jailed.

MI: Arrested.

SO: He was arrested, POW. He was a prisoner of war. And then from the jail in Wailuku, he was sent to Honolulu, Sand Island or wherever and then to California. Then from California he was sent to Kansas, Ft. Leavenworth, I think, and then down to, aah,

Louisiana and from there on to Missoula, Montana. But about my father's property and home, when war started here, because my dad was an alien, you know, in those days, those days Orientals cannot become citizens no matter how long they stayed here.

MI: By law.

SO: By law they were not, they [weren't] permitted to become citizens, unless you were born here. Because of that, he was immediately jailed and he was a POW. And everything, everything my dad had, his bank account, his property, everything was completely frozen...

MI: From Day 1 [Dec 7].

SO: From Day 1, from that time on.

MI: Now they could do that because of martial law and because he was an alien?

SO: I think because he was an alien, because he was an alien. Everything was frozen. So at that time, I was a senior, senior medical student and I was on the mainland. So my older sister was the only one who was finished with school. She just had finished UH [University of Hawaii] as a, what kind of, aah, not school teacher but a...

MI: Librarian?

SO: No, it's right on the tip of my tongue.

MI: That's okay.

SO: Social worker.

MI: Oh.

SO: My oldest sister finished school and so she was the glue that held the family together, supported the family, you know, from then on. So that's where we are. Everything, everything was frozen, completely frozen. Fortunately war was in December and not in September, so my tuition was paid for already and so I was a senior, so I didn't have the big fee of tuition in med school. And all I had to worry about then was my personal well-being, daily living. Most of the books were bought so just incidentals. So I worked at night.

MI: Your rent was paid?

SO: Pardon?

MI: The rent was paid for one semester? Your rent?

SO: Rent?

MI: Yeah, for you.

SO: I had to work. I worked in the hospital. It's the Catholic hospital, at night as a telephone operator to pay for my room and board.

MI: Okay.

SO: Room and board, and laundry until I finished. After graduating, I became a regular intern, intern at the hospital.

MI: When they, when they confiscated the house, what happened? Your family had to move out?

SO: No, not confiscated, just frozen.

MI: Just frozen.

SO: The Alien Property Custodian had the complete, you know, and they well, who took care of everything. It was in their hands.

MI: Okay. Is that a national agency or was it a local, Hawaii agency?

SO: No, no, no. It was a national, federal, federal thing.

MI: Oh.

SO: So I presumed all, all, like my dad, they're aliens. They had property, their property was...

MI: I'm not sure about that.

SO: Yeah.

MI: It may have been selective.

SO: I don't know. I presumed it's all, all, all, what's you called... Alien properties ((?)). Anyway after graduation I, when I finished my internship, before then when I was a senior going to [medical] school, all of my classmates were in uniform. They were PFC, private first class. In other words, they were being paid to go to school. I was not included in that. And because everything was...

MI: What school was that?

SO: St. Louis University in Missouri.

MI: So all of the others were in some kind of the military...

SO: Yeah.

MI: Financial program?

SO: Yeah. But I was the only civilian and because I needed money real bad, I applied to become a soldier, too.

MI: I see.

SO: They turned me down.

MI: Because?

SO: Because? They wouldn't give me a reason, but I presumed because I was Japanese.

MI: It seemed like your freshman year, you applied for that, your freshman year you applied?

SO: No, no, no, not my freshman year. I was a senior...

MI: Oh.

SO: When the war started I was a senior. Senior year in medical school. When all my classmates wear uniforms that senior year. They weren't in uniform until war started.

MI: Oh, okay.

SO: So, I applied. They turned me down.

MI: Okay, okay.

SO: Six months later, I applied again, and they turned me down. After I graduated, I applied again. They turned me down. Then, after my internship...

MI: Where did you go for your internship?

SO: It was in there St. Louis, the St. Louis University Hospital. So after I finished my internship, I applied again and, by God, this time they accepted me. And my gut feeling was then that just about that time they, 100th Battalion [was formed]. [The] 442 was not in existence.

MI: Just the 100th.

