Enoch Kanaya Oral History Interview with Thomas Webb

(Interview starts at 0:01:16)

Webb: My name is Thomas Webb and I'm here with Enoch Kanaka...

Kanaya: Kanaya.

Webb: Kanaya. We're here to do an oral history recording of your time in World War Two. If I could, sir, just get you to state your birthday and maybe where you were born to start us off.

Kanaya: Okay, you already have my name, right?

Webb: Yeah.

Kanaya: Okay, I was born in Clackamas, Oregon in 1925, and then when I was nine-years-old, we moved. My father moved from the farm to the city, when I was nine-years-old. So until 1941 I lived in Portland.

Webb: Okay. That was quite a move, not only in miles across the state but probably...

Kanaya: No, it was only about 8 miles.

Webb: Oh it was only about 8 miles. And did you continue to work out in the rural area or did your father get a different kind of job?

Kanaya: He had a produce store in the city, in Portland, so he was the proprietor of that store.

Webb: And how about your mother?

Kanaya: She helped my dad at the store.

Webb: And did you have any siblings?

Kanaya: I have two siblings, an older brother and an older sister.

Webb: And I think, if my research is accurate, we'll probably talk about your brother a little bit. So how was growing up? What kinds of things did you occupy yourself with? What kind of mischief did you get in to?

Kanaya: When I was in grammar school, I was the only Asian in my class and so I felt like I was just one of them. I played on the softball team until I graduated.

Webb: Okay. My math might not be great, but I put you at about 16 or 17 during Pearl Harbor. Is that...?

Kanaya: I was 17.

Webb: So you were already a young man. About to graduate and then...Pearl Harbor happened. Can you talk a little bit about your memories of that day? How did you hear about it?

Kanaya: Well, I really didn't know what happened on that day until I got home. But it happened on a Sunday and we had a basketball league there at the park and I was playing basketball on that day, so after the game, I was coming home on a bus and for some reason people were kind of staring at me a little differently than before. Because, before I never noticed that. But somehow on that particular day, I know people were starting to look at me a little differently and I didn't know what happened until I got home and my sister and my parents told me that Japan had bombed Pearl Harbor. Well, I didn't know where Pearl Harbor was until later. But when I found out that Japan had bombed Pearl Harbor, I figured, well, it looks like we're gonna be at war. Sure enough, the next day, President Roosevelt went on the radio and declared war on Japan.

Webb: Was there...and some of these questions may be sensitive, so if at any point you don't want to answer, that's fine. Was there in a sense in your community, though, that there was maybe going to be some of the issues that you faced almost immediately? Or...

Kanaya: No...Strangely, the next day was school, Monday, and I'm thinking, gee, what are my classmates and my teachers gonna say about it? But when I got back to school, they didn't seem to mention anything about my being Japanese or anything, because for some reason, I was still the only Asian in my class. I've been with my classmates for years and I knew every one of them real well, so they treated me just like anybody else.

Webb: So maybe that Monday the talk was more about what had happened and that we were gonna go to war. Where...at that age were your classmates at all thinking about enlisting or...

Kanaya: No... They didn't even talk about it. They just went about their schoolwork.

Webb: Because I know Pearl Harbor was one of those defining moments where a lot of people decided they would enlist, so...That's interesting. Your brother was already in the military?

Kanaya: Right. He volunteered before he was drafted. So he didn't want to serve in the infantry. My parents didn't want him to be in the infantry so he volunteered for the medics.

Webb: And that was prior to Pearl Harbor or...?

Kanaya: Prior to Pearl Harbor.

Webb: Okay. Did you get any kinds of letters from him around that time or anything that would've indicated his feelings about the fact that we were suddenly at war?

Kanaya: Well, no, but he came to help us evacuate when we got orders to evacuate. He came and he got a leave from the army. He helped us move a lot of our furniture and things into the warehouse, into the government warehouse they had. So that part he made sure that we were able to assemble at the assembly center.

