This is an interview with Dr. Richard Kosaki on July 11, 2000, and we’re at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa. The interviewers are Warren Nishimoto and Michiko Kodama-Nishimoto.

MK: Okay, we’ll start today’s session with your military years. And we know that you volunteered at the end of your freshman year and I wanted to know why you volunteered?

RK: Well, as I said, they had the earlier call for 442nd [Regimental Combat Team], and my parents only wanted one of us boys to go. Two of us were eligible so my older brother [Mineyuki] went for the 442. Within a week he came back because they rejected him for bad eyesight. So when next call came for people to join the military, this was then the military intelligence, I volunteered for that. And, this was the beginning of my sophomore year at the university. This was in December or the fall of 1943 that we volunteered. We got inducted in January 3, I think, of 1944. We got into the army.

MK: Why did you decide to volunteer for the MIS [Military Intelligence Service]?

RK: Well, that was the opening. The combat team, the 442, the 100th [Infantry Battalion] were already active. I think they were actively in the battlefront. They thought they needed more, for the war in the Pacific, people who knew Japanese. And for my day, I had a pretty strong Japanese background or at least I had the schooling. I went all the way up to equivalent of high school, the Japanese high school, as I said Hongwanji. So I had that skill. In fact, I know that quite a number of the 442 and the 100th were also taken over to the [Military Intelligence Science] Language School, they were good in Japanese. They found that despite all of us going to Japanese school here, that most really didn’t learn the language. When they tested us out, they flunked most of us. So I got in the army in January of 1944.

MK: I was wondering, in those days when they got recruits for the MIS language school, how did they decide whether or not you were good material for the school?

RK: They assumed that most of us knew some Japanese, and they were pretty desperate, I think. The army suddenly saw the need. I guess the navy did, too. The navy, as we found later, had a school in Boulder, Colorado. But the navy didn’t accept Orientals. So most of us were in the army. And there was a pretty large contingent that went from Hawai‘i
when we got in. It was called the 13th Replacement Depot out in Wahiawā, where we got inducted. And within couple of weeks, we were shipped out.

MK: And then who were some of the local men that you remember who went in with you?

RK: Well, some of my classmates, Ralph Miwa, Francis Sogi, Kazuo Nishikawa, my classmates. Oh, Sidney Kan. There were quite a number of my contemporaries who went in.

MK: And then from Wahiawā, where were you folks shipped to?

RK: We got on the SS *Dashing Wave* and we zigzagged from Honolulu to, I think it was San Francisco.

MK: And then from there?

RK: And from there, for some strange reason, we went south to Texas. But we eventually ended up at Camp Savage, Minnesota, in the middle of winter with all the snow.

MK: And then when you were travelling to Camp Savage, did you folks have an opportunity to like get off and see the places?

RK: Not really. We pretty much stayed on the train. We had stops. I remember when we were in Mexico, when we were going through Texas, the Southwest, in one of the stops, the people there saw us and kids saw us and talked to us in Spanish. They thought maybe we were Spaniards. Some of us had Spanish. I did take Spanish at the university and I knew a few phrases so we would blurt back at them. But it was uneventful, as far as I know, all the way to Minneapolis.

MK: And then once you got there at Camp Savage, what was the place like?

RK: Camp Savage was outside of about—I don’t know how many miles—maybe four, five miles or more out of the urban Minneapolis-St. Paul. It was pretty desolate. I understand, it was, I think, an old folks’ home or something of that sort. It was quickly converted into a camp.

MK: And then once you were there, who were the other people who joined the classes?

RK: I don’t know, we had this very large group from Hawai‘i and we were joined by other, mostly Mainland nisei. So it was an interesting combination.

MK: How was it interesting to you?

RK: Well, they were different. We had mixed classes. I still remember this cocky little chap getting up and saying, “I can tell which ones come from Hawai‘i and which ones are Mainlanders.” So he wrote in the blackboard, G-I-R-L, and he says, “Let each one pronounce it.” And Hawaiians say “gail,” we don’t say “girl,” except I fooled him. (Chuckles) But it wasn’t as bad as what was happening with the 442nd, where they had a real clash. We had our arguments and most of the time we went our ways, but we made good friends. I had a couple of friends who were kotonks, very good friends.

But there were differences. I think as I noted, when you go out with the Hawai‘i boys, of course, the restaurants in town like to have the Hawai‘i boys come in. There were couple
of Chinese restaurants that we’d like to go to, especially John’s Place. The waitresses would fight to serve us because they knew that we were going to give them big tips. And then Hawai‘i boys would always argue, “I’ll pay, I’ll pay,” and we all shared. If someone got a lot of money at a craps game or something, we say, “Okay, you got to pay,” and so on.

But when I went out with the kotonks, they always said, “What did you have? How much?” They pretty much split it, not even equal parts but how much you ate or ordered or whatever, which was a really different game.

MK: What other difference did you notice?

RK: They weren’t all like that, but generally speaking.

MK: How did you folks get along?

RK: No, but individually, we got along. As I recall now, we used to play games. But when we play games, the split was usually the drinkers versus the non-drinkers. The “pilutes” versus the “Coca-Colas.”

(Laughter)

MK: And, at Camp Savage, who were your instructors?

RK: Oh, we had several instructors. Some of them were civilians, some of them were military. We had several who were older than we were. One instructor that we had that I really liked was Yoshio Hanao. He was a much older person from Hawai‘i and he had received, I think, university schooling in Japan, so his Japanese was excellent but so was his English. He was a very gentle person. I enjoyed him as an instructor.

There were others, civilians. In our group in the military intelligence from Hawai‘i, we had several well-known figures who were much older than we were. We were maybe nineteen-, twenty-year-olds, but in our group there was Masaji Marumoto, well-known judge, justice. And Masaji was very smart. Ben Tashiro, the judge from Kaua‘i. And I felt sorry for them when we went on long hikes.

Although at Camp Savage, it was pretty much (the same daily routine—-) get up early in the morning, you’re told what to wear that day depending on the weather, and then you spent all day in class. Then after your evening meal, you had at least two or three hours back in class to study. Many of the boys studied all night. Especially for big tests, they would be in the latrine or in their bed with a flashlight. Most of the students studied quite hard. Of course, people like Masaji Marumoto knew the language well.

And I felt sorry for them when we went on long hikes. We had at times seven-mile hikes or whatever, fourteen-mile hikes, through the night. It was tiring for everyone, but I noticed that we who were young would bounce back the next day whereas the old ones would be creaking for two or three days, and I can understand that now.

WN: What were the consequences of not studying hard enough?

RK: Well, I don’t know if there were any rewards. For some reason—I don’t know if this was true in the rest of the army—but we were given very quick promotions. We get in as a private. In no time at all, we get to Camp Savage, two, three months later, I’m a private
first class. Well, let’s see, we started class in February and I graduated in August and before I graduated they made me a tech 5, two stripes like a corporal. When I graduated in August, they made me a team leader, and made me a sergeant. I had a team of five or six interpreters. We went out in teams to be attached to military detachments in the Pacific. So I had a team, I was ready to ship out when I got called back to teach at the school. When I got to teach at the school, they made me a staff sergeant. So I don’t know, the promotions came almost automatically.

Of course, I think, as I mentioned before though, they had many Caucasian officers taking the same type of classes, in fact, as we did. But we were segregated, except that once or twice a week, we met with the Caucasian officers and we had to talk Japanese. They had to practice their conversational Japanese. And I must say, most of the Caucasian officers were very bright. They were picked, I think, for their IQ and also the fact that a lot of them had Ph.D.s in languages, in French or German or whatever. They were linguists in that sense, and they were very bright. When they graduated, they were second lieutenants. When we graduated, we were, at best, sergeants.

WN: Was there any kind of fear hanging over you in case you don’t pass certain tests, like you would go back to combat or anything like that?