SO: The Hawaii boys, primarily Hawaii boys, 100th Infantry Battalion, they did so well in Italy. They showed that they were really patriotic, good soldiers, good fighters. So I kinda have the suspicion that [they thought] maybe Japanese are okay, too.

MI: This was in the middle of 1943 now?

SO: Aaah.

MI: June of '42, you finished your internship.

SO: Yeah, it was...

MI: Because '42 you graduated from medical school.

SO: Yeah.

MI: And then, so...

SO: They had an accelerated program with no summer vacation, no Christmas vacation. All the vacations were cut short, so we...

MI: Finished early.

SO: We finished early, so.

MI: They took you at that point.

SO: At that time, yeah, they finally accepted me, so I went into the Army. In the meantime, while I was, when I was interning, in the meantime my dad was being shipped from Maui to Honolulu to California to Kansas and all over the place. And he used to send me letters. Of course the letters were just full of deleted areas where they cut out, not blackened, blackened...

MI: With the scissors, yeah?

SO: Yeah.

MI: Censorship.

SO: Yeah. Anyway I think it was in November that I got a letter from him saying that he was being sent back to Japan as an exchange, exchange prisoner of war.

MI: Was this something he chose to do or he had no choice?

SO: That is, that is a question that I cannot answer. Whether he volunteered to be transferred or whether he was ordered to be transferred, or he was asked to be transferred, you know, I do not know, do not know. Anyway I presume he was picked to, to go back to Japan as an exchange prisoner of war.

MI: Among others as a group.

SO: Yeah. Of course, there were other Japanese too.

MI: And this was from Montana?

SO: [From] Missoula, Montana—Fort Missoula was a fort that housed only aliens, dangerous aliens. So there were a whole bunch of Germans, Italians and Japanese.

MI: Hmmm. I didn't know that.

SO: They were strictly [civilians], strictly, not soldiers, there was ((?)).

MI: All civilians then, all civilians.

SO: No, no, no. The people there were all civilians, civilians ...

MI: No prisoners of war

SO: No, all prisoners of war, all POWs.

MI: I understand.

SO: All POWs.

MI: From the war front they brought...

SO: No, no.

MI: Just from America.

SO: Only the United States.

MI: So aliens.

SO: Aliens, aliens, all aliens, Germans, Italians and Japanese aliens who supposedly could be dangerous. All, you know, people that were influential in the community, that sort of thing. So I got a letter from him saying that "I am being sent back to Japan as an exchange prisoner of war." And he showed me, sent me a picture with that. He's holding a toothbrush saying, "This is all I have. All I have, you know, toothbrush and this Army-issued POW uniform or whatever you want to call it."

MI: You still have that picture?

SO: Yeah. What?

MI: Do you still have that picture? Was that the one on your poster [at the Maui Nisei Veteran's Memorial Center]?

SO: Yeah, well, it doesn't show but...

MI: That's the picture you sent to us.

SO: Yeah, yeah. Anyway he says, "I cannot go back to Japan looking like this, in a POW uniform, you know, so please send me a suit and clothes and what not." Well...

MI: And you had no money.

SO: Yeah. That year was the first year that they began paying interns. Up until then, interns got nothing, residents got some pay, I guess, but interns, we got nothing. But that year they started, they gave us fifteen dollars a month, (Laughter) fifteen dollars a month. What can you do with fifteen dollars a month? Plus the fact that I used to smoke. So five dollars right off the bat went to cigarettes. I had only ten dollars a month. What can I buy with ten dollars? But, you being a doctor, you know. When Christmas came around, they had the interns' and residents' party given by the staff resident physicians. Well that was in early December and it was just in time that I got my father's letter. I just had my father's letter. So after having a good dinner, we go in the back room [where] they gamble, poker, crap game, what not. Me and my ten dollars in my hand saying, "Akua [God], Akua, Akua, please kokua [help]. Akua, please kokua. My father needs a suit. My father's being sent back to Japan. He needs a suit. He needs this." And, you know, when the night was over, I came home with over four hundred dollars in my pocket. (Laughter)

MI: Who were you playing against?

SO: Gamble.

MI: No, no, what I mean is, attending physicians or some of the other residents...

