

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, FULLERTON

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Japanese American Project

Japanese American Evacuation

O.H. 1382

WOODROW ODANAKA

Interviewed

by

Patrick H. West

on

July 16, 1973

This is an edited transcription of an interview conducted for the Center for Oral and Public History, sponsored by California State University, Fullerton. The reader should be aware that an oral history document portrays information as recalled by the interviewee. Because of the spontaneous nature of this kind of document, it may contain statements and impressions that are not factual. The Center for Oral and Public History encourages all researchers to listen to the recording while reading the oral history transcription, as some expressions, verbiage, and intent may be lost in the interpretation from audio to written source.

Researchers are welcome to utilize short excerpts from this transcription without obtaining permission as long as proper credit is given to the interviewee, the interviewer, and the Center for Oral and Public History. Permission for extensive use of the transcription and related materials, duplication, and/or reproduction can be obtained by contacting the Center for Oral and Public History, California State University, PO Box 6846, Fullerton CA 92834-6846. Email: coph@fullerton.edu

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, FULLERTON

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Japanese American Project

INTERVIEWEE: WOODROW ODANAKA

INTERVIEWER: Patrick H. West

SUBJECT: Japanese American Evacuation

DATE: July 16, 1973

W: This is an interview with Mr. Woodrow Odanaka by Patrick West for the California State University, Fullerton, Japanese American Oral History Project in Whittier, California, on July 16, 1973 at 7:00 p.m.

Mr. Odanaka, could you give me some background on your parents, their life in Japan and their subsequent immigration to the United States?

O: Well, my father was from a farming family in Nagano-ken in central Japan. He spent some time in the Russo-Japanese War in the army over there. Then after that he immigrated over here. He came to the United States in about 1908 or thereabouts, and got a job as a shoemaker at the outset, I believe. Well, up in Seattle he met what, I imagine, you would call a picture bride. My mother came also from Nagano-ken. And they started the family up there. I don't know exactly how long they were there. They moved from Seattle to Portland, Oregon, and then eventually down into Los Angeles, where I was born.

W: Could you describe the process of a picture bride, how this process works in respect to intermediaries?

O: Well, as far as I understand it, a person interested in obtaining a wife would notify people specializing in that sort of thing, who are called baishakunin. They look around for suitable young ladies and contact both parents of the two interested parties, and arrangements are made. Generally it's sight unseen; they come right over, you know, after due process. The arrangement is made and the wedding takes place. It is rather simple,

I imagine, although there are a lot of agreements and arrangements made in Japan.

W: Did the Alien Land Laws or the citizenship denial provision affect your parents, your father in particular?

O: Since we were not farmers here in the United States, landwise it didn't affect us much. My dad was more like a shopkeeper-type tradesman. He did have a wholesale business, a produce market down here in the late 1920s and the 1930s. They lost that business during the Depression. We never were able to own a home; we always had to rent one, because of the land laws preventing property ownership by an alien. Personally, in our family, it didn't affect us that much, other than the fact that we couldn't buy a house. We always had to rent one.

W: Some of the Japanese families were able to put property in a son's name.

O: Oh, yes.

W: Weren't you able to do this?

O: Well, I think that by the time the son in our family was old enough to be a major, twenty-one, I don't think we were that interested in owning the home that we were in. I don't think we could afford it, anyway.

W: This was here in Los Angeles?

O: At that time, yes.

W: You owned a produce business?

O: Yes, that was early, prior to the Depression. After that, he lost that wholesale business in the early thirties--I recall this because of the 1932 Olympics. We lived in a small mama-papa store on the west side of Los Angeles on Santa Barbara Avenue.

W: What is a mama-papa store?

O: Well, it is small; it is not a large store. It's a small store that carries everything: meats, delicatessen products, produce, canned material, and bread. It would be considered a small neighborhood store as opposed to the larger supermarket-type stores.

W: Did you find any problems in discrimination as far as purchasing from wholesalers?

