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ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Akira Otani (AO)

April 14, 1993

Kewalo Basin, O'ahu

BY: Michiko Kodama-Nishimoto (MK)

MK: This is an interview with Mr. Akira Otani at his office in Kewalo Basin in Honolulu, O'ahu, Hawai'i on April 14, 1993. The interviewer is Michiko Kodama-Nishimoto.

Okay. For today's interview we're going to start off real nice and easy by having me first ask you for your mother's name.

AO: My mother's name is Kane Otani.

MK: And your father's name?

AO: My father's name is Matsujiro Otani.

MK: When and where were you born?

AO: I was born in the district of Kaka'ako, Honolulu, Hawai'i.

MK: And what year was that?

AO: Nineteen twenty-one.

MK: And in your family, how many boys and girls were born to your mother and father?

AO: There were, all told, nine children. Five boys and four girls.

MK: And what number child are you?

AO: I was number five.

MK: And of the sons, you're . . . ?

AO: Number two.

MK: First of all I'm gonna ask you to kind of concentrate on your early life in Kaka'ako. When you first born, when you were a small boy, where did you live in Kaka'ako?

MK: People who lived outside of the family parcel.

AO: Immediately next door we had a two-story building which was occupied by, I think, two families who were related to each other, but who were not related to our family at all. And across the street, there were mostly Japanese. As far as I can remember, most of these people were somehow (connected with) the fishing industry. They were either fishermen or people engaged in work related to the fishing industry. For instance, the people living immediately next door to us, the master of the house was, I think at that time, working for Hawaiian Tuna Packers [Ltd.] as an ice delivery man. I cannot remember what his relative living together with him, did.

MK: And then outside of that immediate area, what sorts of people lived there?

AO: I think, generally speaking, they were still mostly people who were somehow connected to the fishing industry. The reason for this is we lived maybe, two or three blocks away from Kewalo Basin. And Kewalo Basin being, at that time, the harbor where many of the fishermen moored their vessels, there were many people who were either fishermen or people connected with the industry, living in that particular neighborhood. Also in the very early days, the tuna cannery was located about, oh, maybe two, two-and-a-half blocks from where we lived. And the cannery, having been located there, and utilizing many women as workers in the cannery, there were many of the people living in that particular neighborhood working for the tuna cannery.

MK: You know, the tuna cannery, did they employ people on a daily basis or on a seasonal basis?

AO: I cannot remember exactly. However, I would think it must have been on a daily basis, (as long as the catches were being brought in).

MK: And what did the women do at the tuna cannery?

AO: Well, again, as far as I can remember, I think they were the workers who did the cleaning of the fish and packing of the fish that was cleaned, after the fish was cooked. The menfolk did most of the butchering of the fish, prior to cooking. The fish was butchered, cleaned, put on racks, put into cookers, and after the fish came out from the cookers on the racks, the racks were rolled to the cleaning tables where the women were engaged in cleaning the fish so to speak. Getting the bones out, getting the blood meat out and generally preparing the fish before the so-called cooked fillets were cut into forms, ready to be put into the cans.

MK: You were mentioning that the women worked at the tuna factory. The men were fishermen or sometimes doing other work related to the tuna packing. Were there other jobs in the fishing industry that these Kewalo Basin people were involved in?

AO: Well, there was some netting work involved. The principal fishery, at that time as far as I can remember was *aku* fishing. And in the case of *aku* fishing, fishermen used nets to catch the bait fish which is called *nehu* or small anchovy-like fish. So the fishermen would go out into the bays, Honolulu Harbor, Kewalo Basin, (Kane'ohē Bay) and any protected areas, catch the *nehu* by using nets. The bait was kept alive in the main fishing boats. Then the fishermen went out fishing for *aku* using the live *nehu* (as bait fish). So these are the people engaged in the fishery, who were people who could have been mending the nets that were used to catch

the *nehu*.

MK: And you know, you mentioned that the people near you were *tokoronomono*. So they were from Yamaguchi-*ken*?

AO: Primarily Yamaguchi-*ken*. That is correct.

MK: What other *kens* had people living in this area?

AO: We had Okinawans, who were very active in the fishing industry. There were also people from---I can't think of the *ken*. Oh, there were also people from Wakayama-*ken*.

MK: You know, with people from Yamaguchi-*ken*, Okinawa-*ken*, Wakayama-*ken*, how were relations between these different *kenjin*?

AO: Oh, as far as I can remember, the relationship was very good. There was no animosity, no discrimination. I think the people got along very well.

MK: And you know, in those early days, was there any one *ken* that reigned supreme in the fishing industry? Yamaguchi-*ken* people or Wakayama-*ken* people or Okinawa-*ken* people?