RK: No, I don’t think so. Of course, they had segregated classes and they tested us before they placed us. It was homogenous grouping. I happened to get into A-1. I think, it was one of the higher classes. They had A-1, B-1, C-1, as top classes. Because in our classes, there were some who had schooling in Japan, were very good. And some of my friends who didn’t study hard in Japanese school, I know, were in maybe C-4, C-5 or so-called lower grades. But almost everyone passed, everyone learned enough. I think they assigned teams in terms of at least two or three would be very strong in Japanese. But they felt that everyone had learned enough to be of some use in the field.

MK: And then it’s a language school basically for war purposes, what did they teach you? What did they emphasize?

RK: Well, basically the language. The army basically stressed the written language. We had to read and write and learn the kanji and so on. And they did have, also, military terms that we had to grapple with. We had to learn some of the military terms. But basically, it was a very intensive language training.

MK: How about culture training?

RK: As far as I know, nothing much. We saw the usual army training films that they tried to depict the Japanese and so on. As I recall, they kind of assumed that we knew something about the Japanese, I guess. I don’t remember getting any lectures on their culture or anything else. It was a very intensive language training, and Japanese is difficult, especially the reading and writing. I found out later that the army emphasized reading and writing; whereas at the navy, I think, had heavy emphasis on conversation, Japanese conversation. So when were in occupation duty in Japan, you know who got along with the girls. I was in a unit that had both army and navy personnel. As the army guy said to me, “Oh Jesus, I think we can write better than Joe, the navy guy, but when we go to the geisha house, I can’t talk.”

(Laughter)
MK: And then later on when you became an instructor, how did you instruct? I mean you had not taught Japanese before.

RK: Well, they had a pretty set curriculum and they had their own textbook, so to speak, and pretty much you stayed with that. But I had an interesting assignment in that I had couple of classes in which I taught English. As they drafted what they had in the army, they found out that some of the ones drafted, mostly *kibei*, they were stronger in Japanese than in English. So they wanted those boys to learn more English, especially, so they could translate or interpret better. That was an interesting assignment. And I taught very elementary Japanese.

WN: So you had to teach English to the *kibei*?

RK: Yes. I had couple of classes where I taught English to the *kibei*.

MK: And again, was that written English as opposed to oral?

RK: It was both. The emphasis was again on written English and seeing the Japanese and have them translate. We did a lot of translations, so I had to correct their English.

MK: And then finally when you finished all your training and your teaching assignment, what tasks were you given? What assignment were you given?

RK: What happened was, let's see, I got through and I stayed, unfortunately, as a teacher for several months. But in the spring of '45, there was a call out for some of us. They wanted to select a few of us to go to get officer training. And this was (for the) notorious infantry training at Fort Benning, Georgia. What were they called? It was very intensive (training). Twenty-one weeks? No, not that long. We were called seventeen-week wonders or something like that.

Anyway, Fort Benning infantry school was famous. And I think almost every week or every two weeks, they started a class to train them to become infantry officers. For some reason I was selected. I still remember being called and asked to face a board of colonels and they would quiz you, and then I got told the next day that I was selected to go to Fort Benning, Georgia, and it was pretty rapid. There were at least four of us. Art Mori—Art was the son of the famous doctor.

MK: Iga Mori?

RK: Iga Mori. And well-educated, I think he was a proud—what is it? Sorry, Art, if I get the wrong Ivy League school, but I think it was Yale that he had been to, very proud of the fact. Always wore his Yale shirt. He and I from Hawai‘i and there were two *kotonks*. But when we went to our class at Fort Benning, there were two or three other nisei, *kotonks*, Kobayashi and Nishibayashi, and maybe a third person anyway, and we were all in this officer training class at Fort Benning, Georgia. And that was very, very rigorous training. I don’t think I can go through that again but morning and night, you were constantly being pushed to do this and do that and the exercises and the field work were, physically, very, very demanding. I don’t know how I made it through.

Interesting thing is, size didn’t seem to matter. On the obstacle course, I was paired against the biggest Black guy—there were few, one or two Blacks in our class. Come to think of it, it was a mixed unit at that point. And I was treated well by my colleagues. We were alphabetical and the guy next to me was a freckled, redhead named Kolenski from
Wisconsin, and Kolenski had flunked from the class before and he was repeating the course. So it was good to know him as a friend because he would tell me what's coming and what to expect.

(Laughter)

He was an awfully nice guy, good sense of humor. And, somehow I made it through.

MK: Did Kolenski make it through to the . . .

RK: Yeah, Kolenski made it at that time.

MK: And then so after you finished this training at Fort Benning, what came next?

RK: Well, the interesting thing was, it was near war's end at that point. I had the impression, I don't think I was wrong, that they were training us for the infantry as everyone thought maybe they have to invade Japan, and that's a dirty job to go in with the infantry and marines. Why did they give me infantry training when most of the MIS people were. . . . Well, there were few on the front line, more and more they were being placed on front lines, but many of them were in the back, interrogating prisoners, and looking at captured documents, and so forth. I figured, well I guess they wanted us to be charging in the front, too. At any rate, the war was nearing an end. In fact, I started my training in March of '45 and I graduated in early August. In the meantime, Germany surrendered sometime in July, I think. And Franklin D. Roosevelt died a week before we graduated. And, we were (designated the) standby honor guard. The class before us got to be the honor guard because Warm Springs, Georgia, was not far from where we were.

So anyway after I graduated, got leave, I was sent back to Fort Snelling for assignment. But then the atom bombs had dropped and the war ends. So (my) assignment is changed, but we still have to go overseas. So, we went to the West Coast to await our assignment to go overseas. Before going over, as I was going from Fort Snelling to the West Coast to San Francisco, I stopped by at Tule Lake to see my uncle, Otokichi Ozaki, and his family who were incarcerated at Tule Lake.

MK: And, what did you notice there?

RK: Well, they were in pretty desolate conditions. I still have a faint picture in my mind, I know Uncle and Aunty and the kids were kind of surprised to see me. And they were in good health. I wrote home that they seemed to be okay at that point. Although just the other day, the oldest cousin, Earl, tells me that he remembers that the day I came, he was very ill, he was in bed. I don’t remember the details.

MK: What were your feelings?

RK: Going to California on a bus, I thought the climate was very hostile to Japanese. I did see a sign, “No Japs Allowed,” in front of a barbershop. But, personally, I didn't have any uncomfortable encounters.

So we were in Fort Mason, California, near Presidio, waiting for shipment overseas. We don’t know whether we were going by ship or plane or whatever. I got called late one night, and they drove me to Hamilton Air Force Base, which was north of San Francisco. My assignment was to take a packet of top secret materials to [General Douglas] MacArthur’s headquarters in Manila. So they gave me the packet, gave me a .45 [caliber]
I was the only passenger so they were very nice to me. As we approached the islands, they let me sit up front with the pilots, to see. When I landed at Hickam, I said, “I haven’t been home for over two years. The war is over, can (I) be relieved of this duty of taking it (to Manila)?” After couple of hours, finally they found someone who was willing to take my place. So I went home for a couple of days. I guess that’s (going AWOL), but then I went back to Hickam and they shipped me out.

I have here what we did. I left Hickam on 17th of October in ’45, flew to Kwajalein, then to Guam, and then to the Philippines, and spent about a week in Manila. And then flew to Japan and landed first at Okinawa just for fueling stop, and then in late October, I was in Japan, in Tokyo. I remember the night we landed, I think I was with Akira Otani. Akira was a 442nd person who was kept behind because he became cadre. He was kept behind to train other nisei soldiers. But because he knew Japanese, they put him into (military) intelligence. At that time I was assigned to counterintelligence. Akira and I landed in Tokyo late at night. We were very hungry. So we looked around, we walked out in the streets, first saw a policeman and asked where can we get a bite to eat. And the policeman laughed at us and he says, “Nowhere. You bombed the heck out of us, we don’t have anything.” We didn’t know the extent of the damage. He was right, food was scarce. Of course, there were no restaurants open, especially late at night.