- O: No, in that area there didn't seem to be, because the Japanese were fairly well into that business. There was a lot of them and there wasn't too much discrimination, out-and-out discrimination, that I knew about. There may have been something that my dad never said anything about. The produce was pretty well run by Japanese, or there were a lot of Japanese in the business, both wholesale and farmers. So in the food business, I think, there wasn't too much discrimination because there were an awful lot of Japanese in that business.
- W: Was this a predominantly Japanese community?
- O: No, it was a totally white community.
- W: Did you have any problems of assimilation?
- O: I didn't. No, we didn't. We were in that situation where, if you are a very small, small minority, the people living there don't feel threatened at all, you know. I had no problems going through school and none of my brothers or sisters did, either.
- W: How many were in your family?
- O: One older brother and two older sisters.
- W: You were the youngest, then?
- O: Yes.
- W: You had no problems at all in school? You were completely accepted?
- O: Yes. In my elementary grades I had no problems. No one ever called me any derogatory names that I recall. Nothing really traumatic ever happened to me that I remember. That was in my elementary years. Then when I went into junior high, we moved into an area where there were predominantly minority groups, Japanese and Negroes, and at that time, since it was a predominantly minority area, there were no problems there, either.
- W: What area was this?
- O: This was still on the west side. Well, we lived right off of Normandie, which is basically a Japanese area. Normandie--it would be Jefferson and Normandie, that general area. They used to call it the Seinan area.
- W: Were you still in the same business?
- O: Yes. At that time, I think, we went to a little larger

store. Instead of having a complete mama-papa store, we moved into a larger market. We just had the produce department.

W: In the years or months prior to Pearl Harbor, there was a rise in tension between Japan and the United States. Was there a similar rise in tension among the people of the neighborhood?

O: No, not so much. We had grown up with the people in the area, and they knew us. We are talking about other races, right? Ethnic groups?

W: Yes.

O: They were mostly Negro and they accepted us for what we were, as people, and there were no big problems. I think when some of the young people ventured outside of the community and got into areas where they were not normally recognized, you know, then they may have run into--I heard of circumstances where they did run into small problems of prejudice.

W: At the time of Pearl Harbor itself, on that day, how did you find out about it, and what were the immediate reactions of both yourself and your family?

O: Well, at that time my older brother was already in the service. He had been drafted in 1940. He was in the service medical corps. I remember that Sunday; we were sitting there. It was a kind of shock to all of us that it did happen. Personally I was just a young kid then; I was all excited, you know, and adventuresome in that respect. I really didn't have any feelings that I was going to be in any harm or danger, being here in the United States.

W: Did you have any feelings of allegiance toward Japan?

O: Well, in a sense not . . . Well, no. I remember before the war started, we read Japanese books and things like that, and looked at them. Our family was not totally allied with Japan. I think our ties were more or less severed as far as Japan was concerned, in respect to relatives, friends and so on. Our roots were pretty well established in the United States since the children were all growing up.

W: Was your household language Japanese or English?

O: Well, my mother and father would speak Japanese, but then we could communicate back with them. They could communicate in English since they did have a business

where they had to be able to communicate in English. But you know, it was fairly poor.

W: Did you go to a Japanese language school?

O: Yes, in that area almost all of us did at one time or another. I didn't start until late. Most kids started when they started elementary school and went right along with it all the way through high school. I think those kids with that type of background would have a little stronger allegiance, but then again, those people that I knew that were like that, they didn't have that much allegiance for Japan at all. They may have rooted for them deep down inside, but when it really came down to it, well, all my friends and everybody ended up in the service.

W: You said your brother was in the service. What happened? Did he remain in the service throughout the war?

O: Yes. What happened there, I remember as soon as that happened, on December 7, they were all more or less quartered and told to stay where they were and "Don't go out." They couldn't go out and do anything. Then they took them off all the--there was a period when they were sort of in limbo. They didn't know what they were going to do, or what. They [the government] finally decided that . . . They went two ways, they established that language school, and also the 442nd. My brother went into the language school. Pretty quickly he got into that.

W: So he remained in the service throughout the war?

O: Yes.

W: Were there any local repercussions, as a result, from the white people or the Negro people in the area?

O: No, not immediately, not in our area. I think in the outlying areas there were some problems.

W: Did you know of any beatings or this sort of thing?

O: I personally didn't hear of any at that time. There were certain areas like, say, down in San Pedro, where there is a very strong pro-Japanese attitude. As far as that community down there, like the Terminal Island group, things were pretty rough down there.

W: When did you first suspect that you might be relocated or interned?

