Interviewee: Minoru Yatabe
Interviewer: Peter Wakayama
Date: March 31 2009
Location: Toronto, Ontario
Accession Number: 2010-017

SEDAI PROJECT
THE JAPANESE CANADIAN LEGACY PROJECT

[Start]

Peter Wakayama: It is on. Okay. Could you give your full name and where and when you were born?
Minoru Yatabe: My name is Minoru Yatabe, I was born in Vancouver, in the Kitsilano District in September 1922.
PW: And uh where were your parents from and when did they come to Canada?
MY: Um my father came from Ibaraki-ken which is just north of Tokyo. Now the exact date when he arrived, we're not too sure of it's very unfortunate but a lot of our family records were destroyed in a fire, when, my my mother died in a fire in her apartment, and at that, in 1984 I believe, and at that time a lot of our family records were gone too. So that's why a lot of our knowledge of our family connections were, you know, destroyed and we we sorely miss them. Some of them.
PW: Roughly when did they come?
MY: Uh it would have been in--
PW: Not exact date but roughly.
MY: Uh around 1900.
PW: Okay.
MY: As far as I can remember. And my mother came from Ibaraki-ken, no Miyagi-ken, I meant sorry. uh from Ogawa-machi which is the south of Sendai.
PW: Did they come together--
MY: No, no.
PW: Or did they come separately?
MY: My mother came in 1911. Now a lot of our parents histories at that time were all lost in the fire so, you know, we're not absolutely sure of the dates and all that but anyway, we knew she came in 1911. And- and- that was that was one date that we could confirm. But she was naturalized in 1940, my father was not.
PW: What do you, do you know why he came to Canada?
MY: Well yeah [laughs] it's the, the streets were lined with gold [laughs]. So we're not quite sure of, of dad's whereabouts, when he first came here but he- he was a gardening contractor and he was in the business of designing and building estates, large estates.
PW: And that's what he was doing in Vancouver?
MY: Yes.
PW: And then your siblings, how many siblings do you have?
MY: Well, we have three girls and five boys, all together. Would you like the names of them all too?
PW: Sure.

MY: Uh okay my eldest brother is Masao[?], and then Agee[?], and then followed by my older sister Koto[?], and myself, and then below me, younger sister Joanne or Yoshiko[?], and, and then our brother Phillip Kaso[?] and then Marnie Mariko[?] Marnie, Keonaga[?] [shakes head no] Hirano[?] and um and then the youngest was Tommy.
PW: And were they all born here?
MY: [nods]. They were all born in Vancouver.
PW: Right. Um growing up in Kitsilano, um what was it like growing up in Kitsilano? Because there were quite a few Japanese families.
MY: Yes well we lived at seven, 1570, 1574 second avenue for- we were born in that house. And then later on we moved to the next door, which is 1576 and we lived there until

[5 minutes]

MY: I was about, oh let's see, around grade seven, grade seven in school anyway. And the majority of the Japanese in Kitsilano lived on Second Avenue, a few on the First Avenue in the 1600 block, some on Third Avenue, but anyways the Second Avenue was the biggest concentration and the- there's a Japanese language school on First Avenue. Um and uh the Buddhist church was right next to that. So our life actually was normal, I mean we lived among- among all the Nisei kids, you know, we all had our uh regular fun, none of us were very rich so we all- everybody had you know make due, make due with everything. Our- and as was the fashion in those days we used to make our own scooters, it was roller skates, roller skates on a two by four with, a with wooden box as the- wooden box with the wooden handles and that was our fun transportation, and we all had those uh pistols with rubber bands and we used to have fights, Indians and cowboys fights out in the bushes around there. There was swimming in the Kitsilano beach mostly in the Indian beach section. Indian, it's called Indian beach informally it's actually part of an Indian reserve. Um. [unclear].
PW: And you went through the public school system?
MY: Yes. The public school there was called Henry Hudson school. Uh it was about, located about, six blocks away from there and uh we used to walk there everyday and uh- By the way there was the Seaforth Highlander's armoury uh on first avenue and Burrard and I used to go by and watch them drill in the kilts and the pipe bands and everything, and I used to think "gee it'd be nice to join [laughs] them" sometimes. So that was the earliest impressions we had of the military. And as far as social life was concerned, there wasn't really much of an organization social life. We were not Buddhists we were United Church and there was no United Church in that are so if, we really had to go downtown to Powell Street to go to United Church. There's one Anglican church which I had my kindergarten classes. But Henry Hudson school was from grades one to six and I really enjoyed, I really enjoyed school. And I was a good student never got into trouble, except one day I got the strap for, and that was because I happened to get into the- into the hall, upstairs hall, one minute before one o'clock and we were not supposed to be in there during lunch hour from 12 to one, I missed it by just one minute and the teacher, [Cody

Hall, Cody Hall's sister. Cody Hall?] is the- the fiery captain of the- of the baseball team you know Cody Hall's team in athletic park. What else, Asahi's used used to play too. Anyway, this teacher she was uh a really fiery temper you know

[10 minutes]