SO: Yeah. Everybody, whoever, mostly the visiting physicians, they're the ones that had the money (Laughter). Interns and residents, we don't have any money. (Laughter)

MI: How did you learn to play dice?

SO: Oh as kids, we used to fool around, roll dice...

MI: Back here [on Maui].

SO: You know, I knew that rolling the dice, seven in the first roll or seven or eleven is a win. After that a number comes out, you keep rolling until the number comes or if a seven comes up, you lose.

MI: But it was just luck, actually?

SO: Yeah, no skill at all.

MI: Not a skill.

SO: No, no, no. Not a skill, you know, but like I said, "Akua sabe, Akua, help me" and I went home with four hundred dollars. So I bought him [his father] suits, two pairs. You know, those days you can buy a good suit for about fifty dollars. And I bought him two suits, two shirts, ties, the whole shebang. And this letter is from my dad but written by somebody, somebody else.

MI: This one they had that the *Issei* veterans...?

SO: I don't think so. I don't know. I have all those other letters I have here.

MI: Hmmmm.

SO: But a...

MI: Somebody wrote it for him.

SO: My dad asked this person to write this letter anyway, thanking me for the suit and stuff.

MI: [dated] August 26.

SO: Yeah, yeah.

MI: I'm going to take a picture of this thing. [Considerable background noise with no dialogue between 18:51 and 19:21] No, I'm not going to take a picture. I want to make sure I get it [Considerable background noise again without dialogue from 19:25 to 20:15] [It took] two months to get there. Two months to get there [to Japan]

SO: Yeah, because the group needed to avoid the, avoid the U Boats and what not.

MI: I'm glad you kept that.

SO: Anyway, so I was able to get all the stuff for him and he went back to Japan well dressed. (Laughter).

MI: That's really interesting.

SO: I'm not a gambler. I don't go to Las Vegas, I ((?)) in fact I went to Las Vegas only twice in my life. But as kids, we used to fool around, so I knew a little about rolling that dice. So my dad apparently was sent to a village, small village some place in Japan to practice medicine, take care of people [during the war].

MI: Now while he was there all this time, did your mother and sister live in the house in Paia?

SO: In Paia.

MI: And they were left alone or...

SO: They were, to the extent, they were left alone. However, every now and then my sister would write to me. "The Alien Properties people are after me again..."

MI: To move out?

SO: To, to confiscate, confiscate the property. Well, I was in the Army by that time, I was in the Army, so I went to the Adjutant General, Adjutant General Office and [said] "What can I do?" And he gave me a number to call in Washington, D.C. Those days I had more guts than sense, anyway, and a...

MI: I saw your letter to the President [Harry Truman].

SO: Yeah (Laughter), I wrote to anybody that I could think of. I called anybody that I could think of. Anyway after I called them, I said, "Look, I am, I realize that my dad's a foreigner and all his property is confiscated but I am also an American citizen. I am a soldier and you should know that should mean something. You can not confiscate the property and throw my mother and my younger brothers and sisters out in the street." And after a telephone call like that, they did not confiscate [the home].

MI: Who did you speak to?

SO: I don't know, but someone, someone in the Justice Department.

MI: Justice Department.

SO: Yuh. And...

MI: How did you find the phone number?

SO: The Adjutant General Office that I went to, to get advice. "What should I do, what can I do?" and he gave me the number to call.

MI: So on the phone you talked to them and then.

SO: I talked to them [on the phone] and I talked to them about my situation. "I'm a U.S. Army Medical Officer fighting for the United States. And you are going to confiscate the property, throw my mother and my brothers out on the street." So they didn't.

MI: But at that time, were they, you aware of other people...

SO: No.

MI: Having to fight like you had to for your family's property?

SO: No, because due, I'm the only Japanese...

MI: You're alone there.

SO: Yeah, so that situation, I'm sure existed with everybody, all, all of...

MI: You don't know how many of the aliens...

SO: All of them. Anyway that last one, the one letter I got from my sister was [while] we were in the port of embarkation in New Jersey, ready to go overseas, overseas when I got this frantic letter from my sister saying that "This time they are really going to confiscate the property." So at that point I went to the Adjutant General and he gave me the number to call and I called. And after telling them the situation, that "What you guys are doing is not right, you cannot throw my family out in the street."