Webb: Well, let's talk about that. How did they tell you that this is what they were doing to you and your family? I guess "they" being the government. I mean, did you get a letter or did somebody show up at your door and say, this is what's happening?

Kanaya: No. Well I didn't really know really what was going on other than my parents knew what to do. They were getting orders from the- I guess from the Japanese higher ups. Those that were- knew what was going on.

Webb: Okay, the leadership in that community. Do you remember what the mood was at your house? I mean, what was going through peoples' minds, what were they...?

Kanaya: No...My parents just took it for granted that the government gave them orders, that they had to be evacuated. And so I was only 17 then. I'm thinking, well, if that's what we have to do, we have to go along with them.

Webb: Okay. And you mentioned packing your items up and putting them in a warehouse...did the government supply that warehouse then?

Kanaya: Well, only our personal possessions, whatever we could carry over there. Because we still had a car until then and afterwards I guess my father had to give the car back to the dealer that he had, and we were only allowed to carry one suitcase each to the assembly center.

Webb: I think I read or heard somewhere that one of the items that you took with you was your baseball mitt.

Kanaya: That's right. That was my favorite glove.

Webb: Were you able to keep it until it finally wore itself out or...?

Kanaya: Well yeah, I kept it all during the time I was in the assembly center and then internment camp.

Webb: And were you able to use it playing catch and that kind of thing?

Kanaya: Oh yeah.

Webb: Okay, so what was...you all met at the assembly center and then what happened?

Kanaya: Well, we were there for maybe about three months. From April, May to June. In July we finally got orders to get on a train and be shipped to our permanent internment.

Webb: And where was that camp located?

Kanaya: Well those of us that were at the Portland assembly center, we were shipped by train to a place called Hunt, Idaho. Actually the camp name was Minidoka. That was about 25 miles from Twin Falls, Idaho and it was all sagebrush country.

Webb: You talked about your parents' attitude about all of this as being kind of resigned to it, I guess. As you're being shipped by train, do you remember, did everybody had that kind of resignation or was there...?

Kanaya: No...They all seemed to take everything in stride. They seemed to do whatever they were ordered to do. I don't know if that's our trait or what but when they were given something, you know, orders to do, they just went about doing it.

Webb: And what was the life like at this camp in Idaho?

Kanaya: Well, at the beginning, it was kind of hard. We got there at the peak of summer, in August and it was very hot and a lot of dust. There was a lot of sagebrush all around the country so we had a hard time keeping all that dust out of the rooms, because these barracks were just tar papered, there wasn't too much protection.

Webb: Did they assign you things to do or were you just kind of on your own?

Kanaya: Well, there were volunteers. They asked for volunteers to work in certain areas and of course, those volunteers, they were paid a minimum wage. Those that were in the profession like doctors and things, they were paid 16 dollars a month. Those that were semi-skilled were paid eight dollars a month. And since I didn't graduate high school from Portland, I had to continue my education in camp where they had set up schools there.

Webb: Now, I moved once when I was a little guy and going to a brand new school with different requirements, that kind of thing kind of set me back a little bit. Now did they have-did you feel like your education suffered because you were now finishing up school in this camp? What kinds of teachers did you have?

Kanaya: Well, the teachers were all from the state of Idaho. I'm sure they had teacher certificates and everything, but [the] equipment that they had, I don't think was, you know, class-A. They were just getting by [with] what they could get.

Webb: Were you able to make new friends going to school there?

Kanaya: I made a few friends. I didn't go to school full-time because in order for me to graduate, I only needed a few credits, so I only took maybe two classes.

Webb: Oh, okay.

Kanaya: And then I had a part time job working at the motor pool and there I was changing oil and greasing the trucks that they used. For that I was paid eight dollars a month.

Webb: Can you give our listeners, I guess, a sense of the pay scale back then. Was that decent, was it terrible, the eight dollars a month?

Kanaya: Well, I didn't really think much about it. Actually, we thought we were prisoners so that we shouldn't be getting anything for our work. Just getting eight a month was something because with that, even with eight dollars, I was able to buy ice skates to skate in winter time.