AO: I don't know for sure. But all I know is the Wakayama-*ken* fishermen were very good. The Okinawans, the Okinawan people (also) were very good. There was one Okinawan family, in fact, who lived in one of the houses that I talked about in our own parcel, and they specialized in fishing for turtles. And they fished for turtles and they butchered the turtles. At that time, I remember that some of the turtles that were caught by these Okinawan people were brought into the market, and as a child I remember butchering or filleting some of the turtle meat that was brought into the market. And what we normally did was after we got the meat off the bones, they were frozen into five-pound parcels for eventual sales to restaurants, hotels, and so forth.

MK: And you know these early Japanese fishermen, did they own the vessels that they fished off of?

AO: I don't remember. I cannot tell you for sure.

MK: So we've talked, primarily, about the Japanese living in your area engaged in the fishing industry. Were there other ethnic groups in that vicinity, too?

AO: I think there were some Portuguese and some Filipinos. But I don't think these people were engaged in the fishery.

MK: And, you know, every neighborhood, there usually are stores. How about in your neighborhood in those days?

AO: Yes, in our neighborhood at the end of our street, which was Kō'ula Street, *mauka* of where we lived, there was one general merchandise store with *papa-san*, *mama-san* selling candies, some groceries. And next to it was---I think it was a tofu-making factory, if you want to call it that. There was also something else there, but I can't quite recall. And then half a block

from there, there was again a store selling similar goods. Then in the other direction, *makai* and on Ala Moana [Boulevard] there was another general merchandise store which my aunty operated. It was more or less in the middle of what we used to call at that time a Filipino camp. The whole block, or whatever you want to call it, (was a) bunch of houses in which practically every house was occupied by Filipinos.

MK: And in those days, where did neighborhood people congregate or hang out together socially?

AO: I tell you, that's very interesting because right across (from) where we lived, there was more or less an open piece of ground and for some reason or other that place (was) kept open for children to play in. But whether or not it was Saturday night or Sunday night, the church people came and as soon as it got dark these people would put on slide shows, and did (a) lot of, whatever you want to call it, (Bible) storytelling. (I think they were mission house people.) Christian religious groups. So, that was one primary gathering place, so to speak.

MK: Did people gather socially at those stores that you mentioned, too?

AO: Not that I can recall, because. . . . They might have, but as far as we were concerned we were just kids. And, you know, they were just plain old stores to us and places that we could go to pick up some dried abalone for ten cents apiece or *crack seed* for whatever it cost. And it was a good place for us kids but as far as whether or not adults gathered, I don't know.

MK: You know you mentioned that sometimes that the church would use that open ground, yeah. What churches were nearby?

AO: I don't know the name. As far as I know, I think there was a mission house that was a block and a half away. And it was these people that came to conduct these services and put on these slide shows. But it was Christian shows because they talked about Jesus and (other Bible stories). But it wasn't a Buddhist service, it wasn't Shinto or anything else like that. It was Christian services.

MK: How about your family? In terms of religion, what was your family?

AO: My family, my father was a very religious man. He believed in Shintoism and he also was a very strong Buddhist. So as far as Shintoism is concerned, he used to take (us) children to the Izumo Taisha which used to have a shrine in Pālama. As far as Buddhism is concerned, there was a Buddhist church on. . . . Can't think of what the street name is. But it was more or less, oh about, less than ten blocks away. In the direction of the [*Honolulu*] *Advertiser* building.

MK: You know you mentioned that your dad believed in Shinto. Did he believe in certain Shinto rites that were connected with fishing?

AO: Well, actually I think the people involved in Shintoism, were people that were either farmers or fishermen because that was the god to which fishermen and farmers looked to for help, for divine aid in getting good crops, good catches. In that respect, inasmuch as my dad was engaged in the fishing business, you know, he always looked to Shintoism for help, for assistance in things of that type.

MK: When you look back on your dad visiting Izumo Taisha, what do you remember him doing in terms of Shinto practice, for bringing on good catches or prosperous years?

AO: What was the question again, now?

MK: He being a Shinto believer, and being a fisherman, what did he do to insure a good catch or a good prosperous year?

AO: I don't know. I think that's a pretty hard question to answer. I don't know. I guess he just prayed hard.

MK: I was wondering if he made certain offerings to the gods at the Shinto shrine. Or went through certain rituals or something that may have stood out in your memory.

AO: Yes, the offerings, well offerings are constantly made so it's almost something that comes naturally. So I don't think that is something special. Naturally he used to take his kids over to special festivals and so forth, but except for going to the shrine to attend special ceremonies, making special appeals, I don't think he did anything like that. Even today, for instance, whenever they [Izumo Taisha] have festivals or different type of ceremony, as a matter of practice, as a continuation of what my dad used to do, I still make [offerings]. You know, give 'em fish, different kind of fish or this or that as offering. I don't think that's anything special. It's sort of like a natural act to do already.

MK: Kind of part of your life?

AO: Yeah.

MK: And in terms of your whole life, your family life, what was your mom's role in the family?

AO: Well, I'll tell you, as far as I can remember, she gave birth to nine children, but my father worked very, very hard, that's for sure. He went to work before we got up in the morning and he came home way, way, late in the night. So, we, as children did not get to see him very often. But in the meantime, my mother also worked. I don't know when she did it, but she also worked in the fish cannery. She also, (at times) work(ed) in the pineapple cannery. Some of the things I remember is that in spite of all this, I can see her in the kitchen and I can. . . . One of the things that really stands out in my mind is, I guess we must have really dirtied our clothes as young kids because, the thing I remember is she'd have to boil our clothes to make it clean. 'Cause otherwise apparently, you know, the clothes are so dirty, she'd have to boil it and then wash it and then hang it up to dry. I can remember the outside wooden stove constantly being put into operation with a big five-gallon can, full of water and soap, while our clothes was being boiled and cleaned. Chee, like I say, I don't know when, having given birth to nine children, having brought us all up, she did work in the fish cannery, she did work in the pineapple cannery.

MK: Was there anyone else to help take care of the kids?

AO: Well, initially of course, my oldest sister. And I think this was general. Almost every family, the oldest, I think, had to help the parents look after the younger kids that came after her. I do know that my sister did a lot of work. In those days, I don't think there was any outside

help.

MK: And your father, you know, at the time that you were a boy he already had a stall at 'A'ala [Market] so he was working over there. He was taking care of that business.

AO: Yeah. I don't remember. I think I was too little to remember him having gone out to peddle fish on his back and doing things of that type. Because by the time I was old enough to try to give what little help I could, he did have a stall and selling fish over the counter. And progressively he went into other activities. Like I got to see him begin the manufacturing of fishcakes and get to enlarge his wholesaling of fish activities. But yes, he already was established, operating a fish stall, as well as doing the fish wholesale business.

MK: You know when your father was doing the fish stall and the wholesale business, what was your mother's role in the business?

AO: My mother had no connection whatsoever with the business. She never had anything to do with the selling of fish, as far as I can recall. I think she---I mean she had nine children, I think she had her hands full already.

MK: (Chuckles) With your dad taking care of his fish stall and the selling of fish, what role did he have at home, with nine kids?

AO: I think very little. Because as I said earlier, most of the children hardly got to see him. He'd be gone by the time we got up, go to school, and he never did come home when we still had our dinner. And so we hardly had dinner together. In fact, I can't remember except for special events like Thanksgiving and New Year's is about the only time I think we had dinner together.

MK: And you know you were mentioning that your oldest sister helped with the taking care of the younger kids and so on. What kinds of responsibilities did the children have at home, especially the older ones?

AO: Well I don't know. It's pretty hard. I think it was almost every person for himself, really, because. . . . Of course, I can't remember when I was too little. But as we grew up and started going to school, the one thing I remembered was what I told you earlier which was, I could see my mother washing or boiling our clothes to get 'em clean. We walked to school. We walked to grammar school. From grammar school we went to Japanese[-language] school. By the time we got home I guess it was four or five o'clock I can't recall exactly.

MK: You know you were mentioning that you folks used to walk to school. Tell me about the schools that you went to.

AO: Well, the grade school I went to was Pohukaina School. And located, what, about four or five blocks away from where we lived. Either the kids in the neighborhood or maybe together with a brother or a sister we walked to school. But I thought, as I look back, schools were pretty good in the sense that, I think the teachers were conscientious. They looked after our welfare and it seems as though they went beyond the teaching responsibility in that they saw to it that we took our cod-liver oil every morning, they saw to it that we somehow got our lunches. And I don't know. As I look back it seems as though I have nothing but good

memories as far as these teachers are concerned.

MK: Do the names of any of those teachers kind of stand out in your memory?

AO: Yeah, I recall there was a teacher named Mrs. Lee. I think she must have been my first or second grade teacher. Inasmuch as she stands out, as you mentioned, I think she was a good teacher. She seems to be, as far as I can recall she was very good to me. Then there was also a Mrs. [Margaret "Mother"] Waldron. Actually she was teaching several grades above my own class, but for some reason or other, just because my older brother was in her class I was given special permission to leave my own class. Whether I was in the first or second grade, I was given permission to leave that class and just to take a spoonful of cod-liver oil from that class. For some reason---I can't recall why it was. I think it was because I was so little. But I do recall that I was given special permission, I used to go to that class, take a spoonful of cod-liver oil, get back to my own class. But those two names I recall, Mrs. Lee and Mrs. Waldron in grade school.

MK: How was their teaching methods back in those days?

AO: I don't recall. I think we sang a lot of songs and did a lot of playing in the yard. But over and above that I can't recall.

MK: How about discipline?

AO: I think discipline was very good because. . . . I think there was a lot of spanking going on because I do remember having been spanked myself. I think there was a special way of being spanked, I guess. Instead of being spanked on an open palm, I think we had to bunch up our fingers and we got spanked right on top our fingertips (whenever) they thought we were not behaving or something like that. That's something I recall.

MK: Do you remember why you got spanked?

AO: Not for any reason except that I must have been bad. I don't know.

(Laughter)

MK: You know, you had mentioned that there was Japanese in the Kewalo Basin area, there were some Filipinos, there was some Portuguese. When you went to Pohukaina School, what was the mix like among your schoolmates?

AO: I don't recall. I don't remember. I know they lived in certain houses not too far away. But I cannot associate these kids, as far as the time spent in school is concerned. I can't recall it. I don't remember.

MK: And, you know, when you were going to Pohukaina School, kindergarten, first grade, second grade, all the way . . .

AO: No kindergarten. I think [Pohukaina School started from] first grade.

MK: When you were going to the elementary phase, were you given any work to do at your dad's

place?

AO: No, no.

MK: And at the same time you were going to elementary school, what kind of Japanese[-language] school training did you get?

AO: Well, inasmuch as the Japanese school, the Kishida School as you mentioned, was about half a block, not more than one block away, it was very simple for us, as soon as elementary school was over, to walk the extra half a block or one block going over to the Japanese[-language] school. And (there)---I can say for certain that the discipline was way, way different. We had to toe the mark there, there's no question about it. We had to do our studies. We couldn't get out of line too much because we were. . . . As far as discipline was concerned at Japanese[-language] school, these teachers were permitted to do a lot of things which people today could hardly imagine that things like that were happening.

MK: They were very strict then?

AO: Very strict. This must be in the upper grades, maybe sixth, seventh, eighth grade because the activities were different. I remember for instance there used to be an open lot not too far away from the Japanese[-language] school. And before class was started some of us boys used to go into the. . . .

END OF SIDE ONE

SIDE TWO

AO: Well, this particular lot was a fenced up area in which there was, I guess there was some sand being kept there, probably in preparation for some construction work or whatever. But being young boys, what we used to do was go over the fence, go into the sandlot, and just play in the sand. On one occasion, somebody, apparently, must have told the owners of the parcel that there were some kids out there playing, we got caught. Well, we didn't get caught really, we jumped over the fence, ran away. But I remember the next day the principal addressed the student body and said, "All those people that were playing in the sandlot, report to my office." Naturally, being very obedient, we all went to the office and we got hell for it, for having gone into somebody else's property, which was actually not permitted. In that respect, discipline was very tough. [There were] instances even in class where students talking among themselves when they're supposed to be paying attention to what the teacher is saying [were punished]. I remember one male teacher, what he'd do was, whatever was in his hand whether it was chalk or eraser, he'd throw it at the bunch of kids. Or sometimes if it went beyond that, he would hit 'em. And one occasion he even made a judo throw at one of the kids, you know. I mean, that's the type of discipline that was practiced during those days without any kind of repercussion.

MK: And how much Japanese did you actually learn at the Japanese[-language] school?

AO: I think we all did pretty well. I think for some reason or other we learned lots and I think the

truth of that was after graduating from that Kaka'ako School [run by a Mr. E. Kishida], and I think it went up to eighth or ninth, eighth grade I think, I'm not sure, [the students continued to do well]. Whatever it was, after we got through that school the next level was either to go to Hongwanji or to Chūo Gakuin. In our case we went over to Chūo Gakuin which was in Nu'uaniu Valley. I thought that when we attended Chūo Gakuin, all those kids (who) were our classmates that went from Kaka'ako did very, very well at Chūo Gakuin. Scholastically.

- MK: How about the teaching methods and the discipline? Were they the same at Chūo Gakuin as they were at Kishida Nihongo Gakkō?
- AO: Well, actually, it's hard to make any kind of comparison because by the time we went to Chūo Gakuin it was at a different level. You know, it was ninth grade, tenth grade or whatever it was. So it's very difficult to make any kind of comparison.
- MK: But I've heard, you know, in those days, the Japanese-language schools used to teach children *shūshin* or ethics.
- AO: That is correct.
- MK: What can you tell me about the *shūshin* curriculum in those days?
- AO: Well, I think it did us a lot of good. And of course, it's hard to put your fingers exactly on why or what. You know it's more morality than anything else. As far as I'm concerned it helped me out, you know, to do right against wrong. I think it's very good.
- MK: How did they teach you right from wrong in those days?
- AO: (Chuckles) Well, I don't know. I guess it was in the stories or in the studies that were covered in the prim[er]. You know, how certain children were rewarded for doing the good things or the better things as against how they were punished [if] what they did was wrong or not right. In that respect, I think, yeah, it is through these study work and stories that were related in the books. Plus, you know, in *shūshin* you talk about *oya kōkō*, *on*, *haji*. All those things. I think it's all though the stories that were related in the books and the stories themselves made you realize that there are certain things you're not supposed to do or you gonna suffer by doing so or you gonna benefit by doing other things which are considered good. I don't know.
- MK: What were your feelings about going to Japanese[-language] school in those days?
- AO: Well, for one thing we had no choice. Secondly I think, in a sense, we enjoyed it because even if we were to go home early, there wasn't very much to do. Whereas if we stayed in Japanese[-language] school, we had more time to play. We also engaged in extracurricular activities in Japanese[-language] school. At Kishida I also went to the kendo classes. So, you were with boys or people your own age and got to do things that maybe you like to do. When you think back now, you could do things you enjoyed while going to Japanese[-language] school.
- MK: And then I know that when you were still going to Japanese[-language] school, you went to Kishida Nihongo Gakkō then to Chūo Gakuin. You went to Washington Intermediate School?

- AO: Well, actually, Washington came before Chūo Gakuin, right. Because Pohukaina School was elementary school. It went up to sixth grade. So seventh, eighth, ninth, was at Washington Intermediate.
- MK: And when you got to Washington Intermediate, how did you find school?
- AO: Oh. In what respect?
- MK: What did you think of school?
- AO: I think I enjoyed school all the way through. Although I don't think I was an especially good student. And I think I had to work extra hard as far as my studies are concerned. I didn't consider myself bright so I had to work extra hard. I don't recall too many teachers there in Washington Intermediate. That's about it I think, as far as intermediate school is concerned.
- MK: Were you involved in any extracurricular activities at Washington?
- AO: No. I participated in those class sports that was part of the curriculum, but not extracurricular, not after hours or anything to that effect because for one thing I was too small. Physically I was small. So no room for me to engage in any other kind of sports.
- MK: And I guess you were also going to Japanese[-language] school?
- AO: Yeah exactly. I somehow can't place it, but I think I don't know at what grade Kishida ended. Whether it was eighth grade. But I think it was eighth because I recall having. . . . You see, we walked to school those days. And we walked from Kaka'ako to Washington Intermediate in Pāwa'a there. I think there was a time when we also walked from Washington to Chūo Gakuin in Nu'uaniu Valley. Then of course, Washington was an intermediate school so it ended at ninth grade. And I don't know if I continued going to Chūo Gakuin after I started high school.
- MK: I know you mentioned you went about two years, yeah?
- AO: I don't remember exactly. All I know is, I can remember many times walking home from Chūo Gakuin, by the time we got home it was dark.
- MK: You know, when you were in intermediate school at Washington. Did you help your dad at work on weekends?
- AO: I don't think I did at that time. I think I started either in high school or after I started going to the university.
- MK: Yeah, I know that you went to McKinley after Washington. Now, what sort of program did you pursue over there?
- AO: Well, I think, I don't know what you call it today, but in those days I think it was college prep, eh. So in order to attempt to go to the university, anyway, you were required to take—I don't know what they called it, whether it was called solids. You take algebra, geometry, chemistry. Courses of that type. Because up till I started going to school, there's nobody in

my family that went to college. For one thing, I think, my parents couldn't afford it, number two, they all (had) to work, start earning a living. All my three sisters, my older brother. So I was the first in my family to go to college.

MK: Yeah, but when you were going to McKinley, did you have it in your mind to go to college?

AO: I think I did, yes.

MK: Were you purposely encouraged to do so by your parents, or not?

AO: That's a good question. I think to a certain extent I was. You know, I think my dad, in some form or other, encouraged me to go to college. I think this is the reason why it became part of me to try to get into college. But I don't know in what form that took as far as the encouragement was concerned, you know.

MK: For yourself, you know, going to McKinley, graduating in 1938, what were your ambitions? You know, as a teenager?

AO: Well, I think it's a little difficult to say, but at one time I felt I wanted to become a lawyer. But then as time went on, as I became acquainted with the kind of work my father did and saw how hard he worked, somewhere along the line I gave up the idea of wanting to become a lawyer and felt that my place was to help my dad. So, in line with that desire, when I started going to college, I majored in business.

MK: And, I was wondering, why did you choose to go to University of Hawai'i, instead of elsewhere?

AO: Well, number one, I didn't feel my family could afford it, going to some other college, going to the Mainland or whatever. Number two as I might have mentioned earlier, I felt my dad could use some help at work. And by staying close to home, attending University of Hawai'i, I could still help him during the weekends. In that respect, you know, I had no desire, whatsoever, about going to the Mainland to go to college.

MK: You know, you mentioned that you would help him on weekends. What type of work did you do at your dad's place?

AO: Well, what I did was I would count the sales proceeds, count the cash that had been accumulated during the week and I would prepare the deposits that would be made on the following Monday. So that was my work to some extent. And occasionally my dad would send me out to go out for collections. You know, to pick up some checks here or there and so forth.

MK: Did you find your college training helpful to you?

AO: Not at that time. Not yet.

MK: What did you kind of concentrate on in college? You said, business, but what aspect?

AO: Well, during those days they didn't specialize the way they do today. It was all general

business. I would say it's just business in general.

MK: And it did come in handy later on?

AO: Oh, yeah. It did come in handy. Although I don't know what kind of student I was, but I think it helped. I wasn't very strong in accounting. But as far as the overall knowledge of business administration, that was the important thing as far as I was concerned.

MK: I know that you were going to college and you were a senior when December 7th came. Now, until December 7th came, did you have any inkling that something might occur between the United States and Japan?

AO: Yeah, as far as I was concerned, not a bit. No inkling whatsoever.

MK: And when December 7th came, what happened?

AO: Well, on that particular morning, December 7, we had earlier stated, of course, after completing the renovation of the ['A'ala Market] building, my dad had planned on having a small reception for the contractors and the people that assisted in the renovation work. And for that reason, I had gone to the market to help in the preparation of getting the food and other related work before the guests would arrive. And so, we were there way ahead of time when Pearl Harbor was attacked. So I was there, at the market, doing bits of work when all hell broke loose and the rest is history.

MK: So, the attack occurred, and you realized it was war. What happened? You're at the marketplace. . . .

AO: Yes, we heard all the---what eventually was found out to be, the bombing of Pearl Harbor. We sensed the sounds that were coming from that direction, from the direction of Pearl Harbor, were not normal. We turned the radio on and listened to excited voices talking about Pearl Harbor having been bombed. We jumped outside the building to look in the sky and saw planes flying around and saw several Japanese planes which could be identified because of the rising sun insignia. We saw puffs of smoke indicating they were being fired upon and I remember very well even seeing white puffs which indicated that our forces were firing blanks. But after listening to more reports coming on the radio, we finally realized that it was war, we were being attacked. And there wasn't much we could do, we heard, we closed up, we stopped whatever we were doing, we closed up the market building as best as we could and headed for home. I know very well that I was very nervous. I had a very difficult time driving home. But somehow made it home. And it wasn't very long after that that things began to happen at home.

MK: What happened at home in Mānoa?

AO: Well, I don't [know] exactly---at what time or how long it took, after reaching home, but we had some people come to the front door and they were Caucasians. Not military people, but they claimed to be FBI [Federal Bureau of Investigation] people. They wanted to know where my father was. My dad who had been at the market, had been somewhat shook up, was in his bedroom resting. They wanted to know where he was, to have him come out. Of course they---I know at least one person who had a (handgun) in his hand, waving it around. And the

moment somebody brought my dad out---he was still in his *yukata* with, I think with a sleeveless sweater. But the moment he walked out, this man with the (handgun) just shoved it in his stomach and said he was taking my father in. We all wanted to know why. He says, "Can't you people realize that Japan attacked Pearl Harbor," and he was being taken in. And there was nothing we could do to try and stop these people. There was more than one, but one had, I remember, had a (handgun).

So, my mother says, "Well, if you're gonna take him, take me too."

They said, "Well, you keep away." And kind of pointed the (handgun) at her this time.

So in the meantime, they were more or less half dragging him outside of the door. There was the car in the front. So my mother ran into the bedroom and said, "Well, if you gonna take him, well, give him some clothes."

So she went in to get something and actually came out with, I think it was an overcoat and a pair of shoes, and tried to hand it to him but they wouldn't let her give it to him. So after he got in the car, what she did was finally throw it into the car. That was it, and that was the last that we saw of him for quite some time.

MK: And you know when your father was taken away, what happened to his family?

AO: Well, naturally we're all down-hearted and I don't think there was much said. There wasn't much we could do. But before that happened, though---after they came my brother-in-law [Richard Toyoshiba], who was a police detective in the police department, lived right in the back. (He) lived in that house---well actually on the same property in a separate building. So somebody rushed over to call him and he came and tried to tell the people that he's a police detective and he wants to know what's going on. They kind of shoved the same (handgun) and pointed at him and says, "You keep out of this. Don't you know that Japan has bombed Pearl Harbor?" So there wasn't much he could do. So, the thing is, in answer to your question, there wasn't much we could do and seems like the rest is blank after that. As far as I'm concerned.

MK: I know that your father was taken away and eventually taken to Sand Island [an internment camp set up on O'ahu], and later to the Mainland, yeah?

AO: That is correct.

MK: You know while your dad was at Sand Island, what happened to the family?

AO: Well, tell you, I don't know. I know that my brother [Jiroichi Otani] took over the business. I don't know how much time had elapsed after that particular incident of my father having been taken away. But as best as I can recall, and I don't know how I did it, and how I got there, but I somehow, somewhere heard on the radio, they were announcing that all the people that were in the ROTC [Reserve Officers' Training Corps], University [of Hawai'i] ROTC, should report to the armory. Now, at that particular time, I was already a senior at the university. I had completed my two years of ROTC work at the university, so I was not in the ROTC at that time. But having heard this appeal being made on the radio, I somehow, and I can't recall how I ever. . . . From Mānoa to the armory, yeah, I don't know how I got there, but I

reported at the armory and volunteered for services with what they called at that time, the Hawai'i Territorial Guard. So, my having volunteered for services on that day, I cannot tell you how my family behaved, what they did, or how they survived or what. I can't tell you that, I don't know.

MK: As for yourself, when you volunteered your services at the armory, what happened?

AO: Well, it seems as though they grouped the different volunteers into different bunches, and handed the uniforms, gas masks, and a rifle, and started giving assignments with certain people being put in charge. I recall that the uniform I put on was way too big for me, it was khaki. I was put together with a bunch of boys or men. I think as far as this particular group was concerned, I think I was the only Japanese boy in this group. But I think our first assignment was the Pālama Fire Station. Different groups went to different installations for guard duty.

MK: And during that guard duty, did anything strange happen?

AO: No, no, nothing strange. No. We just took turns standing guard at the fire station. I don't know how long we stayed at this particular installation, at the fire station. I think maybe two, three days, then we were shifted over to a pumping station over in 'Aiea. Someplace in the cane fields and thereafter we shifted over to KGMB radio station. But we were shifted from one installation to another to another. In between we also went to Koko Head where they have a firing range. We got to fire rifles and got to know our rifles a little bit better. But as we heard, later, you know different groups got to the waterfront, power stations, other radio stations and so forth.

MK: And then as the days went by and you continued to serve with the Hawai'i Territorial Guard, what happened?

AO: Then checking back the records, I think it was about, must have been about six weeks thereafter I think [January 19, 1942]—and I can't recall exactly how it happened—but we were assembled and told that. . . . I don't know how it was put to us, but it ended by our being dismissed. Well, they say that the whole Territorial Guard was dissolved and therefore all men of Japanese ancestry were released. They reorganized as a new HTG, Hawai'i Territorial Guard without the so-called boys of Japanese ancestry. So, we were actually kicked out and we went back home.

MK: How did you feel about all that?

AO: Well naturally, I think we were---I think most of us cussed and bitched and were very unhappy. In fact, we were very mad because here we had volunteered because we felt our country needed us and we had left everything behind to serve our country, to protect our country. To be kicked out in such a fashion didn't make us very happy. Naturally we all bitched and cussed, but there wasn't anything we could do.

MK: So when that happened, what did you do?

AO: Oh, after that, inasmuch as I was still going to school, we started going back to school again. Then, I don't know how it was, but apparently some of the boys had gotten together with

people like Hung Wai Ching [director of the University YMCA and later, a prominent businessman] and Shigeo Yoshida [school administrator, Americanization advocate] and so forth who had been more or less been guiding and counseling some of the boys who were close to them. And I guess it was Hung Wai Ching, Shigeo Yoshida talked to them, the boys that they were close to and said—well, I think it's all history. I don't know in exact words and exact happenings. It ended up by Hung Wai telling these boys, "You know, you boys don't have to cry, why don't you guys offer your services in whatever capacity you can serve and see what they do. You guys don't have to cry over this." So a bunch of them got together and I think Shigeo Yoshida prepared the petition and passed the petition around at the university and I don't know I must have been close to where the petition was being circulated. I signed and I volunteered and I think it ended up by some 169, 170 boys signing. That petition was accepted and first thing you know, we were off again.

MK: And this time, what did you find yourself doing when you volunteered?

AO: This time we ended up at Schofield Barracks doing common labor jobs. Some of the boys ended up digging ditches, breaking rocks, building roads out in the plantation fields where the military. . . . Well, we did work which ordinarily, I guess, the military people did, but couldn't afford to spare the men. So we were---the group itself was attached to the 34th Engineers' Battalion I think. We became an auxiliary to this engineer battalion. So we did work, that type of work, which they felt they couldn't afford to spare their own people doing. So this is why we ended up repairing, or making road, putting culverts into roads where the military trucks passed, and building hutments that the military used for guardhouses and so forth. That type of work.

MK: How did you feel about that, becoming a labor battalion?