MI: Did you have a sense that you were the only one who called or were they getting calls from everybody?

SO: I have no idea. I was thinking only about myself and my family at that point and so they did not confiscate the property. And my family continued to live there. However, after the war was over, the war was over and I came back to Hawai'i and set up my practice, those guys...

MI: They came back again.

SO: Confiscated the property.

MI: When was that?

SO: They confiscated—

MI: '46 or '45?

SO: I think it was 1948 or '49.

MI: Later, several years later.

SO: Yeah, yeah, after the war was over.

MI: I see. Not right then, but...

SO: No, no, no not right then.

MI: So at that time, '48, your father was still in Japan?

SO: In Japan.

MI: Your mother and sister lived in the house.

SO: In the house.

MI: Were you living in the house too? Had you come back?

SO: Yeah, I had come back and I was...

MI: You were living there?

SO: Yeah, at that time when they confiscated the property.

MI: Now when you say "confiscated" what do you mean? They brought a paper or something saying "Get out." How, how did they do that?

SO: Well, yeah, I forget the details on that but, you know. After so many times, by a certain date we gotta get out and the property will be taken over by the Alien Property Department. But before that happened, I fought them. I hired lawyers.

MI: Who did you hire?

SO: Who?

MI: Yeah, who?

SO: At first, Miho.

MI: Which Miho?

SO: The oldest one, Katsuhiko Miho.

MI: Okay.

SO: He was good friends with the senator, Chinese senator, they practiced together at a law firm in Honolulu. At first I had them and then later on, I hired Shiro Kashiwa's father. So actually the Miho should be left out.

MI: Oh, okay.

SO: And Shiro Kashiwa...

MI: Kashiwa had to do something for his father also...

SO: I guess so.

MI: Yeah, yeah. I remember reading a story about him.

SO: Because Shiro Kashiwa's father was a minister...

MI: Oh, I know what it is. He was trying to get his father out.

SO: Yeah, Buddhist minister.

MI: Yeah, okay.

SO: Buddhist minister.

MI: So Kashiwa helped you.

SO: Yeah. Cost me an arm and a leg but I did get my property [back].

MI: How long did it take? How long did it take?

SO: Several years and [for] all that, all that, I ((?)).

MI: Later on before you go, I will take pictures of...

SO: Yeah, okay. [the paper] communications about that.

MI: You kept all this.

SO: Yeah, but I have nothing about the confiscation. This [document] is about me trying to get him [father] back to Hawai'i.

MI: Oh, I see.

SO: Yeah.

MI: That was a separate issue.

SO: Yeah, yeah.

MI: And who helped you with that one? Was it Kashiwa also to get your father back?

SO: I guess I asked Kashiwa, but I did most of, most of the legwork myself. If you know [Territorial] Delegate Farrington, Farrington High School is named after him, Joseph Farrington. That man has helped me so god darn much. I have the biggest aloha for him. And if you read through these communications mostly from him, you know, I asked him to please get my father back. This letter if you look, the first paragraph...

MI: The [US. House of Representative] Resolution.

SO: It passed the [U.S.] House [of Representatives]. He [Hawaii Delegate Farrington] had a special bill [introduced].

MI: It was his bill. Wait, he could submit, he was just a delegate?

SO: Huh?

MI: He was just a delegate. We were not a state then.

SO: Oh, no.

MI: He could submit a bill?

SO: That's why he's a delegate. He was not the Governor of Hawai'i. He was a delegate to Congress and, as such, he had to ask somebody to submit a bill. He cannot submit a bill. He had a bill passed, and it passed in the [U.S.] House and in the [U.S.] Senate. But that's how much Delegate Farrington did for me. That was a special bill.

MI: But they tried to pass a bill where he said that the alien parents of soldiers automatically got it, but that one didn't pass.

SO: No, no, that didn't pass. So a special, my dad, I think, is one of the first aliens to...

MI: To benefit from it ((?)).

SO: To come back to Hawai'i, you know. And I don't know whether this bill included others or not, but at that time I thought this was a special bill only for my father.

