Satsuki "Fred" Tanakatsubo Oral History Interview

July 12, 2014

Interviewed by Jerrod Howe

Howe: We are here today at the Pritzker Military Museum and Library in downtown Chicago, my name is Jerrod Howe, I am here with...

Tanakatsubo: My name is Fred... my Japanese name is Satsuki. My last name is Tanakatsubo.

Howe: Okay.

Tanakatsubo: I like to use the word Fred because it's more common, it's easier. The other thing, I talk to occasional people who say, "What was that again?" You have to keep repeating, you know? So I just use the word Fred more or less as my standard name now. So beside the name, it's a girl's name, and I never did like it. [Laughs].

Howe: The name is Satsuki?

Tanakatsubo: It's a girl's name. In the same class, we had a girl with the same name I had. Make it bad, you know. It's kinda embarrassing to have two names with opposite sexes, you know. Especially when you're a kid, you know. It's kind of hard to take.

Howe: Getting called on in class, yeah.

Tanakatsubo: That's why I use the word Sats. S-a-t-s—which is just half of the first name, half of the name. I know a person that's a female that uses the second half: Suki. It comes from the same name. It's a girl, it is a girl's name. You know? So I go by Fred now and all my documents, everything, are under Fred.

Howe: We will also use Fred.

Tanakatsubo: Thank you.

Howe: When were you born?

Tanakatsubo: I was born in Sacramento, California, April 26th, 1920. I'm 94 years old.

Howe: Congratulations!

Tanakatsubo: 94...I don't know. They say it's gold to be old, but to me it's hell. Everything you do becomes an effort.

Howe: It's rewarding, I hope, to have a long life...

Tanakatsubo: Well...not much more. It gets too much of a struggle. Like I said, I'm glad my wife is healthy where she does a lot of my legwork.

Howe: Gotcha. Well and you've got supportive community members as well. I could see Howard was here today. So...

Tanakatsubo: If it weren't for Howard, I wouldn't be here because I can't walk distance. Any place where I have to do a lot of walking, I kind of refuse to go. You know? Because I can't walk too far.

Howe: Well, we're very fortunate to have you here today, and I just wanna say thank you.

Tanakatsubo: Yeah well, I would like to participate more because I would like to let the people know what we had gone through to prove to them that we are loyal. Our features may not show it; maybe we look different than Caucasian people, but that doesn't mean anything, you know? It's one of the reasons why I would like to participate in things like this. To educate the people that…don't judge people by what they look like; judge them by what they do to you.

Howe: Absolutely, absolutely.

Tanakatsubo: That we are loyal people.

Howe: Well, let's start at the beginning and help put that in context. You said you grew up in California, in Sacramento?

Tanakatsubo: I grew up in California. I went to school in California, and I was inducted from California. But after the war, I moved out East to go to school, and I have stayed. Got married out here, and I stayed out here and had 3 sons—all went to university because we believe in educating our kids, you know? To me, that's very important. Because I myself, as a kid, was prohibited from going because the fact that the family was poor. They couldn't afford for me to go to school after High School because I had to more or less go to work to help the family financially.

Howe: That brings me to another question: what did your parents do for a living?

Tanakatsubo: Well, my father was sort of a small shop owner—a cleaning place, you know? Take in cleaning, laundry, and stuff. It was like a tailor; small operation—just a family type of thing, you know? And we slept in the back, within the shop. Didn't have another home to go to at night, or have a shop to work in and leave and go to another home. We didn't have that. We had a shop and we slept in the back, we ate in the back. It was all one place.

Howe: So was this kind of a family business?

Tanakatsubo: More or less, yeah. My mother took care of the tailor part, and my dad took care of the cleaning and things like that. As I grew older, they taught me how to use a press to press the clothing and stuff. So a lot of time after school— if I'm not going to Japanese school—then I'm at home working in the cleaner.

Howe: Sure, did you have any siblings?

Tanakatsubo: Pardon me?

Howe: Do you have any siblings? Brothers and sisters?

Tanakatsubo: I have five brothers…four other brothers, of which two are gone now—my older one and the one below me. Number three is gone.

Howe: I'm sorry. So you're number two then?

Tanakatsubo: I'm number two, and I have a number four, and a five in California.

Howe: Okay.

Tanakatsubo: So, actually, I kind of figure my life...I have it's like three phases of my life. It's so different from one to the other. I was born as part of the Depression baby. Back in the 20s, since I was born in 1920, and Depression to 1930-'32, was what we call a depressive age where people were jumping off the roofs, committing suicide because of the business failing I think like that. That was the Depression era. 1927. Then I have my life between '41 and '45, which was the military life. Then after '45, when I became a civilian again, my third life as a family man…with the family. So I have three phases of my life that I can talk about. When they ask me to make a speech or talk to a group, I would ask them, "What phase of my life do you wanna hear?" Because during the Depression years, it was so different than what it is now that I would consider it completely different. In those days, like I said, money values were so different. Right now, a nickel isn't worth a nickel. It's not worth anything. In our days, with a nickel, you could do so much. It had so much value. Like, when I'd go to school, my dad would give me a dime. This is your lunch...and with that dime, I'd go to the butcher and buy 3 hot dogs—and that hot dog nowadays would cost you over 4 dollars a pound—one with the skins, alright? I'd get three hot dogs for a nickel. I'd go across the street to the baker, I'd get hot dog buns. I'd get three buns for a nickel. So with that ten cents, I had three hot dogs. And I ate them cold; it didn't matter. This shows you the value of the nickel in those days. Donuts were three for a nickel. They were big donuts, but you could get three of them for a nickel. And milk bottle, a quarter pound of chocolate milk, you could get for a nickel. Nowadays, that bottle would cost you 90 cents to a dollar. It shows you the power of that nickel. Bananas were 10 cents a dozen… the small bananas; the bigger bananas cost 15 cents a dozen—a dozen! Oranges…same thing, 10 cents a dozen; 15 cents a dozen.

Howe: It's a different time.

Tanakatsubo: Two different, completely different…times are different. I'd get a whole slice of melon for a nickel, or go to a candy store, and they're ice cold—for a nickel. I'd get a whole big slice of it! See? Those days the nickels were worth so much money. I'd go to a theater for a nickel! My dad would give me a quarter, and with that quarter, I used ten cents of it and me and my two younger brothers, two brothers, would go in the theater for ten cents. Then we'd have a nickel each to spend. See? The power of the nickel was tremendous. But that was our life, the early part of our life, during the Depression. The milks were a nickel a quart…things like that. Oh yeah! They were so cheap. But the nickel was so powerful. I'm not kidding.

Howe: You said outside...It was a different time, and people of your ancestry, people of your descent, were treated differently during that time.

Tanakatsubo: Well, you know, in California, discrimination was so strong that papers went against us. Even Warren, who was a Supreme Court Justice, Chief Justice, he was one of the antagonizers. He was really against the Oriental people in California.

Howe: And this is prior to World War II?

Tanakatsubo: Prior to World War II, yes. He was one of the instigators in getting us out of California, into the camps. This was your Supreme Court Judge, and I heard that when he died he still would not admit that he was wrong. His son had to apologize for his actions towards the Oriental people. The discrimination was really strong. We had signs in the restaurants that said, "No Japs Allowed." Right in the open, wide open, right in the window, right by the door. "No Japs Allowed."

Howe: How much of that was happening while you were growing up before the war?

Tanakatsubo: During the war...all during my life. In Sacramento, the streets are laid out from the Tower Bridge—which is over the Sacramento River. The first street becomes 1st Street, 2nd, 3rd—going East and West. And the other way—North and South—became alphabet: A, B, C, D. Then all the Japanese people, the Oriental people, including some Chinese people, lived in this area from about H going North up to Y street going South; and from 1st Street, by the river going East, up to 6th. That area was confirmed Jap-town. We all lived in that area. All our businesses…family, business…We lived in that area. We had one school, called Lincoln School, which had an Oriental population of over 80 percent. We couldn't go to any other school. We were confined to that one school in that area. You would call that area a ghetto now, I guess…you know. But all the Japanese people lived in this area, and this is where we kind of learned to know each other. In fact, we knew the whole town. We knew each other backwards—all the kids,

the brothers, the sisters, and all. All of our activities that we used to have: that was just the Japanese-American people. We used to have dancing…and, sure, we had regular things like dancing, stuff like that—jitterbug and whatever. We had all that activity. We had basketball teams—all Japanese. And all the different towns in California, we all had teams that used to play against each other, travel back and forth. So we had our own little…what you call...a secret life, I guess. Basketball, sports, anything. We had our own group that we dealt with—each other. So it as a good life, you know? We had a lot of dancing every weekend. A main band used to come in. We used to have our dates go to the main, dancing and stuff. It was…to me it was a wonderful part of my life. Carefree. Nothing to worry about. Because we accepted that discrimination. We didn't confront it. We just accepted it. If they don't want us, we won't go there. That was the way our parents taught us. Turn the other cheek. Don't make any fuss. It's not worth it, and we accepted this. So if the sign says, "No Japs Allowed," Fine. We just don't go there. It didn't bother us. We just ignored it. That's how we lived with discrimination, very heavily against us, but we accepted it as part of our life, of living in this country.

Howe: Your parents: were they the first ones in your family to move here?

Tanakatsubo: Yeah.

Howe: Okay.

Tanakatsubo: They were the first ones here, and, you know, in California, as you grow up, our parents, regardless of what the financial conditions were, we were sent to school. Education was so important. And not like nowadays. If you did something at school where you got punished, and if you came back and you told your parents that you got punished at school…and he'll ask you, "How did the teacher punish you?" So I would tell him, he says, "Show me!" He would give me the same thing, and say, "This is to remind you. Mind your teacher!" In other words, we were wrong and teacher was right. Nowadays, if you went back and told your parents you got punished, oh man, there was hell to pay, they go right back to the teacher and raise hell with that teacher. In our days, they didn't do that. Our parents backed the teachers up 100 percent. Whatever we did wrong was punished. It was because we did it. That's the way we were brought up. Obedience is very important in our life, you know? And after school when we'd come home, we had another to go to—a Japanese school. Five days a week, right after the American school, we'd go right back to the Japanese school for another two hours. Five nights a week. Half days Saturday.

Howe: What did the Japanese school teach you? What did it consist of?

Tanakatsubo: Basic Japanese language: speaking, writing, and then slowly going through your characters. You know Japanese have three phases of writing: two very simple language, two very simple written, and then you've got the character reading. The character readings were tough because those you have to memorize. But others were like A, B, C,

alphabet. Anybody could read it…the very common. So this is how we started out, with a very simple part, and as you get older then you start to go into your character reading, and this is all memory work. I had to learn how to write it, read it, but the hard part of the language is that when you use the two characters together. Individually it may mean something else, but when you put them together, it means something different. These are the things that we had to pick up with the Japanese language. This is where the difficulty came in, with the language in itself. In order to be able to read a Japanese newspaper, you have to memorize at least three thousand characters, to be able to read a common Japanese newspaper. Those are the basic characters that you should know. And they were hard. So that was our early life as we grew up. Going to two schools every day. You had to pay a fee to go to the Japanese school.

I used to love sports.

Howe: What did you play?

Tanakatsubo: I used to play baseball, basketball. As small as we were, we had our own league, so it didn't matter. I wasn't playing with the Caucasian people. They were 5’ 6”, 5' 8", 5' 9"—to us that was tall because we were 5'3", 5'4", you know? So we used to have our own league, and we used to travel up and down, even between states, and compete with each other in basketball and stuff…or baseball.