MY: real Irish temper, red headed, and she gave me the strap there. And that was the one and only time I had a strap [laughs]. We laugh about it now, but it hurt at that time [laugh].
PW: And you went on to high school?
MY: Yes and then from there we went to Kitsilano High School, junior and senior high schools. And that was quite a ways away, and we had moved to, within two blocks of the school when I was in grade seven and I really enjoyed school.
MY: My father was, as they say, he was a contractor, and he had a company and uh he had employed about maybe a dozen people. And he used to tell us kids that, you know, you have to learn to be- to have a profession and don't be a labourer all your life. So he encouraged us to, you know, advance ourselves that way and people would ask me you know "what did I want to be when I was young?", of course when I was very young, you know, I wanted to be a [farmer?] and all that stuff but it wasn't very long before, in view of the fact, to some extent because my other brother Agee[?] had then gone through to chemical engineering and ended up having his Master's at UBC [University of British Columbia]. So I decided I wanted to be in chemical engineering too.
MY: So my- oh my father was a very interesting person he, I guess, we were the only family with a set of encyclopedias, the books of knowledge, and I used to read that thing from stem to stern, many a time, and there was a public library on Fourth Avenue and I used to go there quite often and I didn't do too much sports or anything like that, I was more- I tended to be more academic and, and I used to- I used to do a lot of things like developing pictures, photographs, you know films, and making prints. I used to charge people for that [laughs] and I also used to make caps[?]. Uh you know, sulphur, potassium chlorate with carbon, activated carbon, and so on and wrap them into foil, and I used to sell them to the kids, particularly around Halloween time, when they used to put them on the streetcar tracks and they would go off with a bang [laughs]. And I used to love electronics and used to make crystal sets and then [watch new sets?] and everything. A couple of my friends Hakujin friends there, used to go the same thing we used to do, communicate with you know from our house to their house maybe about a block away. We used to make miniature transmitters and uh and then at school, I belonged to quite a few clubs and after school clubs. In junior high there was a junior science club, I got to be the president of that club, and in senior high school there was the senior science club and I got to be president of that club, and there was also an amateur radio club I used to belong to that too. And um also, it's out of character here, but I joined the [lancers quadrille?] and square dancering club [laughs]. Which was very as it turned out it was a very useful thing for me subsequently in my army life. And I used to love languages, I took uh two years of French, three years of Latin,

[15 minutes]

MY: and three years of German. I had- I didn't want to continue with the French because the teacher there was a pretty bad teacher but I loved the Latin and I loved the German. The German was a brand new course. At that time BC did not have any German classes and they we had one teacher in our school who was asked to set up the course as an experiment. And so, this teacher, used to do all sorts of things teaching, not just the grammar but the conversation, conversational and culture, arts, music, and we used to even learn folk songs, we used to go and sing together it was a very small class only about eight of us in our class, in our German class. And as it was that was only three years in High school but it turned out when I did get to the first year of university engineering class, scientific German was a requisite so I took another year of German there. Subsequently in my Army life there was a bit of an interesting episode regarding my German.
PW: We'll get to that when we get to your [unclear]. So you went on to university after your high school graduation?
MY: Mhmmm.
PW: And how long were you there?
MY: Just the one year.
PW: One year.
MY: I was awarded a bursary scholarship, and actually, I got in my high school I had the science I had the the scholarship awards for two grades nine and grade let's see grade nine and eleven. I got the scholarship awards for leading scholar in the school and I also did a public speaking, I won a public speaking contest in the school too [laughs].
PW: During this period, just before the war or uh Pearl Harbour- Japan striking Pearl Harbour, how much discrimination did you face during, just before the you know the attack on Pearl Harbour?
MY: In school?
PW: Well school or just generally in Vancouver.
MY: It really didn't touch us.
PW: It didn't, okay.
MY: Uh nothing overt. Uh you know you could feel that we were- socially we were kinda snubbed, but that was because of economic class I guess, you know, most of the Japanese families were not in the high income bracket, so we couldn't afford the sort of things like, you know, going out to sports arenas, you know. There's no hockey for one thing, cause there is no ice, no outdoor rinks, you had to go to the indoor rinks of course we couldn't afford that. And skiing, a lot of people did a lot of skiing on Grouse mountain and all that, but of course we couldn't afford those things. A lot of our classmates they had dance classes and you know skating, figure skating, and all that, which we all envied but we could not afford them of course. And our social graces were not that well advanced, and about the only dance that we could remember doing was the Lambeth walk [laughs]. You know. And that--
PW: You were uh just before December the 7th 41, uh, or when Japan attacked Pearl Harbour, where were you at that time?

MY: Well I had finished my first year of engineering, at UBC, which by the way was a five year course at that time, and I, I got a good grade but I was not able to qualify for the continuation of my scholarship award because I was just about one point too short or something like that, so I had to go out and earn my tuition

[20 minutes]

MY: fees for the following four years. And I worked in the summer time, but like most of the people around there, we went strawberry picking in Surrey and all that but that was not very lucrative, and I did a little bit of work for my dad at mowing lawns and picking weeds and things like that, but it wasn't enough to get my tuition fees up. So in September, uh September of 1941, I decided I should go outside to earn some money and we had a chance to go to Ocean Falls there is a pulp and paper mill there, and my dad knew somebody there and talked to him and he said "sure send your boy up", so I went up and I worked there until Pearl Harbour.
PW: What was your reaction when that happened?
MY: Well [laughs] I don't know it's a very mixed reaction. Uh first off, I was pretty cheesed off because now my education is going to be kinda difficult to continue and UBC, you know, immediately you know said we're not going to have any of the Japanese students there, attending, so that kinda pissed us off. But at the same time we said, "gee what a terrible thing Japan did", that is among the younger ones, there were some of the older ones they all had, they all felt more sympathetic towards Japan, and you know, in an old established community like that you had old, first generation and second generation which were quite different in their attitudes. So, it was, we were recognized, we recognized that many of the older Isseis felt sympathetic towards Japan but as far as we were concerned, the younger ones, we were very disappointed. Very disappointed that Japan took that course. But anyway, what happened was as soon as the Pearl Harbour happened, we were struck of their list, jobless, it was tough, very tough work. I was on the [bull gang?] also a little bit of long shore work when that came in. But you know I joined the Legion [shakes head no]- joined the Union there too like everybody else, but one thing I did notice, when you talked about discrimination, was the fact that the Hakujins had one set of wages, you know, wage schedule and the Japanese had a lower scale. And then the students, you know, student workers, they had another third level, much lower. Um that was the basic wage schedule but, if you managed to get any long shore work it was a slightly higher wage structure and so there were several other students with me at the same time there and we all tried to get as much long shore work as possible. And long shore work came at, was not on a regular shift. When the ships came in, or was due to go out, then we were called in, it could be all times in the day or night. And even after you finished a shift in a daytime, if we needed to get our long shore work well, they would call, so we would work through the night sometimes. So it was very tough work, you know, and I was a pretty scrawny sort of a boy at that time, and it was hard work. In a way I was glad to be able to get out of there [laughs].
PW: So then what happened after that?
MY: Well right away I came home to Vancouver, to Kitsilano, and