MI: I see.

SO: It sounded like that, anyway.

MI: Uh huh.

SO: But Delegate Farrington did that for me and I was able to get my father back to Hawaii.

MI: So of course he was waiting all this time to come back, but could not come back.

SO: Of course after the war ended he was, he wanted to come back because the whole family was over here.

MI: And you lost a brother...

SO: Pardon?

MI: Brothers over there, in Japan.

SO: Yes, that's another story now. When my, when my dad started to practice when he first came to Hawai'i and to this place they called Japanese Hospital of Honolulu, which is now Kuakini, which is now Kuakini.

MI: He did.

SO: Well he was there for three years. After three years, he moved to Lahaina [Maui] where I was born. He stayed there for two years and then moved to Wailuku, where my kid brother was born. After that, there were four children by then. Then he [father] chose to go back to Japan, he wanted to study a little bit more. And he got a [an] ENT specialist, specialty for two years of study in Japan.

MI: He left you folks here.

SO: Huh?

MI: He left you folks here.

SO: No, no.

MI: Everybody?

SO: No, no, he took all of us, all of us. So from the age of four to six, I was in Japan. I was in Japan. And then in Japan, we stayed with [an] uncle, my father's oldest, oldest brother, who was primarily the support that sent my father to medical school because his parents died when they were too young. All the kids were young. Anyway this oldest brother took care of the family and helped my father go to med school and whatnot. So we went back to Japan and after, after two years, he left my older brother, my older brother Kentaro in Japan with my uncle because this uncle had one daughter and no sons. He wanted a son. He talked my dad into leaving my older brother. But more than that, I personally think that my father agreed to leave my brother in Japan because some day when he retired, he wanted to go back to Japan. Then he would have somebody to sponsor him. I think that was the idea. But that I don't know, I don't know. But that was my older brother [as to why he stayed] in Japan. He was about 9 years old then.

So he's not like a brother, you know. He, we never, never lived together. But anyway, after the war, after the war, he came back for the first time and I got to see him.

MI: I see. So he lived his life in Japan after ((?))?

SO: Yeah, and during the war, that older brother was in the Japanese Army. He was a dentist, he was a dentist so I presume he was in the dental corps or whatever. He was in Japan. I was a medical officer in the United States Army, my father was a prisoner of war. Can you imagine the situation I had? I'm an American, my older brother is in the Japanese Army, my father is in the middle as a POW. That's one hell of a situation, I think. I tell that to people and they say "How can it be?" They said "Unbelievable" but that, you know, my older brother be...

MI: How did your mother handle all of this?

SO: I don't, you know, I don't really know. She was a very stoic woman. She didn't...

MI: She did, but she needed to do...

SO: Yeah, I guess she had a rough time because being, being alone with a, with a daughter and two younger brothers. This one here [photo] was my younger brother. He was, he was in high school when the war started, so...

MI: He was drafted or he joined?

SO: He joined. He volunteered to join [the military]. The one below that, he was a dentist and he was in the Korean War.

MI: I see.

SO: So three of us, in our family there were five boys and three girls, of which, three of us served in the American Army, one of them served in the Japanese Army, and one was a 4F, they called it.

MI: Physical...

SO: Yeah, physical deferment. So that was, that was the situation, generally.

MI: Okay, so let me think now, so 19--, what was it? '49, you were able to get your father back here?

SO: No, no, no.

MI: When did your father come back?

SO: My father came back around 1955.

MI: Oh, '55.

SO: Yeah. It took...

MI: But the letter, this thing was...

SO: It took a long time...

MI: After this bill...

SO: After the war but it took a long time, finally, finally got him back.

MI: Okay, so in the battle for the house, you did everything with the lawyer? You had to, your father wasn't here to help you?

SO: No, no, I did everything.

MI: How, how long did it take for Mr. Kashiwa to get the house back to the family, from the time they said they were going to confiscate the house, you had to hire...

SO: We never left [the house]. We were permitted to stay there...

MI: Until it was settled.

SO: Yes.

MI: How long did it take to settle the whole thing?