Webb: I was gonna ask you, with the tar paper, in winter in Idaho. I mean I don't have a great sense of Idaho but I would think the winters there would be fairly harsh. Were the conditions...?

Kanaya: It was cold, it was cold and [in] each section of your apartment or whatever you call it, there was a potbelly stove that used to keep warm with coal. They had coal for those.

Webb: And what was going on with your brother? Maybe you don't know, but during this time, your brother was not at the camp...he was still in service?

Kanaya: Oh yeah. Yeah. But when the war broke out with Japan, there were probably seven hundred, maybe close to a thousand Japanese-Americans that were in the service. Either they were drafted or some of them volunteered like my brother. But a lot of them were serving on the west coast. So when the war broke out, those that were in the infantry, they took away their weapons and they assigned them further inland away from the Pacific Coast. So my brother was one of them that got assigned to, there was a camp called Camp Crowder in Missouri, and he was sent there. They didn't want any people of Japanese ancestry living on the West Coast.

Webb: Was he able to send letters, I assume he wasn't able to get leave at that point to come visit you at camp, but was he able to communicated with you still?

Kanaya: Well he did get leave once.

Webb: Oh, he did?

Kanaya: Yeah, and he came to camp.

Webb: And what was his, I guess, reaction to… here he is serving his country and here his family is being treated like prisoners.

Kanaya: You know, he never mentioned anything about that. He just took it for granted that that's what happened and we were doing the best we could.

Webb: So, my understanding, then is that they asked for-they stopped this idea that no more Asian-Americans in service and started asking for volunteers, but that your mother may have said that you were too young, still. Is that correct, do I remember that research correctly?

Kanaya: Well, yeah. In 1943, they were asking for volunteers because President Roosevelt and the army decided that, in order for us to prove our loyalty, that we would join the service and fight for the country. But I was 17 then. I was still in high school. So my mother said, well, maybe I should wait until I was 18, but when I as 18 the draft board told me I was an enemy alien. And they said classification 4C.

Webb: And what was your response to that? I mean, how did...?

Kanaya: Well, I'm thinkin', how could I be a 4C when my brother was already in the service? But there was nothing I could do with that since they didn't want me to serve in the army; I went out to work in a farm.

Webb: Did you want to serve? I mean I know your brother served.

Kanaya: Oh yeah, oh yeah. But after the first volunteers left to serve with the 442nd, they didn't ask for any more volunteers.

Webb: But was that something that had sort of been, I don't know if instilled in your family would be the right way to say it, but something that even as a boy, you thought that maybe the military-or was it just the times that sort of made you want to serve?

Kanaya: Well, I wanted to join my brother in the service and when I heard that they had formed the 442nd regimental combat team, I wanted to join them and I couldn't do that until after they changed my status to 1A.

Webb: So they changed the status to 1A, you were 18, and then you were drafted or you enlisted?

Kanaya: Then they started drafting.

Webb: Okay.

Kanaya: But there was only one place that we were gonna go and that was to serve with the 442nd.

Webb: Did they send you a draft letter or did somebody show up to the camp or how did that work?

Kanaya: No, they send you a letter and they tell you to report for induction and that was Fort Douglas, Utah.

Webb: How'd you get there?

Kanaya: I guess they took us by truck, by an army truck from the camp. There were quite a few of us.

Webb: That'd be quite a long ride I would think, in an army truck.

Kanaya: Yeah, yeah.

Webb: Okay. So you're in the 442nd, I have read elsewhere that there was a, let me get the proper terminology here, basically an oath that originally- when they started letting people fight again that there was an oath, but you were a little bit later than the oath that was mentioned in one of the books I read. Did they make you do any kinds of jumping through different hoops than they might of if this wasn't going on?

Kanaya: Not that I remember. I think everybody takes an oath when they join the army.

Webb: Okay. So once you get inducted and you go to...you're in Utah, Fort Douglas, Utah, then what happens to you, do you have training there, or do they send you...?