[25 minutes]

MY: immediately then you know you're faced with all the restrictions and registration and all that, which we went through. We had good friends there in our neighbourhood next door neighbour was a very nice family and they helped us out an awful lot and many of the people around there and a lot of my classmates lived around there too, and they were very sympathetic. We didn't have any overt acts of discrimination, they all felt sorry for us. But they couldn't do very very much themselves, you know, so we had a car and everything but we tried to sell many of those things, but, you know, you couldn't get very much for them and we had to get- Of course my father was- had been quite a sportsman. He was the president of a Japanese sports club, and they used to go out every year in the springtime for duck hunting and then in the fall deer hunting, deer and bear hunting, every year and dad had some lovely Italian shotguns which we had to you know give away, I don't think we even got reimbursed for them. We managed to sell our car to one of the neighbours but as far as the house to this day I still don't know just exactly what happened to it. I don't know whether, we must have been reimbursed for it somehow but to what extend I don't know. And I was too busy anyway on so many other things I never really bothered to check. We had been- we had purchased that house, but we were still paying the mortgage on that, at that time. Of course in those days, I think the house was something like 15 thousand dollars. Which was a big sum in those days, but we had a fairly large family so we had to have a fairly large house at that time. Now my father had passed away in 1938 and so my brother, eldest brother Masao[?] he was running the family business.
PW: So then there was the orders to evacuate, and tell us what happened for that evacuation period. What did you do and what did your family do?
MY: Well of course the evacuation orders started coming in 1942, and at the beginning of '42 , well boys- a lot of the boys were sent out to you know work camps right across the country and we were wondering what's gonna happen to us and then one of dad's, my father's biggest clients, his name was Nelson Spencer and he came up to my brother one day in January I believe, in '42, and asked you know "where you fellas going to go? You gonna be sent out to work camps and all that" and my brother said "well, uh I think so, but we have absolutely no idea and we have no control over anything anyway so no use my saying anything." Well then Colonel said "look would you be interested in going out to Ontario?" And my brother said "I guess it's as good as any place else". So he said "okay well I'm gonna ask a friend of mine out east" so he phoned this person who happened to be Mitch Hepburn, the Premier of Ontario at that time. And so, he came back to him, my brother and said "well I phoned this guy in Ontario and he said he's willing to take a few of you boys"

[30 minutes]

MY: So we said, "okay well that's fine". So actually, it wasn't until May that we really started- started preparing for that and it wasn't until April that we finally got to Mitch Hepburn's farm, [Bannockburn?] Farm in St. Thomas and there was seven of us in that first bunch and- Dan Washimoto[?] and Harry Naganobu[?] and Luke

Tanabi[?], Black Yukano[?] and a few other boys. Most of them had degrees in Arts and Commerce. And we left by train, CN, and we got to London and from London the foreman of the farm picked us up in his car and drove us down to St. Thomas and we were introduced to Mitch and, showed us an old farmhouse and said you boys are going to stay there. So we started our life, of course none of us, none of us, had ever been on a farm before [laughs], you know, and we knew nothing at all about farm life. Now- but anyway, Mitch had a large dairy farm and vegetables, his onions were very well known. And anyway- so we started on the farm life and my brother, my older brother was asked to look after Mitch's gardens. He said well I want you to be responsible for my gardens. He had a beautiful farm and a, you know, a flower garden around his house and uh so it took my brother most of his time on that garden but uh we also took turns in looking after the cows too, at five o'clock, five thirty in the morning calling the cows in from the fields, cow bells, cowbells, you know, and then taking them into the into the milking barns and sticking the milk machines on and then we go and have lunch- breakfast- and then afterwards we come back and we start stripping the cows and then clean up and then after that my brother would be going to his garden work and the rest of us would be out on the fields doing everything. Mowing hay or stacking corn or oats or something like that, it was tough work. It was very tough work and especially when it started to be cold in the wintertime, it was terrible. We didn't have the proper clothing of course for that- in BC you know it was never that cold [laughs].
PW: How much did you earn on the farm?
MY: Well actually I believe when we got there, the going rate for everybody, he had a large staff, it was a big farm, and I forget how many workers he had but there was quite a few, and the prevailing wage when we got there was forty dollars a month I believe. I think it's forty dollars a month, I can't quite, I'm not absolutely sure. But that and keep. Forty dollars and keep. So you had your meal, you know your food and everything as well as your accommodations.
PW: Did you have to cook your own meals?
MY: Uh yes. Actually, one of the boys that we had with us, he was a cook. So he did the cooking. But you know Mitch Hepburn was a very nice guy and he was quite amicable and he used to come in and flop on the cots in our place and shoot the breeze with us. You know very human

[30 minutes]

MY: that way. We had- anyway,most of the boys you know as I said were all university graduates and all that, so they said you know uh actually you're paying, your rate of pay is very, very, too low, so I think you should raise the pay and [laughs] much to our surprise Mitch agreed. And so immediately he raised the pay I think up to 60 dollars a month you know which, applicable to all the workers.
PW: When you came out to St. Thomas probably the locals would be the first time they saw some Japanese Canadians--
MY: Oh yes.
PW: What reaction did they have?
MY: Well we were insulated from them because