SO: Ah, Jesus. (Laughter) It was several years. Golly, I'm not, I'm not sure [how many]. It took years to fight them. Just like it took years to get my father back. It took years to get my father back.

MI: Just fighting and fighting and fighting.

SO: Yeah, I had to fight for the property and then I had to fight to get my father back.

MI: Were you, you were not aware of others going through the same process to get [their] things back?

SO: I don't know, I really don't. No, no contact with anybody...

MI: Nobody really to help you, everything is on your own.

SO: Everything was on my own.

MI: As a young person, (Laughter) for a young man, you had to do all these things?

SO: Yeah, I had to, had to do everything, you either, either fight or lose everything.

MI: Lose everything.

SO: Lose everything. I had nothing to lose so, except money. You know it cost me, lawyers, as you know, lawyer fees are pretty expensive, but I did, I did accomplish what I went out to get.

MI: Was your father aware of all of this?

SO: I don't know. So...

MI: How about when he came back, you told him the story when he came back?

SO: Yeah, and well as I say, my mother is a rather stoic woman. In my entire lifetime on two occasions I saw my mother cry, she had tears, and this was the second time when she saw my dad get off, off that plane...

MI: He came back by plane?

SO: Yeah, yeah, by plane in 1955 and he apparently had a mild stroke because his right leg was partially paralyzed. So he walked with a cane and he dragged, he dragged his right foot, he had a foot drop. So when my mother saw him get off the plane and walking with a cane and dragging his foot, tears ran down [her face].

MI: What was the other time?

SO: The other time was before that. That was when the war ended. War ended, we were coming back on a troop ship [from Europe]. When we, as we approached the United States, the Commanding Officer says, "Boys, I got good news for you. All of you can go to your loved ones, your family, your friends, for one full month. Then you come back to Fort Bragg" where we were...

MI: Started from.

SO: Yeah, and then he added, "Except, except Lt. Ohata. He cannot go back to Hawai'i."

MI: Because?

SO: Because he says no one that he knows of goes from the zone of interior in the United States to a combat zone, which is Hawai'i. But I told him, "Hey, it may be a combat zone but I'm from Hawai'i, that's my home."

MI: So you were alone at, you were not with a group of Hawai'i people in the medical corp?

SO: No, no, no.

MI: You were just a...

SO: That's why if you look at this letter to, I was, ah, hold it...let's see...

MI: Wait, what is it? Hawaii ((?)).

SO: Anyway...

MI: This is October...

SO: Anyway at that time he told me, except Lt. Ohata, he cannot go back to Hawai'i because Hawai'i is a combat zone. So I said, "Eh, that's not fair. Everybody going home, I'm not going home." So again I went to [the] Adjutant General's office and he gave me a number to call and I called Washington D.C. When I called Washington, D.C. the, I think it was a Major that answered the phone. He says, "I haven't heard of anybody going from the zone of the interior to the combat zone either" he said, "but let me talk to my superiors and I'll get back to you. Call me back tomorrow." So the next day, I called them up again and he said, "I got good news for you. I got permission to let you go back to Hawaii." So he sent me just a piece of paper saying that I can go to Hawai'i.

So he sent me just a piece of paper saying that I can just go to Hawai'i, you know. So with that paper in my hand, you know in the Army system, if you are an enlisted man the Army will arrange all transportation, transportation for you. If you're an officer, you're on your own. (Laughter) So all I had was this piece of paper saying that I could go back to Hawai'i.

MI: So you...

SO: I headed for the closest Army airfield, Army airfield, showed them the paper and said "You got anything going west?" They said, "Yeah, we got until Indianapolis." So I bum a ride to Indianapolis. I get to Indianapolis, I asked, "Eh, you got anything going West?" Next stop was Denver, I think.

MI: So you worked your way...

SO: In other words, I hitchhiked my way and then finally ended up in San Francisco. What is that big air base, air base over there, near San Francisco? Anyway...

MI: Travis? Moffet?

SO: Yeah, just north of San Francisco there was a big...

MI: Is that by Davis, California or Sacramento area?

SO: No, no, not Sacramento.

MI: Not that far.