Kanaya: No... They put us on a train and they ship us to our basic training area which was Camp Blanding, Florida.

Webb: And what kind of training did they give you?

Kanaya: It was called the IRTC, Infantry Replacement Training Center and it was a 16 week combat course and we learned how to fire every weapon that the infantry had.

Webb: Had you fired a weapon prior to being down there for training?

Kanaya: I might have fired a 22. rifle a few times.

Webb: What other kinds of, lots of marching, lots of...?

Kanaya: We were marching all the time, morning, noon and night.

Webb: Were the commanders especially hard on you or did you feel like they treated you fairly, what was the leadership like?

Kanaya: Oh, we were treated fairly, but very hard. They wanted to make men of us.

Webb: Did you feel like you transitioned into military life fairly easily or was it a bit of a challenge?

Kanaya: It was a challenge, but it was kind of interesting because we never had to train that hard before.

Webb: And as you were training, did they give you any indication of what was going to happen, that you were going to be sent to Europe, or anything? Did you know what it was that you were training for specifically?

Kanaya: No, we didn't know where we were going to go or anything. All they wanted to do was to train us as best they could as combat men.

Webb: And so after the 16 week training, what happened?

Kanaya: Well then they gave us a furlough, a couple weeks furlough and then report to our destination, our port of embarkation.

Webb: Do you remember where that was at?

Kanaya: Fort Meade, Maryland.

Webb: And how did you get up there? Take a train?

Kanaya: We took a train; I took a train from Chicago.

Webb: Oh, from Chicago...so you were...

Kanaya: Because my parents were living in Chicago at that time.

Webb: Okay. So about the time that you went into the military, your parents left the West Coast?

Kanaya: They left the camp and they found work here in Chicago.

Webb: Okay. What'd you think of Chicago when you came up here?

Kanaya: Well, I thought, gee, it's quite a big town, compared to Portland.

Webb: I was gonna say, it's a little bit different, just the hustle and bustle.

Kanaya: And the best thing I liked about it was I was wearing an army uniform and I was able to get on the streetcar and go anywhere I wanted to without paying.

Webb: And so for your two week furlough, you just visited with your family? And were they making into Chicago fairly well at that point.

Kanaya: I think they did, they were working as housekeepers at the Three Arts Club which was at 1300 N. Dearborn and it was a woman's- I guess, for women's arts. That wanted to be in the arts, they stayed there

Webb: Okay, and how, at this point, do they feel about you being in the military? Are they worried about you, did your...?

Kanaya: Oh yeah, they were worried about me, especially after my furlough was up and I was leaving and at that time they heard that my brother was missing in action in France.

Webb: Where in France, do you remember?

Kanaya: In northern France.

Webb: And how did they hear about that, did they get a letter?

Kanaya: They sent a letter to my sister, she was married to another Nisei, my brother-in-law. She had married in Texas where he was stationed in Fort Sam Houston, and she was the one that received the letter from the army saying that my brother was missing in action.

Webb: I hear those kinds of stories and I can't imagine getting that news by letter. That would be a shocking thing to open up.

Kanaya: Right.

Webb: So you go back to Maryland and you embark. Is that right, after your furlough, you go to Maryland and embark. I assume it was a fairly long trip over to Europe?

Kanaya: Yeah, well actually it was an ocean liner. It was called the Aquitania which was a sister ship of the Lusitania that was sunk during WWI. So it was an old British liner.

Webb: Was it strictly being used for the military at that point? So it was all... And what did the troops do to pass the time while they were going across the ocean?

Kanaya: I was seasick most of the time so I just stayed in my bunk.

Webb: Had you been out on the ocean before that.

Kanaya: When I was three-years-old, my father took us to Japan, but I don't recall that trip too well.

Webb: Yeah. Well, even if you're used to the water I think being on the ocean, it's a whole other...

Kanaya: Well, if you've ever been on a ship in the Atlantic in winter time, especially in December, the waves were about 50 feet high.

Webb: This is December of '44...45?

Kanaya: It was the winter of 44, 45, yeah.