Then I got an assignment soon after. Most of us thought we wanted to stay in Tokyo, where all the action was, we thought. But I didn’t have rank. I was just a new second lieutenant so I was shipped to Osaka. I got sent to what they call the counterintelligence, but the censorship section, they want us to look over mail, and the press, and everything. A lot of what we were supposed to be doing was supposed to be secret. And they had major stations in Tokyo, Osaka, and Fukuoka. And I got sent to the Osaka station, which in the long run, turned out to be a better deal because Tokyo was overrun with American GIs; whereas in Osaka, there weren’t too many of us. So we had, I think, a better time in terms of getting to know the Japanese and finding our way around.

MK: And then what was your job there? You were censoring things. What were you looking for?

RK: A lot of them are so-called secret, but we were just trying to gauge public opinion to some degree, but they were afraid that there might be rebel groups, insurgent groups, or something else. The wildest one was, for some reason, they intercepted messages that said that Hitler had escaped to Japan. It was only rumor but everything is suspect. So we had to chase this down. They said Hitler was hiding in Karuizawa, which is this nice resort area north of Tokyo. So we had to send people out there, agents out there, to look for him. Of course, he wasn’t found. But the climate was such that everybody was worried and they wanted to be sure. Partly what we were trying to find out is how the populace—what were their feelings about the occupation and so forth. But also they were trying to see if there were any groups organized to cause trouble.

But it was a good assignment in that I was in charge of a section doing some other work. And I had some good people. We hired a lot of native Japanese, ones that knew English, and a lot of them came from the Kobe area. Kobe was an international city, a big trading port, it still is, and they had a strong contingent of foreigners, Germans (especially).
There was a German gal who was pure German but her Japanese was perfect. And we had some of Dutch origin, Indonesian. It was an interesting group. And we also hired some Hawaiian people, some people from Hawai‘i who were stuck in Japan during the war. We had an excellent nurse who was from Hawai‘i. I think she was trained at Kuakini. We needed to run a dispensary, so we hired her to do it and it was good because she knew both English and Japanese.

We did little things, when I look back, there were so many things we could have done that would have been interesting. One of the interesting things, politically, was, in our unit, we had a lot of officers. We had enlisted men, too, but for the kind of work we were doing, we had all these people who were coming out of these intelligence schools, Camp Savage, Snelling, and the naval school in Boulder, Colorado. I remember there were some officers who were very bright. On the IQ test, they had the highest scores but they were real characters and they were, when I look back, very sophisticated. One of them was interested in socialistic and communistic thought. He used to invite the Japanese communists, who were just let out of jail, into our quarters. He wanted to talk to them, find out what was going on. I got in on some of their conversation, but even if I was going to major in political science, I guess I wasn’t that interested. But they were very nice people, very bright.

We had interesting people. We had one man in our organization who translated *Chushingura,* or has a English version of *Chushingura.* Not the most scintillating, but I gave him credit. You know, Tuttle published it. So we had some interesting people like that.

We did little things like, we got to be good friends with some of the Japanese especially in the Kobe area or Nishinomiya. We tried to help the kids and some of the people around the neighborhood. Our neighborhood was devastated, but it wasn’t a very poor neighborhood. We were situated in the Mengyo Kaikan building, which is a very substantial building. It’s a beautiful building. It’s the cotton exchange. In Osaka the commercial center was very strong and the textile industry (was prominent), so this was an important organization. We took over their building, which was remarkably intact, although the surrounding areas were pretty leveled, devastated.

We used to befriend, especially initially, the kids in the neighborhood. They finally came around. At first, people would be avoiding us. I still remember, we went around, very few people would—they wouldn’t run away, but they weren’t out to meet us. They were curious. I know they were looking at us behind their doors and so forth. But in no time at all, I think they came out. And, of course, the American soldiers were not what they were told we would be doing, running roughshod, pillaging, and raping, and so forth. So gradually they came out. I must say that the troops who first went in, we went in with some of the troops [who] were combat veterans like the 6th Army under General Krueger, which was stationed in Kyoto, the Kansai area in Osaka. They were very well behaved. It was the younger kids [i.e., troops] who came later. I stayed there for a year and I could see it. As younger kids came later, the younger kids were the ones who, most had no battle experience, were having a great time chasing the girls, and playing the black market. Because food and cigarettes and stuff were very scarce in Japan so you could easily trade for cameras and other things. But the first troops, I must say, the combat veterans, were very well behaved. So they set a very nice tone. And [General Douglas] MacArthur, I guess, behaved like the emperor, so that helped to calm things. So it was surprisingly tranquil, although there were incidents, especially some of the men—you don’t blame them—kind of resented our presence. But on the whole, most people
were friendly, too friendly sometimes. We tried to do little things in our neighborhood like I’m always trying to give candy to the kids.

And some of us had relatives. I didn’t know I had some of these relatives who came to see me after word got around that I was there. Most of my relatives—I don’t have too many, but they were all in Kochi-ken, which is not too close to Osaka, so I didn’t get to see them because transportation wasn’t easy. I did go to visit later on, but I found that there were some distant relatives in the Osaka area. There were two of them, Yamashitas and they would come. One would come to ask for cigarettes.

The other one, very gentle man, who had a family, came to say that his wife had just given birth to a baby, their second daughter, and she didn’t have enough milk to feed so if I could help. So I talked to our supply officer and made arrangements so he would give me a case of Carnation milk, Carnation cream, that I would take to the family. Years later when my parents went to visit, they told them that that saved the little girl’s life. But I think there were others who were doing similar things.

When I went to see my grandmother in Kochi, much later, I made sure to bring sugar and candy, and other things. Sugar especially was in strong demand. Because I remember that first Christmas when we threw a party, since we were the unit that had the closest contact with the Japanese entertainment world and everything else, we commandeered the biggest theater in Osaka which was still operative, and invited all of the famous acts, the vaudeville shows, the old-fashioned shows, the Takarazuka girls to perform, and to throw a party for the GIs (who) were stationed (around Osaka). It was a nice party. It was Christmas and New Year’s entertainment. We had two shows at this big theater. It was well received.

In payment we invited the performers to come our quarters and we would feed them. We had arranged nice little sandwiches, and coffee, and doughnuts, snacks. The first group came and they bowed politely, but before long, they started to take the food. I saw a lady (grab) a bowl of sugar and dump it into her *kimono* sleeve. The major who was in charge was amazed. I said, “We should have known these people haven’t had good food,” especially sugar, they didn’t have. So we had to quickly quit this dainty sandwich stuff. Whatever we had prepared, we started to pass out and just give them instead of (having them) eat it there. They would rather take it home. Some ate there, but most of them wanted to take (food) home for their families. So we started to give out the food that we had. Took out more canned goods and stuff, and try to give them, which they appreciated. By that time the Takarazuka girls came—they came last, I still remember—we were out of food, so we had to have them sit in our mess hall. They had to wait while the cooks prepared more food because we ran out of (prepared) food. But conditions were such that this was to be expected.

MK: And then, how did the Japanese react to you? Here you are, Japanese-American soldier?

RK: I personally had very few hostile encounters, hardly any, although I did hear mutterings and some of them would avoid us. But on the whole, most of them, they were very friendly—in fact, overly friendly. They’re human. Sometimes I think they were just trying to be nice to us because they thought that’s the way in which they can get candy or books or something. We hired a lot of Japanese, as I said. And they like to work for us because I think they were paid well, not only that, but they were given, from time to time, we would give them candy, canned goods, things we could distribute.
But also since we hired in (my) division, a lot of girls. I asked my family to send me all the magazines they could buy, girl magazines, *Ladies Home Journal, Good Housekeeping*, because at that time in Japan, there was very little. Now, there are so many magazines, but at that time, hardly anything was published. Maybe there was a limited edition of *Shufu-no-Tomo*, or something of that sort, but I know they were hungry to read things and they were hungry for English. So, we started a little library and the girls would take home the magazines, that was very popular. My sisters were wondering why I was asking for all of these things, why we go to the PX [post exchange] and buy up all these magazines. But, when you look back, we could have done more to help.