[speaking over one another]
MY: we were on the farm yes. And uh the only people that we really got to see were just the farm workers and they took to us they realized that we were, you know, much better educated than they were you know, higher class of people [laughs] actually, you know. And uh quite urban, you know, and they were all farm, simple farm folks. So we were teaching them a whole lot of new things and they really appreciated our efforts.
PW: How long were you on that farm?
MY: Uh well first of all, let's see now I think I have [leans to his right slightly out of view of camera] uh [noise of papers moving around] yeah, I was there at Bannockburn[?] farms from April '42 to July '43. Now in '42 the many of the other boys, especially the ones who had graduate, graduate degrees, university degrees, they left after about four, four-five months and thereafter, yes, it's quite a lot of room left in our York house, which is the farmhouse that we would stay in, and Mitch came up to us and said "look you still have family back home don't you, back in Vancouver?", and we said yes, "uh why don't you ask them to come over this York house. I'll fix it up a little bit better"So he put in a um a toilet, and a septic tank fjord and also he had a well dug so we had running water. In this old, old farmhouse which is called York house. Uh and so then we called my mother and the three younger, three youngest children in our family. My two older- The older sister and the next younger sister had been sent out to other places as domestics. My sister, Koto [?] was in Belleville, at a blind- blind person's school or something like that. And uh my, the other sister was due to come to Alma College as a domestic there. So, but anyway, the family got reunited. Agee[?] in the meantime had been helping out- had been asked to help out the BC security commission you see, he worked for Mr.Truman and sort of a liaison person. Cause he could speak English, and Japanese fairly well. And so he was still in Vancouver at that time and then eventually when the families were allowed to come to Toronto, then Agee[?] finally came over too and his helping out all the new arrivals and all that. My mother was then with the family- who were settled in Toronto. But In [leans to his right slightly out of view of camera] but me let's see that was in

[40 minutes]

MY: uh, April, yes. In April, I struck out on my own and went to London, and I got a job as a printing ink technician. Right away, it was just a two man outfit, it was just a branch uh with a head office in Toronto, so I was there and for a while and actually after about five months of working in London, the head office said "we want you uh working in our head office in Toronto" so I came into Toronto myself at that time. Now I was wondering why they had sent me to Toronto and the company said "well, at least you had some university training and you know drafting and you know a little bit about engineering and you- we don't have any anybody in our company whose you know whose gone to university and you know they're all unskilled and we want to expand our company and we want to establish a factory in Oakville, there was a brand new facility there. And we want you to help work on that". So,

they sent me to work in establishing that factory in Oakville, on the ninth line in the QE [Queen Elizabeth Way] and so- among other things they wanted me to sent up a varnish department. There was a special kind of a varnish in- in for this printing company and there's nobody had any experience with that and it's a brand new patented process. So they said, "well you- you design this [laughs], build this". So I did an awful lot, I used to go to the main library on St George and College Street, I used to go there every night and study, on my own, all about varnish making and everything, and so, I finally designed something, instrumentation and everything and it worked [laughed]. And in the factory itself the layout of the machines, the roller machines, things like that, I was able to work on that and then I was- and then there was another part of the Oakville structure which included a laboratory so, they finally hired one guy who had a little bit of chemistry and an old guy who had been working with them for years but didn't really have any technical knowledge, but, they decided they wanted to have that as a sort of control lab- control and a research laboratory. And they said "well you'll fit in there too". So I did all sorts of things, running around doing this and that, and doing a little bit of research too, in special kinds of printing inks that they were working on.
MY: And then it was um, [leans to his right] let's see. It was in the early 1945, early 1945 when the Japanese Canadians were allowed to join up, and up until then as you know uh everybody- many other boys tried to be called up, but despite all their volunteering efforts, nobody was accepted. That's the ones from BC, there were some from outside of BC who were but, as far as we were concerned it was [shakes head no] no go. So we were kinda resigned to that, we all wanted to but we all felt we were Canadians and we needed

[45 minutes]
MY: to show our sense of citizenship and, but anyway.
PW: That's the reason why you wanted to volunteer for the Army?
MY: Yes, and we wanted to get our franchise too.
PW: So there were two. Show loyalty and--
[unclear both speaking]
MY: And to get our franchise--
PW: Franchise to go because you were not allowed to open at that time.
MY: [nods yes] Mhm hm. And we were you know we wanted to do it for our community, for the Japanese community you see. But uh, it wasn't until January when the war cabinet, the Canadian war cabinet, decided to allow us to go and uh so um you know there was a rush for everybody to join, it was actually in April when we finally did get accepted we all joined up in the horse palace here, and, and, just, the very first ones were picked up, were the ones picked up by the British officers you know recruiting team from England and they had picked up a bunch, twelve of the boys who were the first bunch. These boys were willing to go overseas in other than a Canadian army uniform, because the, Canada had said "well these boys can go with you to, overseas but as long as they're not in a Canadian uniform, you can go in the British uniform or you can go in an Australian uniform." 'Cause the Australians were the first ones who had asked about the possibilities of the Japanese Canadians in Canada if - about their coming into the- being allowed to join up and were