Webb: And where did you land once you were to the European...?

Kanaya: We landed in Glasgow, Scotland.

Webb: Okay, and what...?

Kanaya: Then we took a train from there through Edinburgh, all the way through London and we went to Southampton and then we took a British destroyer from Southampton, we crossed the English Channel to Le Havre.

Webb: And what is the mood like at this point, as you're starting to figure out where they're sending you or was it...?

Kanaya: Well, I knew that we were going to go to Europe. I mean, do something, we were going to join the 442nd.

Webb: Are you able to hear from either your leadership or other soldiers around you what is going on as far as how intense the fighting is or you know, this is gonna be fine? Did you have any kind of sense of what it was that you were about to face?

Kanaya: No, no. We were all traveling by ourselves and we took these 40 and eight French troop trains well, they were World War One trains, they were made for 40 men and eight horses.

Webb: And so what happened, you joined up with the 442nd in France?

Kanaya: By the time I joined them, they had already been taken off of the front because they had lost so many men that they were not able to continue their operation, so they sent them back for replacements and that's when I joined them.

Webb: What were the first few days like as you become one of the replacements? You see different, you know, Hollywood depictions, I suppose, where the people that have been there don't really trust the replacements, there's a little bit of an animosity. Did you feel like you were- that you fit in, that you were on your own?

Kanaya: Well, it's a strange thing. When I first joined the 442nd, they put us through another combat training force. They wanted to make sure that we knew what we were doing. So for about a week before I actually joined my company, we were put through another training course in combat.

Webb: Just a week long or how long was that training?

Kanaya: Oh, it was close to a week, I guess. We had to learn how to throw hand grenades and everything else.

Webb: My understanding is that you operated a bazooka at various points.

Kanaya: Well, that was later on. That was when we went back to Italy, yeah.

Webb: Okay. Had you had that training, back in Florida? You said you got to use all the different...

Kanaya: Right. We learned how to fire bazookas during basic training.

Webb: We'll talk about that, that's...Okay so, you're in France, you've been trained. You're now a replacement and you're seeing all kinds of, I can't even imagine. Where did they send you first?

Kanaya: When I went to France?

Webb: When you were in France.

Kanaya: Well, I joined my company, but my company at that time were in Sospell, France, which is near the border of the Italian line. There was a mountain range called the Maritimes Alps that separated Italy from France. So the 442nd were given the job of protecting that Maritimes Alps from the Germans for about 18 miles along that line. So we had outposts all along the Alps. But it was strictly a defensive move.

Webb: Was it sporadic fighting from the Germans, no...?

Kanaya: It was sporadic, very low contact with the Germans. It was...they used to shell. They used artillery every now and then at some of our outposts but that was about all.

Webb: So they must have then moved you from that area into Italy, or did you...?

Kanaya: Well as soon as the 442nd went back to full strength with all the replacements that were coming- when they got back to full strength the Generals gave us orders to go back to Italy.

Webb: Where at in Italy?

Kanaya: At that time, the Germans had fortified the Gothic Line, it's called the Gothic Line, and that's where they stopped the Allied advance, even before the 442nd left for France. So when the 442nd came back to Italy, they were still at the same line when the 442nd had left and somehow, the generals knew that the 442nd could somehow penetrate the Gothic Line. So after several...a few weeks...four of the generals got together and our colonels got together and they said the best way to penetrate the Gothic Line was to sneak through the mountains and attack them from the rear. They gave us that job. So that's what we did in April, April 4th of 1944. That's when we were able to penetrate the Gothic Line.

Webb: How did you move all of your equipment through the mountains?

Kanaya: We had to carry everything.

Webb: You had to carry everything?

Kanaya: Yeah. We had the full field pack but by the time we got up to the mountain we had discarded most of it because it was just too heavy to climb that mountain with a full field pack.

Webb: Did the troops have problems with altitude or anything like that?

Kanaya: Nope, nope.

Webb: So you essentially dropped everything that wasn't essential?