**MK:** But that was using your own funds, right?

**RK:** Pretty much, yeah.

**MK:** You’re doing it as an individual.

**RK:** Oh yes. Although if we could, we’d take the government supplies, like the sugar, the cream.

**MK:** While you were there, we talked about the devastation that surrounded the building that you were all in, were there chances to go outside of Osaka and see other parts of Japan?

**RK:** Oh yes. I was lucky because I had a jeep assigned to me, full time. My jeep number is *mi-no-juni, mi-12*. The joke was, after a while, they say, if it’s a nice day, Kosaki is not in the office, he’s out taking pictures. I got interested in color photography in those days, Kodachrome, which you would have the ASA speed of twenty-five at the most, or fifteen. And Anscochrome. My family said, “Why are you always—” All I was asking for, they said, is to send me films and it wasn’t easy to get it at that time. So I took a lot of pictures of Japan at that time. Unfortunately my Anscochrome film, my pictures, have all kind of faded, but my Kodachrome films, pictures are still very nice. So I have some very beautiful shots of the seasons in Japan, the *momiji* in the fall and the cherry blossoms, especially around Kyoto. Also, of course, I have a lot of street scenes, women in *monpei* and the devastation. I did a lot of traveling. I had to go every month, at least once, to Tokyo, by train that was. It wasn’t the *Shinkansen*. In fact, it took almost a day, as I recall, to make that trip overnight to Tokyo. We were curious and some of us went to Hiroshima not too long after to see the devastation there. We were escorted by some orphan kids who were very willing to...

END OF SIDE ONE

SIDE TWO

**RK:** The kids wanted to escort us around and, of course, they wanted us to so-call pay them in terms of candy and gum and whatever, which we expected. We knew it was expected so we had the supply with us. And I did go to Fukuoka. I didn’t get to Nagasaki at that time, though. We went south, we went to Beppu. In Setonaikai I went to see my relatives a couple of times in Kochi. And, being in Osaka, we went to Kobe occasionally but more often, almost every weekend, we went to Nara or Kyoto. Both cities were not bombed. They’re both beautiful ancient cities. I somehow knew how to drive (there). There weren’t super highways, but I knew the road even at night to drive from Osaka to Kyoto.
and back. And we made some good friends in some people in Kyoto, who showed us around. So for us in occupation duty, at our age, it turned out to be a pleasant assignment.

MK: And then, as your tour of duty was ending, what were you thoughts on war and military?

RK: Well, I was grateful that I didn't have to go through actual combat. Some of my friends had to, I didn't see all that devastation, although I could see (it) in Manila and I could see (it) in Guam. In Okinawa and Japan itself, the devastation is something awful. And then you hear the stories of what happened, so you know how bad it is. But considering that, I thought, especially in Japan, the spirit was picking up. And, our contacts were, on most occasions, very pleasant.

As I said, we were young and we were not really looking for adventure, we were curious. But when I think back, we could have done much more in terms of helping out, much more in terms of learning the language more intensively, or teaching English as many of them wanted to learn English. In our unit, too, after a while, they brought in to replace us in the service. They brought in a lot of civilians, including girls from Hawai'i. Quite a number. I don't know if you knew Professor Dorothy Shibano?

MK: Yeah, she's from Maui.

RK: Yeah. The Shibano family on Maui. Dorothy came with a contingent. I guess the position I had, the section I had, was secret, super secret or whatever, so the commanding officers gave me first choice. They came to become our secretary, administrative assistants. I used to have a sergeant before, but all of us were being discharged. I lost my sergeant, he was a guy from Hawai'i, too. And so I got the first pick of the girls who came. We looked over the record, but at any rate, Dorothy became my secretary. She was very bright. I don't know how she is now. She wasn't very well recently, but she would be an interesting one (to interview). Dorothy knew a lot of Japanese because I think she had been to a high school in Japan, but her English was good, too. So I'm not surprised that later on, she did get a doctorate in Japanese and taught Japanese here at the university. I was lucky. She was very good, very conscientious. And we had some older Japanese men who came. In fact some of them were issei. Mr. Nakahata and there were others who knew my dad, people who knew my dad. They came because of their knowledge of Japanese (and) English.

MK: So they came as civilian employees of the military?

RK: Right. In fact some of us, if we wanted to, one or two of my friends did, could have stayed in the army because they wanted to keep some of us to do this kind of work. Or some of us could have been discharged and gone back as civilians. They were looking for people to do the kind of work we do and interpret or translate, so-called counterintelligence work.

MK: Did you ever consider that as an option?

RK: No, I wanted to get back to school. But, unfortunately, because they made me an officer, I had to have more points to get discharged. So the friends I went in with, who were still sergeants and so forth, could leave within six months or so. But I had to stay in Japan for a whole year before I was eligible to be discharged because we, as officers, had to have more points, more time in service. So I had to spend my full three years in the army, so a full year of occupation duty in Japan.
I tried to be back in the fall, but I couldn’t make it. I knew I was going to get out in November, I thought, but somehow they lost my papers. I spent a month in Tokyo waiting to get my discharge papers and be sent back to Hawai‘i, at which time every day, I used to go to see sumo in Tokyo. In those days it was very slow. They didn’t have a time limit on the face-off. You could practically read a short story between bouts. Went to see some of that and I got to run around Tokyo and see my friends who were mostly in Tokyo. I stayed there two or three weeks before they finally got my papers in order. I got back to Hawai‘i in November, but I wasn’t discharged until the end of December. December 20 of 1946, I got discharged.

MK: And then by that time, what had you heard about your other friends who had joined the 442 or the 100th?

RK: I knew that most of them were back. They came back, and the ones who wanted to, a lot of them on the GI Bill were at the university. That’s why when I came back, as I said, when they knew I was coming back next term, they ran me for ASUH [Associated Students of the University of Hawai‘i] president. I have been gone for three years, but I ran against very popular Raymond Ho, who ran a very successful carnival for the university. But I was backed by the veterans who were back here, and most of them were 442. Dan Inouye, my classmate, wasn’t back at that time because he was still hospitalized.

MK: And so when you came back to UH, you just picked up where you left off?

RK: Well, pretty much. Because a lot of my friends were back from the army, too. We formed a very strong contingent on campus.

MK: I know that when I looked through the book Malamalama, there’s a Mr. Toyota who spoke about the “Under the Tree” gang.

RK: Yeah, that’s Ralph “Horsey” Toyota. Ralph was a little older, he’s a good 442 man. Outside of Hemenway Hall, between Hemenway and University Avenue, under those trees, usually that’s where the gang assembled after classes and just talk story.

MK: And, who were members of this “Under the Tree” gang?

RK: I guess besides Ralph Toyota, there was Claude Takekawa, some of these were a little older than—class or two above us as Ralph was a class or two above me. Claude Takekawa, gee, who else? Shigeto Kanemoto, I think, was there. Gee, I guess I have to look at the book to get all their names, but it was a regular gathering.

MK: And what kind of group was it? I mean, informally gathered . . .

RK: Just informal, very informal. At that point, too, where Sinclair Library is now was the parking lot, so those of us who were fortunate to have cars would park there, and so that’s another place where we’d congregate. A lot of the veterans—not a lot but some of them—bought surplus jeeps, so there were a lot of jeeps parked there, too.