- O: Well, you know, it started from the other end. We never really thought too much about the fact that we might be uprooted and taken into a camp or anything like that. I never dreamt anything like that would happen. It probably was in the newspapers when General DeWitt started to come on pretty strong about the Yellow Peril and all that sort of thing within the West Coast area. It being war-time, you didn't really know if he was telling the truth or what, since there was news censorship and all that sort of thing. In the papers, anyway, feelings got pretty inflamed. I think, as a whole, because of that, most of the Japanese people, more or less, played it cool and didn't go out of their way to make themselves too visible out of their own little communities.
- W: There were numerous stories of sabotage which were unsupported, but there were many stories in any event. Do you know of any cases where this might have actually happened?
- O: In all the years that we have gone over this and talked about it and people have researched it, I don't think that anybody has ever come up with any proof that any actual acts of sabotage did happen. Even in Hawaii, were there any? I don't think there were any reports, even in Hawaii, of American citizens involved in acts of sabotage. There may have been Japanese citizens in Hawaii who may have tried it. But with all the research done, I don't think I have heard of any cases.
- W: The government froze most of the money that the Japanese people had in banks. Did this affect you in any way?
- O: No, it didn't. Our bank account was frozen but there wasn't too much in it. In those days, people weren't too wealthy anyway. We, in particular, were not wealthy. We weren't poor, and since we had a store we managed to eat. No, it didn't have any dire effects for our family. But there were a number of people who lived in our area that were fairly well off. One gentleman who had been in the wholesale produce business was very well off. I think, just about in the 1940s, his business had grossed over a million dollars. This was very unusual. He had just at that time begun to expand in his own financial way; he started to export machinery to Japan. You know, he didn't realize what was happening. And as soon as Pearl Harbor happened, that evening of December 7, the FBI came by and picked him right up. They really had everybody covered.
- W: Do you know of any other examples concerning the FBI and what methods they used?

O: Well, they came by. There were a number of people picked up in our area; they were men who were very active in social groups. By social groups, I mean strictly community groups or those who were Japanese school teachers, businessmen, and many who were more or less financial, political, or educational leaders of the community. They were picked up right away. They picked them up first and asked questions later. But the FBI apparently had a pretty good line on each one, on suspicion; there was no actual proof of any wrongdoing or anything like that. They were just people who possibly could be . . .

W: There were reports of discrimination in that retailers and wholesalers would not sell to Japanese people. Did this affect your store in that you couldn't get supplies?

O: No. Up until the time that we were ready to leave, our store didn't have any problems, not any that I was conscious of. I don't recall hearing anything about that.

W: Was your business affected in any way by boycotting or just by not buying from Japanese people?

O: No, the store was in an area that was all Caucasian, sort of middle-class Caucasian. It was a walk-in type of business. We delivered and so on and had been there a number of years, so I think there was very little adverse reaction?

W: Among Caucasian friends, you found no reaction whatsoever?

O: No, very little.

W: They treated you the same as before?

O: Yes.

W: When did you first realize, and what was your reaction to being interned?

O: Well, it was kind of a demeaning thing to be herded around. You know, you get put into buses and trucks and hauled into places with everybody standing there looking at you. You go in and soldiers are at the gates and barbed wire and so on, and they are all looking at you, you know. All of a sudden you are taken out of your little community, where everything is pretty much in order, then you are taken out to a place like the Santa Anita Assembly Center, where we went. It's kind of a shock. But yet, for me personally at that time, it was kind of a great adventure. You know, a kid--I was seventeen years old, but a seventeen-year-old now is a

lot different than a seventeen-year-old was then. It was exciting and interesting, and at the same time it was kind of embarrassing to have that done to you. I wasn't an angry person at that time.

W: How were you notified?

O: I think a letter came to everybody, and there were big posters of notification on telephone poles and all the businesses had the information, you know, about relocation and the dates and the time. And everybody was notified by mail, I believe, as to where and when to be, and what you could take and what you could not take. You would just have to get rid of all your other possessions or store them, if you could afford to.

W: How much time did you have between being notified and actually being interned?

O: Gee, that was a little while ago. (laughter) I really don't remember. Let's say, for us personally, I think we had sufficient time, maybe two or three weeks.

W: It varied in different places?

O: Yes, it varied in the different areas. In some places it was just a matter of days. Like in San Pedro, I know they were told to move, and I know it was pretty hairy there.

W: What were you able to do with your store and your possessions?

O: Well, my father just had to give the business--the store--up. It was just like kissing it good-by.

W: He wasn't able to lease it?

O: No, not at that time, the reason being that my parents didn't know when they would be coming back and how long it would be. My father was just more or less renting that department. So he just gave up that business, period. We sold the truck to those people there at the market. I forget for how much. We stored our belongings with a Negro neighbor, what few belongings we wanted to keep. And he was nice enough to put them in his garage and keep them. And I think we just gave stuff away. That was about it. We didn't have much of real value.