rebuffed you see by the Canadian government. So anyway, the 12 plus 23 others who were not quite as ready to go as non Canadians, you know, but they were, they were held there, but they- when the decision came that they would be able to go as Canadians the original twelve left and the twenty three otherswas the second wave which went a couple weeks afterwards. But they went directly to England and India, no basic training at all in Canada or language training.
PW: But there was a time period when you had the training camp at Brantfort right?
MY: Well yes.
PW: And then did those 12 have any basic training in Canada?
MY: [shakes head no] no.
PW: So they were shipped out right away?
MY: [nods] that's right. Right away.
PW: Cause there was an urgency for interpreters--
MY: Well they weren't even asked if they knew any nihongo [laughs].
PW: But then you went to the training camp in Brantford?
MY: There were 53 of us, we were the largest bunch.
PW: That went to the training camp in Brantford?
MY: [nods] yes.
PW: And then how long did you train there, what did you do?
MY: Well basic training.
PW: Basic training okay.
MY: The Canadian Army normal training- basic training. We were there for about three months or so. Three and a half months or so and then we were, at that time in Brantford we were tested for nihongo as well, by Japanese American officers who came up specifically to test us. And, [laughs] they found that there was only about a quarter of us who knew any nihongo, you know, and out of the 25 percent, only a very very small percentage were fluent, the rest were, the 25 were a little bit but they needed everybody needed a little bit of training in the military language of course. Cause most of us knew street language which was not exactly the best, but there were quite a few of us who had gone to Japanese language school.
PW: Did you take Japanese language school?
MY: [nods] yes I did in Kitsilano.
PW: How long did you take it?
MY: Uh about eight years.
PW: Eight years.
MY: Yeah.
PW: So you were about to read and write and speak?
MY: Well [laughs]
PW: Relatively for--
MY: Relatively uh yeah. Oh, we couldn't [shakes head no] read the newspapers but um uh-

[50 minutes]

MY: But we did- out of the 53 of us who went out to S-20, S-20 was the pacific command Japanese language school and- which had been set up in 1940, uh '40, uh

well it was conceived in 43 but it wasn't really set up until 44 and they had realized that you know there would be a need for people who could speak and write and read and write and talk in Japanese so they had mostly hakujins, you see, mostly officers, so then we were the first one of Japanese origin who did go to S-20.
PW: So did you go to- for training in Vancouver?
MY: [nods] Yes.
PW: You did go.
MY: Mhm hmm.
PW: In that period.
MY: Yes all the 53--
PW: All the 53 went to Vancouver for--
MY: Yeah yup. So, we were all in different classes according to how much Japanese we knew and there were, oh about six or seven, who knew a fair amount and they were put in one class, class one, which received maybe about four months of training, military language training, and then they were sent out as the first wave of the S-20 graduates to go to Southeast Asia. And um--
PW: And your brother, Agee, was in that?
MY: Yes.
PW: The first wave?
MY: Yes and Roy Nito[?], [shakes head no once] Roy Ito[?] and [Shay Goay?], [Sadao Nikaido?], [Tad Odai?]. Yes, that was it in that bunch.
PW: So the first group went first.
MY: Yeah. They went, I guess it was, when they finally did go overseas, it was around December I think, December of '45. Now the- The pacific war had ended while we were still in Brantford, you see and uh, we were all hoping that Japan- that the Canada would be an occupying force, but Canada decided that they were not going to be an occupying country, decided to have nothing more to do with it. So, we were a little bit, all of us became redundant really, at that point, but the- but the high command, the allied high command, said "yeah we still need a bunch of you guys there to help out, especially with the war crimes commission investigations and all that and interrogations and all". So uh, the first wave went and then several months after that the second wave, which included myself, and let's see, who else was there, quite a few of us in the second bunch.
PW: So you went from Halifax on the ship to Southampton[?] correct?
MY: Uhh
PW: You had to come back to Halifax I guess because you were on the west coast is that right?
MY: [nods] Yeah, well we from S-20 then we went, we the ones who were going overseas, then we were sent to the Little Mountain Barracks in Vancouver and then from there we went by train, CN, right across Canada to Halifax and then we took the Aquatania[?] which is a troop ship at that time, still, and got to Southampton and from Southampton we went to the holding camp, Canadian Army holding camp in Bramshott, in Sussex the southern part of England. And then um we were then, eventually,

[55 minutes]

MY: attached formally to the British Intelligence. We went as Canadian Intelligence but we were attached to the British, and, and then, from the south of England then we went to Yorkshire to, to Rotherham in Yorkshire, in the south end of Yorkshire. That's where the British Intelligence Core Depot was during the war. They had taken over the [Wentworth woodhouse?]estate, half of it anyway, which is a really wonderful manor, I guess you call it a manor. Established by Charles the First and it was the leading social meeting of all the nobility in England. They used to have lot of fancy balls and everything all the earls and all that were there, and uh we had a Quonset hut just outside.
PW: Did you have training there?
Brendan Uegama: Uh sorry Peter, we're gonna have to swap tapes [unclear].
[video cuts to a new section in interview]
PW: Where were we? Sorry, where were we? Where did we get to?
MY: We got to England.
PW: Oh yeah.
MY: Rotherham.
PW: Oh right. I was asking if you had training there.
MY: Uh really we were shown a few things but not not really any--
PW: anything extensive?
MY: [nods] we were really uh we were trying to get acclimatized to the British Army ways you know [laughs].
PW: [unclear] British officers [laughs].
MY: You need to, you want to talk about that? [laughs] No.
PW: That's okay I just it was a funny story.
MY: Part about the fish and chips [laughs].
PW: No about how he came out for a roll call and you guys [laughs] had your things and your pants and all that, it doesn't matter. Are we rolling?
BU: We are rolling.
PW: Oh we are. Okay. So then you were at this training centre and tell me what happened from that point on.
MY: Well then after we were fully integrated into the, attached to the British Army, then eventually we, we had a few trips down to London and back and all that but finally it was-[reaches to his right] I have the exact date here.
PW: Oh that's okay.
MY: Uh [looks at paper] March. In March then we came down to London and then we went to, we were sent to an airport, Bourn airport near Cambridge, and, and then from there we went to the waterbeach airport where we- where the RAF [Royal Air Force] ferry come, ferry transport command, air transport command took us on our journey to India. On a liberator bomber and so we left, yeah, we left on the- on March the-March the 15th.
PW: How many of you, how many of the niseis went on that on that trip I mean that thing? How many of you were there?
MY: Do we have that picture? [points and looks to his right]
PW: Oh it's okay I mean a dozen?-
MY: There were about 13 or 14 of us I think, of the Niseis.

PW: Were there Hakujins--
MY: Yes.
PW: people going along with you as well right?
MY: [nods] Yes. Yeah a couple, we were all sergeants and so were couple of the British uh sergeants too.
PW: But all the niseis were all sergeants is that correct?
MY: [nods] Yes.
PW: Because you went through the training got promoted.
MY: Yes.
PW: That was even before you came to England.
MY: Yes [nods]. We had our stripes before we left Vancouver.

[60 minutes]

MY: And there were uh three- captain Horn, Tom Horn who was our conducting officer and he became a major afterwards. And then there was there were two other officers, Caucasian officers with us and that was our group. So anyway, we went on this liberator bomber and we, first went to Eastress[?] Airport in Marseille. And then across the Mediterranean to uh um Castel Benito in Libya, which is then a prisoner of war camp for Italian prisoners. And then from there we went to Cairo and camp Mena, just outside Cairo, where this- we were there for several days, and this camp was very close to the sphinx and the pyramids, so it was quite a site. And they had a well stocked bar in this camp too. Um and then, after several days in Cairo then the liberator took, went on to Shaibah, Shaibah which is the airport for Basrah in Iraq. And then from there then we went to Karachi, Karachi in India, which at that time was still India, it is now Pakistan. And from there the RAF then took us to Dakotas, in DC3s, to Poona. Poona is the, was the British Army training camp just outside of Bombay. What is at that time still Bombay and from there, after a few days there, then we were transported by air again to, to Madras, in the south east corner of India right opposite Ceylon which is now Sri Lanka. And we stayed there for about a week and then the royal navy took us across the Indian ocean to- to Singapore on a landing crafting assault ship, they the SS-San Juan. And it was fortunately, it was a very small craft, fortunate that the waters were very very smooth and, but it was so hot so hot that we never slept in the bunks below we all slept out on the deck and we were looking at the southern skies, 'cause we were below the equator at that time and all the stars were quite different. It was very interesting. We were so close to the water that you just, you know, you could look out and spray would be coming out and lot of florescent fish and algae and everything, it was very interesting, and we had dolphins following us and we had whales too. It was very interesting one. And finally we got to Singapore, and we stayed in Singapore for a few days, until things got a little bit organized and then we were then shipped to, by truck, to Malacca [Melaka]. A very ancient town on the west side of Malaysia. This was a particularly bad place from the point of view of terrorism by the Kenpeitai, the Japanese Kenpeitai, there was a lot of public hangings and everything there, so immediately we were set to work with field security gathering information on the Kenpeitai

[65 minutes]

MY: which is important for the war crimes commission. And um--
PW: Just hold on a second I'm going to—
[video cuts and restarts again]
MY: [looks down at left hand] yeah we're over an hour.
PW: Yes.
MY: How long do you want me to continue?
PW: We just keep on going there is no time limit.
MY: Okay.
PW: No time limit. Uh so are we rolling again?
BU: We're rolling again.
PW: So do you want to continue your story?
MY: Okay and the majority of the boys were, were doing, you know, all the work investigating the war crimes data, information that was required. And we had a particularly bad relationship with the communists there, it had been a very strong communist stronghold during the war, and they hated the Allies too. They hated the Allies just as much as they hated the Japanese [laughs]. And one thing I remember is that we had a real to do with the to-do with the communists one night, at a one of the dancehalls. We were very close to another British outfit, infantry outfit, they were the red berets commando type of group and they were stationed not far from us and we really- we had information that there was gonna be a, some sort of a incident at this dancehall planned by the communists. So we said well okay we'll have a go at it [laughs] so we sharpened our sharpened our belts and everything, knuckle dusters and everything and so we got there and the Allied troops were on one side and the communists were on the other side and everything was, you know, we were all waiting for things to happen and the washroom the men's washroom was on the communists' side and one of the ally, one of the British boys had to go so he went, but on the way he had to tie his shoelace, so he bent down to tie his shoelace and then when he did that one of the communists came from behind and gave him a kick in the ass [laughs] and that started it. There was a real fight a real, ruckus, you know. And then somebody threw a smoke bomb in there and the people fighting and all the wicker-work furniture was being tossed from one end of the floor to the other [laughs] and all the orchestra members there panicked and packed up their instruments and they scrammed, and all the dance girls they [laughed] scrammed and they're screaming and everything and the bartender was shuttering up all his stock of liquor and everything. Anyway, it went on for quite some time and finally we, we knocked the hell out of them [laughs]. It was a real a real battle. And then we had told, we had warned the military police in that area you know give us about 10 minutes anyway, before you start coming in so [laughs] so they came in but by then most of them had slunk away [laughs] so that was a big incident.
PW: When you were in that area you came from Canada and England, which is fairly moderate temperature, climate, Singapore is really hot and humid, how did you get acclimatized to that humidity and heat?
MY: Well--

PW: Or do you remember very much about that? Because I think it's very hot and humid in that zone, area.
MY: Well it depends on what kind of dress you had, you know. When we were first got out there we had only had the Canadian army uniforms and even the, although we had the tropicals, well the summer dress, the Canadian army summer dress, but even that was too hot so we were issued British army equipment.
PW: Is there a difference?
MY: Oh yes completely different.

[70 minutes].

PW: In what ways?
MY: They're all cotton. Cotton loose weave, very light and they could, you could withstand a lot of high temperatures.
PW: So that made it fairly--
MY: Oh it made it lot of difference. And we soon got used to it--
PW: After a while?
MY: Oh yeah. It didn't figure in to anything at all as far as we were concerned. And but anyway, another reason why we were kinda fed up with the uh the communists was that they were in cahoots with the merchants around there and we were loosing a lot of the parcels that we were getting from home, you know, and if you recall, during the war if you wanted to send a carton of cigarettes it was the -what brand was that now- anyways the Canadian tobacco, a carton- if you, if somebody in Canada wants to send a carton of cigarettes, all they had to do was give, put a dollar in, put the name of the recipient and that was all. We got them, the tobacco companies and all commissary and everybody made sure we got our cigarettes. But, when we were in Malacca we found out that our parcels were getting less and less, and then we soon found out that there were some of the merchants in the stores there, they were selling Canadian cigarettes. So--
PW: Coming from your parcels?
MY: Oh yeah yeah [nods], somehow they had managed to pick them up from the postal deliveries you see.
PW: Because I guess the Canadian brands were like exporter players.
MY: [nods] they were exports. And of course nobody else but the Canadian ones would be able to recognize them so- and I remember at one time the fellas decided we're not going to stand for that so we went in and raided all the stores where they were selling these export cigarettes and told the merchants, "look they're ours, they're not yours you must have swiped them somewhere, so we want to get them", so we picked them all up. The merchants were mad as anything, but we said to heck with you guys. You know you're nothing but a bunch of thieves there, so, and as I said they were very close to the communists so that's one reason why we were pretty well cheesed off with the communists [laughs].
MY: But anyway, enough of that, it was after we had been there for about two three weeks, Captain Horn came up to me and said "Min how would you like to join your brother?" I said "where is he now?" "Oh, he's up in Northern Thailand with this bunch and there is a SEATIC unit", SEATIC was Southeast Asian Translation and

Interpreting Centre and he said "there is a SEATIC unit up in the North Thailand and their job is to, was to check out the entire 15th area of the entire Japanese army" and the 15th area army was the army in Burma and northern Thailand, and there is 150,000 of them and they all, everyone of them has to be checked for for any, any atrocities that were committed by some of those troops. And so each one of them had to be individually checked and it's only, your brother is the only Nisei there and the rest are all Hakujins you know he said by that time it's almost, three quarters or so all finished somehow but they needed some help, some added help. So there's a French Canadian fellow who was also in our draft, Fernand Laduke and he had been with Agee's draft but from New Delhi he was sent to Saigon and French-Indo China at that time, which is now Vietnam.

[75 minutes]

MY: And there he was doing a lot of work interpreting in English, Japanese and French. But his job is finished there now so he'll be in Bangkok by the time you get there and uh so you two will be working with that unit with Agee's unit. So I said okay, so then I had to wait for transport and finally I got to Bangkok in a beat up DC3 [laughs] we wondered if the plane was going to ever make it because, oh we had, some awful weather patterns at that time too. But anyway, we got to Bangkok and there, Fernand Laduke was there, so he greeted us, greeted me, and said well we have to wait for a convey to join the unit because it's pretty bad Bandit country there, the dacoits and we have to go in an armed convoy to go to Nakhon Nayok which is the where the boys are stationed. Nakhon Nayok used to be one of the Japanese army's headquarters, field headquarters, and it's one of the biggest ones in that whole area. And so the SEATIC unit decided to go there and set up it's unit there, being the most convenient, it was a railways centre and all the troops were coming in by train and, and also, the Allies said we're, they'd been, the SEATIC unit was supplied with a guard company of the Queen's Own Regiment which is a British infantry unit and they were there to sort of protect us from any, any problems, particularly from the dacoits, the Japanese Army gave us no problem at all, when they fought, they fought, but when they were told to lay down their arms, they laid down their arms and they're absolutely 100 percentage cooperative. And so anyway we, Fernand and I, stayed in Bangkok for about a week and then finally we got a convey so we got up to Nakhon Nayok and we found that the work was so, so much work left even though there's only less than a quarter job remaining it was tough work and and then, at first they used to have the larger units come but towards the end there's all sorts of smaller units scattered all over and they'd come not together, but in drips and drabs, and they had to be, whenever they came in, they had to processed right away, 'cause there's sorts of scheduling problems, with the transportation, from the docks in Bangkok. So they decided well look then we'll have to split up our units so that there'll be different people, different groups, different parts of our unit going out to different areas to handle different groups in the interrogation of different groups. Well we got to a point where in some cases, a single person from SEATIC had to go out to do, conduct the interrogation by himself. And me, I had one, myself. I had to go out and take a jeep and I had a Sten machine

gun and a revolver and a brief case with all the files and I had to drive out to about, to a railway junction about, oh, about 20 kilometers away from the main station. And there's a company, a Japanese company, a medical company, that I had to interrogate and when I got there the major who was in charge of that company

[80 minutes]

MY: he greeted me, he saluted me, and said "are you ready to inspect my troops?" I said "inspect your troops?" [laughs] I didn't expect that when he said "oh yes you have to inspect our troops." So he has his troops all lined up and I had to stand up on the jeep and then and then the major would, commanded his company to do a march past and salute me, so I had the me a sergeant [brings right hand to forward in salute motion] saluting [the whole company?] [laughs] it was so funny. I never expected that but anyway, so the march past was all done and then I was taken to a tent where the interrogation was to take place, there was two orderlies in the front there called out the names of the fellows individually and they came into the tent and I had to, I was seated there with all my files and I would check off his name and started asking him all sorts of question, you know "what's your name, what's your rank, what unit, and uh on such and such a day where were you stationed and what did you do, what were your duties" and so on, and so there were about- about 80 odd people in that company so I finished that in about half a day.
MY: And then, I noticed that there we some women around and I- and they weren't included on my roll. So, I got, I summoned the major and said, "how about these women aren't they part of your unit?" And he said "well they're nurses, and nurses aren't subject to any interrogation that's what I was told" he said. And I said "oh?" and well I guess the names were not on the list so I couldn't do anything there, so but anyways, the nurses are just outside there sitting around doing, there was about a dozen of them, and immediately I said these aren't nurses, this miserable looking bunch of females some were pregnant, and I figured they were the so called comfort women and so I tried to talk to them but they were Koreans and Chinese, and I guess just Chinese and Korean, and some could speak- could speak a little bit of English, some could speak Thai, they didn't speak any Japanese at all, so anyway with a little bit of English and a little bit of Thai I was able to come, get a little bit of conversation with them, so I found I asked them how they were treated and all that and they said not very well you know, and where you from and they told me where in Korea and China and then I had a couple of chocolate bars with me, so I said "you split these among yourselves I wish I had more to give you but that's all I have" [laughs] and so that was my only contact with the so called comfort women.
MY: But anyway, then that was- my job was done, I went back and it was shortly after that we broke up camp, we finished our work, we broke up camp, we had to break up the camp. The Queen's Own Infantry left first, and then we- and then we broke up our camp we had about six 1500 weight trucks , plus a scout car, and we had to load up all these trucks up with files and documents that we had. We had, oh, piles and piles of documents, which were important and had to go back to headquarters in Bangkok. So, it was decided that okay we'll leave- go break up camp on such and such a day, left in early afternoon, but the commander said, you know,

our trucks are not very- mechanically they're not that safe, you may have troubles on the way so if you do break down make sure you stay,

[85 minutes]

MY: go off the road, but guard, guard these trucks well because he said there's all sorts of information on the car, on the files which are essential. So, I was armed with a Sten machine gun, and one officer, well there's just one officer, one uh noncommission officer like me, and one Japanese army driver. And the driver was armed with just a club, a wooden club, because by regulation you could not give him any arms, and I had my Sten machine gun and the officer had a couple of revolvers and that was all we had, we didn't have any grenades, no nothing. I was hoping that we would get a Bren machine gun or something, but anyway, that's all we had. So, we started off, and sure enough all six of the trucks broke down en route [laughs] andso, so the commander, our commanding officer, he said "well look-" he came up and down saw where we were all stuck, and said "look make sure that you watch yourself very very carefully because this is kinda dangerous dacoit country. And anyway, what I'm going to do is go to the RAF station" at the, what is now the international airport in Bangkok, what was the name of that airport? oh, I forget now, anyway so he went ahead in the scout car and he said "I'll bring tow trucks and everything from the station". So he went, and we waited and waited and waited and hours and nothing happened [laughs], we were getting kind of nervous cause it was getting dark, you know, and all alongside the road there were culverts and places where dacoits could easily hide and come up on us. So anyway, finally, after about two hours company, the commanding, officer came back and said "I'm sorry we were so late but when I got to the airport, there was a shooting war going on between the Royal Air Force and the dacoits ",there was a real shooting war going on. So I had to hide and wait, until the their thing was over. It was over in about an hour, and they drove the dacoits off, so I finally got to the airport and explained the situation and they said okay, well then we'll send- dispatch trucks, tow trucks, along and we'll pick everybody up and fix them up where we can on the road and bring them back, tow them back. So anyway, after another hour or so then everything got fixed up, my truck was able to be fixed, they had to change a carburetor or something like that. Anyway, and then we had a nice dinner, hot dinner, and then after that, then we set back, set out to go back to Bangkok which is about another 15 kilometers away. As soon as we started on our way back the monsoon rains started, and it was terrible. Rain terrible, terrible rains all the way down! Blinding rainfall, you know, you could hardly see even with the wipers on [laughs] but finally we got to Bangkok and anyway, the first thing we did was check all the mail that accumulated there while we were up in the unit at Nakhon Nayok. And then we found that my older brother had just gotten married [laughs], that was one of the letters that we had from home so we decided that we had to give him a toast. So, Fernand had had a lot of bottles of brandy, which he had brought with him from Saigon. He said the monks- the monks in Thailand- in Saigon really

[90 minutes]

MY: knew their liquor and they had hoards and hoards of beautiful liquors, and brought back a lot of brandies and all that, but he, Fernand went to look for this supply in his room, every one of them had been stolen while we were away. So we had to search around and finally the only liquor that we had was a bunch of triple distilled Chinese wine [laughs]. Triple distilled! [laughs] So anyway we three, my brother, Fernand and myself, we had several toasts to my brother at home and I think we were a little stunckled [laughs].
MY: But anyway, ah, okay. That was the funny part. Then afterwards we- by then quite a few of the other Niseis, the Canadian Army boys, had come to Bangkok. And they were working on, with the British War Crimes Unit and the Dutch War Crimes Unit. The Dutch War Crimes Unit had come from Java and there were some incidents in, during the war, involving the Dutch soldiers so they wanted to send their troops, their investigating teams too. So, the boys were working on the war crimes work and then shortly afterwards I was, my officer, my commanding officer then came up to me and said "Min", he said, "I'm going to assign you to work with a Colonel Morris, a British Intelligence Officer" and that's all he said. So much to my surprise this British Officer, he had been the manager of Dunlop Rubber for 10 years before the war started, in Bangkok. And before that he had been working for Dunlop as managers in their branches in Singapore, New Delhi, Calcutta, and Bombay. So he knew the whole area very well. And anyway, he was given several assignments he said, he told me, he said we're doing counter intelligence work. And he told me that his main job was to see, get any details we could find out about a secret underground, after the war, movement which the Japanese Army was setting up. It was setting up of a group of ex-military and civilians of Chinese, Korean, Taiwanese, Thai, and Japanese military, and civilians. And they were to set up a secret group, organized so that in the future, in the future, if there is another conflict in that area they would be able to start up, be reactivated at a minute's notice and, you know, carry out any subversive work, if needed. And this was to be sponsored, you know, worked out by the Japanese Imperial High Command. