

Military Women's Memorial Oral History Program

Interview Transcription

Interviewee: Chito Isonaga

MWM ID# 044911

SGT, Women's Army Corps (WAC), 1944-1946

Interview Date: May 2, 2003

Interviewer: Yoshinobu Oshio and James Tanabe

Runtime: 01:20:00

00:00:11 Yoshinobu Oshio

Alright, ready? This afternoon we are interviewing Chito Isonaga in Poipu, Kauai on May 2nd, 2003. May I call you Chito?

00:00:24 Chito Isonaga

Yes.

00:00:24 Yoshinobu Oshio

Okay. Chito served in the U.S. Army, the Army—the Women's Army Corps actually, from December 27, 1944 through February 26, 1946, during World War II as well as during the occupation of Japan. She was honorably discharged at the rank of sergeant and currently resides in Poipu Beach, Kauai, Hawaii. I'm Yoshinobu Oshio, the interviewer, and James Tanabe is the core interviewer as well as the camera operator. Chito, let's start with your parents' name, and where they came from, and a little about your family, how many members there were and where were you—are you Chojo or Jijo or wherever the family is from?

00:01:18 Chito Isonaga

My parents' names are Tokuichi and Kazuyo Wakayama Isonaga. My father was born in Yamaguchi-Ken. My mother was from Hiroshima. And then what?

00:01:41 Yoshinobu Oshio

How many brothers and sisters?

00:01:42 Chito Isonaga

Oh, I have two brothers and two sisters. I had another sister who died when she was four.

00:01:53 Yoshinobu Oshio

Where are you in the...

00:01:55 Chito Isonaga

Oh, I'm the, I'm the oldest in the family.

00:01:59 Yoshinobu Oshio

And where were you born?

00:02:03 Chito Isonaga

Oh, I was born in Koloa, Koloa, Kauai, yeah.

00:02:07 Yoshinobu Oshio

Right in the neighborhood then, yeah?

00:02:08 Chito Isonaga

Yes, I was born uptown, yeah, Koloa town.

00:02:12 Yoshinobu Oshio

What about your early schooling? Did you attend elementary, and intermediate, high school in the area, as well as did you attend Japanese language school?

00:02:25 Chito Isonaga

I attended Koloa Elementary School from the 1st to the 8th and after that I went to Kauai High School. And I graduated in 1933. I was a classmate of Sparky Matsunaga, you know. Yes, and he was—I was in his English class when Mrs. Anderson used to teach way back.

00:03:00 Yoshinobu Oshio

And while you were going to school in Koloa from 1st grade to 8th grade, was there a Japanese language school in—?

00:03:07 Chito Isonaga

There was a Japanese language school in Koloa, and I guess I went from the 1st grade to the 8th grade.

00:03:17 Yoshinobu Oshio

What did you study there? Do you remember?

00:03:20 Chito Isonaga

Well, we started Japanese language reading and writing, I guess.

00:03:26 Yoshinobu Oshio

Katakana, Hirakana, Yomekata?

00:03:28 Chito Isonaga

Yes, yeah.

00:03:31 Yoshinobu Oshio

And after 8th grade you didn't have to go beyond that, no school?

00:03:37 Chito Isonaga

No school after that, yes. I don't recall if I went up to 8th grade or not, but anyway I attended, was forced to go to Japanese school [laughs].

00:03:49 Yoshinobu Oshio

Well, most of the other Nisei sort of went to Japanese school and encouraged, or kind of forced by their parents to go to Japanese school.

00:04:01 Chito Isonaga

Yes, yes, yes.

00:04:02 Yoshinobu Oshio

So they weren't too happy to go there. So, from the time you graduated high school until December 7th, what did you do during that period?

00:04:20 Chito Isonaga

After high school, in fact I went to Japan the year I graduated, in August with my mother and my sister who was 12 years younger than me, you know. Yeah, I went to Japan. In fact my mother waited for me to graduate from high school to go back to visit her.

00:04:46 Yoshinobu Oshio

So at that time you went to Yamaguchi-ken?

00:04:50 Chito Isonaga

No, well, I went to visit there but mainly I went to—I was in Hiroshima. And my mother left me there, and so from, I guess it took '33, I think from—I don't know when, but maybe around September, I went to grammar school in Hiroshima.

00:05:20 Yoshinobu Oshio

You mean after graduating high school, Kauai High, then you had to go back to grammar school over there?

00:05:25 Chito Isonaga

No, Japanese school.

00:05:28 Yoshinobu Oshio

Yeah, Japanese grammar school?

00:05:29 Chito Isonaga

Yeah, maybe, you know, it was 7th or 8th grade but I went there from October to March when the Japanese school starts, their system. And then in March I went to Shintoku Chugakko [secondary school] in Hiroshima. My mother came back in February of 1934, but I stayed back. In fact, she took me to Japan to go to school. And I stayed with my aunt in Yokogawa and, and I went to Shintoku Chugakko in the 3rd grade and 4th grade. And then I graduated from Shintoku Chogakko, and then I went to Hiroshima Jogakuin, which was semon gakko [professional training college] during those days. But they used to call it Hiroshima College for Women, and I entered 3rd grade and 4th grade. And there, you know, I majored in English. There was an English class and a homemaking class. But all us Niseis, you know, went into the English department in order to learn Japanese of course, because everything was in Japanese, you know. And I went 2 years there and graduated. And then after that I came back to Hawaii. So this was... Yeah, that was 6 years, you know.

00:07:13 Yoshinobu Oshio

So before the war then you came back.

00:07:15 Chito Isonaga

Yeah, I came back in 1939, I think, yeah. Uh huh.

00:07:19 James Tanabe

There were other Nisei ladies with you?

00:07:22 Chito Isonaga

Yeah. In fact, I just visited my girlfriend. She graduated from college— high school, I think, Mekin [spelled phonetically] High School. And she, she was one of them. And Kazue Ueda, you know, the Ueda store in Honolulu, the shoe store.

00:07:41 James Tanabe

The shoe store.

00:07:42 Chito Isonaga

Yeah, Kazue Ueda.

00:07:43 James Tanabe

Yes.

00:07:44 Chito Isonaga

But she came back to, uh— I don't think she graduated, but Ruth Nishihara was one class above me. And so, you know, we were in the dormitory and she was next door to me. In fact, she was in rehab, she fell backwards one morning and hurt her back, so I just visited her last week. Yeah. She was very close to me.

00:08:13 James Tanabe

All our shoes were from Ueda shoe store?

00:08:15 Chito Isonaga

Yeah, Ueda. Oh yeah, Kazue. So I hear from her every Christmas.

00:08:22 James Tanabe

So these girls were with you under the same conditions that you were there? They were sent to Japan like you?

00:08:30 Chito Isonaga

Probably, yeah. Probably, you know. Well, my mother wanted me to go to Japan and learn Japanese because she was afraid that— she wanted me to act as interpreter for the rest of the family, you know, in case. Yeah That's the main reason why I went.

00:08:50 Yoshinobu Oshio

So that was a big transition, eh? Going from Hawaii high school, then you had to go back to, like, intermediate school, and from there to go to Jogakuin.

00:09:00 Chito Isonaga

To this day, I don't know how I learned Japanese, you know. Really, exams, you know, Japanese exams ask to sort of memorize, you know, the thing. And you forget portions of, you know, the thing. And, you know, I really don't know how I learned the language, you know.

00:09:20 James Tanabe

But being in a Japanese environment, you probably absorbed it, yeah?

00:09:23 Chito Isonaga

Yeah, yeah, that's what I think. I'm surprised, you know.

00:09:27 Yoshinobu Oshio

So you came back in 1939, so what happened between 1939 and December 7th?

00:09:35 Chito Isonaga

Well, I came back and then... Let's see now. Oh, '39, I think 1940 there was that census taking.