MK: With all these returning veterans, you hear about veterans coming back on the GI Bill and getting their education, and it gives you the story of just picking up things again and everything went okay. In fact sometimes, it seemed like it went even better than expected in the sense that they had that financial support. But as veterans coming back from war, were there difficulties or maladjustments among some of the men?
RK: There must be, but I think on the whole, the adjustment wasn’t difficult for most of us. I can’t think of one bad example. One of my classmates, the one that used to run with me after class to the cafeteria to be first in line, Jimmy, he went to combat and the horrors of war stayed with him and he couldn’t adjust. Unfortunately, he was in and out of the hospitals. For a while we thought he was okay, he got married and everything else, but eventually he committed suicide. That was an extreme case, I guess, but there were others who were bothered. But most of us, especially those of us who were lucky enough not to see actual combat, I don’t think we’re that scarred or anything. In fact, we came with better sense of purpose, more self-confidence.

And university here had a sense of community, not just among us but, on the whole. I thought the faculty, too, most of them were very friendly and open. I think the post-war faculty was much more, in a sense, democratic—big D (and) small d—than the previous (faculty). And, I remember, my wife Mildred was in school. She (had graduated), but she used to write to me and tell me about some of the new professors that came in who were very good. Allan Saunders was one of them. She found him to be very unusual and very challenging. She told me that, especially as I want to major in political science, I should take him. I didn’t have an introductory course then. So I still remember coming back and registering. Registration then was done by professors. I remember standing in line downstairs in Crawford 103. The tables were up front and at one of them, Allan Saunders was sitting there, registering. And the girl, sweet little girl next to me says, “You see that man there with the white hair and the mustache?”

I said, “Yeah.”

“That’s Saunders, don’t take his class, it’s tough.”

I did take his class. . .

(Laughter)

. . . and got to know him well and it was stimulating. We had some good prewar professors. I think I mentioned Charles Engard in botany, Charlie Moore in philosophy. But after the war, it had brought in not only Allan Saunders but we had Ed Vinacke in psychology, another excellent teacher, very egalitarian, friendly, stimulating. There was Harold McCarthy, very unusual. Harold McCarthy, I think, was one of the brightest people I know, a real genius, so much so that he acts like one.

MK: What do you mean by that?

RK: Well, this happened much later when I got in the faculty. Mrs. McCarthy calls me and said, “Dick, can you check on Harold, whether he’s in his office or not?” He had an office where the old library, where the TIM [Travel Industry Management] School is now, downstairs he had an office where philosophy was. She says, “I got a call from a student, frantic,” and said that there’s a note on Harold’s door that says he’s gone to the Mainland. This was exam week, or just after exam week. So I went to check and, sure enough, there was a note on his front door saying he went to the Mainland. But what I found out later was, he got so tired of being interrupted by (students). . . He was trying to correct his test papers. And he didn’t give true, false, he gave these blue book exams. He got so tired of being pestered by students who wanted to know whether they passed or not. He put up the sign and he crawled out through the window (when he wanted to go out).
That was Harold McCarthy. We were taking a course from him. He came to us fresh from his Ph.D. from Cal Berkeley and he liked surfing. I still remember one of the exams we had to take, we were waiting for him. “Gee, exam time is here and he’s not here.” Few minutes later, he comes running in, in his shorts and his slippers, and sand on his feet. He said, “I forgot all about this, the waves were good, I was surfing. I have to come, give you here this silly test.” But he was a very unusual teacher, very bright. He could really tax you to the maximum. It was interesting.

There was Kenneth Inada. You know Kenneth? He is retired as professor of philosophy at State University in New York at Buffalo. Kenneth was a Farrington High School grad. Kenneth was also in the 442nd. He has a beautiful chapter in *American Heart, Japanese Eyes*.

WN: *Japanese Eyes, American Heart.*

RK: Yeah. In that book Kenneth Inada has a beautiful chapter on when he was in the 442nd, why he didn’t shoot the young German soldier who was whistling on his bike, riding through. That’s Kenneth. I remember Kenneth Inada who was the most devoted student. He took every course that Harold McCarthy offered. I still remember once when, in class, Harold McCarthy came, looked around, waited, waited, waited. Finally he says, “Where is Kenneth Inada? I can’t start without him. This is the first time I haven’t seen him in class.” (Chuckles)

But that was Harold McCarthy. His office was a mess, you go to his office to talk to him, he has piles of papers. And then when he wants to make room, he just shoves some off. But in terms of someone who read with understanding and knew, if you asked him, this passage, (or if) this comes from Milton, this comes from Shakespeare, he could tell you. Brilliant mind. So he was one of those. Harold McCarthy was an outstanding teacher. Ed Vinacke was good.

MK: Ed Vinacke, what did he . . .

RK: Psychology. You can ask—Kiyoshi Ikeda had a class, I think, with him, too. He thought Kiyoshi was one of the best students he had. And in history we had Tom Murphy. The history department needed some good teachers and Tom Murphy was good. Tom also wrote *Ambassadors in Arms*, about the 100th infantry. Tom was good in that I had English history from him and he approached history as not only about great kings and great battles but more about the life of the times, of common folk, and so forth. I forget what book we’re using that time. We used some kind of book which gave you history more in terms of the grassroots, or tried to.

MK: And then how was he in terms of relationships with students?

RK: Very good. But Tom was much more formal than others. Tom used to teach a large class at Farrington Hall, and there used to be one of these dogs wandering around campus. It always used to go to his class and disrupt his class. So Tom, one day, bought firecrackers and threw [them] at the dog. (Chuckles)

WN: These anecdotes that your sharing with us, is this indicative of how intimate the university was at that time?
RK: I guess you can say that. We had a sense of community. Of course, I said this not too long ago, how much I enjoyed being undergraduate here. It was an undergraduate college. People think it was a cow college, but my undergraduate experience was so much better than my son’s experience here where everything was very impersonal. He goes to a math class. “How many in class?”

He says, “Twelve.”

And, “Does he have good discussions?”

He said, “No. The teacher just lectures to us.” He said, “The teacher doesn’t know who we are, my name.” Well maybe we had that in our time, too, but on the whole we knew the faculty, most of them. The faculty knew us. Saunders and Vinacke, they were always around campus from morning to night and to the evening. And, we stayed on campus, as Ralph Toyota says, we sat around the—maybe because we’re on the GI Bill, most of them didn’t have to do too much work aside. And the teachers then, too, Ed Vinacke, Tom Murphy, told me later that that was the best group of students they’ve had, the ones who came back, the veterans who were mature. They enjoyed that period, and we enjoyed them, too.

But I was active in the ASUH and I knew the professors. I worked on campus, which is all very helpful. When I said this, Walter Nunokawa, Walter says he was undergraduate at that time, few classes below me, I guess, and he said his experiences were different. Even in those days, he said, he spent a minimum of time on campus. He went back to Pālolo with his Pālolo gang. So he doesn’t think my experience was typical. But I think it was more typical than it is—well, for some of us—than it is today for most students. We had a sense of community and spirit. I don’t know if this is indicative of the difference, but when I ran for ASUH president, the turnout was almost 100 percent. In fact, some people said that there were more votes than students. Whereas now, if you get 5 percent of the vote, you’re elected.

MK: You know, you made a statement that some of the professors really enjoyed having the veterans as students, that they were more mature. Do you think, because the students were veterans, it was really different? They were older, went through more than, say, a kid who just graduated from McKinley or Farrington and went straight to UH?

RK: Yeah, I think it makes a difference. Along those lines, I think I noticed this, too, when I came back to teach, the GI Bill was helpful but we did borrow money, too. So we’re all eager to have more compensation, so a lot of us taught extension, what was then called extension courses, especially in the evenings. I taught Downtown, I taught at Hickam, Schofield. Especially Downtown, we had older students. Abe Piianaia was one of those students and Abe is older than I am and he was one of my students. I thought they were much more fun to teach, much more serious, they ask better questions.