Kanaya: The main thing was our ammo and our canteens and our pick. Shovel and pick.

Webb: Did you run into any pockets of resistance as you were trying to break through?

Kanaya: Well, when we got up there, they were surprised because we came from the back and they were all looking toward the front. But when we got up there early in the morning a lot of them were still sleeping. So they didn't have a chance.

Webb: What was the fortification like? What was it that you were facing?

Kanaya: Mostly machine gun nests. They had a lot of machine gun nests. And of course, by the time we got up there, some of them, or most of them, were still sleeping so they didn't have a chance to use them at all.

Webb: I hear about-and I've seen the pill boxes in Normandy. Can you describe what a machine gun nest looks like? Is it as fortified as that, is it just in the brush or how does that...?

Kanaya: They usually kind of dug in and it was fortified with stones and whatever they could get up there so it was mostly a stone machine gun nest.

Webb: Now, the Gothic Line, is that the Po Valley campaign or is it...?

Kanaya: It was right before the Po Valley. The Gothic Line was called the Apennines and it ran east and west for several hundred miles and the eighth army was on the east side and they were stopped by the Germans over there. And the fifth army was over on the west side and they were stopped by the Gothic Line there. So it was a stalemate for almost six months until we came.

Webb: And then you broke it open.

Kanaya: And we broke it open.

Webb: And then...?

Kanaya: Well it still wasn't easy even after we broke it open because they were still fighting. Even though they were retreating they were still fighting.

Webb: How severe was that fighting? Just little pockets or was it...?

Kanaya: It was mostly pockets, yeah and there were- some had battalions to defend themselves, but eventually they had to retreat.

Webb: And is this where you were using the bazooka? Or was that a little bit later on?

Kanaya: Mhm.

Webb: I was curious because I've never actually talked to anybody that's fired a bazooka. Is that a one person job or did you have somebody helping you?

Kanaya: There's an assistant, you have an assistant and he's supposed to help you load the rocket, but a lot of times if the assistant isn't there, you gotta do it yourself.

Webb: That would be, I would think, difficult. And I assume you were just firing those at the nests, the machine gun nests?

Kanaya: Right.

Webb: So where do you follow the Germans to, as they're retreating, or do you break off and go somewhere else?

Kanaya: No, we kept chasing them through the Po Valley, and they were still fighting even after we got past some of the mountains and the hills, but once we got into the Po Valley, they didn't have much area to defend. They couldn't defend themselves too well there, because it was mostly planes. So that's when they all got on the trucks and they just retreated and we didn't see them until we got near the border of Switzerland. They had all went into Switzerland for safeguard until the peace treaty was signed.

Webb: If they got into trucks and were retreating and you, the 442nd, just has basically their packs, their guns, was it the Fifth or the Eighth that helped resupply you? How did you get resupplied?

Kanaya: Well, we had a lot of supplies. We had [an] efficient service company that kept bringing us supplies all the time, except sometimes they couldn't reach us and we had to go back after it. But they still had the supplies.

Webb: And did they truck those in or...?

Kanaya: Yeah, they came by truck.

Webb: Okay. I don't really know as somebody that hasn't served how to ask questions or whether to ask questions about the kinds of fighting that you faced. I don't know if that's something that you want to talk about. The history books are fairly clear that you saw unimaginable things.

Kanaya: Yeah, well, it's hard to describe combat because only a combat man would know what the experience is that they had. It's hard to describe the feeling either. Because all you wanna do is get as many of them as you can and still try to survive.

Webb: Yeah. Maybe I'll just sort of change the line of questioning then. At any point up to this point had you heard about your brother? Did you know if he was still...?

Kanaya: Not until after the war. When our commander, well he was, actually he was the commanding colonel of our regiment. When my brother was captured, he was my brother's colonel. He was a battalion commander at that time and he called me into his office personally to tell me that my brother was released and he said that my brother was one of the bravest that he knew in combat.

Webb: That's... a good feeling.

Kanaya: Yeah.