SO: Anyway, when I got there, the Army regulations said if you're going overseas you need inoculations. So I had to, I had to go to the medics and get the shots. And then I ran into this, ah. Major there. I forgot his name now. But he was, he had orders to be transferred to Tripler [Hospital]. So he was interested in Hawai'i. In no time we got to be buddies, you know.

MI: I see.

SO: He [was] asking me all kinds of questions about Hawai'i. Well he being a Major, he had [a] certain amount of prestige. He said, "So you want to go back to Hawai'i?" I said "Yeah", I have only thirty days. In fact...

MI: How many had you lost...

SO: Yeah, I lost about three or four days already. So he says, he picked up the telephone, he calls dispatch saying, "Eh, I know the guy that's in dispatch so I'll fix it up for you." So he calls dispatch and he says, "I've got an officer from Hawai'i here. He needs to go back to Hawai'i." That afternoon, I was on the plane coming home.

MI: Was he on the plane with you? It was a different plane?

SO: Yeah. It was a...

MI: It wasn't his plane that you were coming...?

SO: No, no, no, not a, an Air Force plane coming to Hawaii all the time. Anyway he put me on that plane, so that was in the morning, so in the afternoon I was in Hawai'i. It was still Hickam [Field on O'ahu] and not Maui. I still had a leg to go. So I went to Dispatch again and said, "I need to go to Maui." He said, "We got planes going there every half an hour to Maui." You know, Maui had the 4th Marine Division, 4th Marine Division...

MI: That was the one in Haiku?

SO: Haiku, yes, Haiku. So he said and then [at] Dispatch the guy told me, "You know, I have some very important papers that need to be delivered to Maui. All the ((?)) there's about a dozen of us on the plane, but you're the only officer so I'm giving you the responsibility to carry [them]."

MI: You were a Lieutenant at that time.

SO: Yeah, I was a Lieutenant. So he gave me the name and code ((?)) and I will properly identify himself. That time, NASCA was, you know, Kahului Airport was not in existence. It [airport] was in Pu'unene.

MI: Pu'unene side.

SO: Yeah, so I got on the plane. When I, when I got, when we reached Maui, I got off the plane and now there was this Captain with a jeep you know, and he identified himself. So I said, "I've got some important papers to deliver to you. Where are you going, by the way, sir?" "I'm coming to Cocomo (sic?). "Then, then you're going to pass Pa'ia?" He said "Yeah". He offered to give me a ride, so he gave me a ride, he gave me a ride, took me right to the front door of my home. I knocked on the door...

MI: Mother expecting you.

SO: My mother answered. She acted like she saw a, a ghost or something. When she realized I was for real, she had tears run down her eyes. That was the first time I saw her cry. Good, good story but, yeah, I hitchhiked my way all the way back to Maui.

MI: When was this, when did you come back to America?

SO: Aaah.

MI: About when, what year was this?

SO: It was, the war ended in May in 1944, yeah. No, in '45.

MI: '45, in August.

SO: No, no.

MI: Europe.

SO: In Europe, when war ended, it was 194-, May 1945 and this was in June or July, 1945. 1945.

MI: I see.

SO: And then...

MI: How long did you stay over? You had to be back in one month.

SO: In one month.

MI: How did you know when to leave Maui?

SO: I left, I left about three days ahead before I was due back. I gotta give an excuse.

MI: When you left here, you didn't have a way? You had to do the same thing?

SO: Same thing.

MI: To get back.

SO: I went to dispatch, bum a ride to Honolulu. From Honolulu, bum a ride to California and then from California all the way to the East Coast, all, each, each hitchhiked on the Army, Air Force plane.

MI: When did you get out? How many years did you serve [in the military]?

SO: Aaah, two, a little over two and a half years, little over two and a half years.

MI: So when the war was over, they let everybody out or you had to wait till you're ((?)) was discharged from the Army, all the soldiers from the Army? They all got discharged the same time?

SO: No, no, no.

MI: Depend on when...

SO: So when I got back [from Maui], we were to regroup, regroup at...

MI: North Carolina.

SO: Fort Bragg and the division I was with went on to Japan.

MI: I see. You went with them?