00:09:54 Yoshinobu Oshio

Every ten years, yeah, every ten years.

00:09:56 Chito Isonaga

And Charlie Fern was the head of the census taking.

00:10:01 Yoshinobu Oshio

Charlie Fern, the publisher of Hawaii Island.

00:10:03 Chito Isonaga

Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. Up at Garden Alley, he was the publisher. And it was just at the stage where the TV station was, you know, he was going to form the KTOH. And so, you know, so we talked and then he knew that I had studied in Japan. So I went to work for KTOH when it first opened. Yeah, I still announce, you know.

00:10:32 Yoshinobu Oshio

Oh, radio announcer, Japanese radio announcer.

00:10:34 Chito Isonaga

Yeah, yeah, for a while. Got criticized every evening when I came back from my mother [all laugh], from my father [all laugh].

00:10:46 Yoshinobu Oshio

What they were saying, the pronunciation not right?

00:10:50 Chito Isonaga

Yeah, yeah. And sometimes, you know, I read the names of the singers, you know, that I read the names wrong, you know. I remember that To Kylie Ling, there was a singer by that. And I know I read it wrong, read his name wrong, you know, and mom would criticize, you know. So that was really a hard job [laughs].

00:11:19 James Tanabe

She was listening very carefully. She was your tutor.

00:11:22 Yoshinobu Oshio

So December 7th, when were you at that time on Kauai, and what was your parents' reaction, or how did you feel?

00:11:33 Chito Isonaga

Well, I was actually in church, you know, when they said that Honolulu was being attacked. And so, we rushed home. But I remember when the night before, I was ironing my dress to wear to Sunday school. And the Japanese, my parents listened to the Japanese station every night, and— oh, at that time, I was working with two FBI agents, going around the island, you know, checking on the consulate agents and the Buddhist priests from each, you know.

00:12:22 James Tanabe

And how long was that, did that continue? I mean, from when to when?

00:12:26 Chito Isonaga

It was before the war.

00:12:28 Yoshinobu Oshio

What period of time you're talking about?

00:12:29 Yoshinobu Oshio

Before the war, she said.

00:12:30 Chito Isonaga

Before the war.

00:12:31 James Tanabe

I know, but, from when...

00:12:32 Chito Isonaga

It wasn't for long, you know, but two agents came from Honolulu and I accompanied, I went around with him and Japanese priests and Japanese—I remember Taniguchi from Waimea, you know, Mr. Taniguchi from Waimea, all the prominent businessmen.

00:12:52 Yoshinobu Oshio

What kind of information did the FBI want from you?

00:12:56 Chito Isonaga

I can't remember, but, you know...

00:12:58 James Tanabe

Did you talk to these people, with the FBI?

00:13:01 Chito Isonaga

Yeah, and I acted as interpreter, you know, with them, before the war. So, the night before the war started, we were listening to the Japanese—I was pressing my dress for Sunday, and they said, 海外の皆様、今一度申し上げます。 [automatically transcribed characters]

00:13:26 Yoshinobu Oshio

What did they say, 海外?

00:13:26 Chito Isonaga

They said, 海外, overseas, you know, nationals, I guess. “I repeat again, there might be war in the Pacific.” 大変よに戦争が勃発するかもしれません。 They announced it, once or twice. And I was working with the FBI agents, you know, and we laughed about it, you know. But I remember the TV station, before they signed off, they said, “I announce once again,” you know, “今一度申し上げます。”

00:13:58 Yoshinobu Oshio

Radio, you still remember that.

00:14:00 Chito Isonaga

Yeah, I remember that.

00:14:01 Yoshinobu Oshio

Remember that particular phrase, [Chito and Yoshinobu over each other] 海外の皆様、今一度申し上げます。大変よに、

00:14:07 Chito Isonaga

The war might break out in the Pacific.

00:14:10 James Tanabe

And the FBI's were...

00:14:12 Chito Isonaga

They were up at Lihue Hotel, yeah.

00:14:16 James Tanabe

They heard that too?

00:14:17 Chito Isonaga

No, they didn't hear it. I heard it at home. But I was working with them. But I wished afterwards that maybe, you know, I'd called them to tell them that this is what this... that I heard this.

00:14:30 James Tanabe

So you think they never heard about that?

00:14:35 Chito Isonaga

I don't know. They had listening posts in Honolulu.

00:14:39 James Tanabe

They must have.

00:14:41 Chito Isonaga

Sure, they must have. Yeah, they did announce it. I can—I remember very clearly they announced it. And I think after that, they gave the wind direction. But that I'm not sure about, you know. Yeah. The shortwave radio, we used to... dad and mom used to listen to it every night.

00:15:02 James Tanabe

Did that announcement get repeated daily?

00:15:06 Chito Isonaga

No.

00:15:07 James Tanabe

Just that one time?

00:15:07 Chito Isonaga

Before they signed off at night, you know. The thing used to come on every night at a certain time. And before they signed off, they said, they announced that. I remember very clearly. Yeah.

00:15:24 Yoshinobu Oshio

Okay, so coming back on December 7th.

00:15:28 Chito Isonaga

Yeah.

00:15:29 Yoshinobu Oshio

Where were you and what happened?

00:15:30 Chito Isonaga

I was in Sunday school.

00:15:32 Yoshinobu Oshio

Oh, Sunday school.

00:15:33 Chito Isonaga

Yeah, yeah.

00:15:34 Yoshinobu Oshio

And you were teaching a class or something?

00:15:36 Chito Isonaga

No. No, I wasn't teaching a class. I used—I taught at one time in the Sunday school. But I remember I was sitting in a class line, you know. When they announced it. So we all hurried home. Yeah.

00:15:56 Yoshinobu Oshio

And what did your parents say at that time?

00:15:58 Chito Isonaga

Well, I can't remember very clearly what they said, you know. But of course they thought that Japan would win, you know.

00:16:10 James Tanabe

Did they express that to you, one way or another?

00:16:17 Chito Isonaga

I can't quite remember.

00:16:20 James Tanabe

But you have a sense that that's how they felt?

00:16:23 Chito Isonaga

Yeah. Yeah, that eventually that America would win, you know.

00:16:31 James Tanabe

Oh, that America would win.

00:16:32 Chito Isonaga

No, not America. Japan would win, you know. They were sort of more or less confident that Japan would win in the end.

00:16:42 Yoshinobu Oshio

So were you still working after December 7th? Were you still working as a Japanese radio announcer, or what happened?

00:16:51 Chito Isonaga

That I can't remember very clearly. But I worked with Reverend Yamada. With, there was a Kauai Morale Committee. I worked with them.

00:17:02 James Tanabe

That was Masao Yamada?

00:17:03 Chito Isonaga

Yeah, Reverend Yamada, yeah. He had an office at their home, and I used to go there every day to help. And after that, I went to work for the police department on Kauai. Yeah. And then I went to— There were— A lot of people were asking me to come and work for the Office of Censorship, so I went to Honolulu and worked for the Office of Censorship. When I volunteered, I went to Honolulu.

00:17:42 Yoshinobu Oshio

So you were in Honolulu working for the Office of Censorship.

00:17:46 Chito Isonaga

Censorship.

00:17:46 Yoshinobu Oshio

What did you do there?

00:17:50 Chito Isonaga

Read letters. Japanese letters.

00:17:54 Yoshinobu Oshio

Japanese letters going out to other places?

00:17:57 Chito Isonaga

Yeah, going out to the sons of, you know...

00:18:02 Yoshinobu Oshio

Maybe in Europe, going out to...

00:18:05 Chito Isonaga

Yeah, in [unclear]. And of course, there were certain people that we had to concentrate on, yeah, you know.

00:18:15 Yoshinobu Oshio

So they told you which letters or which parents to kind of look out for?

00:18:22 Chito Isonaga

Well, there was a list of names that you had to be careful of, **but** you just read through, you know.

00:18:32 Yoshinobu Oshio

Did you write in English or in Japanese?

00:18:34 Chito Isonaga

Oh, Japanese. So, I was in the Japanese department.

00:18:38 James Tanabe

So these letters were intercepted at the post office?

00:18:44 Chito Isonaga

Yeah, the Office of Censorship. There was the American side, too, you know. In the federal building, you know, the old post office on the second floor.

00:18:56 James Tanabe

So they must have been intercepted letters that went to APO, yeah?

00:19:02 Chito Isonaga

I guess so, yeah. Mainly, probably. And it was there that, you know... I was working at the Office of Censorship when they asked for volunteers, I guess. The recruit— People that recruited, you know, came. And I waited until the last day of the recruitment, and then I went and volunteered. Because, you know, I didn't want the publicity. It came out in the papers, your name and everything.

00:19:43 Yoshinobu Oshio

So this was different from the 442 volunteer, but this was only for WACs or only for...

00:19:53 Chito Isonaga

Yeah, it was only for WACs at that time.

00:19:57 Yoshinobu Oshio

And how many of Nisei women volunteered at that time? About... Can you remember?

00:20:07 Chito Isonaga

There were quite a number.

00:20:08 Yoshinobu Oshio

Niseis, though?

00:20:09 Chito Isonaga

Yeah, Niseis. There were quite a number.

00:20:11 James Tanabe

You're talking in Hawaii or what?

00:20:12 Chito Isonaga

Yeah, yeah. Hawaii. I think I have pictures to show, you know. There were quite a number.

00:20:21 Yoshinobu Oshio

So after you said you were going to enlist in the WACs, what about your parents? What did they say?

00:20:30 Chito Isonaga

Well, it was easy for me to volunteer. I didn't tell them I was going to volunteer, but I volunteered. And then after that I came home on leave, you know. But I think it was easier for me to volunteer because I was in Honolulu rather than on Kauai. There might have been some objection, but, you know. But I thought Japan was going to lose. And I wanted to go back to help my relatives and my schoolmates, you know. Yeah. And I did help them. Yeah, yeah. One reason I volunteered was because I knew the language and I figured I had something to offer. And not only that, you know, I wanted to help my relatives and my schoolmates, which I did, you know.

00:21:22 Yoshinobu Oshio

So after you volunteered, where did you go? Where did they send you?

00:21:26 Chito Isonaga

No. So I came home and... I guess I worked, you know, until it was time to go.

00:21:47 Yoshinobu Oshio

Go on active duty.

00:21:49 Chito Isonaga

Yeah, yeah. But I think I came home for a couple of weeks.

00:21:55 Yoshinobu Oshio

Came back to Kauai, in other words. And then you had to report for duty.

00:21:59 Chito Isonaga

Fort, yeah, Fort Derussy, I guess.

00:22:03 Yoshinobu Oshio

The one in Waikiki.

00:22:04 Chito Isonaga

Yeah.

00:22:06 Yoshinobu Oshio

And how long did you stay there and where did you go after that?

00:22:10 Chito Isonaga

I don't, I don't know when I went in, but anyway, we... I think we left around January or February, because when we got to San Francisco and when we went on the train, I know there was snow when we reached Flagstaff, Arizona. And— well, I saw snow but many of the Hawaiians, the girls didn't see, you know, snow. So I remember it was quite a to-do over there.

00:22:49 Yoshinobu Oshio

Oh, you saw snow in Japan while you lived in Japan?

00:22:52 Chito Isonaga

Yeah, yeah, I knew snow, but yeah. And then we had basic training at Oglethorpe, Georgia. We went to Fort Oglethorpe, Georgia.

00:23:04 Yoshinobu Oshio

So is that where the WACs had their basic training?

00:23:07 Chito Isonaga

Yeah, the Hawaiian WACs, together with the U.S. WACs, you know.

00:23:11 Yoshinobu Oshio

So you people were in a group together then?

00:23:14 Chito Isonaga

Yeah, we were in a group.

00:23:14 Yoshinobu Oshio

Were there other, like mainland Nisei women too?

00:23:17 Chito Isonaga

No, no, no Nisei women, but they were American, you know. Yeah, I think there's a picture of somebody here with a, with a...

00:23:32 Yoshinobu Oshio

Hold it like that, sir. Do you know where you are?

00:23:45 Chito Isonaga

No, that's it.

00:23:52 Yoshinobu Oshio

Okay. Chito is holding a picture of her WAC basic training at Fort Oglethorpe in Georgia. And she's in the fifth row from the top. First, second, third, fourth, fifth. And she's the first, second, third...

00:24:18 James Tanabe

Next one.

00:24:19 Yoshinobu Oshio

Fourth.

00:24:21 James Tanabe

Right there.

00:24:23 Yoshinobu Oshio

Right there. On the right.

00:24:28 James Tanabe

Got a nice big smug smile on. [Chito laughs]

00:24:39 Yoshinobu Oshio

Okay. This is a list of Women's Army Corps recruits that was ordered to active duty and were to go to Fort Oglethorpe for basic training. Okay, from the list I see... Kojima. One.

00:25:02 James Tanabe

Oh, there's...

00:25:03 Chito Isonaga

She passed away.

00:25:03 Yoshinobu Oshio

Murahashi.

00:25:04 James Tanabae

Oda. Oda there. Oda.

00:25:07 Yoshinobu Oshio

Oda.

00:25:10 Yoshinobu Oshio

Misawa. Kaneshiro.

00:25:17 James Tanabe

Kido.

00:25:18 Yoshinobu Oshio

Kido. Nakasato.

00:25:21 Chito Isonaga

Parakurotawa.

00:25:23 Yoshinobu Oshio

Tanaka. Tanaka. Fuji. Tamashiro.

00:25:28 James Tanabe

Kutaka. Kutaka.

00:25:29 Yoshinobu Oshio

Oh, Kutaka. Tamashiro. Oshiro. Shichina. Next row. Kono. Chito Isonaga. The interviewer. Interviewee. Mitsue Nouchi. Hatsu Kitayama. Reiko Kaneshiro.

00:25:51 James Tanabe

What's that? Bernice Naukane?

00:25:54 Yoshinobu Oshio

Naukana.

00:25:54 James Tanabe

Naukana.

00:25:55 Yoshinobu Oshio

Sounds like a Hawaiian.

00:25:56 James Tanabe

Hawaiian, eh?

00:25:57 Chito Isonaga

Hawaiian, yeah.

00:25:58 James Tanabe

Oh, yeah.

00:25:59 Yoshinobu Oshio

Iwa.

00:26:00 James Tanabe

Kitayama.

00:26:01 Yoshinobu Oshio

Where is it, there? Hatsu Kitayama.

00:26:06 James Tanabe

Kaneshiro. Oh, Hanashiro. Reiko.

00:26:09 Yoshinobu Oshio

Reiko Hanashiro. Fumiko Segawa.

00:26:19 James Tanabe

How about Hattie Fong, or Fang?

00:26:19 Yoshinobu Oshio

Fang, Fang.

00:26:19 Chito Isonaga

That's Hawaiian. No, Chinese.

00:26:21 Yoshinobu Oshio

Fang. Hideko Yamashita. Dorothy Yamagami.

00:26:27 James Tanabe

Alice Chow.

00:26:30 Yoshinobu Oshio

Marjorie Hada.

00:26:32 James Tanabe

Charlotte Chow. Genevieve Hoo.

00:26:43 Chito Isonaga

Yes, she's Chinese.

00:26:46 Yoshinobu Oshio

Hirakane.

00:26:48 James Tanabe

No, Hisako Hirakawa. Margaret Yang.

00:26:53 Yoshinobu Oshio

Toshiko Kawamura.

00:26:55 James Tanabe

And Kim, yeah?

00:26:58 Yoshinobu Oshio

Anna Kim.

00:27:00 Chito Isonaga

I went to see her last week. She has Parkinson's and can't walk anymore.

00:27:07 Yoshinobu Oshio

So how many were there in this list, about?

00:27:11 Chito Isonaga

You should have checked.

00:27:13 James Tanabe

I'd say maybe 20.

00:27:21 Yoshinobu Oshio

That's the shot of the whole class, yeah. That's the graduation class, a picture?

00:27:29 Chito Isonaga

No, it wasn't a graduation picture.

00:27:30 Yoshinobu Oshio

No? Okay. Okay. Alright. Got all the WACs.

00:27:40 Chito Isonaga

Oh, after basic training—

00:27:41 Yoshinobu Oshio

No, what did you do there at Fort Oglethorpe? What kind of basic training did you, the WACs, get at that time?

00:27:51 Chito Isonaga

I can't remember the classes we had, but I know we learned how to march, yeah.

00:27:56 Yoshinobu Oshio

March? [Both laugh] March and salute.

00:28:00 Chito Isonaga

Salute, yeah. I think we had classes too, but...

00:28:07 Yoshinobu Oshio

You had to fire weapons or anything?

00:28:10 Chito Isonaga

No, none of that.

00:28:11 Yoshinobu Oshio

A lot of calisthenics, maybe?

00:28:13 Chito Isonaga

Calisthenics, yeah. And march, learn how to march. Left, right, yeah.

00:28:21 Yoshinobu Oshio

Then, after basic training.

00:28:25 Chito Isonaga

Went to clerk school, Des Moines, Iowa.

00:28:28 Yoshinobu Oshio

Not only the Nisei, but all mixed up, all different people went to clerk school, or just...

00:28:35 Chito Isonaga

I remember just the Hawaiian group, you know. Not all of us, I guess. Some of them went elsewhere, but the majority of us went to clerk school in Des Moines, Iowa.

00:28:47 James Tanabe

So now, in all of this WAC training, the Nisei were not segregated?

00:28:53 Chito Isonaga

No, no, we were all in a group. The Hawaiian WACs, we were all in a group. We stayed in the same hut, or whatever. We stuck together. But there were Americans too, but they were separate.

00:29:13 James Tanabe

When you say American, you're talking about Haoles?

00:29:15 Chito Isonaga

Haoles, yeah, yeah. In basic training at the same time, yeah.

00:29:21 James Tanabe

So for your billeting, for your housing, you were together as Hawaiian group?

00:29:28 Chito Isonaga

Yeah, Hawaiian group.

00:29:29 James Tanabe

But for training purposes, you were mixed?

00:29:33 Chito Isonaga

I can't remember that. I don't think so. I think we stuck together. Yeah.

00:29:39 James Tanabe

So you would have classes only for the Hawaiian group?

00:29:42 Chito Isonaga

Probably, yeah.

00:29:44 Yoshinobu Oshio

Okay. So at the clerk school, how long did you— and what did you do at the clerk school?

00:29:55 Chito Isonaga

Well, I can't remember, but you know, I guess we learned...

00:30:00 Yoshinobu Oshio

How to keep records and all of the military records,

00:30:03 Chito Isonaga

Those things, yeah.

00:30:04 Yoshinobu Oshio

look at personnel records.

00:30:05 Chito Isonaga

Yeah. And while we were there, several of us, three or four, I think four of us were yanked out of that class and we went to...

00:30:21 Yoshinobu Oshio

Washington?

00:30:22 Chito Isonaga

No, we went to a place, you know, what do you call that? You know, we yanked out of the class and we were scheduled to, ordered to go to Washington, D.C.

00:30:38 James Tanabe

Oh, you mean a replacement depot.

00:30:43 Chito Isonaga

Yeah, we had a detachment there. And while we were there, I remember we were there when FDR [Franklin Delano Roosevelt] had passed away, and I remember seeing this parade. The rest of the, you know, class, people who were attending, the WACs who were attending the curb school, they marched, they had a parade in honor of FDR, but it was when he had died. So they had this parade, I remember seeing that. And then we went to Washington, D.C. And I think I was there for about a month and we were told that, you know, we were going to, I think—I'm sure we were at OSS because, you know, later on the OSS became CIA and the buildings down there, the quonset huts down there past the Lincoln Memorial where the CIA—later on was CIA buildings, must have been OSS. And they told us that we were scheduled to go to, or we heard through the grapevine that we were scheduled to go to OSS, to China, I mean, China-India-Burma area. And I was sort of glad, but before—and we were in our summer uniform in Washington, D.C. Then we got orders saying, go to Snelling. So we had to put away our summer clothes, drag out our winter clothes from the bottom of a duffel bag, all wrinkled, wore that and went up to Snelling to, you know, MIS.

00:32:46 Yoshinobu Oshio

What date are we talking about here now? February, May '45 is when President Roosevelt died and during that summer. So see if you have to change clothing. The change of clothing is in October of '45. The change to khaki...

00:33:04 James Tanabe

So you're going off to Snelling now?

00:33:06 Chito Isonaga]

Yeah, Snelling.

00:33:08 Yoshinobu Oshio

What did you study there at Snelling? What kind of class? [cut in recording]

00:33:16 James Tanabe

Okay, so you're off to Snelling, how many of you?

00:33:21 Yoshinobu Oshio

How many of the Hawaii girls went to Snelling?

00:33:36 Chito Isonaga

I can't remember how many, but...

00:33:45 Yoshinobu Oshio

Okay, the group of WACs, Niseis that were at Snelling. 1945, approximately the summer of 1945.

00:34:04 James Tanabe

Okay, I've got the right side of that. Give me the left side. Bring your left hand down some. No, just the other way. Bring your left hand down.

00:34:16 Yoshinobu Oshio

This way?

00:34:16 James Tanabe

Yeah, thank you.

00:34:29 Yoshinobu Oshio

Let me get a little bit closer up here.

00:34:41 James Tanabe

No, I'll do the close up. Tip it, get it straight. Yeah, okay, and then give me that right side again. Thank you.

00:35:09 Yoshinobu Oshio

Do you know where you are in this picture?

00:35:11 Chito Isonaga

Oh yeah, I had a list.

00:35:15 Yoshinobu Oshio

We'll show that, here. Fort Snelling album, name is listed on proposed honor roll. Isonaga, Chito as EW-1

00:35:31 James Tanabe

That's two rows of names, huh? Or two columns of names, huh?

00:35:34 Chito Isonaga

Yeah, they were in my class.

00:35:36 Yoshinobu Oshio

E-11 and E-21.

00:35:40 James Tanabe

How come the left side is only initials?

00:35:45 Chito Isonaga

Oh, is it? Yeah, yeah.

00:35:52 James Tanabe

Two columns, right? That's interesting. All the left columns are only initials, and the right column has all the full names on it. Okay, straighten that out for me, will you? Okay, take a close-up. Get all our names in. That's the first class. EW-11, right side. And EW-21, left side, and right side. Okay, got it.

00:36:38 Yoshinobu Oshio

Oh, they listed the— [video cuts]

00:36:47 James Tanabe

Sorry, would you repeat those names? I didn't get it on camera. The four from Kauai?

00:36:54 Yoshinobu Oshio

The four from Kauai is, uh, Kisako Yamashita.

00:37:01 Chito Isonaga

Wait, wait now.

00:37:03 Yoshinobu Oshio

What?

00:37:04 Chito Isonaga

Maybe the name is, you know.

00:37:06 Yoshinobu Oshio

Oh, different.

00:37:06 Chito Isonaga

Yeah.

00:37:08 James Tanabe

Go ahead. Four from Kauai.

00:37:12 Chito Isonaga

Reiko Hanashiro, huh?

00:37:14 Yoshinobu Oshio

Yes. Tamie Tsuchiyama [last name said in sync with Chito].

00:37:20 Chito Isonaga

And what's Marjorie Hada.

00:37:25 Yoshinobu Oshio

Marjorie Hada.

00:37:27 James Tanabe

And the first one, I didn't get the first one.

00:37:29 Yoshinobu Oshio

Haruko, or is it Kisako Yamashita?

00:37:32 Chito Isonaga

No, Har— No, Haruko Yamashita.

00:37:35 Yoshinobu Oshio

Haruko Yamashita.

00:37:35 James Tanabe

Okay, those four from Kauai. Okay, question. Do you know how many girls were from Hawaii—state of Hawaii, or territory of Hawaii—other than the four Kauai people?

00:37:50 Yoshinobu Oshio

The list that she had was about 40-something. The one that we inducted, this big picture that she had. It's listed here.

00:38:00 Chito Isonaga

Haruko Oda.

00:38:00 Yoshinobu Oshio

EW-11, Haruko Oda.

00:38:02 Chito Isonaga

Haruko Oda. Okay, let me see now. [Mumbled name] was there. Was Eiko Misawa in there?

00:38:12 Yoshinobu Oshio

Misawa, Misawa. Yes? No.

00:38:16 Chito Isonaga

I don't...

00:38:16 Yoshinobu Oshio

Barbara Misawa.

00:38:17 Chito Isonaga

Yeah, maybe...

00:38:18 Yoshinobu Oshio

Different.

00:38:19 Chito Isonaga

Oh, maybe that's the one.

00:38:22 Yoshinobu Oshio

She went by Barbara or Mieko? That's the only Misawa.

00:38:31 Chito Isonaga

Handafu [spelled phonteically].

00:38:32 Yoshinobu Oshio

Misawa is not a common name.

00:38:34 Chito Isonaga

Eiko Misawa. Toshiko Nak— [video cuts] Oh no. Mitsue Noguchi, she wasn't there. She's the nurse.

00:38:50 Yoshinobu Oshio

Not Noguchi, eh?

00:38:51 Chito Isonaga

No, Noguchi.

00:38:57 Yoshinobu Oshio

No.

00:38:59 Chito Isonaga

Kitayama. I don't think she was there.

00:39:08 Yoshinobu Oshio

No.

00:39:09 Chito Isonaga

See? [Reading names under her breath], Yamagami. I don't think she was there.

00:39:24 Yoshinobu Oshio

No.

00:39:24 Chito Isonaga

Yamagami. Iwakawa was there. Kawamura.

00:39:34 Yoshinobu Oshio

Kawamura, Toshiko.

00:39:35 Chito Isonaga

Toshiko, yeah. She was there.

00:39:37 Yoshinobu Oshio

Yes.

00:39:38 Chito Isonaga

Okay, see. That many were there.

00:39:39 James Tanabe

Okay, so there were about five or six or seven that didn't go to Snelling.

00:39:43 Chito Isonaga

Yeah, yeah.

00:39:45 Yoshinobu Oshio

Okay. So how long was Snelling?

00:39:51 Chito Isonaga

Was from— when did we get to Snelling?

00:39:57 Yoshinobu Oshio

You said it was when FDR, FDR died from May '45, and then you had...

00:40:02 Chito Isonaga

No, not there. Went to OSS for a couple of months, one month or two.

00:40:08 James Tanabe

October you went to Snelling, yeah?

00:40:11 Chito Isonaga

Around there. Yeah.

00:40:12 Yoshinobu Oshio

To change from khaki to wool. So usually October or November, that's the change of clothing about that time.

00:40:19 Chito Isonaga

So maybe around November. And then the class didn't last too long. No.

00:40:32 James Tanabe

Well, the men were six months, yeah?

00:40:35 Chito Isonaga

Yeah, I thought it lasted about six months.

00:40:39 Yoshinobu Oshio

And when did you go to Japan, then?

00:40:41 Chito Isonaga

Around February, I think.

00:40:44 Yoshinobu Oshio

Of '46, the following year.

00:40:48 Chito Isonaga

The war ended when?

00:40:50 Yoshinobu Oshio

August '45.

00:40:52 Chito Isonaga

Oh, oh then.

00:40:54 Yoshinobu Oshio

Japan...

00:40:54 Chito Isonaga

No.

00:40:55 James Tanabe

So around September.

00:40:57 Chito Isonaga

September. Yeah, we must have gone around October, yeah?

00:41:00 Yoshinobu Oshio

One month after the war ended?

00:41:04 Chito Isonaga

Yeah, about that. One or two months after that. Oh, maybe here [starts flipping through papers].

00:41:13 Yoshinobu Oshio

Have your orders.

00:41:16 Chito Isonaga

Well, I don't have the orders, but...

00:41:26 James Tanabe

Say that again?

00:41:28 Chito Isonaga

Basic training, Fort Oglethorpe, Georgia, January '45 to March '45. And then clerk school, Des Moines, Iowa, March 1945 to April 1945, assigned to OSS, I had. And MIS, May '45 to November '45. And then November, December, they assigned me to instructor for student officers, you know.

00:42:02 Yoshinobu Oshio

Where, Snelling?

00:42:04 Chito Isonaga

Snelling, yeah. Fumiko Segawa and myself, we were assigned to teach. But then fortunately we were told to go to Japan. So, you know, I guess we went to Japan around January or February of '46. Because we got discharged on 26 February 1946.

00:42:30 James Tanabe

And when you say we, all of that Nisei group at Snelling went?

00:42:37 Chito Isonaga

No. I have the list here, but...

00:42:45 Yoshinobu Oshio

This, the one went to Japan?

00:42:47 Chito Isonaga

Yeah.

00:42:51 Yoshinobu Oshio

December '44, this says.

00:42:56 James Tanabe

Japan.

00:42:59 Yoshinobu Oshio

[Reading from a list of names] Matusko Kido, Fumiko Segawa, Muwako Yamamoto, Edith Kodama, Mary Nakamura, Atsuko Mori,

00:43:10 Chito Isonaga

May Nakamura?

00:43:12 Yoshinobu Oshio

Mary Nakamura. Sue Shinagawa, Rhoda Knudten, Harriet Hirakawa, Chito Isonaga, and Nakanishi. Kenny? Kerry Nakanishi.

00:43:31 Chito Isonaga

Terry Nakanishi.

00:43:32 James Tanabe

You got Miki Mina— Minato?

00:43:38 Chito Isonaga

No.

00:43:39 James Tanabe

And Betty Ching crossed out, yeah?

00:43:40 Chito Isonaga

Yeah.

00:43:46 Yoshinobu Oshio

Okay. Only that many went to Japan. And there is some more pictures. Okay, this says Tokyo bomb for Hawaiian... Maybe you can zero in, huh?

00:44:05 Chito Isonaga

Maybe this is a better picture.

00:44:13 Yoshinobu Oshio

It's "Japanese-American WACs Leave for duty in Tokyo." [Title of a newspaper clipping on screen]

00:44:21 James Tanabe

Let me blow that up here.

00:44:28 Yoshinobu Oshio

There are 11 Niseis.

00:44:42 James Tanabe

Okay, and let me get the picture there.

00:44:47 Yoshinobu Oshio

Got this?

00:44:48 James Tanabe

No, let me get the picture there.

00:44:50 Yoshinobu Oshio

Which picture?

00:44:51 James Tanabe

Okay, I'm getting it. Okay.

00:44:56 Yoshinobu Oshio

Where are you in that picture? Where are you?

00:45:01 Yoshinobu Oshio

This is six years to the camera. Atsuko Mori, Miwako Yamamoto, Chito Iso— [video cuts]

00:45:12 James Tanabe

That's Chito there?

00:45:13 Yoshinobu Oshio

Yes.

00:45:14 James Tanabe

Okay.

00:45:15 Yoshinobu Oshio

Nice big smile there. All right. They seems to be happy.

00:45:18 James Tanabe

How about that other picture we had?

00:45:21 Chito Isonaga

I think this fall we went—I don't remember her, but—went to Washington D.C., the four of us.

00:45:31 Yoshinobu Oshio

Oh.

00:45:32 James Tanabe

All these Niseis.

00:45:33 Chito Isonaga

Yeah.

00:45:33 Yoshinobu Oshio

That's the OSS group.

00:45:34 Chito Isonaga

Yeah, I think this is it. And look here. I took the girls to Tokyo. Try to read over there.

00:45:45 Yoshinobu Oshio

WAC Sergeant Isonaga.

00:45:48 James Tanabe

Okay, I'm at the top picture right now.

00:45:50 Yoshinobu Oshio

Okay. It says Tokyo bomb for Hawaiian-, Japanese-American.

00:45:56 James Tanabe

And those are the ones that were went to OSS first.

00:45:59 Chito Isonaga

Yeah, I think it was, yeah, last time. At one time.

00:46:04 James Tanabe

I'll get the caption there.

00:46:06 Chito Isonaga

I don't remember Matsuko Kido being there, but somebody said that she claimed to have gone.

00:46:14 James Tanabe

Okay, I'm at the bottom picture now.

00:46:17 Yoshinobu Oshio

Okay. It says sergeant Chito Isonaga was a top kick of this group of 13 WAC linguists.

00:46:29 James Tanabe

And where is Chito?

00:46:34 Yoshinobu Oshio

Where are you in this picture? On this one, here. The extreme right.

00:46:39 James Tanabe

Okay, that's what I thought. Let's see. Oh, yeah. Pretty chic looking WACs. Yeah.

00:47:04 Chito Isonaga

Famous picture on the plane, going to the...

00:47:11 James Tanabe

Boarding the plane.

00:47:13 Yoshinobu Oshio

Yeah. There you go. Mary Nakamura. The transport, the air transport.

00:47:21 Chito Isonaga

Maybe this is clearer.

00:47:23 Yoshinobu Oshio Chito Isonaga

Oh, that's clearer, I think.

00:47:24 Chito Isonaga

Yeah. Matsuko sent me the magazine that has her article.

00:47:33 Yoshinobu Oshio

You know where you are?

00:47:38 Chito Isonaga

I think I know.

00:47:48 James Tanabe

Wait, let me get one last shot. Chito is six from the bottom.

00:48:00 Yoshinobu Oshio

One, two, three, four, five, six.

00:48:06 Chito Isonaga

[video cuts] —each, Fumiko Sekigawa and myself. I threw it out, the paper.

00:48:11 James Tanabe

Okay, what's that?

00:48:12 Chito Isonaga

That's the graduation, I think.

00:48:17 Yoshinobu Oshio

Change assignment.

00:48:27 Chito Isonaga

Yeah, faculty award.

00:48:30 Yoshinobu Oshio

Oh, faculty award for outstanding student, WAC, P-5. Company G-E-W-R.

00:48:48 James Tanabe

Where is it? I don't see it.

00:48:50 Yoshinobu Oshio

Right here.

00:48:52 James Tanabe

Okay. Award for what again?

00:48:58 Yoshinobu Oshio

It's faculty award for outstanding student, WAC.

00:49:07 James Tanabe

Okay.

00:49:08 Yoshinobu Oshio

All right.

00:49:10 Chito Isonaga

And down below is Florence Segawa. So the two of us were assigned to teach after graduation.

00:49:17 Yoshinobu Oshio

The other person that was kept back to serve as instructor is P-5 Sumiko Sagawa.

00:49:30 Chito Isonaga

Segawa.

00:49:31 Yoshinobu Oshio

Oh, Segawa.

00:49:32 Chito Isonaga

Yeah.

00:49:35 James Tanabe

Okay, there she is. Okay.

00:49:43 Yoshinobu Oshio

That's not Stanley Segawa's sister or anything? There's a Stanley Segawa in MIS, living in Lihue.

00:49:49 Chito Isonaga

No, I don't know. I don't think so. Yeah. This one is Hilo.

00:49:53 Yoshinobu Oshio

Oh, she's from Hilo.

00:49:54 Chito Isonaga

Hilo, yeah.

00:49:55 Yoshinobu Oshio

Okay.

00:50:03 Yoshinobu Oshio

Chito, are you ready?

00:50:05 Chito Isonaga

Yeah.

00:50:05 Yoshinobu Oshio

I'm going to ask you about your assignment in Tokyo. When you went to Tokyo during the January, February, where were you assigned and what kind of work did you do?

00:50:20 Chito Isonaga

It was mostly translation, I guess. I was assigned to D2, you know. Oh, when we first went over, we were assigned to Colonel Rush.

00:50:36 Yoshinobu Oshio

Oh, the CAC.

00:50:37 Chito Isonaga

Yeah. And so, you know, Sumiko Segawa, myself, and Miwa Koyama were assigned to Colonel Rush's place, you know, and we translated some secretary—I think it was Harada, I can't remember the name—but the diary that he wrote for somebody important, political, you know, and we translated that. And we had a Kyoto University professor help us with the translation. And I remember one portion of what I translated was used for that military tribunal.

00:51:36 Yoshinobu Oshio

For the French tribunal in Tokyo.

00:51:37 Chito Isonaga

The war crimes trial. Yeah, one section that I had translated, I remember, yeah, came out, you know, they used it as evidence.

00:51:46 Yoshinobu Oshio

Remember what it was?

00:51:47 Chito Isonaga

I cannot remember, but there's, you know, just a small sentence or something that the secretary to this famous person had written in the diary, and that portion was used in the war crimes trial, I remember.

00:52:03 Yoshinobu Oshio

And then one major war criminals at that time were trying, Sugamo prison. So the trial was going on while—

00:52:11 Chito Isonaga

Yeah, well, we were translating that thing. And we were stationed at— you remember, Madam Sawada, you remember her? She had an orphanage, but she was close to Paul Rush. It was behind the British Embassy, and we went to see her former mansion, and that was the office.

00:52:35 James Tanabe

The wife of the diplomat.

00:52:37 Chito Isonaga

Yes, Madam Sawada. Yes. She used to help out the Nisei—

00:52:41 Yoshinobu Oshio

So Colonel Rush was a missionary in Japan, yeah?

00:52:45 Chito Isonaga

At one time, yeah.

00:52:45 Yoshinobu Oshio

He spoke Japanese then?

00:52:47 Chito Isonaga

No, he didn't speak Japanese [laughs].

00:52:48 Yoshinobu Oshio

After the war, he went back again, you know. He established Rush, some kind of agency.

00:52:54 Chito Isonaga

Yeah, no, he had a station in Ryo [spelled phonetically]. He helped, I think Yamanashi-Ken, they had a farm there, and he developed that thing and taught them how to raise cattle. And even today it's a big—

00:53:11 Yoshinobu Oshio

Ranch.

00:53:12 Chito Isonaga

—ranch-like place where, you know, the tourists go there. They go for tours, yeah. They have a dairy farm and everything. And when we worked for him, every weekend we used to go up to see St. Leo. And once, Prince Takamatsu came along with us, and I think I have a picture somewhere. There's that thing there. Oh, yeah, that's, no, down below, yeah. The two pictures that I took. Yeah, we used to go up, and we used to have, you know, we used to have lunch at, you know, Colonel Rush's place, you know. Oh, here's some more, some pictures that I have that are better. Yeah. You can go through it.

00:54:14 Yoshinobu Oshio

Prince Takamatsu?

00:54:15 Chito Isonaga

Somewhere. Somewhere. [video cuts] —Rush's office.

00:54:26 James Tanabe

That's you.

00:54:27 Chito Isonaga

Yeah.

00:54:28 James Tanabe

At the typewriter.

00:54:30 Yoshinobu Oshio

How come you people weren't in uniform?

00:54:33 Chito Isonaga

We were— oh, in the early days, we didn't have any clothes. We used to take off everything and used to wear our uniform. That's why I don't have any uniform left.

00:54:48 James Tanabe

Oh, okay. You're typing the translation.

00:54:54 Chito Isonaga

Yeah.

00:54:56 James Tanabe

What's all those stack of papers in the back?

00:54:58 Chito Isonaga

Those were the secretary's diary that he wrote.

00:55:04 James Tanabe

Oh, wow. And there's a million pages back there.

00:55:10 Chito Isonaga

Yeah. See, this is a picture when we went to [place name, can't hear over dog barking]. Here's Colonel Rush.

00:55:29 James Tanabe

Wait, let me get that picture. Let's see. Let me see that picture.

00:55:32 Yoshinobu Oshio

Paul Rush. He's a famous guy.

00:55:36 Chito Isonaga

Yeah. We used to call him Pepe Rush.

00:55:43 Yoshinobu Oshio

Personal signature, autographed signature. That's him there. Lieutenant Colonel.

00:55:55 James Tanabe

And this group picture?

00:55:56 Chito Isonaga

Yeah, this is, I think we went up to his place, the Yamanashi Canyon.

00:56:02 Yoshinobu Oshio

Yamanashi Canyon.

00:56:04 Chito Isonaga

Yeah. I think this group went up there. Yeah, we used to go up there quite often. Sometimes on a truck and sometimes on a train.

00:56:13 James Tanabe

Is that you on the front right?

00:56:17 Chito Isonaga

Am I here? Yeah, this is me. Yeah.

00:56:19 James Tanabe

Yeah, I spotted you.

00:56:24 James Tanabe

Okay.

00:56:27 Chito Isonaga

I think Takamatsu is somewhere in this one, maybe.

00:56:30 Chito Isonaga

[video cuts]—me.

00:56:31 Yoshinobu Oshio

Hawaii boys going to the same language school.

00:56:34 Chito Isonaga

Yeah, yeah.

00:56:36 Yoshinobu Oshio

Do you remember any of them?

00:56:38 James Tanabe

Oh, there's a fish.

00:56:39 Chito Isonaga

Yeah. We used to go almost every weekend, fishing. Yeah. Minnesota has a thousand lakes. [video cuts] That's the Lincoln Memorial. Every time one needs to go to that, you know, office. [video cuts] And I worked for uh, for the Civil Service Division. That division tried to form the civil service system in, for the Japanese government. And then I worked for government section, and that was General Willoughby's section. So, yeah, I was on the fifth floor, the same floor as...

00:57:36 Yoshinobu Oshio

Daiichi Building.

00:57:37 Chito Isonaga

Dai-ichi Building, fifth floor, where General Willoughby used to go down to the fifth floor, and General Nakata was down there. And we— the diplomats, you know, the Japanese government dignitaries used to come and interview.

00:57:56 Yoshinobu Oshio

So you got to, had a chance to see General Nakata going in and out of the office?

00:58:00 Chito Isonaga

No, from out the window when he used to go in and out, yeah. Never used to see him on the floor, but, you know, I know it was on the fifth floor, same floor as his. Because General Willoughby, his right-hand man, you know, go down to see him. Yeah. I worked for government section.

00:58:19 Yoshinobu Oshio

So how long did you work in that section? Until you were discharged in February of '46?

00:58:25 Chito Isonaga

No. You know Raymond Aka?

00:58:33 James Tanabe

Yeah, I heard the name.

00:58:34 Chito Isonaga

Yeah, he was working in that section, too, government section. Then he went to defense forces, and then he went, you know. But I worked with Raymond Aka in General Willoughby's office, yeah, government section. And at one point, I came home on the British Strait, the long way from Kobe. I went around the world and came home, you know. And before I came home, people that worked with me in G-2, you know, they transferred. I think that's when OS was transferred to CIA, and the office was in NYK building. And there used to be a snack bar, and, you know, we all used to go. And there was a fellow that I knew that went to work for CIA. And one day when I was in the coffee line, you know, I told him that I was going home. And he says, "why don't you come work for us?" So, you know how the Army is, they have reduction in force every once in a while. So to play it safe, I filled out a pink sheet about this thick, you know. And applied for the CIA job.

01:00:02

And then I went, from Kobe I went around the world on a British freighter. And it took us, and my girlfriend and I had a three-week trip, tour of Europe after— when we reached Paris, you know, which was the end of the tour, the ship. But the ship took so long to go there because at Port Swettenham somewhere, we were there a whole week, you know, because it was a British freighter. And so the tour had gone, long gone by the time we reached there. So I got off in Genoa, and then I went to Italy, and then to Paris, and then to England, to Southampton, and got on the Queen Elizabeth II and came home. And I came home around August or September. And I figured around October, you know, that when I reached home, I wrote back to my section where I was working that I was home. And I

thought that by— around October I thought, gee, my orders will come to go back to Japan. They had a big reduction in force, so I guess it was easier to tell somebody that's not there that, you know, that your job was cut off. So in Christmas time, I wrote to this fellow that told me to sign up for CIA that I was home, that I was ready to work for you [laughs], you know, for the outfit. But it took me about six months or longer, and then I got orders to go back to Tokyo to work. And then I worked for the CIA about 15, 16 years, I guess. And I retired in November of '75, when I was 60 years old, because it was mandatory retirement. Yeah.

01:02:18 James Tanabe

Did you ever meet up with Kantagami?

01:02:21 Chito Isonaga

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

01:02:23 James Tanabe

CIA at the time?

01:02:26 Chito Isonaga

Yeah. Yeah. Yeah, in Washington. You know, they say when we were in Tokyo, they told us, you know, we never mention where we work or everything, you know, and the kids will see. And yet, you know, our building was the only building that had, had air conditioner. You know, you could tell right away that we were working there [all laugh]. It's a funny way, you know.

01:02:56 James Tanabe

There were signs to tell.

01:02:57 Chito Isonaga

Yeah, really! The Air Force was across the street, but our building was the only one that had an air conditioner [laughs]. Yeah.

01:03:08 James Tanabe

General Willoughby.

01:03:09 Chito Isonaga

General Willoughby, yeah.

01:03:11 James Tanabe

You don't hear too much about him, yet he was all of the MIS's chief.

01:03:18 Chito Isonaga

No, he, General Willoughby wasn't MIS chief.

01:03:21 James Tanabe

Well, he was chief of G-2.

01:03:23 Chito Isonaga

Yeah.

01:03:23 James Tanabe

So in that sense, he was.

01:03:25 Chito Isonaga

Yeah. Yeah, he was—

01:03:26 James Tanabe

In as much as MIS was under G-2.

01:03:28 Chito Isonaga

Oh, yeah.

01:03:30 James Tanabe

But that's besides the point, but can you give us some impression of him?

01:03:38 Chito Isonaga

Never saw him.

01:03:39 James Tanabe

Never saw him. In the same building, though.

01:03:42 Chito Isonaga

Yes, in the same office, you know.

01:03:44 James Tanabe

Well, what about, did you hear anything about him, what kind of guy he was, so forth?

01:03:48 Chito Isonaga

I don't know. A fellow that lived on Tapan or Betancourt used to, you know, go shopping for the wife, I know [laughs]. No, I never even saw him, I think. We were in the front office, you know.

01:04:06 James Tanabe

Well, it's just that you don't hear too much about him.

01:04:09 Chito Isonaga

Yeah, General Willoughby.

01:04:10 James Tanabe

I mean, he's a general at Top G-2. But apparently what he said about MIS tells you that he had high regard for the MIS.

01:04:25 Chito Isonaga

Did he? I didn't even know that. Yeah.

01:04:29 James Tanabe

Well, he was the one that made the statement that the MIS work shortened the war in the Pacific by two years, at least two years, that's his statement. I don't know how official that statement was, but, and also saved countless lives.

01:04:49 Chito Isonaga

There was a guy named Matsukata that worked with us, too. But he was a national, huh, and I guess he came from a good family. I forget his name, he passed away though.

01:05:04 Yoshinobu Oshio

Working in Japan?

01:05:05 Chito Isonaga

Yeah.

01:05:06 Yoshinobu Oshio

With the CIA?

01:05:06 Chito Isonaga

Yeah, yeah. Not with the CIA, with government section. Ray Aka was with us, too. He was my sensei, too [laughs]. And they were good friends with , uh, Taeno [spelled phonetically], at the hair?

01:05:26 James Tanabe

Department store?

01:05:27 Chito Isonaga

No, no, the movie theater, no. [All three crosstalk]

01:05:33 James Tanabe

Oh, the production.

01:05:34 Chito Isonaga

Yeah. Yeah, and I remember going to Ray's place. You know, he had a house, and Christmas like that, he would invite us, and he would come. Yeah.

01:05:49 Yoshinobu Oshio

So you were with the CIA after you got out of the service. You were with the CIA for about 16 years, and was your service all the time in Japan, or different—?

01:06:00 Chito Isonaga

I was in Japan, and in fact, you know, my mother was my dependent. I called her, and when my dad retired from his business they came to Japan and stayed with me for a whole year, from April to April. I had a house in Daikanyama, you know, and my parents had a ball [laughs]. Yeah.

01:06:25 James Tanabe

What did you do in the CIA as a civilian?

01:06:29 Chito Isonaga

Well, you know, with languages, and they gave me a chance to learn Chinese. I went to school, you know. We had a school where they taught different languages, and they taught different languages. We went there for six months. But I cannot speak the Chinese language, but, you know, I used to translate. Because I knew kanji, yeah? That's why it's faster for me to pick up the language. There, a lot of similarities in the meaning and stuff. There are some exceptions, but, you know. But I think Chinese... Haoles were good at

Chinese, but Niseis had a difficulty because, you know, Chinese, what do you call it? They have tones, yeah? Speaking. You can say, chufan la [spelled phonetically], it could be, you know, eating good food, and it could be the other way. You know, depending on how you say it. So, you know [laughs].

01:07:32 James Tanabe

What kind of documents were they mostly, that you translated?

01:07:36 Chito Isonaga

Newspapers, newspapers.

01:07:37 James Tanabe

Newspapers.

01:07:37 Chito Isonaga

Yeah, yeah. A different section. Our section was agriculture and next section was political. So, you know, how many— what do you call it? Rice they harvested and stuff like that. That kind of stuff, you know. New translation of that.

01:07:55 Yoshinobu Oshio

At that time, the Japan Nomi Kumiai, were they very active? the Japan Farmers Union, during the time that you were there?

01:08:04 Chito Isonaga

No, I didn't have anything to do with the farmers, yeah.

01:08:07 James Tanabe

Of what use would the production of rice be to the CIA?

01:08:14 Chito Isonaga

I don't know [James and Chito laugh]. I have, what do you call that CIA gave me? I think I worked 15 years.

01:08:33 James Tanabe

[video cuts] This is Chito Isonaga's recognition for honorable service, 1954 to 1975, 21 years. Turn it over and we'll see who that's for. The Central Intelligence Agency, United States of America. Thank you.

01:09:00 Chito Isonaga

Let's hide this in the library now [laughs].

01:09:06 Yoshinobu Oshio

[video cuts] After you retired from the work in Japan, CIA, you came back to Hawaii?

01:09:11 Chito Isonaga

Yeah.

01:09:12 Yoshinobu Oshio

And what did you do? Is this where you, you had your home here?

01:09:17 Chito Isonaga

Yeah.

01:09:20 Yoshinobu Oshio

Since then, what—?

01:09:23 Chito Isonaga

You know that year I retired, in March my dad passed away. He waited for me to come back, and he died the following, the following morning.

01:09:37 James Tanabe

He saw you.

01:09:38 Yoshinobu Oshio

The following morning!

01:09:39 Chito Isonaga

Yeah, yeah. And he told me to come back, it was around Wednesday. I said, can you wait for the weekend? She scolded me and said—even today she laughs about it, you know. She knew that my dad was going downhill. And so I came home, and then my brother Herbert met me. He said he'll come with me too. So we went to Wilcox Hospital. He said, "Suman, no," you know, coming home. And then he passed away the following morning. I guess he waited for me to come back.

01:10:11 Yoshinobu Oshio

He was satisfied to see you.

01:10:12 Chito Isonaga

Yeah. And mom died five years later, exactly five years later.

01:10:25 Yoshinobu Oshio

And since then you've been here all the time.

01:10:28 Chito Isonaga

Yeah, I've been here, but I travel a lot. Well, I traveled a lot while I was in Washington, D.C. because New York is close. So every other year I used to come home, and every other year I used to travel to New York. So I've been all over New York.

01:10:44 Yoshinobu Oshio

So that takes up a lot of your time, and your hobby and things that you do enjoy in your time.

01:10:52 Chito Isonaga

Well, when I came home, mom used to grow all those dendrobiums. And I came home and I was—and when I took over this house, I didn't know how to handle those flowers. So I over-fertilized it and people used to ask me if I had a dendrobium graveyard because, oh, I killed every last single one of her dendrobiums, you know. Mom used to go to Shimonishi, and she used to buy a lot, so she had as much as I have now. But I killed every last single one of them [laughs], and then I started over, and now I have all that [laughs]. And I used to send my mother's roses from Jackson and Perkins every year. So I've been keeping up with that.

01:11:40 James Tanabe

I see that. Okay. Anything else you want to say, Chito?

01:11:51 Chito Isonaga

No. But, you know, when I first came back, I didn't have any—what do you call that? Social Security. So I wanted to work, work, work, you know, and get five years. I needed 25 months, I think. And I wanted to go and work, but my mother told me, “don't rob jobs of people who really need it.” And it was at a time when the hotels were, you know, really flourishing like it does now. And so she told me, “don't rob jobs from people who really need it,” so I never worked. My sister, she used to work down there at the Poipu. You know, when John Suel [spelled phonetically], because she run it, you know, she used to go and work in the evenings like that. And when she was working for Roberts, too, so when she was working, I'd go and pinch hit for her. But I never took credit for that [laughs]. So.

01:12:58 James Tanabe

That's a rather socially conscious statement that your mother made.

01:13:03 Chito Isonaga

Yeah. She says, don't, don't, don't, don't. And it was at a time when the hotels were just coming up.

01:13:13 James Tanabe

Chito, in your experience in all of your life, would you have a message for people in general and especially to the young people of our generation as to what value should dictate their lives?

01:13:38 Chito Isonaga

I don't know what to say. I guess, study hard and set a goal for yourself and work towards it diligently.

01:13:58 James Tanabe

Do you feel that there's an overemphasis on education for materialism, for gain, and not enough emphasis on other human values?

01:14:14 Chito Isonaga

Yes, I think so today. But you have to think about finances because, you know.

01:14:27 James Tanabe

Of course.

01:14:30 Chito Isonaga

It's getting harder and harder for them, you know. I think we had it easy. I'm glad I lived [laughs] during the years I've been living because, you know, I think we've had it easy. But I feel sorry for the future generation. They'll have to work harder and get a good education so that they can...

01:14:57 James Tanabe

I would dare say that if young people worked as hard as you have, that they would surely get ahead for what they want.

01:15:08 Yoshinobu Oshio

You're being very modest, I think, all the things that you've done, Chito.

01:15:14 James Tanabe

Your generation did work very hard and made a lot of benefits for the rest of us.

01:15:22 Yoshinobu Oshio

A lot of sacrifices.

01:15:26 James Tanabe

Thank you, Chito, for telling us your story, sharing your story. I enjoyed your interview.
Thank you very much and have a good life.

01:15:38 Chito Isonaga

Thank you.