Webb: When you're facing these kinds of horrific situations, do you keep people like your brother, like your father and mother in mind or do you just push all of that out?

Kanaya: I kind of pushed it all aside. Yeah. I just figured well maybe I might never see my brother again until after the war was over.

Webb: So you've pushed the Germans into Switzerland and you've gone through the Po Valley. Where did they send the 442nd after that? Or did you stay with them?

Kanaya: Well, most of the old original veterans, they were sent home, because they had enough points and everything, so practically all the originals were sent home. The ones that were left were us replacements and our job was guard all of these prisoners in these different prisoner of war camps. There were several of them in Italy that the 442 were sent to guard.

Webb: Strictly in Italy? You didn't ever go into Germany or...?

Kanaya: No.

Webb: What was it like guarding German prisoners of war?

Kanaya: It was one of the easiest jobs I ever had, because we would guard maybe, spent about four or five hours a day guarding and get maybe two days off and we would go into town and do shopping and everything else, so we didn't have a whole lot of work to do after the war.

Webb: But was it difficult being that close to people you may have been facing as an opponent or...?

Kanaya: No...I treated them as human beings. In fact, I got to know some of the cooks that were cooks for the camp and every night that I was on guard he would come out and give me some coffee and maybe a roll and we would kind of talk. In part English, some German and-but he told me that he had gained 30 pounds during the time he was a prisoner, because the Germans in the army had very low food. So I think he was kind of sad that he had to leave and go back to Germany

Webb: Yeah, I think a lot of those guys were, from things that I've read, it seems like they were okay in the...

Kanaya: Oh yeah, we treated them very humanely.

Webb: Yeah. They were fortunate in that way. So how long did you work at the POW camps then? How long did it take you to get the points that you needed to come home?

Kanaya: Well, I had enough points to come home in the last group and that was in July of '46.

Webb: And how did you get home?

Kanaya: I came home on a troop ship, we were the last group that had enough points to come home. They decided to send the whole 442nd home as a group and actually, there was about 500 of us that came home, and when we reached New York harbor, jeez, they treated us like heroes, you know? They had airplanes and fireboats with water and when we reached the pier they had some Hawaiian girls from the Lexington hotel dancing on the pier and quite a few dignitaries. Then, a few weeks later, President Truman wanted to give us a personal Presidential Citation which he had never done before during the war. So in July, it was about July the 2nd, we paraded for President Truman in Washington DC, the 500 of us that came home, and he presented us with the 7th Presidential Citation. I suppose you all know that he gave that famous talk that we fought not only the enemy but we fought prejudice and we won.

Webb: What was your feeling, hearing that?

Kanaya: Well, I felt pretty good. I thought, gee, it's about time that someone said something good about us.

Webb: What other kinds of citations did you receive?

Kanaya: Well, besides that, we got the congressional gold medal later.

Webb: 2011? Is that the right date? Or was it way before that? When did you get that?

Kanaya: Oh, it was recently, about two years ago.

Webb: Okay, and what is the story behind that? How did you, how were you notified? Did you go to Washington DC?

Kanaya: Well, first, the congress had to approve it and it took a few years before we finally were able to get the medal.

Webb: You had some people in congress fighting to get the recognition.

Kanaya: Right, right.

Webb: And then you went to DC for a ceremony?

Kanaya: Yeah, they had the chairman of the congress, Senator Boehner. He's the one that was the principle speaker but we had several speakers at the convention.

Webb: How many of the survivors were able to make it to that?

Kanaya: I would say about, over 400.

Webb: Oh, good.

Kanaya: But with all the friends and family there were over 2,000 that were there.

Webb: That's powerful. Well, thank goodness they did. That's a...you deserve such an honor, that's really amazing. So you're in New York, you go to DC, the President. You've marched for the President. Then what happened? I assume you weren't released from the military immediately or were you, were you allowed to go back to Chicago right away after that or...?

Kanaya: Oh yeah, after I got discharged, I came back here to Chicago.

Webb: Had you been able to send letters home to your parents? Were they able to send letters to you as you were in Europe or was communication kind of...?