SO: When I got back to Fort Bragg, they told me, "You are an ethnic Japanese and there's no Japanese will go to the Asiatic Theater except if you're in the Intelligence Corps., interpreter."

MI: MIS [Military Intelligence Service].

SO: Yeah. So, so I was dropped. I was dropped. I was sent to Indianapolis where my kid brother was in ((?)) living.

MI: I see. At that time all of this ended, you were discharged, how old were you by the time you were discharged? All these things happened?

SO: Yeah, yeah. Twenty, twenty-nine, something like that. Twenty-nine, I think.

MI: All this happened before you were twenty-nine? All these things happened before you were twenty-nine years old?

SO: Yeah, yeah, look [newspaper article]. The only *Nisei* to participate in this historic event, the invasion, the invasion of [France].

MI: You told me that over the phone. I thought you were the only survivor, but...the only one to participate...

SO: He says the only one. He says because the other guy, person is dead.

MI: So you're the only surviving one.

SO: Yeah. No, no. There were only two.

MI: Yeah.

SO: That anyone knows of and of the two, the other person is dead.

MI: Who was the other person?

SO: I have no idea. I have no idea what, this guy Shima.

MI: What's the first name? Is this a front page story?

SO: No, no, no.

MI: That's where the thing starts. Maybe at the end of the story. Oh, from Maryland, from Maryland.

SO: Yeah, yeah, but he called me from Washington, D.C.

MI: So your story is still being told all over the place.

SO: Yeah, I really felt sorry for my father, but my father ((?)) really, really had it bad. My mother too, my whole family suffered. But you know, my dad, my dad, he took it real nice, he was not bitter.

MI: That's what I was just going to ask you. How different was he when the last time you saw him before you went to medical school?

SO: Oh, broken man.

MI: He's physically older.

SO: Really a broken man. He was, as I knew him growing up, he was a proud and haughty [man].

MI: Did he ever regain any of that over the years? Never, never...

SO: No, he was, he was really, sad to say, he was really a broken man.

MI: What did he do after he came back? Was he working...

SO: No, no.

MI: He never worked.

SO: Because he lost his [medical] license. You know, he lost his license, he cannot practice without a license.

MI: I see.

SO: However, when I started practicing and I had some Japanese patients...

MI: He would help you?

SO: He would help me, he would help me.

MI: So physicians who were aliens in Hawaii, like him, did they all lose their license or automatically they lost their license...

SO: Automatically, if you don't pay your license fee...

MI: Were there some left behind in Hawaii who didn't go to Japan, go to camp...

SO: I guess...

MI: They were allowed to practice. Were they allowed to practice? They kept their licenses?

SO: They kept their licenses.

MI: If he was an alien you automatically lost your license?

SO: No, no, I don't think so. In my father's case, he went back to Japan. He lost his license. He couldn't practice at all.

MI: What a life.

SO: What?

MI: What a life.

SO: Yeah. Lots of ((?)). I really cry.

MI: How old was he when he returned in '55?

SO: Ooh, aah, let's see, he was born in, was born in 1985...

MI: In 1885.

SO: 1885, he was born in 1885.

MI: So he was 70.

SO: Yeah, so he was 70. But he was, he was really a broken man. This picture, you can see him here, this is him—proud.

MI: Is Tokukugi [photo studio], is the one in Wailuku? But if all these lives were put...

SO: What?

MI: If all these lives were sent to camp, people of Maui, the non-Japanese...

SO: He came back, he came back looking like this, a broken man.

MI: He never...

SO: He was not a complainer. *Shoganai*. "*Sensou kara shoganai*", you understand?

MI: That's one I've never heard.

SO: Yeah, "*sensou*" means "war". "War so cannot help".

MI: I see. I mean, I knew that "*Shikata ga nai*", but I've never heard this one before.

SO: What's that?

MI: I hear "*Shikata ga nai*", but this one is a little different. First time I've heard this one.

SO: Oh, yeah. So I don't know if you wanna...

MI: I'll take pictures of you.

SO: You want to glance at these? These are communications from Delegate Farrington regarding my father's internment in Hawaii.

MI: I'm going to turn this sideways, these pictures.

[Letters and pictures reviewed]

MI: About one hour. Good.