In class, I still remember, so we repeat what’s in the textbook. In those days it says, “No Catholic can be elected president of the United States.” I say this in my class on campus, nobody questions (this). But I still remember saying this in my evening class Downtown and one of the students said, “How do you know? What’s the proof of that?” which is a good question. Of course, soon after that, John Kennedy got elected president. But you see, the questioning and the discussions, I thought, were much better in the evening.
MK: Once I interviewed this nisei vet who came back to college and he characterized his group of friends as being somewhat rebellious and that they would sometimes get in trouble with the administration on issues. And he said in certain respects, their being vets, kept the professors on their toes, you know?

RK: I think so. The teachers and the professors who were good loved that. Like Allan Saunders, I got to know him because in class, there was something about statehood. When I look back he was baiting us and I took the bait. I challenged him. So he said, “You come up here and debate it with me.” But he wanted us to have different points of view and to challenge. So, those professors enjoyed having veterans and I think it’s true.

Some of this is depicted in the movies. I still remember a movie called Apartment for Peggy. It’s an old movie, was it Jeanne Crain? Anyway, a lot of veterans were married, too, so here’s Jeanne Crain, wife of a veteran who was going to school and they live in these, as they were in many places, very bad housing on campus. A lot of the universities, I don’t know about here—oh, here, I think we had some shacks, some barracks out here, just about where this building is, was a veterans’ dorm. My friend Ace Higuchi stayed here. Especially the neighbor island veterans stayed in those.

Apartment for Peggy—I think it was Jeanne Crain—anyway, she organized the veterans’ wives in these not very nice quarters. So she’s constantly going to the administration, challenging them, because their favorite tactic is to say she makes up these things. She said, “Do you know that 66 and 8/10 of our students, our wives, are pregnant?” They need more of this and that. (When) she tries to make a point, she uses statistics, but she doesn’t say 50 percent, she always says 55 percent or some other figure that sounds believable. (Chuckles) But that depicts how they tried to interfere or challenge the administration.

I guess we did, too, in a sense. I think I told you about the incident in the sociology class when the professor showed the use of condoms on a broomstick. Some people objected and the administration was not too happy about it. Then we tried to defend the professor, and the president said to me, “It’s none of your business.” But I think we had an impact.

MK: What was the outcome of that?

RK: Nothing really happened. It died. The professor, as far as I know, maybe he got a letter but that’s it. There was a day, too, when Allan Saunders came here. Before he came, all the professors wore neckties. He came and he wore an aloha shirt. It’s a famous story now, and he openly defied the edict that professors should wear neckties, be so-called properly dressed. In fact he formed the organization which he called FWASTO, Faculty Wearers of Aloha Shirt Tails Out.

(Laughter)

Deliberately wanted tails out and used to give cards to professors who followed him.

I was in political science which was called government in those days. The students, we organized a government—what did we call it?—fellowship or whatever. We had great parties, great discussions, we used to go to lectures of people. We used to have, for example, the American University field staff, this is days before television. One of the big deals was, the university had many lectures in the evenings, members of American University field staff and these were people who were all over the world, correspondents
or professors who would go to visit these university campuses to report on the latest developments in Indonesia or in France or whatever.

I still remember, the students go to these lectures en masse and after that, go to somebody’s home oftentimes. Fortunately I had rented a home very close to campus on Hunnewell Street. They used to come over. We’d have coffee and doughnuts and continue the discussions or we’d go to somebody else’s home. Sometimes, even (though) Allan Saunders had a small apartment, we’d go there. So we had a lot of these discussions. And the government department, traditionally—I don’t think they do it now—on Kūhiō Day, the holiday, we had a big lū'au. Ed Toma, who later became a principal (at McKinley High School), big football player—I guess it wasn’t Ed, it was his girlfriend then who was a political science major. Ed knew how to dig an imu and make kālua pig. We all helped him dig and stuff, and we always had that. So we had a big lū'au dinner-like on Kūhiō Day, played baseball. Allan Saunders was a very good first baseman; he could catch. There was a lot of fellowship.

MK: So Allan Saunders really got to know his students?

RK: Right. So it’s surprising how many students, even after (graduation, kept in touch with him). If you read his book, you know, we wrote to him. Ralph Miwa, for example, had kept his letters. Allan, he didn’t write books, but he wrote a lot of letters. If you wrote to him, he’d respond. I was amazed at how much Allan Saunders (and) Harold McCarthy (knew), they were both great readers. I wish both of them had written more. Allan, in many ways, purposely did not write. He didn’t believe in publish or perish. He fought that in many places. He went to prestigious universities—Wisconsin, Amherst, but he didn’t like that atmosphere of publish or perish. He came here and enjoyed the teaching. He wrote well, but he purposely did not want to publish.

McCarthy did some of it, but I wish he had done more. But both of them were very avid readers of everything. So I remember asking Allan Saunders once, I said, “I wonder if you’d give me a list of books that I should read as I go to graduate school.” And in no time at all, he gave me (a list). And he used to type, he had this little typewriter. He used to type what they call the “Columbus method,” with just two fingers, “discover and land.” They call it the “Columbus method,” but he typed on both sides of a sheet, almost—starting with the Greeks and everything—all the books that he thought (I should read). I kept that for many, many years. To this day, I haven’t read all of the books. In fact, not even half of them. But it’s sort of a list of great books. But you see how they responded?

MK: And you mentioned like, you would also go to his apartment?

RK: Oh yes. I left as a first-semester sophomore. When I came back, in order to be ASUH [Associated Students of the University of Hawai‘i] president, you have to have junior standing. Because I had taken so many credits, I took more than twelve every term and also then they gave me credit for military service. The registrar was kind enough to say, “Okay, you qualify.” So they ran me for office. So I became ASUH president when, really, I was only a junior. I couldn’t finish, being ASUH president, I couldn’t take all the courses. So I had to stay beyond. I was president (during the) ’47-’48 (years), but didn’t graduate till ’49, so (in) my so-called senior year, I took some so-called graduate courses, (and) worked at the Legislative Reference Bureau part-time.
One of the courses I had, I don’t know whether was readings or whatever, but there were graduate students, about five or six of us. There was Ralph Miwa, Bob Horowitz, myself, Sarah Park and Mickey McCleery, I think. And it was a seminar and usually was late in the afternoon and held at Saunders’ apartment. So we sat on the floor, very casual, but very intensively we’d discuss whatever the assignment was. He usually assigned some reading. It was good learning experience. Of that group, all four of us, Bob Horowitz, Mickey McCleery, Ralph Miwa, and myself, all four of us got Ph.D.s in political science from different universities in the Mainland, and all of us taught political science.

WN: Now, you said that some of the professors like Saunders and McCarthy actually welcomed students like you who questioned things and so forth, I was wondering if there were some not-so-good professors in the department, without using names maybe?

RK: Well, every university has, every school has, I guess, what you might consider outstanding ones, and majority are okay, and there are few you want to avoid. But it’s hard to say, I think, because, well, people have different tastes. And some professors are challenging and good for some types than others. So I don’t know. Because you have different fields of endeavor, (too).

WN: I’m just wondering if Allan Saunders represented the department. In other words, was it his style or was he the sort of the. . .?

RK: Well, he was the department. Before he came, there was no separate, I think, department of government or whatever they called it. The others who were there were administrators like Paul Bachman. I had international relations with Paul Bachman. Very nice guy, but he was busy with the administration. He later became president. And there was Ed[mund] Spellacy. Ed was already a dean. Ed was very formal. Ed never wore an aloha shirt. You knew he was from Harvard. But he was very nice, a real gentleman. Who else was in the department? So Allan was pretty much the department. And Norman Meller taught one course, I think. And we had visiting professors.

MK: And earlier, you mentioned a Laura Schwartz, she was in what department?

RK: She was an English teacher. She was a very excellent English teacher. Later she became Mrs. Korn. She married Alfons Korn.

WN: When you mention the talks that you had, maybe at Saunders’ apartment and so forth, did the talks center around Hawai’i or was it political issues dealing with the world? Do you remember that at all? In other words, was there a Hawai’i element in the teachings?