AO: Well, we still felt we were doing something that inasmuch as they wouldn't permit us to carry arms, we felt we were doing something for our country anyway. And inasmuch as all this work was being done as a group, moralewise, they all felt pretty good. We all---you know and because everything what we did, or everything what our group leaders, leaders like Ralph Yempuku or some of the others. Well, Hung Wai Ching came out often and although he wasn't with the group, he came out often. Shigeo Yoshida came out often. And our group commander was Richard Lum. He was a regular army man with the engineers. Tommy Kaulukukui came with our group. And there were couple of other. . . . I don't know whether there was another officer, but there (were) a few sergeants, Hawaiian sergeants that kind of overlooked or supervised what we did. But guys like Ted Tsukiyama, they became hutment leaders. We had three barracks, that the boys lived in. So each barrack had a barrack leader, then under the barrack leader we had gang leaders. We had different gangs. We had gang leaders—we were all separate—each gang doing different types of work. So we all felt that since the government didn't see fit to permit us to carry arms, well, we were doing something to help out our country. Well, the morale was high. In the meantime we also, to occupy time, we played football, we played baseball, some guys golfed. Inasmuch as we were at Schofield Barracks, we had access to the library. I think some professors or instructors came from the university to conduct some night classes and things of that type.

MK: All that time while you were with the VVV [Varsity Victory Volunteers, also known as Triple V], did you know what had happened to your father?

AO: No. All we know is somewhere along the line, I don't know exactly when, and I don't know whether it was by letter or not, but they were informed that he was in a concentration camp in the Mainland somewhere. Eventually we found out that he was at [an internment camp in] Lordsburg, New Mexico.

MK: And you know with your being in the Hawai'i Territorial Guard, being in the VVV, and your father being taken away, how did you feel inside?

AO: Well, I, you know, I've been asked that question many times. But I still felt that even though my father was taken in, in that manner, I still felt that America was my country and my country was attacked and I wanted to do whatever I could. I don't know how some of the people would think of the type of thinking that I might have had, but that was my feelings then that I still wanted to do what I could for my country.

MK: What did your sisters and brothers think of what you were doing?

AO: Well, I don't know because I didn't give 'em a chance to express their opinions. In each instance, I just went. In the first instance I just told my mother, when I volunteered for the [Hawai'i] Territorial Guard, I said, "I'm going." And that was after my father had been taken in. Even at that time they didn't know where I was because for maybe two, three weeks, couple of weeks at least anyway, they never knew where I was although they knew I had volunteered.

END OF SIDE TWO

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MK: You were saying that they didn't know where you were.

AO: Yeah. So, that was when I was in the Territorial Guard. But once I was in the Triple V [VVV], they knew where I was and we got to get leaves. After a while we got to have leaves and got to go home on weekends. So it wasn't too bad at all. But we did stay in that organization for close to eleven months, I think, you know. Until things started happening where the 100th [Infantry Battalion] started making good records and good reports [were] coming out. So when they finally---when the big boys in Washington decided to commit the people here to volunteer for the 442[nd Regimental Combat Team], our Triple V was dissolved and the boys were told they could go home.

MK: You told your mother initially that, "I'm gonna go volunteer for the Hawai'i Territorial Guard." Did she have anything to say to you at that time?

AO: Well, as far as I can recall, I don't think—I think she was in shock already, the fact that my father had been taken in. So I don't know. But as far as I can recall, she didn't have very much to say, and I guess I was determined to go anyway. I can't give you any kind of answer on that. As far as I can recall, she didn't say much. I think she was in shock.

MK: And, you know, you mentioned that the VVV was together for months.

AO: About eleven months I think.

MK: Besides being at Schofield, what else did you folks do during that time?

AO: Well, Schofield was our home during that period. But in between, of course, for activities we were asked if we wanted to donate blood which I did participate in. Giving blood two or three times, I don't know. We also were asked if we wanted to participate in buying saving bonds, which we did. And for other activities, as I told you, they kind of permitted us to have a library or have somebody come from the university to teach certain classes if they wanted to. We also had for recreation, judo, kendo. We also had a football team, participated in (the) barefoot league. Some of the boys also got to take up golf. That's about it I guess.

MK: How about in terms of work for the VVV?

AO: Work, well, I think we, the boys, worked pretty hard. You know, we had certain things to do and although sometimes it looked like they were playing we still had either military or civilian supervisors that came to assign the work to us and see to it the job was done. So there's no question the work was done, you know, whatever we were assigned to do.

MK: You know, that it's been referred to as a labor battalion. What kind of labor did you folks do?

AO: Well, like I said, for instance there was a quarry gang. And people, boys like Shiro Amioka, Wally Doi, Hiroshi Kato, (Ryoji Iyamba, Dick Uyemura, Teruo Himoto). They were in the quarry gang. They went up to the quarry and, you know, actually broke rocks with sledgehammers and so forth. Then there were some of us who worked with the road repair and road-making gang. They had (some of us assigned to) the engineer group, (which) had their own steamrollers, so we provided (the) labor to smooth out the road before the steamrollers came. Or we dug ditches, put in culverts, you know, over which sort of like bridges were built. We also built, like I said, we built hutments, small hutments (which) the military used for guard (houses). Work of that type.

MK: For today I'm gonna end here and then we'll continue with your leaving the VVV and getting into the 442. Okay?

AO: Okay.

END OF INTERVIEW