Kanaya: Since I didn't write Japanese, I didn't know how to write Japanese, so I was always writing to my sister who was in San Antonio with her husband who was, he was a supply sergeant at Fort Sam Houston. So I sent her all my mail and whatever I wanted so that she could tell my parents.

Webb: Okay. Was she able to get letters to you as well?

Kanaya: Oh yeah, yep.

Webb: So, you're discharged...what was it like coming home after you've been discharged? Was there a sense of relief, trepidation?

Kanaya: Yeah, in a way, but you really didn't know what to do with yourself because, you know, you weren't in the army anymore, and you're free to do whatever you wanted to do and actually you're kind of lost, so the army had what they called a 52/20 club. They would give you 20 dollars a week for 52 weeks if you don't have a job. So I wasn't going to look for a job right away. So with that 20 dollars I got, I used to go to the ball games, and I used to see all of the Cubs' ball games.

Webb: Cubs fan huh? [Laughs]

Kanaya: Yep, because that was my favorite sport.

Webb: So you're kinda getting re-acclimated into civilian life. So after the 52 weeks, what'd you do?

Kanaya: Oh, I started taking some courses. First I went to night school at Northwestern, I took a few courses there and I didn't like any of them, and then I heard that there was going to be a television school and I was wondering well, gee that sounds interesting. So I signed up for the television school at a place called the American Institute. It was a television...I think it was strictly for GI's, but I went there for two years.

Webb: So that was on the GI Bill...?

Kanaya: Under the GI Bill.

Webb: Went there for two years... finished up... and then started a career?

Kanaya: Well, I was looking for a job and there was a place called Admiral Corporation that were looking for technicians, so I got a job there and I stayed with them for 28 years.

Webb: That's amazing. Were there any significant memories of your time in service that really stand out and sort of, to you, feel like represents what your service was all about? When you talk to people are there certain stories that you feel like really highlight your experience?

Kanaya: Well, what I enjoyed mostly was our Company, F Company. We used to have reunions. Well, first there were 442nd reunions in Hawaii and here on the main land, every three years, we would go to all these reunions and that was a lot of fun.

Webb: Okay. What did you miss most about the states when you were overseas? Were there things like the Cubs baseball that you really missed or were you just so focused on the job at hand that you didn't have time to think about those things?

Kanaya: Yeah, I wasn't thinking too much about what I was missing. Because when we were interned we didn't have much of anything. Even when we were overseas we didn't have too much of anything. I suppose I missed the good food, especially the Japanese food. We didn't get too much Japanese food, but when I was a kid my parents would always cook Japanese food and I would get used to that. But we didn't have any of that overseas.

Webb: K-rations?

Kanaya: But, once in a while, we would get rice. But it was mostly K-rations and C-rations.

Webb: Did you have any contact with the general population in Italy or France? I mean, you said you went shopping after stuff was over but as you were kind of marching through did you have any contact with the people?

Kanaya: Some of them, but I never would get their address or anything, but I would see them every now and then and we would talk a little here and there.

Webb: Yeah, grateful that you were there, I'm sure.

Kanaya: Oh yeah, oh yeah.

Webb: And how about baseball, did you get to play baseball overseas at all?

Kanaya: Oh yeah, I played on the baseball team, but just when I was going to start regular with them, they told me I had to go home.

Webb: Well you were probably okay with that, weren't you?

Kanaya: Yeah.

Webb: Were there any things you thought we would talk about today that I didn't bring up?

Kanaya: No, not really, I think we covered it pretty good.

Webb: Well I wanna thank you for your service, it's an amazing story and it's been a real honor to talk with you.

Kanaya: I wanna make one point clear though that both of us, I am not a hero because the heroes I would say are those that we had to bury overseas because they're the ones that made the supreme sacrifice for us so that we can come home.

Webb: I think that's a very strong point. Okay, well I really wanna thank you for taking the time to tell your story today and I think that'll conclude it.

Kanaya: I'm glad to be of service.