RK: Occasionally there might be reference to Hawai’i but generally, especially with Allan and with McCarthy, it was pretty classical. Both of them were very strong in philosophy. With Allan, we did the classics of Plato, Aristotle, Rousseau, and so on. With McCarthy, the courses I took were like logic, philosophy of science. So there was no attempt made to (refer to Hawai’i), unless you can illustrate something in terms of what was happening in Hawai’i.

MK: Did you ever get a sense of what they thought of Hawai’i’s society at that time?

RK: Well, all I know is that, they both enjoyed Hawai’i society, I remember McCarthy going back to the Mainland once and coming back and saying, “Jesus, I’m glad I’m back in Hawai’i. I go there and everybody looks the same.”
They both liked Hawai‘i. I don’t remember them going out of the way to say it, but they both felt at home. They liked the diversity although they never explicitly talked about it. Didn’t have to.

WN: I was wondering, too, at that time, there were a lot going on in terms of things like the laborer, the labor front, ILWU [International Longshoremen’s and Warehousemen’s Union] was in power, was there any of that in the discussions or in class, at that time, to give you folks an awareness?

RK: Yeah, sometimes, especially statehood was a hot topic. And, that’s another thing. When we were in the ASUH, we made a special attempt to push statehood. We testified before congressional committees. This is where Patsy Mink made her name. She was a student representative and she wowed the committee. Then she went to Washington to testify and then she decided she’d stay on and finish up on the Mainland. And debate topics were about statehood. So we were, in that sense, concerned.

We had a constitutional convention (on campus), the mock constitutional convention. When I was ASUH president, this was one of our big projects and we were kind of talked into it by Allan Saunders. But what we did was, most of us were for statehood. The territory did have a constitutional convention before statehood and formulated the so-called, “Hope Chest Constitution.” We preceded that, the students on campus. We had constitutional convention delegates elected. The elected delegates assembled at Farrington Hall where most of the sessions were held. And, as I recall, we had the chief justice or someone swear in an opening session and on and on we went. If you look in the records, the students at the convention—I wasn’t a convention member—but the students did produce a constitution. So we went through that process. So we were in that sense engaged. Oh, and Allan Saunders did run for office, I don’t know when. When was the constitutional convention? So this was after, I guess, I was a student. It was later on, and Harold Roberts ran as a delegate.

WN: I think it was 1950, was that the one?

RK: Yeah. That’s right, 1950.

WN: Was that what you call the “Hope Chest Con-con?”

RK: Right, this is before statehood, yeah.

WN: We should finish up the UH, before we get into the politics. (Chuckles)

MK: Okay. I have this other question. People always talk about the nisei vets talking among themselves about what they’d like to change, once they’ve got back to Hawai‘i. Did you have that sort of conversation with fellow vets?

RK: Well, as students, I think, there was some talk, although this became much more focused later on, especially as we returned from graduate training. Most of them became lawyers and then became more focused. And that’s where [John A.] “Jack” Burns came in, yeah.

MK: So that was later then?
RK: Well, yeah. As students, undergraduates, we were hoping to get to some graduate training, because the interesting phenomenon is, with the GI Bill, more of us could afford it. The GI Bill, I wish we could do a good study. Dan Inouye thinks that more Japanese Americans took advantage of the GI Bill than any other (comparable) group.

WN: In Hawai‘i or nationally?

RK: Nationally. I told (him), I wish I could do research and document it because I agree that, generally speaking, when I look back, so many of us took advantage of the GI Bill. Maybe you can just study the 442, 100, and the MIS and see what percentage, who came back, took advantage. I don’t know how you can find those records. But I had the same impression, I told Dan. I know (of) some 100th infantry boys who after high school went to work, but after they got out, a number of them came to the university.

WN: Is it per capita, you think, or was it sheer numbers we are talking about?

RK: Percentage, percentage-wise.

MK: You think there was a higher percentage . . .

RK: Who took advantage of the GI Bill . . .

MK: . . . among Japanese-Americans rather than, say, other ethnic groups?

RK: Yeah.

MK: Could it be that you were more informed about the opportunity or . . .?

RK: No. This is the Oriental drive. They said (it’s) Confucianism, stressing education. Previously, a lot of us wanted to go to school. Even my neighborhood, some of the older boys, but they had to help the family, couldn’t afford it. But they got in the army and they survived, they came (home). I can think of two or three older boys in the Waikiki community who, as a result, didn’t go back to Castle & Cooke [Ltd.] or wherever they were working, they came to the university. And of course, it opened up (opportunities). Before that, we thought you could be a schoolteacher, or if you’re lucky, your family could afford to send you to law school or medical school. But after the war, it became possible, especially law school. George Yamamoto, who was a sociology prof . . .

END OF TAPE ONE

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RK: I understand that George Yamamoto was working on a dissertation pointing out that after the war, the GI Bill made it possible for the nisei—instead of just aspiring to be schoolteachers as they did before—to become lawyers. There are good examples. Sakae Takahashi was already a teacher. I guess, Masato Doi. I think Matsy Takabuki, on and on it goes. Morio Omori.

WN: I’m just wondering, if the GI Bill affected admissions standards at all? I don’t know about Mainland. But, say, here at the University of Hawai‘i, I was wondering if more
people were able to come here, even if maybe prior to the war, they wouldn’t be able to qualify academically?

RK: I don’t think so. I think most of them could qualify, but it was finances that kept them out. I don’t know, maybe the administration was much more friendly to having people with GI Bill come in, I really don’t know. I’m interested in (the) GI Bill because I think it was something that really changed the face of this country.

But, one version is that, there were opponents of the GI Bill when it was proposed in Congress. I guess I may have told you that when I went to enter the army and I went to say goodbye to Paul Bachman, who was then dean of faculties, he said to me, “If you can come back alive, the government might pay your way to graduate school.” And he was right. The GI Bill was in the works. I should look this up in the congressional records, but I’m told that the Ivy League presidents opposed the GI Bill, in some sense thinking that this would open the floodgates to the hoi polloi (and) lower standards. That’d be interesting to note. But in this country, it’s been a continuous battle overcoming the elitist philosophy. In many ways, the GI Bill helped to overcome that.

MK: Also, you mentioned in your own situation, having the GI Bill also allowed you to work less and free up time for other things?

RK: Well, yeah. It made it possible to say to my parents that I can make it on my own because I have the minimum. I got married in the meantime, but my wife Mildred was already working as a schoolteacher so she had her salary which helped. We could make it. And the GI Bill carried me through two years of undergraduate and three years of graduate work. I got the maximum, whatever it was, but it saw me through five years of schooling. They paid for your tuition, they paid for books, and they gave you an allowance.

I must say, when I was at the University of Minnesota on my GI Bill, I met students from Japan. One of them, (was a) very delightful character. But, one day he says to me, “You have GI Bill.” He says, “I have GI Bill, too.” He says, “U.S. Army is paying for my schooling here. I have a scholarship and I have a monthly allowance. I know your GI Bill, you have a monthly allowance of $125 or something.” He says, “I have more than that.” He laughs, he says, “Your army defeated my army.” He was in the Japanese army. And he says, “Your country is very generous.”

(Laughter)

I don’t know how much. He was getting $150; I think, I was getting $125. He had a U.S. Army scholarship.

MK: And then before we leave the topic of, say, UH, I was wondering, how were the relations between the regular students and the veterans?

RK: Of course, the veterans are men, older. I think they got along well, maybe too well with the young girls, because a lot of them did marry the younger girls, as I look back. But I don’t think there was any kind of friction or anything of that sort.

MK: And then you also mentioned that, while you were still a student, you got married?

RK: Well, yeah. I got married when I graduated in ’49, before I went down to graduate school.

MK: How did your family take to that idea of your marriage?
RK: What did I say? Did I say '49?