Played football with no helmet, no nothin’. I remember tryin’ to tackle a 145 pound fullback—and I weighed 78 pounds! [Laughs] All I know is after I tackled him, I found myself looking up in the sky—the guy just ran right over me. Things like that I can remember. But we never got hurt, surprisingly, you know? Yeah, I never weighed more than 118 pounds back home. 5'3" 5'4", 5'4"…I'm shrinking now I think [laughs]. But that was about normal for us.

So, we got into the Army…in fact, what I did was, in 1941 I turned 21, and in those days we had what they call a draft system. You serve one year, and then you're released. You can go back to a civilian job. I remember that year when I volunteered, I had just turned 21, and I had the draft thing hanging on my head so I figured, well, I should go in, and I'll get it over with and go back to my job. At that time, I had a good job with a civil service. In those days, civil service was a gold mine job. I'll tell you why: when you graduate…we couldn't get a job in a regular firm with the Caucasian people because of discrimination. You could have an engineering degree, doesn't mean anything, they won't hire you because you're an Oriental. So I took a civil service test. About two or three thousand of us took a test. Out of that they take so many qualifying, those with the highest scores. I came in within the first 75. Very high score. You know why? Because civil service was like a speed test. You gotta know how to take it. You don't have to be smart to pass it. It's a matter of speed.

Howe: Just gotta pass the test.

Tanakatsubo: Right. Okay, anyway, for every job that's open in the state, the man that's hiring…the state will send […] three telegrams to report for the interviews. You go to the man that's hiring, and he'll interview the three of you and hire one. Being an Oriental, I had two strikes against me to start with.

Howe: Two?

Tanakatsubo: Two strikes already…against the two that's competing against me because three names go to the guy to hire, and he'll take one out of the three. So I'm competing with two, what I call, white boys.

Howe: Oh, okay.

Tanakatsubo: See, okay…So I get turned down, okay? I get a second one because your name goes back up on the top again, see? You know, when you get turned down, your name goes back on the top. So when another job opens up, you get another telegram. So I got seven of them. Seven times I got turned down...and at that time I was out of high school. I was working for one of my friends—he had a laundry—ironing shirts every day. I'd go to work at 5 in the morning and I worked till 7:30 at night. Ironing shirts. Hot, humid, steam coming up all day long. Ironing shirts, you know… I could iron about 200 shirts a day.

And on the 8th one, I figured the hell with it. I'm know I'm not gonna get hired. I'm not kidding myself. By the time I got my seventh one and didn't get hired, I figured, okay, I'm a Jap, I'm not gonna get hired, so...When I got the 8th one, I just ignored it, and went to work. I was ironing away—that was on a Friday. About 5 o'clock in the evening, we hear an old man come walking in to the laundry, and he asked for me. So my boss called me—I'm ironing away, I'm all sweaty, you know. I go up to the counter, I says, "You're asking for me?" I says, "What can I do for you?" Well you know...He says, "Are you so-and-so?" I said, "yes I am." He says, "You get a telegram from the state?" I said, "Yes I did." He says, "Well why didn't you go for your interview?" I said, "Sir, as you can tell, I'm not a fool, I've got 7 other telegrams, I'm competing against your Caucasian people for a job." I've been turned down seven times, and every time I get a telegram, I have to ask my boss to get two or three hours off to go for an interview, and after the seventh time, you get to the stage where I kind of feel guilty asking for time off, knowing that I'm not gonna get the job anyway I told him. That's the reason why I didn't show up. So he's just looking at me, he's giving me an up and down look, you know. I'm all sweating and looking around the area where I'm working. He says, "When can you start?" I said, "What?" When can you start? I said well I have to give my boss at least two weeks notice and he's working nearby, you know. He said, Sat, it's okay. So I said well fine then, I says, I can start Monday. He says okay, fine. Here's the address. Nine o'clock, show up. I said yes sir, and I got my state job.

Howe: Wow.

Tanakatsubo: And he turned out to be quite a man, because I found out later, working with him, that he was quite fair. Maybe that's the reason why I got the job, you know?

Howe: Well, he could see that you were a hard worker. […] He could see you standing there, doing all that work. You were a hard worker.

Tanakatsubo: Yeah, he figured I was a hard worker…yeah. Well, he was okay; he was quite a gentleman. And I worked for about a year and a half for the state, then when the drafting came up...So that's when I figured, ah, I got that thing hanging over. I can't do anything, or plan anything, because I don't know when I'm gonna get drafted. So I figured, I should volunteer. I'll go in and get it over with, then come back to my job knowing that my obligation is over. So I volunteered.

And December 7th came and knocked everything all to hell. I got stuck for four years [laughs].

Howe: How did your family feel about you volunteering?

Tanakatsubo: They didn't feel bad. All I had was my dad and my brothers anyways. So... you know in those days the money that we made…in fact when I was working in the laundries, I was working six and a half days a week, at least 12 to 14 hours a day, for 40 bucks a month. For 40 dollars a month! That was the standard pay. Working for the government, I was getting paid 90 bucks a month, so you can see the difference in the pay scale—lucrative. That was like a gold mine job. But see, the money that I made every month…I'd come home, I'd give it to my dad. "Here dad, here's my monthly wage." Everything goes to my parents; I don't keep anything. This is the way we were brought up. That was the structure in our family and life, you know. So...this is the way we grew up and this is when I went to the army and on the 7th of December...

Howe: Real quick…because there's a definite shift in what happens after 7 of December…

Tanakatsubo: Yeah after that...when I was working for the state, life was beautiful, you know? We had our weekend dances, and girlfriends, and going out; had sports and things like that… with not a care in the world, you know? Life is so nice and so easy. Would be easy. It was, in fact, pleasant. And, like I said, the places that they didn't want us, we didn't bother going. But other places would let us in: movies and restaurants and things like that. It wasn't bad. It was okay, and we all knew each other in this small area... We would walk down and see…we knew everybody…you know everybody: the family, the kids. We all grew up together. So it was really a nice little community. Safe. I could walk through that area at 2 o'clock in the morning and I wouldn't have to worry about getting hit over the head or anything. You know, as dark as it was, it was safe because it was all Japanese people living there.

We used to have what they call a bath house. A lot of these have a bath house in the home. So we had what they call a communal bath, where we paid 5 cents, go in. You get a face towel, bath towel, you bring your own soap and all that, you pay a nickel, you go and take your clothes off and put them in a locker, and take a nice bath. A real hot bath—Japanese style, where you wash yourself outside, and then you rinse all the soap off, and then you go into the hot water, and you soak. Before you go home you get into a cold shower because the water is so hot it opens up all your pores; when you take a cold shower it closes the pores up again. Then you get your clothes and you go home. That was our life when we were kids, growing up. We had basketball games, and we would take the visiting team with us right to the Japanese bath house, take our bath, and pay for the incoming team's bath, and after that we'd go out and eat somewhere and have a good time together, you know? That was our early life, when we were growing up, it was really nice, wonderful. Then this draft thing came up, and that's when I volunteered for the Army.

Howe: So you enlisted. When did you go into service?

Tanakatsubo: October, 1941.

Howe: Oh, wow. Okay, So it was very short.

Tanakatsubo: Yeah, before the war and...

Howe: Where did you go for basic training?

Tanakatsubo: Camp Roberts, California. Up in the mountains, South of San Fransisco, near the coast.

Howe: How long was that?

Tanakatsubo: We were there from October...it was more of a...I think I was in the field artillery…yeah, replacement units. We trained on the field artillery. And December 7th came and I didn't go home that weekend because, if I remember, I had a date on the 14th, the week after. So I figured I'm gonna save my money, and I'll go home the next week, the following week. But then when December 7th came, that was it. That locked everything down. I never did get to go home after that.

Howe: Was your unit…the field artillery unit that you were with, before Pearl Harbor...

Tanakatsubo: It was basic training, so there was no such thing as a unit. Just basic training where something…something field artillery. I forgot because it was so long ago, but I know it's a unit that you train as a field artillery. I remember when the war broke out, they came in and took our rifle away from us, and I was wondering, what's going on? You know? Why aren't they taking the other guys' rifles, but they took just ours away? There were three of us in the same unit—Japanese Americans. Three of our rifles were taken out of the unit. They put us into an empty barracks, and eventually, there were more and more

Japanese American guys that were taken out of the other lines that were training in the same camp...and they were all brought over to this one barracks, and we ended up with about 50 or 60 of us in one barracks—all Japanese American. All our rifles were taken away from us. Everything. Any weapons—that means rifles and bayonets. We just laid around and did nothing. We were wondering what was going on. I was fortunate in that respect that I was able to type. I took typing in school, high school. I could type over fifty words a minute. So my company headquarters—where I was training—in my spare time, I used to help out at the company headquarters because I could type for them. And because of that I got my PFC rating. That meant a lot because that meant an extra six bucks in my paycheck, you know. Because I was only getting 21 dollars a month, and that 6 bucks made it 27 dollars a month. I was getting paid more than the other guys [laughs]. Anyway... they took our things away and we really didn't know what was going on because all they did was take the guys out of our unit, put 'em on a truck, or pickup garbage can. Some were taken out and put into a different outfit, work as a KP, and they'd come back at night again. That's all we were doing: picking up garbage cans, KP work. I was always in the office. I was fortunate that I was spared from all this garbage work. Then one night, about 2 in the morning, they woke us up and said, "Pack up your gears. Whatever you have and fall out." So they marched us off to a railroad siding in the camp. Loaded us on to this train, and the blinds were all drawn, you couldn't look out. Then about an hour later, the train pulls out. We didn't know where we were going or anything. We just sat there for a while, and then an officer came up—a second Lieutenant. He had a field order, one that said, 'Fort Lewis, Washington'. So we went up to Fort Lewis, and we were put into an outfit called DEMA or something... DEML or... something. Somebody told me what it was—I forgot. It was something like a labor outfit. Labor battalion. From this pool, people were taken off of KP work, picking up garbage cans, washing windows, working on the ground, things like that. It was a labor unit. That's all. We were all Japanese American. There were about 200 of us at Fort Lewis, and during one of these times when I was called out to report to a certain office. I remember walking in to this office—a small dinky place—and it was a Caucasian Captain sitting behind a desk. The minute I walked in, he greeted me with a beautiful Japanese language. I said, "Wow!" I used to call them all white boy. Wow, look at this white boy; he speaks Japanese. Beautiful Japanese. I couldn't get over it.

Howe: This is Captain Joseph Dickie?

Tanakatsubo: Captain. He's sitting there. The minute I came in, the first word that came out of his mouth was the Japanese language. Greeting me. Not thinking, I talked back. I reported back in Japanese, and we're conversing now, back and forth in Japanese. He says, "You're pretty fluent with your Japanese language." I said, "I'm a Japanese American, naturally." I told him. You know. Because I talk with my parents, and I went to Japanese school. After, he said, "Would you like to"— vol, that word vol, that means volunteer. I said, "I am not volunteering for a thing, because you know why? The first time I

volunteered got me into this god damn mess." I told him. The uniform I got on, I'm not proud of it. The uniform to me means garbage can, KP work, that's all it means to me. I'm not proud to wear it. I wanna get the hell out of it. And I walked out on him. I figured that was it. But after I got out, I kind of got scared because you don't talk to an officer that way. I said, "Wow, did I just talk to him like that?" I was scared, I went all the way back to my barracks, and all this time, I'm thinking, "Oh boy, I hope they don't send anybody after me." I was really scared then, because of the way I talked to him, you know. Then nothing happened, unless I forgot about it. Then next think a new order came up. In fact, I was playing for the Fort Lewis basketball team. I was on their basketball team. You know, because I played a lot of basketball when I was a kid. So I played for the school, for the basketball team and everything else. I was having a good time in Fort Lewis. Then an order came out. We all packed up again, and on the train we go. We're headin' out Midwest, and up in Minnesota. And there we got into a tiff with an outfit that came up from the south. They called us "Jap-boy", and we had a big brawl— right on the field in Minneapolis. [Laughs]. Two units, clashing. [Laughs].

Howe: Was this at Camp Crowder or Camp Savage?

Tanakatsubo: No, this was in Camp Snelling. Fort Snelling.

Howe: Fort Snelling, okay.

Tanakatsubo: So right after that incident, about 200 something of us were shipped out to Camp Crowder, Missouri. A new camp had just opened up, and it they wanted the camp ready for inductees coming in—that we were sent there working on the ground, washing the windows, cleaning everything, getting the camp ready for the inductees that were coming in. And that's when this service club lady heard that I could type. So she offered me job working for the service club, which is great. She even promised me a top d grade on top of that. I said, "Hey, that's for me." Working at service club, I don't have to eat at the mess hall. I could eat at the service club, and everything else. I figured, I'm in, you know—for about a month. I was just working over there, real easy going. And once I went back to my barracks, I see my name on the board, my name on the board…get ready to pack up. I said, "Wow. Where in the hell am I going now?" I had a good job and everything. I said, "Where should I go?" You know. So I went up to the CO about it, and he says, "Out of my control. This is from Washington." So next thing I know, I was in Camp Savage. When I pulled up over there, I look up at the camp. I says, "It doesn't look like the army camp…a bunch of low cabins." I went into one where I was assigned. The walls were black; it was filthy. I look in the john; you wouldn't even use that john. It was all black inside, and dirty; hasn't been cleaned. And I look at the place and say, "What the hell kind of camp is this?" It was filthy, you know. The grasses were away, and they were tall. Not cut or nothing. So for a whole month, that's all we did was work on the… scrubbing the walls, cutting grasses. Fatigue work, for a whole month. And then 1st of June, all of a sudden, everything changed. Notice came out. Class B uniform—they were

out of fatigues. Your name, asking you to go to a certain barracks. So I went to…I was in one of the lower classes. At first I didn't know why, but I could tell later why. I found out why. Anyway, it was a classroom, but there was nothing in the room. The room was empty; no desk. We had to sit around the wall with a book on our lap. They passed us a small book, and I looked at it; it was a basic Japanese book. I said, "What the hell…what kind of thing is this? A Japanese book?" I found out it was intelligence school. So I said, "That's okay." I figured my mind it's like a horse. You can lead a horse to a trough; doesn't mean that he's gonna drink. I was rebelling. So they got me to the school. They can't make me study. I had a chip on my shoulder. I had been kicked around so much that. You get to the stage where you don't care anymore. You don't care what happens. It can't be any worse than what you've been getting up till now. So I figured, I'm not gonna study. I had my mind made up. So I go to the class and I'll just do the basics, just to get by. I don't put in time, I don't study, I had enough basic to read this easier language book. I had no trouble reading them. But I wasn't studying. But then every time I came back to the barracks at night time, I see these other guys, the light goes off at nine o'clock. I see these guys get into the blanket, put the blanket over, put a flashlight, they're reading the book. I said, damn look at these guys. I'm not doing nothing, I'm not putting any effort in. I just lay around my bunk, just rebelling and these guys are bookin' away like crazy. And I go back to school every day, just get by. The teacher knew that I wasn't studying. But I had enough Japanese background, that I could still get by without studying, yeah, you know. So he didn't say anything. That went on for about a month and a half. Because I wanted them to kick me out, is what I'm trying to do, really, you know, basically. Because I was intending to work. I was mad because they took me out of my good job that I had at Camp Crowder. Now they got me studying, which I don't want to do and figure I'm rebelling because I don't want to be here, you know? My mood was starting to change because these guys are bookin' like, man I'm not kiddin'...I couldn't get over these guys, it was some really stunning...kind of make you stop being a little. Like, "Hey why don't you put a little more effort in?" I'm talking to myself. I'm going to get a little behind, a little behind and the teacher knew that I could do the work, but I wasn't doing it because I wasn't studying, and he wouldn't say anything. But I think he turned my name in because they called me into the office. I kinda let myself...I told them why. I didn't volunteer for this. You guys Shanghaied me over here because I didn't want to be here, and I don't see why I should have to study for something that I don't want to be.

Howe: By this time, did you know...You said that you were aware that it was intelligence training, but did you have an idea of what you were going to be doing, what your responsibilities would be?

Tanakatsubo: Oh yeah, I'm no dummy. I could tell what it was for. I was just rebelling. Just to be rebelling because of the way I got treated. Inside of me was all burned up. I said, "The hell with it. I'm not gonna do anything." This was my attitude. After that, I talked again,

and they kind of brought up my brother's name in…like a blackmail. He was in Camp Robinson. I found out. So I figured, "Well, I'll study. Minimum. Just to get by, anyway. Just to get 'em off my back." So I start to study a little bit, a little bit. Next thing you know, you're into it, you know. So 6 months went by, and it was kind of hard because the Camp that was so out of the way— it was so basic that they didn't even have a bus system into my camp. So if you wanted to go to Minneapolis on the weekend, you hitchhiked your way in because they had no bus coming in to pick us up and take us back. If we wanna come back in from Minneapolis that night, we needed four or five of us to get together trying to get a cab together to come drive us into the camp—about 19 miles. Which was a hard thing to do because cabs didn't wanna go out that far, you know?

Howe: Right.

Tanakatsubo: They never really did anything for us for that six months. On a Wednesday, we went to school half the day, then the other half of the day was for physical fitness. They put us out in a field and we would go marching, and we'd end up out in the road about a half mile from the camp. By that time, we were beat, we were tired. We were hoping that there was an ambulance behind us, waiting, in case anybody dropped off. I hope somebody drops off, then I'll join them. Orientals are funny; they don't want to be the first one to do it. So, nobody drops out. Everybody waiting for everybody else to drop out, and no body drops out. I don't wanna be the first, the next thing you know, we're double timing in. Tired as we were, we double timed half a mile into the camp. Stand at attention, then get dismissed. Head for the barracks, flop on the bed with a pack and all. Too damn tired to take the pack off. We just laid on our bunk, too tired to go in town that night. That was our Wednesday. We tried to rig up something where somebody would drop out, and we'd all join him. But nobody wanted to be the first to drop out. [Laughs] As tired as we were, we never dropped out. We all end up running into the camp, too tired to go out that night. [Laughs] To me, it's kind of funny when I think about it now because of our lousy pride. We don't want to be the first to drop out, and nobody drops out. This is one of the Japanese's…I think a fault that we have. That's true of the Japanese soldier; they don't want to be the first.

Howe: Because of that attitude, did anyone ever get hurt? Did they over exert themselves?

Tanakatsubo: No, no, they were just plain tired and lazy. If someone dropped, hey, I'd join 'em. I'd drop. But nobody does it.

Howe: Yeah, no one wants to be the first one.

Tanakatsubo: No one wants to be the first, yeah. We have some…I will say, our personal…a little bit different, you know. We're not the gung-ho, go-ahead style type of people. We're very laid back, and we're good followers; not a very good leader. That's the way I look at it.

Howe: Fair enough.

Tanakatsubo: Even in an organization, nobody wants to be a commander of the legion post. But they're good workers. But they don't wanna be a commander. We always had trouble trying to get someone to be commander of the post. [At] all the other posts, the people are fighting to be a commander. On our post, it was so laid-back; no one wants to take any responsibility. But they're good workers. All you do is ask them to do something for them—they'll do it. No problem. But this is our nature.

Howe: It's like you're passing a hot potato around—no one wants to hold on to the potato.

Tanakatsubo: But you give them a chance to hold it, they'll hold it for you.

Howe: There you go.

Tanakatsubo: This is our nature.

Howe: If you don't mind... How long were you at Camp Savage for?

Tanakatsubo: Savage? 6 months.

Howe: And then...?

Tanakatsubo: And then at the end, before we take our final exam, we put in for furlough to go see our parents, whatever, before we get shipped overseas. In the meantime, our parents had all been... all the Japanese had been pulled out of their homes and put into different camps.

Howe: This is because of Executive Order 9066?

Tanakatsubo: The order. Right, 9066. Right. So my dad was in Tule Lake, California.

Howe: Where was this?

Tanakatsubo: Tule Lake, it's up north near the Oregon border in a salt flat. It's like a lake flat, there's nothing there, so that's where they built this camp, Tule Lake. They call it Tule Lake.

Howe: Was your mother or your brothers there?

Tanakatsubo: Yeah. My father, but I didn't have a mother—just my younger brothers and my father. Because my older brother was in the army already, somewhere, I didn't know. I didn't know where the hell he went, though. My family was split up all over. Anyway, I put in for a furlough to go see my dad before I get shipped overseas, and my furlough came

back denied. I said, “What do you mean, denied?” We were cleared by the FBI... They gave us forms to fill, and hell, they knew everything that we were doing when we were kids. They knew our life. I couldn't get over…reading the damn thing…they knew everything that I was doing when I was a kid. And we were cleared by the FBI to go to the school, the MIS school. But we're not good enough to go into California? They didn't want us. So that's when my rebelling came back again. I got that chip back on again. I put my name across my exam, tore the paper in half. I...I wouldn't take it. I said, “That's it.” So when they got my paper, they looked at me, and looked at my paper. I just sat there. Didn't budge an eyeball. Turned it in. Next day, another paper. Put my name, *rip*, sat there. Didn't do a thing. I just sat there. I wasn't the only guy. There were a bunch of us guys that had parents in Tule Lake that were all turned down. So when they saw me tear up the paper, they backed me up.

Howe: They all did it too?

Tanakatsubo: Yeah. So they finally called us into a big…like a meeting room—used to be a mattress factory over there. Boy rats are like that, running all over the place. They had us all in that room, and our civilian instructor—the head instructor—he was in charge of all the instructors. His name was Iso. He has a Harvard degree and all that, you know? He was standing up on the stage; he's a civilian.

Howe: Japanese American?

Tanakatsubo: Yeah. So when our Colonel came in—Colonel Mashbear—he got up. He hollered, “Attention!” And nobody got up. Nobody. He yelled, “Attention!” again. Nobody got up. Then, we had a tech sergeant. He was the leading non-com in the school there. He was a tech sergeant. He got up. He said, “Mr. Iso, you're a god damn civilian. Who the hell are you to give commands to the armed forces?” “You're a civilian,” he told him. He was right. That was the reason why we didn't get up. Why should a civilian give us orders? Colonel's coming down, he heard all of this. Oh boy, and that man's face was red. Oh, he was mad. He didn't like us at all. The first group was in San Francisco. They had about 60 kids, and we were the first school in Savage. When they moved the school to Minneapolis, and the people and the students that went to this school did not come from this Camp, they were all drafted into the Army before the war. These guys were Army personnel already. They were not the people from out of the Camp; civilians. We were Army personnel.

Howe: If you don't mind…you had already decided to serve, you volunteered to serve before Pearl Harbor—the attack on Pearl Harbor happened?

Tanakatsubo: Right.

Howe: And people coming into service after Pearl Harbor, there's this idea that maybe they're volunteering to try and prove their loyalty. But you had already committed, so you shouldn't have had anything...

Tanakatsubo: These…what happened was, right after the war broke out, we were cut off; all the people were cut off from joining. They were class 54C; undesirable. So they couldn't get in to the Army if they wanted to.

Howe: But you were already in.

Tanakatsubo: But we were already in the Army. And this was the problem that came up; they didn't know what to do with us. And this is really when they were kicking us all over the Camps—all over the United States—doing fatigue work, KP work, trying to keep us busy, trying to make up their mind [about] what they want to do with us. Until there was a demand for language personnel. And this is when the thing started for the school. But all they could interview were the people that were already in the Army, and not the civilians because they were class 54 C. They were not draftable. So they had to interview all the Japanese Americans that were in the Army at that time, and they were able to bring up only about 170. Out of the 170, a lot of them that could barely, just barely make it. They could talk the language, but they couldn't read. I have difficulty reading. If you wanna be able to read Japanese literature, you gotta be a kid in Japan. To go to regular high school in Japan where all they do is talk Japanese. If you go to school here a couple hours a day, you're not gonna get that ability to do all that. You don't have enough times to learn all those characters. Some of the people that were good at it in the Army were people that were born here, but their parents sent them to Japan to be educated. We called them *Keibe*. They're American citizens, but they were educated in Japan. These are the ones that they should have. They got some into the school. We were fortunate that we had some *Keibe* in the classroom because they were able to read the stuff, but their English was poor because they spent so much time in Japan. And this way, when OC's…when we go in the field, we form a two man team; a man that could read and a man that could speak. I can't read, but if he talked to me, if he reads to me, I could translate it. While hearing, I could know enough Japanese to be able to translate. If we can't, we had the dictionary. As a two man team, we could work very proficiently. For interrogating, there's no problems. It was a matter of talking, which was no problem. But if we get documents, he'll take over. He will scan it. If it's not important, he'll push it aside. If it's important, he'll read it to me, we'll translate it, and send it back to the headquarters. This is what we got out of the report, let them know. If it's prisoners, I will go out and interrogate them. Front line— anywhere where we got the prisoners. If it's the front line type of interrogation, then we're only concerned with the immediate area; the area that were going into. If they got that area mined, snipers set up, machine gun positions, your back up artillery… where's it at? Where's your headquarters? Who's your officer? How much training does the unit have? Are there veterans from Manchuria or China? Or are they green crew from Japan? These are

information, front line type of work. We were more at the background. A guy could be an aircraft employee, might know quite a bit about airplane parts. Those are people I wanna interrogate, back then, and the civilian type of business. There were two types of interrogations that we had to commit—depending on where you're at and what your job is. My case was mostly the front line work. My job was the immediate area; find out booby traps, stuff like that to safe guard our kids going in—into the particular area. Going into caves, stuff like that. This was primarily what our job was all about in the front line.

Howe: I wanna get to that. But, we missed the end of that story because you were gonna go on furlough.

Tanakatsubo: Oh. What happened is that Mashbear tried to explain to us why some of the furloughs were turned down. But we told him we were cleared by the FBI—that should clear us from everything…that we are loyal. We may get killed overseas, may never see our parents again. All we're asking [for] is a week off to go see our parents before we go overseas. "That isn't much to ask," I told him. I was really mad, you know. So I got up. I was on the blackball list, anyway, so what the hell. It didn't make any difference anyway because I was known as a rebel anyway. But anyway, Mashbear is trying to explain to us, because of the area, different commanders are in charge, and they set up their policy, and the government backed them up. So...Some of us had to go overseas without seeing our parents, and my dad died in camp when I was overseas.

Howe: Did you get a chance to see him before you left?

Tanakatsubo: I never did see him, no. He died in 1943, and I was in Savage from June of '42 through December '42, and I left for the Aleutian Islands in December of '42.

Howe: I'm sorry.

Tanakatsubo: And...When I was in Australia, my kid brother wrote me, and said, "Dad passed away. He had an accident in the camp. He fell…hit his head or something. He had a brain hemorrhage." So, here I go again. I put in for a furlough to go back. In fact, I asked for a furlough from Camp Crowder because that's when the parents had orders to pack up and leave the home. So I asked for a furlough to go back and help them pack because all we had was my dad and my younger brother. And they turned down my furlough then, again, you know. It was a period of continuous denial—as far as I was concerned—for what I wanted to do for my family. I keep getting turned down, and all the more the rebellion kept building up inside of me, it kept building. So by the time I hit the school, I was at the peak. You know? So I went overseas, and when I heard about my dad in Australia—it's a warm country...and I can't drink, but I had a bottle of booze. I went out in the field. I laid out there for almost two weeks. I laid out there, got drunk every day, didn't report for work, nothing. My buddies all came, bringing me food and stuff. And I just kept drinking, eat a little bit, drinking. Finally about two weeks later…kinda…get out

of it, and said, “Well...what are you gonna do? Can't do this for the rest of your life.” So I got up, and I went into the front offices, and said, “I want a transfer to front line duty.” At that time, they were getting ready for the invasion of New Guinea. So they sent me out to join this combat unit, and I was with them for the Operation to New Guinea. And when that was over, we went into the Philippine Islands; the main island, Luzon. And there I worked with the front line and going to prisoner camp, interrogating prisoners, and things like that. I was dark and skinny. I passed for Filipino. Oh yeah, they thought I was a Filipino, you know. I used to drive my Jeep all over prison camp, all over. Nobody bothered me. [Laughs] Because they thought I was a Filipino driver.

Howe: Okay, and they weren't giving Filipinos in the service…they weren't giving them a hard time?

Tanakatsubo: Well, the Filipinos, they liked the Japanese soldiers, for one thing. And I don't know, somehow we just never...you know…After interrogating, when lunchtime come, I go into the stockade. I'd go eat with the prisoners because they eat rice. They had their own rations, their own cook and everything. Yeah, so what the hell? So I go in there and go eat Japanese food. [Laughs]

Howe: Right?

Tanakatsubo: Why not? What the heck, you know?

Howe: Probably better than K rations...

Tanakatsubo: No, I didn't wanna eat the Army food. I'd get tired of it. I kind of missed my rice, too, so...When they have lunch time, I'd go in the stockade, go eat my rice, and come back out again, interrogate prisoners. [Laughs]

Howe: So you ended up in Australia. Was this part of the battle at Attu? You weren't in the Aleutians at all?

Tanakatsubo: After Kiska was over, we had 40 men up. They sent up 20 more replacements for the Kiska Operation. They thought we might need more interpreters up there. But as you know, Kiska was evacuated, and we didn't know about it. We had a blockade out, circling the island so they wouldn't get out. But somehow we're very systematic in whatever we do, and they knew the blockade was out. They knew when the blockade was open, when they had to pull out to refuel. And what happened is—funny thing—after we were civilians, we used to have a reunion in our MIS group. And we had one in San Francisco—this is after the war—and they sent me a circular saying that they're gonna have a Japanese soldier that was on Kiska attend... He had asked permission to attend our conference, our convention. I said, “Great, I wanna talk to him” because I was always curious to how they evacuated Kiska without us knowing about it. My theory was that they used a submarine by going straight up north, past the blockade, and then

down into Paramushiro—which is only 500 miles from Kiska. That was my theory, anyway. So when I went to that reunion, I met with that guy, we sat down, we talked about two hours—so interesting. And I was trying to prove my theory. He said, "Your theory is right, in a way, but the submarines were too small. You couldn't get enough people to evacuate. They had over 7,900 soldiers on that island."

Howe: 7,900?

Tanakatsubo: Yeah, it would have been a big battle because Attu only had 2,600, and Attu took us 3 weeks to conquer. So you know what's gonna happen with 7,900...

Howe: Yeah, no kidding.

Tanakatsubo: We had three more divisions to participate. The 10th mountain regiment was up there— a special mountain group. But anyways, when I conversed with this prisoner, with this Japanese national guy in San Francisco, he said, "They knew your schedule blockade. You guys are so systematic and everything was to schedule. So we knew exactly when the blockade would be open. When the pull ship pulls out to refuel and things like that. So we timed ourselves by stripping a cruiser and a destroyer. They stripped them. When the time came, they snuck them in, and in one hour's time, they loaded 7,900 soldiers off the island. They left their guns, everything behind. Just loaded 'em up, left the landing craft, everything, and took off—in one hour's time. Then, when they came back to blockade, they were gone, but we didn't know it. They were bombing them every day after that. Nobody on the island. So when we landed...

Howe: Wow. Yeah. So did you land with the 7th infantry division on Kiska?

Tanakatsubo: On Kiska and Attu, both.

Howe: Okay. And then from there, where did you go?

Tanakatsubo: And then after that thing was over, we were pulled out and went back to our home base. We were on an island called Adak in the Aleutian Islands. And from there, what we would do when a unit came up, we'd get assigned up in Alaska to the different units—probably because the interpreters were detached service. So when the war was over, when everything was over, we got sent back to our unit. You know, we were on detached service. They said, "How come you guys didn't get any award?" Well, you know, if you are attached to a unit, you don't belong to the unit. They figured, "Why should we waste our promotion and stuff like that with a unit…people that don't belong to us?" So you may do something heroic—it doesn't mean anything. You're not gonna get it because they're gonna hold that award within themselves. So you go back to your home unit. That's the reason why a lot of times the…not like the 442nd that were awarded a lot of things. A lot of the MIS did not get awarded because we were on detached service—you didn't belong to the unit.

Howe: And no one in that unit is gonna make sure that your parent unit has that information?

Tanakatsubo: Yeah...no, they didn't see. So...that's the reason why a lot of the MIS people didn't get awards or anything. Because they were not attached to a unit, and they didn't want to use that…waste that award with detached people. Because I'm not gonna be there anyway, so why should they give out their rationed award to somebody else that's not gonna be there? But that's just the...the Army is the most discriminating body in the world! They are! I hate to say it, but they are. You know. You already segregated as to what you're gonna be. But this is the Army, so what are you gonna do? You accept it. So we were on Adak when the thing was over we found out we had over 48 MIS people up there and the war was over up in the Aleutian Islands. You don't need that many people up there. So they decided so send 28 of the earlier people back to some other units that could use them. And I was on the list to go to Attu for the winter, and I dreaded that because I didn't wanna go to Attu. It was a mud hole, you know? But I was waiting for air transportation to go to Attu because I was on one of the first planes to take off Attu. You know, after the Attu operation was over, what they did was they drained a lake on Attu, and then put steel mesh out. That was the landing field. So when they backed a C47 right against the edge of the cliff, turned that around and put the break on, and start gunning their gun, next moment then, they release their break and take off hoping they could take off before we hit the ocean.

Howe: Oh goodness...

Tanakatsubo: So we were one of the first ones to take off on a C47 from Attu, and the pilot says, "Hey, hang on kids. Hope we clear that ocean before we take off." "We're on the first plane taking off," he says.

Howe: We're an experiment.

Tanakatsubo: So you could tell when you take off because you're on a steel mat; it's noisy. You know, the wheels on the mat. All of a sudden, you don't hear the noises...uh oh, I think we're off the ground. Attu was like that. They drained the lake out and put steel mat down, peg it down, and that became your landing field. It took the US engineers a matter of maybe two weeks to make an airfield. They would drain the lake out, put steel mat out, that's it. They were good at it. Japanese soldiers had to go with us, to help us pack, packing the ground with their hands, you know? We came in with a bulldozer, and did it one time. Those Japanese soldiers couldn't get over it—how mechanical our army was because they didn't have all that stuff. So from there, I got sent down to Australia. It was nice down there. We were what they call an aisle section, interrogation section. It's a room. What happened is that they had a cell downstairs—prisoner's cell—and they keep one old time prisoner in each cell, and whenever they get a new prisoner, they put him in with the old timer. What we'd do is—the cells are tapped and we're in a room—and

we'd listen in on their conversation. Because we recognized the old timers' voices from the new one, and we'd see what they'd talk about, see what kind of information. Usually, when two soldiers get together, they'll talk, they'll talk about the unit where they came from and all of that. So this is what we're trying to capture. Get the information through the earphone, and put down their notes. So when the interrogator goes on, he takes his notes and goes down to interrogate the prisoner. He could tell if the man was telling us the truth or giving us a bunch of bull crap. Because we already had some information about that soldier, you know? Australia was like a German...they had everything tapped. They got established and were set up for that kind of work. It's amazing.

Howe: Do you think that the old timers knew, or that they never caught on?

Tanakatsubo: I don't think that they caught on because they talked. We knew his story, you know. One was a Lieutenant that was a pilot. His arm got shot off. They picked him up in the ocean, but the US Sailors, they're souvenir hungry. They took all his papers away from him. So when we got him, we didn't know who he was. All we knew was that one arm was amputated, one hand was cut off. We didn't know his rank or nothing. We go down to interrogate him two at a time. Interrogate him for an hour, come back, two other guys go down. If he starts talking too fast, we put him on a record right away. Recording, take it down, and then we'd translate it later. You know. They had a real good system set up in Australia. And this guy, we kept hitting him. Two men go down at a time, one hour, come back, two other guys go down, then we'd have a three man squad…I mean, three squads. In other words, that room had to be kept monitored 24 hours a day, so we had a team of 8 coming in every 8 hours, keep changing. We had him on his foot for 16 hours, this prisoner.

Howe: Wow. This was the pilot?

Tanakatsubo: Well, we didn't know he was a pilot. We didn't know what he was. We were trying to find out what he was. He gave us all kinds of stories. Every time a guy goes down, he gets a different story. So we didn't know who the hell he was. You know. Finally, he broke down...He said he was a pilot—crashed and the Navy picked him up. That was one of the problems; the Navy took away all his papers, kept them for souvenirs and stuff like that. So by the time we got him, we didn't know who the hell he was, you know? Found out he was Lieutenant in the Air Force, and he was a pilot and stuff like that. He had a lot of information about the planes that we could use later for interrogation: plane parts, and the kind of plane it was, the build of the plane, and stuff that we could give to the Air Force. You know, stuff like that. But this where a lot of interrogation comes in. Get knowledge of everything: background, home town, factory,—depending on what his occupation was—any kind of information we can get that can help our people. Pilots, the weaknesses of the plane, and stuff like that—which is important, you know. So interrogation was important in a way that. Like MacArthur said—he knew

more about the enemy than any war that he had ever been in. He said, “You guys have shortened the war by 2 years with all the information that we have about the enemy.” You know? This was our credit. At least MacArthur knew our worth, you know?

Howe: Even if—at the unit level—you weren't recognized? Man...

Tanakatsubo: So...anyways...from there…one thing is, while I was in the Philippines after—well you might say the operation was winding down. We were getting ready for the invasion of Japan. This was in August. I kind of had an idea where our unit was gonna hit, you know? And I was kind of dreading that because I don't mind fighting soldier to soldier, its okay. Killing each other is fine, soldier to soldier. But I knew when we invade Japan that we were going to be fighting kids. Because these kids—girls and boys both—were being trained with a bamboo spear to fight when we come in. I knew that they were training because with the Japanese people, it was common that they would train the young people. I was dreading as to what would I do if a young girl, or a young kid come at me with a spear. What the hell would I do? I don't mind firing, killing a soldier because that's war. But to kill a kid...not even in the military, you know? I kept wondering whether I would have…whether I could pull the trigger and shoot the young kids if they came at me, you know. I had kind of a problem with that. My innermost thing was…I think I would just turn and run unless it became a matter of my life, then I would have to shoot. But if I could avoid it, I think I would try and avoid a situation of that sort. This is what I thought, anyway. It kind of bothered me all during the Philippines—after the Philippine operation, when we were getting ready for the invasion of Japan.

Howe: Sure.

Tanakatsubo: I had never forgotten that part of it. But when they dropped an atom bomb, they solved the problem. In a way, it was a bad bomb, but in a way, to me, it was a Godsend because that solved my problem. Because I think, in the long run, if they didn't drop that bomb, I think there would have been a hell of a lot more casualties in Japan— including the young kids. And by dropping that bomb, I think we avoided that part of the conflict. So in that respect, I think that dropping the bomb was the right thing to do—as bad as it was. I think it saved lives, instead of taking lives. That's what I thought. So we did go into Japan then, and our unit took over the area in Osaka. We had a lot of work, we were sent out as interpreters every day. I was sent to a Suntori, the booze place, you know? Suntory Whiskey. Suntori. It's a big outfit. Take inventory over there and...

Howe: What was the...was it a factory?

Tanakatsubo: Suntory, S U N T O R Y. It's a very well-known factory, a Whiskey factory.

Howe: Okay...that's why it's well known?

Tanakatsubo: Yeah, I know. When I went to their basement, I saw their 500 gallon kegs. Scotch. Nineteen hundred. 45 year old scotch, can you believe that? 45 year old scotch, 500 gallon kegs. Down in the basement.

Howe: Could you take it home?

Tanakatsubo: I got a bottle, they gave me a bottle. I don't drink, so it didn't matter. I could never drink. But anyway, I had to go down there to take inventory with an officer.

Howe: By the way, what unit were you with when you were over there, in Osaka.

Tanakatsubo: They called it I-Corps.

Howe: I-Corps?

Tanakatsubo: Yeah, first corps.

Howe: First Army Corps?

Tanakatsubo: I kind of didn't like this officer that I was assigned to. Always just grabbing things—I want this, I want that. Kind of showed us supreme attitude, you know? And I didn't like that attitude. So when we'd go to take inventory—like Suntory, and all that—he's always looking for free handouts, and tell me to get him some bottle for this and that, this and that, you know. And I hated that. So I'd just tell him, “We can't ask for any bottles. What's the matter with you?” You know. But they gave us to all the…whatever they have here. I said, “I should tell that guy anyways. After he leaves, then they will give me a bottle.” They say, “Oh, it’s a gift I want you to take with you.” But I didn't want to beg for the food, you know, like you wanted me to do, you know? I didn't like him. That's why...He was more or less over me. I was a non-com. He was a first, second Lieutenant. You know?

Howe: How long were you in Osaka?

Tanakatsubo: We landed there in August, right after the bomb. I was there till November. And I kept harping that...and at that time, if we had something like 15 or 16 points, you could get rotated home, get sent home. By that time, I had 45 points because I was an OC for 2.5 years. I was in…every time you go in combat, you get so many more points, and you know, depending on if you were this or that. I had accumulated 45 points already. So in November and October, I asked to be discharged. I wanted to spend at home in California, my Christmas in Cal, back home. That's all that was in my mind. I wanna be home for Christmas, you know? This was in November, and they said, “No, why don't you sign for another 6 months? We'll upgrade you.” Or, “Why don't you become a civilian—a civil service rating.” I said, “No, I've got 45 points. You can't keep me. I've got

my right to go home and get discharged.” “I've got 45 points,” I told them. “Guys with 16 points are going home.” I said, “You can't keep me here,” I told them. So I came home. I was still rebelling [Laughs].

Howe: Of course, of course.

Tanakatsubo: Yeah, they offered me a rank. I came home a staff. They offered me a tech sergeant rating, or a civil service rating, this and that. But I said, “No, after four years in the Army, two and a half years overseas, I wanna go home. I wanna go home for Christmas.” So I came home. But you know what? I got discharged in Camp Beale, Marysville, which is only about 45 miles north of Sacramento. When I came out of that bus station, all of a sudden, I realized, “Where are you going to go? Your dad is gone, you don't have a family, you don't have a home. Where in the hell you gonna go?” It didn't dawn on me at that time. All I wanted to do was go home for Christmas—never realized that when I did get home, I really had no place to go. I had no home. My dad is gone. I didn't know where the hell my brothers were. So I put the duffel bag on a sidewalk outside the bus station…self-pity. I said, “Yeah, where the hell are you gonna go? You got no place to go.” Tears coming out. Self-pity, you know? I think that's the loneliest time of my life. When I first came out, realizing that all of a sudden I had no place to go. I had no family, no home to go to. I'm thinking...damn. If I had thought enough, I think I would have stayed in. I mean, you know, I think I would've, knowing that I had no place to go when I got home. Again, all I thought in my mind was, “I wanna go home for Christmas because I spent two and a half years overseas…wasted two and a half…two Christmas times, I was overseas. One Christmas, I was in New Guinea, I slept under my Jeep, and I could hear the Navy singing Christmas carols on their ship. And that was one of my Christmases, sleeping under my Jeep in New Guinea, getting ready to move out for the invasion of the Philippines. So to me, I think Christmas was important until I realized I really had no place to go when I came home.

Howe: Did you try and go back in?

Tanakatsubo: No... that wasn't any part of my future. So I figured well...what the hell can I do...Sacramento, this was daytime, you know? And I just got off the bus from Marysville, just got discharged. So maybe I'll head for the Buddhist church, which is about 5 blocks south of that bus station. Maybe somebody will be there that might have come back. So I carried that duffel bag, and I walked 5 blocks and got to the Buddhist church. There were some people that were back there; they were all sleeping in the gym over there. They had no home either because they lost their home when they got put into the camps. They couldn't buy the property, so all they could do was rent it. So when they came back, they had no home either, you know? All the Japanese people. In our days, the people—not being a citizen—they couldn't buy property. The farmers couldn't buy their land—they had to lease the land that they farmed on because they couldn't buy the property. So our people, living in Sacramento, all they could do was rent the home

that they were living in, rent the business that they were working on. But they couldn't buy the property because we were not citizens. So when these people came out of the camps, they all wanted to go back to their home towns, and that was fine. But they came back to the home town, and they had nowhere to go because they couldn't go back to the original home they had.

Howe: But you're a second generation Japanese-American...so did that also affect your generation? I mean, I can understand people who migrated here from Japan...the naturalization process...

Tanakatsubo: No...we could buy property if they would sell it to us, but they wouldn't sell it to us.

Howe: Okay, okay.

Tanakatsubo: Discrimination comes in. You are a Jap—just that simple.

Howe: But you're a US citizen, that's the thing.

Tanakatsubo: It doesn't matter. To your eye, I was a Jap. That was what we had to fight. So even though you were a natural born citizen, you couldn't buy the property because they wouldn't sell it to you. It didn't matter whether you were a citizen or not. If they won't sell it to you, you couldn't buy it. This was what we ran into, and this is what we fought for. To give us a…hey, give us a chance. This is my country, too. I fought for this country. Give me a chance to become part of your country. Sell us the piece of land I wanna live on. We fought for this; this was our purpose, to improve our position in our country. So parents could maybe hope that they could become a citizen, a naturalized citizen in their late age. This is what we wanted, and this is why we fought. I want a piece of this country. I wanted to say I own a piece of country because I put my life to protect it. This is my country. Give me my rights. All we want…a fair shake to make a living for my family, and this is why we fought. Our life was worth it. We needed that right to live, and I'm glad that it has improved. At least our kids are able to go to school, any school. And being an engineer, you can get hired as an engineer. During our days, you could come out as an engineer, but it doesn't mean you'll become an engineer. You work at a corner food stand because they won't hire you unless you go out east. Maybe if you're lucky, you know, you might get a job. But this was our life when we grew up. So our life now is so pleasant, you know. I have my own…I've got my own building, I was able to buy a building. My kids, I was able to educate my kids. I have a son that's an architect. I have a son that's an optometrist. I have a son that's a computer tech. Sure, I worked two jobs in my life, when I was growing up because my two kids were going to university, and needed the money. I couldn't get no welfare. I couldn't even get a student loan because I didn't have enough money to have a property to get a mortgage—this is what they told me. I told them, "If I don't have enough money to get a mortgage, then what?" They said, "It doesn't matter, you don't have a mortgage." That's why I couldn't get a

student loan. So everything I did, I had to pay. So I worked 16 hours a day for over two years to educate my three boys. This was my life.

Howe: After you served and you got out—you said you got out in '45, December, '45?

Tanakatsubo: November of '45.

Howe: November of '45...and then you…you were in Sacramento for a while.

Tanakatsubo: Well...I was in Sacramento for about a day, and lo and behold, one day, my brother—older brother, who was married to a girl that came from Oakland. Well, that girl's father went back to Oakland, and I think to the kid, they had a home. So they met my father; they went to the same camp. That's the reason why my dad went to this one particular camp. Because my son is married to daughter, and the daughter of the family went to this camp, and they met. Because of their family tie, my dad decided. In fact, first he was thinking about going back to Japan. They were telling them, “You either go to the camp, or we're gonna ship you back to Japan.” And he was thinking about going back to Japan. I know he wrote to me one time about it when I was in the Army. He wrote to me about thinking about going back to Japan, and I told him, “Dad, if you do that...you're not gonna have any more family because we are not gonna go back to Japan. That means, you're not gonna have us as your sons because we'll be here.” I told dad, “Think about it. I'd rather have you stay here as a family.” So I guess he decided to go to Topaz. That's where my brother's wife's family went because they were from Oakland. So when I came out, like I said, I had no place to go. The family had sent my older brother to Sacramento, thinking that I may come back to Sacramento when I got discharged. He told me to “go to Sacramento, go look for your brother. He may come back to Sacramento.” So that family had sent my brother from Oakland to Sacramento to look for me, and like I said, they were right. I did come back to Sacramento. So my brother saw me, and said, “Hey, hey, whoa, am I glad I see you. Since the Najimas,”—that's the girl's family—“they want you to come to live with them in Oakland.” So I went back with them, and they had a roof for me in their house, and they wanted me to stay there like their kid. They were gonna look after me. I was so flattered I had such wonderful people. So I stayed with them for about a month. I helped them paint the place, and they had two boys and a girl. I got to know their kids, and we got along real well. And in fact, the oldest boy, he belonged to a book club, and he used to get books every month. I loved to read. So after dinner, I'd usually get a book and I'll start reading. I missed it in the army, reading, you know, and I would finish a book a night, just about. I actually enjoyed it so much, and never thought of going out, and their mother started to worry about me because I didn't go out for a date. Their kids go out for dates from Oakland. They go to San Francisco, and they'd go dating. But I wouldn't go because I was too busy reading books, enjoying it. The mother was getting worried about me, you know? So she told her kid to fix me up a date. This and that. They were really wonderful people. The

mother looked like that old granny in the granny series...you know the hillbilly series. The granny? She looked just like them.

Howe: The Beverly Hillbillies?

Tanakatsubo: Yeah, they were really wonderful people. They looked after me like I was their own kid. And then after about a month, I started to feel this…I can't do this, I'm not even their kid and they're taking care of me like I was their own kid. They want me to stay there, go to school, to University of California, and all that, and live with them. I thought that, I couldn't do that, that's too much of a sacrifice for a family. So I said, "Maybe I should head out east, try to go to school somewhere." You know. I didn't want them to assume the responsibilities of taking care of me. I felt it was too much of an obligation, I felt that way. So I told them," I love you people. You're being wonderful, and I couldn't be any happier," but I told them it's too much of an obligation. So I told them, "I think I'm gonna head out east and go to school, but I'll always consider you two as my folk." Because they were wonderful, but I told them I have to go on my own, I have to go to school. So I left, and I came out east. I went to Cleveland. I was going to a dental tech school. You know, when I was a kid, in high school. Those days, if you wanted to go to college, you had to have trig and foreign language. Those were the requirements to get to go to college. My dad had already told me when I was a junior in high school that I could not go to school. I have to go to work, if I graduate. I told him, "Dad," I says, "I'm getting straight A's, and I enjoy going to school. I wanna go to school, Dad,." I told him, "I'm getting good grades. I could make it." But he said, "No son," he says, "You have to go to work." So that was my future. That's the reason why I didn't take trig, I didn't take language. I took home economics, typing, things like that, you know—just to get to the credits to get out. But I wanted to go to school real bad, but I was not fortunate enough in my life to go to school so...That's why when I graduated, I ended up working in small hand laundries, working 12-14 hours a day for 40 bucks a month. Working in hash house second street—where all the bums hang out—where I could get a beef stew dinner for ten cents, fifteen cents. A three course dinner, 15 cents. That's beef stew, and rice, and potatoes, and salad, and dessert—you get all that for 15 cents. But I worked 12 hours a day, from 5 o'clock in the morning to 7:30 at night. One day off a month, that was my schedule. If I'm not waiting on tables, I'm washing dishes, and I had to mop the kitchen, mop the floor before I go home every night. That was my schedule, 5 in the morning to 7:30 at night.

Howe: So then after… well you showed up in Cleveland. So were you able to go to school in Cleveland?

Tanakatsubo: Yeah, I was going to trade school, working in a lab, learned how to make partials and everything; dental work, lab work. It was a trade school, and during the day I would go to school. At night time, I got a job as a typist for the United States Treasury; typing out income tax returns and checks. I worked 6 hours a night, just typing out checks. So 6

hours, and during the day I would go to school. I found a Japanese family that would take me in, like a boarding place. And I would stay there in the night time and go to school during the day, work nights and come back around midnight. Get up in the morning, and go back to school, go to work, go back. You know. That was my life, after I came out.

Howe: Did the government ever give you any benefits?

Tanakatsubo: Oh yeah, they paid for all of this. And then they gave me some kind of a per diem to go to school, and whatever money I had, I ran out, because my per diem wasn't coming in from the government. It takes them a couple months to catch up, I guess. So I told this lady—the Japanese couple—that I ran out of money, that I won't be able to pay them until I get my government check. They said, “That's okay.” So I was living on the money I was making at the government, and one night…one day this lady comes running up, all smiles. “Your check came!” I said, “Good, cash it for me, and take out whatever I owe you.” After that the checks were regular, so it didn't even matter. But it was a nice home that I was in. And like I said, going to school every day, night time I'm working at the government, downtown square in Cleveland. Then that's when I met my wife. She was working for the war relocation authority office. I had checked in over there to sign in to look for a houseboy job after duty when I first moved there. But I couldn't find a house boy job; you know, work as a house boy and then go to school because I was working nights, so…until I got this boarding house thing. But I met this girl then, and she was from my home town, but I didn't know her because we were five years apart. So back home, when I was 17, she was only 12 years old. You know, hell. Back home, when I was 17, 18, 19, I was in my prime. That's when we used to go to all the dances and stuff. I was a hellcat out there, man... Going out of town dances. Go to two, three dances a week out of town. You know, Marysville, Walnut Grove, Alton, all those towns had dances. We used to have a group—we used to go out, go dancing, we used to have girlfriends in these towns, have dances. Oh, we used to have a ball. San Francisco had the World's Fair on Treasure Island. We used to go every night because they used to have a different name band performing. A bunch of us would get together in a car and travel over to Treasure Island for dancing. We used to really have a good time dancing. In our days, we used to do a lot of ballroom dancing—our group, you know. It was nice. All these names I used to circulate, one night stands, I'll take a date, go to Sacramento Memorial Hall. For a buck a head, go in, there'd be a thousand people on the floor dancing, name band. Kay Kyser, you know all those name bands. They were great. We used to know all the players, the singers, the soloists: Tommy Dorsey, Jimmy Dorsey, Artie Shaw. We listened to all those name bands. Our age was a dancing age. We used to do a lot of ballroom dancing. I think it's starting to come back little by little. We didn't dance two feet apart from each other like the kids do nowadays. We used to hold them close [laughs]. It was nice. But that was our life when we were growing up, you know. We had a wonderful child life. Discrimination—it didn't bother us because we stayed

away from those unpleasant things. We had our own life to lead, and we did our own thing in our own neighborhood.

Howe: Well then, how did that change, that attitude? Did it change at all after the war?

Tanakatsubo: Our attitude didn't have to change because we accepted what was there, but the attitude of the outside people that changed—that made a difference in our lives. The Caucasian people, after they realized what we had done, their attitude had changed so much, the company had changed. They had more or less given us a lot more credit. They gave us a lot more chances to go into their field. They started to accept our abilities as an individual, that we are trustworthy, that we are good workers, we work hard. We don't take off like a lot of the people do. That we are dependable people to hire. Those things have all come in to view, and had improved our lifestyle quite a bit. I think that what we did during the war had improved our lives 100%--especially with our kids. For that we're thankful because this is what we did it for, actually. Improve their lives so that they didn't have to go through what we did. But our life was nice, too, because we accepted what we had, and we lived our own life, and not have to depend on that type of life where it was unpleasant. So life wasn't bad, really, when you come down to it. We had a good life; we had a lot of fun. We did a lot of things, and we enjoyed our life because we accepted what was there. The discrimination and all, we took all that into a part of our life, and we avoided ever going into it. See, we stayed away from all that. That was what our parents wanted. Don't make any waves. And we did what our parents wanted. We had our own life, it was great, and we did what we wanted to do. Improve our life, and our kids life, and we have succeeded, and for that I think we're grateful. So now in the twilight of our life, we're enjoying the good of what we did, and good for the community, and for our own kids. To us, that was enough of a reward, I think. I didn't need anything more.

Howe: That brings me to my next question: when was it that the Military Intelligence Service was finally recognized for their contribution?

Tanakatsubo: Oh, almost 30 years later. We were told not to talk about what we did after we got out of the Army. We couldn't even publish it, or write, or do anything about what we did until the government opened up their archive—which was about 30 years later. I think now you can go into any library or archive of the government and read about what we did, but in our days, it was a closed issue. We couldn't understand why because the war was over. Why keep it a secret? That we couldn't understand. Why we couldn't talk about it? 442nd and 100th—they used to talk about what they did. So why couldn't we talk about what we did as part of the war? But they never gave us the permission, and for 30 years, it was part of the secret part of the Army.

Howe: So then in 1974, I believe it was... the Freedom of Information Act.

Tanakatsubo: I don't know when it was, but I never even gave it a thought because they don't want to talk about. Okay, we don't talk about it. We accept it. Whatever we were told was what we did. We were told to obey, and we did obey. If they said don't talk about it, okay fine. We don't talk about it.

Howe: Well at some point, somebody comes to you and says, "They've been talking about it, we've been talking about it, and now we want to thank you for your service." Did you receive that recognition?

Tanakatsubo: When we did, we assumed that it was okay to talk about it. The government had okayed it, but we really didn't know whether we were or not. We're the type of people where we're told to be doing this or that, we obeyed it. That was the way our life was set because that was our teaching from our parents. You obey your authority. Like if I went to school, if I got punished, and I came back and I told my parents, they didn't go back and raise hell with the teacher. Hell, I got punished at home again just to remind me not to do it again. That was the way we were brought up. Our teacher had 40 kids in the classroom, never had any problems. 40 kids in the classroom. Now the teachers, they complain when they have 20, but our teacher that taught us had 40 kids in a classroom. But she managed, because you can assume that she had made a difference.

Howe: What recognition did you receive for your service? What awards, if any?

Tanakatsubo: Just the standard, because I was on detached service in a lot of the places. Although, I think I should have gotten a Japan occupational one. I didn't get that. Outside of that, I got a little brown star that I was very proud of—that's a sign of action, you know. I got five of those. That's how my grandkid…kinda brag how many ribbons he had. He was in the Navy, you know, and he was kinda bragging, so I looked at him. He tells me—kind of puts that in my face—I said, "Hey, that's great kiddo, but I'll tell you something that I've got that you don't have. He said, "What's that, what's that?" I said, "You see those little brown things? That little brown star on there?" I said, "That's action, buddy. That's action. You don't have any on your ribbon." I said, "I'm proud of those little stars that I've got because it shows that I was in action." So, that was it. So that kinda settled my grandkid a little bit—took him off his high horse.

Howe: Yeah. Knock him down a peg.

Tanakatsubo: Yeah. [laughs].

Howe: I understand you also received a medal from Congress.

Tanakatsubo: Yes.

Howe: The congressional gold medal.

Tanakatsubo: That, plus the unit citation. I got three of those.

Howe: Presidential unit citation?

Tanakatsubo: Different units that I was in. I wanted to go to the one in Washington, but I can't stay on my feet too long; I can't walk too far. That's the reason why I didn't go. I wanted to go.

Howe: When was that awarded? Was it rather recent?

Tanakatsubo: Gee, when was this? Was it around November?

Howe: Okay, so it's fairly recent.

Tanakatsubo: Because we had ours in April; the local one. So it must have been around November or February, somewhere around then. Because I know I wanted to go…or was it June? I think Enoch went. I knew I wanted to go. But my kid always says, "Oh, it's easy. Take a wheelchair!" I said, "No." I don't care for wheelchairs, even now. The only time I use a wheelchair is when I go to my doctor. He's up on the 4th floor. And from the parking lot to the professional building, I have to have my wife put me in a wheelchair and take me up. Outside of that, I try to walk. I don't care for wheelchairs. Maybe it's my pride.

Howe: It stays with you.

Tanakatsubo: My pride…because you get so helpless, you know. You feel that way. That's why I don't like old age. I've been so independent that—because I grew up without a mother, and from the time I got out of the Army, I've been on my own, you know. Because I had no parents, no home. My dad died in '43. I've been on my own so long that...

Howe: But you have family of your own now, yeah?

Tanakatsubo: Oh yeah. I have three kids. All went into professions...at least. I owe that to the schooling. Bringing them into the world. At least my obligation was to at least educate my boys, and that to me was something I had to do—even if I had to work 16 hours a day two years in a row. It didn't matter what I did, as long as I can at least educate the boys. Give them the education that...I think I owe them that.

Howe: Did you raise them here in Chicago, or did you start having kids with your wife in Cleveland?

Tanakatsubo: No, here.

Howe: Okay, when did you guys move here?

Tanakatsubo: I moved here in 1940...November of '46.

Howe: Oh wow, okay. So it was fairly soon.

Tanakatsubo: I lived here longer, more than I did anywhere else. Because I was in California 21 years… but since I got in the Army, I've been out here. After the Army, my life has been out here. We got married in Cleveland, went to Niagara Falls for a honeymoon, and I came here in November—Thanksgiving day, in fact. I had 1 and a half room, fourth floor walkup. I had to get on my hands and knees to get that apartment. Those apartments were hard to get, you know. You couldn't get any apartments. In fact, even after we got married and I had a kid, I was looking for a bigger apartment. I read in the paper there was a three room apartment, so three bedroom apartment. So I called the place up. They said, "Oh yeah." I said, "Okay, I'll be down to see it." You know. But when I got there, and opened the door, he looked at me. He says, "You're a Jap." This is after the war. I said, "So? You told me you had a flat that was open." He said, "No, no, I just rented it out. I don't have a place." Then I looked down at the ad; that's when I got mad. I said, "You son of a bitch. You won't rent it out because I'm a Jap. You know I spent four years in the Army fighting for assholes like you?" I said, "What a shame." And then I had to walk away. I thought, Holy Christ, after four years, I still run into this God damn thing…man. I said. "When is it gonna stop, you know." But I figured, well, what are you gonna do? We have this attitude of *Shikataganai*—it can't help. We have a term called *Shikataganai.*

Howe: *Shikataganai*?

Tanakatsubo: As in, you can't help. There's nothing you can do about it. That was one of our words we used. It can't help. So I just walk away. That was our parent's teaching. Turn your cheek, walk away. Don't make any fuss

Howe: Smart. Yeah, that's smart.

Tanakatsubo: That's one of our pet words we use, you know. Can't help.

Howe: *Shikataganai*?

Tanakatsubo: Yeah. I ran into that here in Chicago.

Howe: That's messed up.

Tanakatsubo: I just talked to him 15 minutes before that.

Howe: He was real happy to see you, and then all of the sudden when he sees you...

Tanakatsubo: Then I was no good. He didn't want to rent it to me. Being a different nationality, thing is, you expect it. We were taught to expect that, you know. Our parents, they taught us well. [laughs].

Howe: Well because they had experienced it firsthand. So...

Tanakatsubo: Yeah, well, we had seen that before, so it was nothing new. We had experienced that thing before. In fact, we lived with it. So to us, it was nothing new. We were used to that, you know. We don't raise hell or get mad about it. Sure, we don't like it, but we accept it. There's nothing we could do about it. So we just walk away. That was our teaching. So...

Howe: Smart...We're getting kind of long in the interview, but I recognize that I haven't asked you at all…when you were on the front lines, you described some experiences translating when you were in New Guinea, but you didn't describe a whole lot of your engagements when you were on the frontlines.

Tanakatsubo: Well... Actually, you don't really do much. You get orders to obey, you obey it. If they interrogate, you go interrogate, right there and then. First you ask the officer what kind of information you wanna get. I'll see if I can get it for you. If he doesn't know, he doesn't know. That's all there is to it. But first, trying to find out what his background was, too. Find out if he was valuable in the background, I make a notation to re-interrogate him later on the background. See, you have orders to obey, you get orders to obey. That's it.

Howe: Were you ever in combat? Directly in combat?

Tanakatsubo: Not to that level, but close enough. Where, you know, I could see things. To go to dead bodies, look for documents, hoping I could get something out of them. So when I was up in the Aleutian Islands, they had a bodyguard with me. But when I hit the South Pacific, I didn't have that. But I went through a lot of dead bodies looking for documents, diaries, stuff like that, which is important because sometimes you get pretty good information out of them—especially in the diaries because they put a lot of things down, you know. A lot of things after that…a lot of times at night times, my partner and I usually try to go through these documents in a hole by ourselves, and he'll take a fast glance, and if it's important, I'll make a notation and give it to the CO, and say, "Here, I got something on this person, or this dead body. It might be important." And I'll give them this document, or whatever we translate, turn it over to the officer, and let them figure out what they wanna do with it.

Howe: Sure. How were you treated by the men in your unit?

Tanakatsubo: Oh there were no problems.

Howe: Yeah, were they glad to have you?

Tanakatsubo: Oh yeah. When they found out what we were doing, they were tickled to have us. You know, because at least sometimes, our information could mean their lives, you know. Knowing ahead of time what we were facing, who we were facing. If they had a machine

gun set up, we'd try to get them knocked out before we move in. If there are land mines, or snipers, or something like that, you know—which is information they never had before, but now we have it. What to look for, you know.

Howe: And because of that, you've developed a level of trust?

Tanakatsubo: Yeah. Oh yeah. We had no problem getting along with the troops, had no problem at all. Because we were doing the same thing. We were both miserable in the frontlines, and they accepted that we were going through the same thing that we were going through. That we don't get any special treatment, you know, because of what we're doing. We're doing the same thing that they're doing.

Howe: But like you said, the things that you're doing is saving lives.

Tanakatsubo: Well, what we were doing is getting information about the enemy that would eventually would save lives—sometimes direct, sometimes indirect. But it was something that we had before, that we never had before. Information on the enemy, you know. As a McArthur staff say, "You saved us over two years of war." Because we knew more about the enemy than any time, at any time…our company…what our unit knew about the enemy. We had more information about the enemy than any other wars, you know. So...

Howe: I hope you don't mind me asking this: you call them the enemy, but, you're of Japanese ancestry. So was there ever a conflict there for you, a personal conflict?

Tanakatsubo: No.

Howe: No?

Tanakatsubo: Never.

Howe: Okay.

Tanakatsubo: My uniform says I'm on this side—that's all that matters. But once they're caught, I'll treat them kindly. If they're wounded, I'll have them looked after, you know. If their water or cigarette, I'll give it to them. But they're human, even though they're enemies. Once they're captured, it's different; they're not your enemy any more.

Howe: And the word enemy carries with it an emotional context. Did you ever feel…did you ever have feelings of anger or hatred towards the enemy, towards the opposition?

Tanakatsubo: No. Because they were forced into the war like I was forced into our war. They were forced into it. They didn't do it on their own. They were under command from somebody else, and being a good soldier they followed their orders. That's the way I accepted. They were just taking orders, like I'm taking my orders.

Howe: Right, obey.

Tanakatsubo: If I'm told to shoot him, I'll shoot him. If he got the same order, he has the same order; he has to shoot.

Howe: Gotcha.

Tanakatsubo: But once they're captured, they become a human being. They're not enemies anymore, they're not out to get you anymore. They're just another person. That's the way I look at it. So we sit down and talk; interrogation. By being kind to him, he responded. And in order to get what I want from him, which is very good information out of this guy that will help our side. So why should I hate him? He has already helped us by giving me information that I want.

Howe: Right. Respect.

Tanakatsubo: Now that I've got everything out of him... Now, I could at least treat him human, you know. Try to take care of him, see what he wants.

Howe: Right. Do something in kind.

Tanakatsubo: Right. Well, this is my attitude, anyway. They're a human being, like anybody else. In fact, I had a case, where, in the Philippines, I was trying to interrogate this one soldier in a tent, and he kept saying, "I wanna die, I wanna die, I wanna kill myself." I couldn't interrogate that son of a bitch because that's all he kept saying. "I wanna die, I wanna die, I wanna kill myself." I finally got tired. I said, "Damn." So I called his guard outside my tent. I told him, "I'm gonna pull this guy's bluff. I'm gonna... call him." I said, "Stand by." So I got up, moved my chair back, I cocked my carbine, I pulled out my bayonet. I told him, "You wanna die?" I said, "You damn fool. Go ahead. There's a knife. Commit *harakiri*," I told him. Right now. I was waiting for him...Just between us, I didn't care. I had my gun cocked, carbine ready. I told him, "Go ahead, there's a knife. Go committ *harakiri*. You want me to help you, I can help you," I told him. "If you wanna take your damn fool life, then go ahead," I told him. "*Ini ji ni*," I told him, that means useless death. He looked at the knife, he looked at me, he looked at the knife. He started to reach out—hand is shaking. I watched him. I wasn't gonna let him do it. I would've stopped him. I just wanted to see if he was gonna do it or not. I was gonna call his bluff, that's all. So he looked at it, he looked at me, and he reached out for the knife. As I was getting ready to move, then his hand backed off. He was scared. It's scary to take your own life. I went up to him. I slapped him across the cheek one time, hard. Then, he broke down and started to cry. That was it. Took the knife back, put it back in. I let him cry for a while. I took a cigarette. "Here. Have a cigarette." Then that was it. We started talking. Sometimes you call a bluff, it works out. But I made sure that he wasn't gonna

do it. But, like I said, I didn't know. I had to let my guard know what I was gonna pull, to back me up. I wasn't gonna let him commit suicide, I would've stopped him.

Howe: Well and making him face that reality, you may have saved his life. Because if he had gone down this train of thinking without someone stopping it, it may have been worse.

Tanakatsubo: Yeah, right. It was more like he was trying to kid himself that he could do it, but when really the time comes, it's not that easy to take your own life. It's hard. It takes a lot of guts to commit suicide. You know. And it turned out okay, so...Some of these things, I don't report that in my...Because they would tell me…call me a fool, putting a knife out like that. So I didn't say anything to anybody. It was just between me, and the prisoner, and my guard.

Howe: Sure.

Tanakatsubo: But you know, these are some of the things that you go through in life. Sometimes you think about it, sometimes you don't. Sometimes you think that…did I do something right? Or...you know. You kinda have little doubts about yourself—whether what you did was right, you know. But then you come to this road, well, what can I do? Turned out okay. So...you think about it sometimes, you know. War is something where a lot of things happen; it's not normal. It's not a normal part of life—and all the things that you don't try to think about, trying to forget it. You know? Sometimes, if you think too much about it, you go off your bat. You know. Kind of start to bother you too much. The bad things you gotta try to forget. Let it go over your head. This happened, and this is what happened, so, it's okay. You know. But being a veteran, sometimes when I see some programs, it really affects me emotionally. I kind of put myself in that position, and sometimes I get tears coming out watching a movie. I get teary eyed. I says, "Boy, some of the things really affect me." It still affects me. Militarily, you know. I'm glad that my kids don't have to do this. That's the way I feel, you know. I think nowadays, the kids, they're too young to go through all these emotional things. I think this is why we're having our problems. The kids that's in the armed forces now; 18, 19 year old kids. Our war, we were over 21. A lot of difference in ages, you know? We weren't kids any more. But, nowadays, so much of this emotional thing…people coming out with…the kids are too young to face all of this.

Howe: Well...I think there's also a different context. You came from a time that was much different…more different. Much more difficult. The country was in a state of economic distress—The Great Depression. And people already had a hard time at home, and trying to make a life work. So you already kind of had a mentality of what your parents taught you and how to survive in this country. I'm giving my own opinion at this point, but I feel like...

Tanakatsubo: No, no. It makes sense.

Howe: I feel like there's a preparedness that living that way. I'm not saying it makes it any easier to go to war—because war is just not easy at all. But as compared with people today who…the economy is probably a lot better. We've receded a bit, there's fewer jobs available, but the cost of living…people live a little bit better.

Tanakatsubo: Their life is softer.

Howe: Softer. There you go.

Tanakatsubo: I think we were much harder people.

Howe: There you go.

Tanakatsubo: Well, that's our fault. We made it that way.

Howe: Well...Just the way it is. Just the way it is.

Tanakatsubo: Yeah.

Howe: I don't wanna stop you, but was there anything else you wanted to talk about? Anything that you thought I was gonna ask, but we didn't talk about?

Tanakatsubo: Really, I think that just about covered my life—except the twilight of my life. Small things, like I wanna buy another car. But, how long am I gonna drive it? Is it worth it for me to buy another car? Things like that. You know, very trivial things, you know. My life is easy now, and what I did before made my life what it is now. So I really don't have any complaints. The kids grew up well, educated. They're on their own. I did everything I wanted to do in my life: Got a wonderful woman as a wife, been married 68 years. You know, you can't ask for anything more. I think I'm just satisfied with the way that life turned out. Even with all the suffering we did, it didn't matter. The end result was what we wanted, and what we got, and we got exactly what we wanted. So, actually, I really… when it comes down to it, I really don't have any complaints. What discrimination there is, so what? We had more. I had it worse. So it didn't matter, although I don't like it. But now I can talk back a little. No, I don't have to turn my other cheek like I had to before when I was younger, like what my parents used to teach us. Now, I don't turn my cheek. If there's something I don't like, I come out and let them know. I think I earned that right to do that. That's the way I look at it now.

Howe: I would agree.

Tanakatsubo: My days of turning my cheek are over. I've earned my right to speak up for myself. If I don't like what you're doing, I've got a right to complain. Because I earned a piece of this country. I earned a part of it. I think I own it. That's the way I feel now. Much more secure, you know? Not like that: "Okay, let it go, it's not important." It's not important,

but for something I don't like, I can speak up now. I never could—I never did before. I was taught all that.

Howe: I would argue that you did earn it—not to say that it wasn't yours to begin with. But serving your country...

Tanakatsubo: Well, we had to bring it out...

Howe: What's that?

Tanakatsubo: We had to bring it out. You know—which we did. But some of the young kids that died, I kind of feel for them. Young kids, as young as they were, they were able to sacrifice themselves for what we have now. You can never repay them. The young kids that died…and so young. But they were willing to do that, and for that I am very grateful. I was able to come home while some didn't. That, I should never forget; the gratefulness for some of the young people that died.

Howe: Well, we're very glad that you came home, and we're very glad that you came here today.

Tanakatsubo: Yeah, I'm very fortunate. Very fortunate. You're a very good interviewer. Easy to talk to.

Howe: I try, thank you. Thank you. You have such great stories, I don't wanna stop us, but I also realize we've been going at it for the last two hours and fifteen minutes...

Tanakatsubo: Wow! That long? Oh my god.

Howe: Yeah, so...I know I have so much more I could ask you, but I don't wanna...I don't wanna exhaust you.

Tanakatsubo: No, I like people to know about what we had gone through. Maybe they'll realize something too, you know? Their life is different than ours. Yeah, being a little bit different makes a lot of difference. It's something you have to fight for, that's all. But I think the country is so much more educated now. I think it's so much more forgiving, you know? Tolerance in the world now, I think it is. And I hope that what we did kind of brought that about, you know? Showing a little more tolerance to people with other nationalities, and that, they could be okay, you know? So...

Howe: This is kind of what we're hoping with the oral history is: just reminding people that it was different, that there was a different time, and people weren't as accepting. And it's not to glamorize or highlight that, but to let people know, and to be grateful for the sacrifices that you made, the time that you spent.

Tanakatsubo: See, for us, it's not a sacrifice. You know. It's a natural thing to do.

Howe: I wouldn't disagree. I served as well. But, when you step back from it, the time that you gave...

Tanakatsubo: See, it just happened, the thing that we did made it a little different because of our nationality, but we didn't do anything different than what the other nationality people had done. The Italians and the Germans—they did the same thing I'm doing. But we got a little more acknowledgement, due to the fact that we were a little bit more different, and the government picked on our people a little more. But outside of that, what we did was not a sacrifice; it was our natural duty to do. So for me, it's not a matter of sacrifice. I only did what I was supposed to do. But it's just, in our case, it turned out a little bit better. Circumstances were a little bit different, and it made it seemed like we sacrificed—but actually, we didn't sacrifice. We only did what we were normally supposed to do. Right?

Howe: That's a common response. But, given the context, doing what you were supposed to do…just doing the work that you're told to do—obeying—is so significant because that effort that you put in to your duties changed people's perspectives; changed how people looked at people who are different. The duty that you performed by getting information, and passing it along to your commanders in the field helped Caucasian soldiers trust Japanese-Americans much more. Maybe more than they had before going into the war. And that simple act, what you did, your duty, just going to work every day, doing what you're supposed to be doing, was so significant because it changed somebody's perspective. And that's why it seems like, well, it's not that big of a deal because today, people are hopefully a little bit more understanding. They see each other a little bit more equally.

Tanakatsubo: Sounds good. Sounds good. [laughs].

Howe: [Laughs]. Fair enough, fair enough. I'll stop preaching.

Tanakatsubo: That's good. Yeah, a lot of feelings went out tonight. A lot of my feelings just came out. It's the way I felt, you know. But like I said, when it comes to war, things…sometimes, certain things will affect me more than other things, you know.

Howe: You got me going a couple minutes ago. You affected me, your words affected me.

Tanakatsubo: But it's a natural thing. It's not a make-up thing. It really happened. You know. That was...that's part of my life, some of those emotions. You know. It has happened to me. So through my lifetime I have gone through a lot. But like I said, I accept it as part of my life. It was going to happen. So...Sounds like I said, it's my twilight…how long…I don't know. Maybe this year, maybe next year. It could happen. But it's okay because I had a good life.

Howe: I will hope for twenty years.

Tanakatsubo: No, that's too long. [Laughs]. That's too long.

Howe: Fair enough.

Tanakatsubo: Like I tell my kids, don't worry about a thing because my funeral's all paid for, my plot is already there, my stone is in place. I tell my wife there is no expenses—except when you bury me, then you gotta pay the union labor to dig a hole and put my ashes in. That's the only time your money's gonna have to come out. All the other things are all paid for. It's a hell of a subject, but it's what I did. It's all paid for: my death, my wife, funeral service. Montrel Cemetery—my plot is there, my stone is in place. All I have to do is put the date on when I passed away. Everything else is there. So my kids don't have to be burdened down with all of the expenses. That's the life.

Howe: Well, hopefully that's not for another number of years. So...

Tanakatsubo: I hope not. But it's been wonderful.

Howe: Sure. Well, thank you for coming today and thanks again…you don't call it a sacrifice, but I will call it your service. Thank you for serving.

Tanakatsubo: Thank you.

Howe: On behalf of the Pritzker Military Museum and Library—this is our challenge coin. It's just to show our appreciation.

Tanakatsubo: Thank you.

Howe: Thank you. Thank you very much. Glad to have had a conversation with you today.

Tanakatsubo: Yeah, I don't mind talking about it because it is my life. And more people know people about it, it improves our situation better. People understand our people more better, and start to trust us more too—so that our kids would have a better life, you know. Our kids are just like we are, very trustworthy. They're good workers...I hope. Very good interview. Thank you.

Howe: Thank you. I appreciate you.