W: What were you allowed to take with you?

O: Clothes, a few books, personal belongings, anything that

you could carry. Blankets and clothes, and that was about it.

W: How were you transported?

O: We went in a bus.

W: Where did you actually start from or where did you have to report?

O: I think we started from in front of a church. I really don't remember where we started from. I believe we all met in front of a church.

W: Then you were transported by bus to Santa Anita?

O: Yes, to the assembly center.

W: Do you remember what sort of security they had? Were there soldiers?

O: Yes, there were soldiers there; they were armed; there were machine guns up in the watchtowers; there was an armored truck around, and it was all barbed wire.

I guess the first contingent that went to Santa Anita Assembly Center went right in and cleaned out the stables and made apartments out of those, and then they constructed wooden barrack-type buildings with tar paper and composition. I forget what they were like--about four units to a barrack.

W: How were you quartered, with just one family to a unit?

O: Yes, each family, and if it was a large family they got two units. By that time, my brother was in the service and my two older sisters were not with us. The older sister was married, and she went to an internment camp in Idaho because she was living up in the Bay Area at that time. The other sister was married and her husband was in the service. So she moved back to Minnesota because her husband was stationed out there at Camp Savage.

W: This was prior to Pearl Harbor or prior to internment?

O: Prior to internment, since she had been with the family during the war. But then as soon as relocation started, she moved out to Minneapolis and got a job out there as a secretary.

W: Could you describe the assembly center itself?

- O: Well, the whole big parking lot at Santa Anita Racetrack was all full of barracks. It was laid out with a large road from the main entrance and then a road leading up to the grandstand. It was blocked off into certain areas relative to the mess halls, and there were about five large mess halls. You sort of related your area to the mess hall that you went to.
- W: Did you do any cooking at all in the apartment, or was all your food provided in the mess halls?
- O: No, I don't think there was any cooking within the units. There were only light bulbs, you know, an electric cord hanging down with a light. That was about it.
- W: Were there beds?
- O: We had cots and the mattresses were straw mattresses. They were just large empty sacks filled up with straw.
- W: Did the Japanese people make them?
- O: No, they were supplied. I think they were using army cots, and then later, when we went to Colorado, I believe they had a regular, solid-piece mattress with a spring under it, as I recall.
- W: What sort of internal organization was there inside of the assembly center?
- O: Well, they did have a council. They developed a council, after awhile, according to the certain blocks or areas; and the representatives went there to talk over the functioning, the maintenance and so on, the care of the area. They didn't have too much say-so as far as policies or anything like that goes.
- W: These were all Japanese people?
- O: Yes, Japanese Americans.
- W: And they would take their ideas or suggestions to the camp director?
- O: Yes.
- W: How long were you in the assembly center before you went to Colorado?
- O: Well, let's see. We went in there about March and we must have been there about three or four months. I'm not really sure.

W: Then you were transported by what means?

O: By train. From there we loaded onto trains, and they were relics! Our group went to Amache, Colorado.

W: Were they passenger trains with seats?

O: Yes.

W: Were they overcrowded?

O: It wasn't overcrowded, no. It wasn't like a cattle car, but it just so happened that the trains that we had were really old. They had outlets for gaslights. I don't know where they got such old cars. (laughter)

W: Could you describe the concentration camp itself?

O: Well, the camp was called Amache, in Colorado. The town where this train stopped was Granada, and it was about a mile and a half to two miles south of the town, right on the edge of the Dust Bowl. It looked like the desert out there. It was laid out in a square pattern and the barracks there were a little more substantial. They had a little heavier composition material on the walls. Basically, they were four units per building, two small ones and two large ones, depending on the size of the families. They were laid out in small blocks in a grid pattern like a, b, c, and d one way and 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 the other way. Within each block, there would be about twelve or sixteen barracks, about six or eight on each side, and in the center was the mess hall, and the community bath, toilet facilities and washing facilities.

W: Washing for clothes?

O: Yes, laundry.

W: What sort of food did you have?

O: At the outset, most of it was government supplied. We never had it very hard, you know. The diet was pretty well prepared, I would say. We couldn't really complain about the food. It might have been a little on the starchy side. But later, the people in that area were allowed to go out and start farming in the unused farmland, to develop it and start growing their own produce.

W: This was outside of the camp?

O: Yes, just outside of the camp, and they started farming and growing the produce for the camp. It improved the diet or the menu considerably.

W: Were any of the products sold outside of the camp?

O: I don't know if they had actually set up that. I don't know. I don't think so.

W: Did you have any contact at all with people outside of the camp?

O: Well, let's see, we got there in the fall of 1942, I would say. After a few months, things eased off a little bit. The people were not quite so uptight about it in the community. It was a very small town down there. There was a train stop and a drug store and a few houses, and that was about it. We were allowed to go down there. You could sign out and get a pass and go down there to the drug store. Actually, there wasn't anything there, but just the thought of being able to get out of camp and go down there was a big deal. And then we would come back. No big excitement. There were work parties allowed to go to various towns, like Lamar, which was so many miles west of the camp. Apparently there was a labor shortage in the whole area, so young men were recruited, and they were paid to go out and work as farm hands. I went out and topped beets for a little while and made a few bucks. Others were out on farms for quite awhile.

W: Who paid you?

O: Well, the farmers paid the men the prevailing wage.

W: Were you able to earn any money in the camp itself?

O: Yes, it was almost like a communistic type of situation. There were three levels of employment: the professional type got, if I recall, nineteen dollars a month, the medium got sixteen dollars, and everybody else that worked got fourteen dollars a month.

W: What were the various types of jobs at the different levels?

O: If you worked in the kitchen you got fourteen dollars. If you were a foreman or something, you got sixteen dollars, but if you were in an administrative or professional capacity, such as a doctor, you got nineteen dollars. Later, during the winter, there was also a clothing allotment. They set up a deal where you could buy so much, and you could order things through the Monkey Ward--Montgomery Ward--or Sears catalogs. And everyone was buying pea jackets and things like that over and above, and jeans and shoes and things like that.

- W: Was this clothing allowance over and above your salary?
- O: Yes, everybody got a certain amount allotted to them.
- W: Could you describe any government that was set up inside the camp that was run by the Japanese people?
- O: There, too, I think they set up a council-type situation where they discussed whether they wanted improvements or could make improvements, or the schooling, the type of school and what could be done. They set up certain rules in respect to the use of materials. Overall, there wasn't too much discontent. They knew that they couldn't do much. They knew that they had only so much leeway to do things, and within that area I think that between that group and the camp director, things went pretty well. I don't recall there being much confrontation between the governing bodies and the director.
- W: Were there any cases of violence within the camp?
- O: We apparently didn't have much within our camp, not that I recall. You mean head-to-head confrontation between the administration or the guards and the people?
- W: The guards versus the interned people.
- O: No.
- W: Or among the Japanese people themselves?
- O: In Santa Anita there was one great big so-called riot. I am trying to recall just what started it. Oh, yes. The tension built up after a few weeks. There was a group of young fellows who were pretty disturbed about the whole thing being set up there. And there were rumors that this one person was a Korean, and he was a spy, more or less, and that he would infiltrate the Japanese people and everybody would think he was Japanese. They said that he would then report to the director and so on. Well, I personally did not know for sure. I think it was true but I don't know for a fact. But that started it off. This group of younger men in their mid-twenties tore up the administration building pretty much. They just tore the whole place up, and then everybody was getting upset and wanted to do something. It just so happened that I was out in one area where they all confronted this one security guard--he was a civilian security guard, not an Army personnel--and it was just a matter of their . . . I mean, it was that people had gotten to the boiling point with no real obvious reasons for picking on this man, but he was a symbol of the jailers, more or less. He got pretty

scared and I don't blame him, because there were a couple hundred people all around him and everything. But he kept his cool enough to walk into one of the mess halls and phone the office, and all the administrative personnel just slowly moved out of the place, and that day and night they were patrolling. The MPs moved in and they were patrolling the whole camp area with armored half tracks and machine guns, and searchlights and everything else.

W: This was inside?

O: Yes, at Santa Anita. Now that was the only, well, there were . . . There were some confrontations between separate Japanese groups, like the San Pedro group which was considered to be very pro-Japan, and the guys from the west side, where I grew up, who were not as pro-Japanese. There would be confrontations between them and so on--small ones, no big things. They just had prior gang affiliations from outside, and dumped all in one place, they were trying each other out, which is a normal community-type situation. But in Manzanar, they did have a shooting. You have probably heard of that already.

W: Yes. Where were the guards in relation to the camp? Were they visible from inside the camp or were they stationed away from it?

O: No, like in Santa Anita, they were always in a watchtower. And they would ride in a jeep around the perimeter. Very rarely did the MPs come inside. Like at Santa Anita, there were also these security guards. I didn't know why they had both, but I guess they were more or less to act like a police force. There wasn't much confrontation between them. In the Amache relocation camp, the fire department was manned by the interned people, the Japanese there. I don't recall any policing going on. I never ran into a situation there. There were no robberies, no murders, or things like that.

W: Were there any cases of anyone trying to escape or get out?

O: In our camp, no, not that I know of. I have heard of cases in other camps where guys did. It was not that hard to sneak out, if you had someplace to go and knew where to go. An awful lot of the guys, like I was telling you earlier, left camp on work permits and outside farm permits. Some were gone a heck of a long time on their own.

W: You mentioned before that you were allowed to go into

the local town. Was it difficult to get a pass to go into town?

O: No, I don't think so. I believe there was a quota for the number of passes each week. I recall going in only once or twice, but I wasn't in camp an awfully long time. I left in February 1943. I went in once that I really recall specifically.

W: Do you recall how the school system was set up?

O: Yes, it was set up with outside teachers, and most of them were credentialed, I guess, or certificated. I really don't know if they were. I imagine they were, though. They were hired through the WRA [War Relocation Authority]. I only recall one teacher who really impressed me. I don't remember any of the others I had. They were good teachers; they were competent. They didn't have any material to work with--it was an awful tough job for them, in that respect. But I think that most of the kids were pretty good, and didn't give them a bad time. They were glad to go to school.

W: Something to do, I guess.

O: Yes.

W: Were you a senior in high school when you were interned?

O: Yes.

W: And so your senior year was disrupted. Did you finish high school and get a diploma in the camp?

O: Yes, there was a big void from the time we left the city of Los Angeles. We didn't go to school at all in Santa Anita, although part of the time was over the summer vacation. We left in about March or April. The effect was like having just the fall semester. Actually, I didn't miss a heck of a lot because summer vacation took up that slack. But we did have a diploma and I got credits, so I went right from there into college.

W: When did you leave the camp and under what conditions?

O: Well, my situation was a little unique in that my sister, who had gone to Minneapolis, helped me. My brother-in-law had been shipped out way before that, he was in New Caledonia. My sister was working for a lawyer who happened to know some people in a small college called Carleton College in Northfield, Minnesota. I mean, everything was just done for me--they said, "Here is your train ticket, you get up there"--practically every-

thing. I was practically enrolled before I knew what was happening. I got up there . . .

W: Was this provided by the government?

O: No, this was all done on our own. I mean, I had permission to go to college, and it was okay with the government. If I wanted to go to college, it was all right with them. We had train fare, and maybe the government did pay, I don't recall. I think they set that up a little later in the resettlement program. I really don't recall. Maybe my sister paid my way. It was so long ago, I don't remember the financial part at all. I think my sister helped me out getting started there, and I paid her back later.

W: Did your parents remain in camp?

O: They stayed in camp. They had nowhere to go at that time. They were there for, let's see . . . I went to school that fall and for the next spring and that summer. So about the end of 1944, I was drafted, and my parents were still in camp at that time, because I came back to Colorado then.

W: This was as a visitor?

O: As a visitor, because I was being drafted out of Colorado, not from Minnesota. That was so that I could go with all my friends who were leaving at the same time. We all went together. I visited my parents there. From there, we were shipped out of Denver. We traveled up to Denver on a train, and then we went into service down in Camp Blanding, Florida, as infantry training replacements for the 442nd Regiment.

W: When you left camp, did you run into any problems?

O: Well, prior to that, my brother had already been overseas in Guadalcanal with the 25th Infantry as an interpreter-translator. He had come back, and while I was up at school, they had shipped him out to all these different camps trying to drum up volunteers for the language school, trying to get more people to enlist in that. You know, that became a big issue. Why volunteer for the service when they stuck you in this camp? That was really a hard nut to crack as far as trying to decide which way to go. I think, deep down inside, everybody knew they were getting the dirty end of the stick, in this way. Yet there was a certain sentiment, too: this is that old rah-rah stuff of going out and proving yourself and showing them that you weren't what they thought you were. You weren't a "yellow Jap" or

something like that; you were a "red-blooded American" and so on. I don't know if you recall--you may not, you are probably too young for that--the All-American Boy type of thing and all that. That kind of thinking prevailed. But at the same time there was a bit of confrontation among the young people, and some took a position so far extreme that they got themselves to such a point where they had to volunteer to go back to Japan. I mean, they resisted it so much and they argued so much about this, that a certain group was sent to this camp down in Crystal City Texas and from there they shipped out and repatriated themselves back to Japan. The funny thing was that when we got over to Japan, after awhile, we ran into that same bunch. They came to us for handouts. They were in bad shape. But that is another story.

W: When you went on the train back to Minnesota to go to school, did you run into any problems there?

O: No, they were very nice people in the Midwest, as far as I was concerned, and everyone else seems to feel the same way. We were accepted very well, you know. There was not that anti-Japanese sentiment that had developed on the West Coast, because there was no hostility or competition or anything like that. It was a new thing to the people in the Midwest and so the Japanese Americans were accepted, more or less, as what they were. We were very surprised, people were real nice. We had very few problems.

W: Did you remain in the 442nd?

O: Well, here's what happened. When we went down to Camp Blanding, there was a company of oldtimers, guys who had been in the service since before December 7, and they were all being retrained to be shipped out as replacements for the 442nd. They were a few weeks ahead of us. This was a new program, I guess, this replacement training for the 442nd. The original 442nd had trained in Mississippi as a whole regiment, and they had gone overseas already. So we were the second batch going in, and we were the draftees. The kids who were in the 442nd were all enlistees, but we were the first unit as draftees to come into this camp for replacements. We went through this whole seventeen weeks of training, preparing to go over to Europe. Then the week that basic training was over, when we got our orders--oh, how many of us?--possibly thirty or forty of us were pulled out and sent to Minneapolis to the language school which had, by that time, changed to Fort Snelling. Then the rest of the company went on to Europe as replacements.

- W: So you remained at the language school or in the service, in general, until when?
- O: Well, from there I went to language school. I was there until August 1945, I guess it was. Just as the war ended we shipped out to the Philippines, and we were there a couple of months, I guess. Then we moved up to Japan and did occupation service.
- W: When did your parents leave the camp?
- O: As soon as the war was over. I think it was about 1945. They moved up to Minneapolis and worked for a family. My mother was a housekeeper and my dad was a gardener around the house. They were there for maybe a year or so. Then by that time, about 1946 or the end of 1945, my brother was out of the service and they all moved to Chicago and got jobs in the Chicago area.
- W: There was an application for leave clearance which included the loyalty questions. Number 27, for example: "Are you willing to serve in the Armed Forces of the United States on combat duty, wherever ordered?" Did you have to sign this?
- O: The loyalty oath--that was a big contention.
- W: And there were a lot of people who were against it?
- O: Yes, there were many.
- W: And then the other controversial question was Number 28: "Will you swear unqualified allegiance to the United States of America and faithfully defend the United States against any or all attack by foreign or domestic forces, and forswear any form of allegiance or obedience to the Japanese emperor, to any other foreign government, power, or organization?" This meant to the Issei that they were giving up any allegiance to Japan and citizenship, plus they were denied citizenship here, which would make them stateless people.
- O: It put them in a heck of a spot. By that time they had been in the States for twenty-five or thirty years already. They knew that there wasn't much for them to go back to in Japan and a lot of them, I think by that time--about 1943 and 1944-- they already knew that Japan was going to lose the war anyway. That might have influenced them a little bit. But most of them, my dad and everything, had no intentions of ever even thinking of going back to Japan. There was nothing to go back to there, anyway. Their family was pretty stoic. They take things and accept them as they are and go from there. Fortu-

nately, everything worked out well.

W: When did you return to California?

O: Well, let's see, I got out of the service in 1946. My folks were still in Chicago then, so I went back to Chicago. I went to school from there, back to Carleton College. I stayed there and worked in Chicago in the summertime, and graduated in 1949. After I graduated, another friend and I drove out here to California. My folks stayed in Chicago though. My sister was already out here, so I stayed out here and got a job.

W: Did you encounter any discrimination?

O: I didn't run into any, no.

W: How about in employment and that sort of thing?

O: Well, just at that time in 1949, jobs were pretty hard to get, so I really couldn't say if it was due to discrimination or just due to times being bad.

W: Were you able to apply your college diploma to your work?

O: Oh, no! I didn't, no. I ended up working in a nursery, a wholesale nursery. I thought I was going to apply my knowledge, but I did not.

W: Could you, in summary, give your opinion as to what you believe the Japanese American people feel about the internment?

O: Well, I think there were some people who really lost a lot of money, the farmers and businessmen who were just plain uprooted and got back about ten cents on the dollar when they were allowed to apply for restitution that the government gave them. So there was a financial loss. Philosophically or morally, I don't think it was the right thing to do. But at the same time, the war sure changed people's thinking. And I don't think it will ever be done again; I hope not. But, actually, I think as far as the Japanese people in California are concerned, it was a good thing. It pulled them out of their stereotyped roles of life--the gardener, the storekeeper, the farmer and the college educated kids who never got beyond the produce market. They were pulled out of that and got out of the stereotyped roles and other areas and came back and managed to get into the mainstream of things here. So I think in the long run, actually, it did the Japanese people a favor.

- W: Do you think that the reason that this could happen was that the American people felt bad about it, and thought they had done something wrong, and were trying to make amends?
- O: Partly. At least I think so, in a sense, you know. And I think they were more willing to accept them as persons rather than as stereotypes.
- W: Can you think of anything else we should cover?
- O: Well, oh, there are a lot of little things. But basically you have covered everything pretty well.
- W: I would like to thank you very much on behalf of the California State University, Fullerton, Japanese American Oral History Project.
- O: You're welcome.

END OF INTERVIEW

ODANAKA

INDEX

- Alien Land Law, 2
- Amache, Colorado, 11,12,13, 14,15,16
- Assimilation, 3,4,19,20
- Attitudes
 - toward Japan, 4,5
 - toward Japanese Americans, 2,3,4,5,7,17,19,20
 - toward relocation, 6,7,8, 19,20
- Bay Area, California, 9
- Businesses
 - produce, 2,6,19
 - retail grocery, 2,4
 - wholesale nursery, 19
- California, State of, 19
- Camp Blanding, Florida, 16,17
- Camp Savage, Minnesota, 9
- Carleton College, 15,19
- Caucasians, 5,7
- Chicago, Illinois, 18,19
- Citizenship, 2,18
- Colorado, State of, 10,16
- Crystal City, Texas, 17
- Culture, 1
- Denver, Colorado, 16
- Depression, The Great, 2
- De Witt, General John L., 6
- Discrimination, 3,19
- FBI, 6,7
- Fort Snelling, Minnesota, 17
- Granada War Relocation Center
 - clothing allowance, 13
 - farming, 11
 - internal government, 13
 - living conditions, 11
 - school system, 15
 - transportation, 11
 - work leaves, 12
- Hawaii, 6
- Idaho, State of, 9
- Internment, 6,7,8,9,19
 - notification of, 8
- Japan, 1,2,4,6,17,18
- Japanese Americans, 5,10,13 16,17,19
 - land ownership, 2
- Japanese language school, 5,7
- Language, 4
- Lamar, Colorado, 12
- Los Angeles, California, 1,2, 3,15
- Loyalty, 17,18
 - oath of, 18
- Manzanar War Relocation Center, 14
- Minneapolis, Minnesota, 15,17
- Minnesota, State of, 15,16,17
- Mississippi, State of, 17
- Montgomery Ward, 12
- Nagano-Ken, Japan, 1
- Negroes, 3,4,5,8
- New Caledonia, 15
- Northfield, Minnesota, 15
- Odanaka, Woodrow
 - brother, 3,4,5,9,16
 - brother-in-law, 15
 - father, 1,2,4,16,18
 - employment, 1,2,19
 - immigration to U.S.A., 1
 - grocery store, 2,4,6,7,9
 - military service, 16,17,18
 - mother, 14,16,18
 - relocation, 8
 - resettlement, 15,16
 - sisters, 3,9,16
- Olympic Games of 1932, 2
- Pearl Harbor, bombing of, 4, 6,9
- Philippines, 18
- Picture brides, 1,2
- Portland, Oregon, 1
- Prejudice, 2,3,4,19
- Property, ownership of, 2
- Repatriation, 18
- Resettlement, 15,16
- Russo-Japanese War, 1

ODANAKA

INDEX

San Pedro, California, 5,
8,14
Santa Anita Assembly Cen-
ter, 7,9,10,13,14,15
 internal organization, 10
 living conditions, 10
 riot, 13,14
Sears and Roebuck Company, 12
Seattle, Washington, 1

Terminal Island, California, 5

United States Army, 5,9,16
 17,18
 Japanese American battalion,
 5,16,17

War Relocation Authority, 15
West Coast, U.S.A., 6,17
World War II, 5,18

Yellow Peril, 6