MK: Forty-eight?

RK: I got married in '48. I just had my 52nd anniversary. So that was my senior year. But, Mildred, my wife, was already teaching. She was teaching at Farrington. I had my GI Bill. We got married in the summer—oh yeah, that's another thing. I went back on active duty. When I came back here, I went back in the reserves.

By the way, I went back to Fort Shafter. I guess my boss in Japan liked me because for my army service, I got two commendation ribbons for doing meritorious work in occupation duty.

But anyway, I still remember being called, so I took my mother and she was very proud. We went to Fort Shafter to get the decoration. I was familiar with Fort Shafter then because after I got discharged from the army, they asked us to stay in the reserves. For some of us it was good because there was a small pay attached to it. So during the summer, I went back on active duty for three months. So you got paid and I got promoted to first lieutenant. So you get your pay and you have all the PX [post exchange] privileges, which was helpful. When I first married, I can go to the PX and buy the essentials. And my tour of duty was very pleasant. I lived in Kaimuki then and I got assigned to Fort Ruger, which was an active fort then. Because, I guess, I was in intelligence, I became the intelligence officer for a month at Fort Shafter S2 [army designation for the intelligence component].

MK: What would an intelligence officer be looking into at that time?

RK: Oh nothing, a lot of paperwork. You got to read reports, supposedly confidential, about Russia, or about this or that, and so on. But primarily, I must say, it was more out of wanting to be helped financially. Maybe it was a patriotic thing to do, too. In fact, I think, as I look back, I was assigned to S2. When they reactivated, in a sense, the 442nd as a reserve, I guess I got assigned there as S2, but I didn't stay long. There wasn't anything that we really did in an organized way. When I went off to graduate school, I resigned, because I couldn't go to meetings and things of that sort, and I was never a good military man anyway. (Chuckles)

MK: I'm wondering, shall we continue or shall we end here?

WN: Are we done with the UH?

RK: That's it. Let me think if I know anything more about the UH.

WN: . . . from the UH before we go up to Minnesota?

RK: When I think about it, there were quite a number of things that we did. I was trying to recall if there's anything significant when I was in school.

MK: You were involved in the statehood effort . . .

RK: Yeah, I think I said earlier, one of the nice things was as soon as I got elected ASUH president, the army called and said, they have all these books that they want to get rid of and these were all copies of John Dewey and Shakespeare and all that stuff. So we hauled
And then I think, during that time, ASUH also helped to complete the lower wing of Hemenway or something?

Yeah, that was why the big carnival was held by Ray Ho. I wasn’t here then. It was a very successful carnival, and they raised a lot of money. Ray Ho ran it and he did very well so they expected him to become ASUH president. And Ray Ho and I became very good friends, to this day we (still) are.

Oh yes, another thing that we did, I remember, as ASUH president, I along with Ray Ho and with John Phillips, Haole guy. The three of us represented the ASUH and we went to a student council meeting. I remember going to Los Angeles, where John Phillips had some relatives. But we also attended the beginning of the UNESCO [United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization], the UNESCO meeting in San Francisco. So we were there for that meeting, representing ASUH at the UNESCO meeting, which we thought (was) great. (The UNESCO preamble read): Since wars (begin) in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men we got to have peace. Guns into plowshares and all that. So the ASUH was active on that score, too.

For example, the carnival was one thing, it was before you got there, but I was wondering, was raising funds a priority?

Yeah, as far as I know, Hemenway Hall was built not by tax money. Well, there’s a tax on the students. As undergraduates, even before my time, what they used to do was have—they strong-armed you. As you registered, each student, someone literally twisted your arm and said, “Okay, five dollars for Hemenway Hall,” for the student union. That’s how they raised the money.

That was in addition to the student fees?

Yeah. Whatever the student fee was, they wanted an extra five dollars or whatever it was. It was a lot of money in those days. We kind of forced---it was before my time they started doing it. That was before my time, they built the first part of Hemenway Hall. They may have gotten some other funds. Of course, it’s named after a great regent, Charles Hemenway, who was really a sweet guy. He was just before my time—I met him—and he was a very caring person, great friend of the students. He may have donated some funds, too. But later on, they wanted to expand the building. And so they had this carnival, which I understand—as I said, before my time—(was) very successful and they raised a great deal of money. They were able to finish the building.

Also, during your years at UH, did you participate in other activities besides ASUH, say, the frats or social clubs or debate teams or that sort of thing?

No, I did not. We sponsored debate teams, we sponsored the constitutional convention, but I myself didn’t run or participate actively in those.

I’m wondering, running for ASUH president, did you look at it as an opportunity to sort of apply what you’re learning with political science, or did you look at it as part of your academic career or your academic studies, or was it just something like an extracurricular activity for you?
RK: I guess it was a combination. I had come out of this—it was probably as my wife says then—the McKinley upbringing under Miles Cary where he emphasized student activities and we had great fun. McKinley was trying to be a community. In many ways, what Cary was trying to say was not that we’re all equal but we should all participate. We’re a community—staff, teachers, students. Let’s hear what we have to say and see if we can work things out. And I mentioned not all teachers went along with that.

But here at the university, I thought we were older, we could handle things more ourselves. Since I was active at McKinley, which was the biggest high school, I was sophomore class president, student body president, and freshman class president, when I came here, I guess I was just tabbed as someone who’s got to run for office. So when I got back, even before I got back, my friends were asking me, “When are you coming back?” Before I know it, before I even registered, I was running for ASUH president. Bob Kimura, he was another veteran, who later became a member of the house of representatives, he was my campaign manager. He and Ralph Miwa, oh, they were twisting my arm to run.

MK: In those days, did ASUH officers have a stipend, like they do nowadays?

RK: I don’t think so. I’m not sure what expenses were paid. I did get this trip to the Mainland. I don’t know if we got any stipend. But we had to contribute a lot—oh, it’s another thing. It wasn’t my car, it was my brother’s car, but I had to use my car to pick up the cheerleaders.

(Laughter)

WN: Tough assignment.

RK: The worse was, it was tough when I …. The football team from the Mainland is coming in, so I got to go gather the leis, pick up the girls, take them to the airport, and stand in the background as they greeted the football players, the visiting team. Pearl Luning, one of the beauty queens, she lived in Kaimuki, somebody lived in Liliha, and I had to go around, pick them up. I don’t think they paid for my gas.

(Laughter)

MK: You would think, there was someone else who would have to do that.

RK: There were others who were doing it, too. A lot of it was do-it-yourself. As I said, I wanted a bulletin board, so I asked Rusty Kawamura, whose father was a contractor and he became a contractor. So Rusty said, “Okay.” He put up a very nice bulletin board for me up in front of the Hemenway Hall, so we could put up our notices of meetings, or coming events.

WN: I was wondering, too, your vice-president or your treasurer and secretary, did people run in teams those days?

RK: No, not really because I ran alone, not as a team. I think Rosemary Tongg was my vice-president, Evelyn Taira was the secretary, Ed Sato was the treasurer. I didn’t know them until I got elected, until we got elected. I mean I knew them casually, but we didn’t run as a team.

MK: Did they all have prior careers in student government at their respective high schools?
RK: I think so. Oh yes. And at the university, because they were all seniors.

WN: Besides the fact that it was a political office, was there politicking involved to get votes or anything like that?

RK: Oh yes, there's a lot of politicking. I was amazed when I came back. What did they do? There're all kind of gimmicks. They give gum or something, and they have flyers and leaflets and stuff. It was quite intensive. They had posters. The question was, did they picture me in an army uniform or not? So some posters carried me in an army uniform. In some ways it's good in contrast to Ray Ho, he didn't go in the army.

WN: Shall we stop here?

RK: Okay. One more and we can get through, yeah?

MK: Next time, it's the University of Minnesota.

RK: Well, there isn't much there.

WN: Okay.

END OF INTERVIEW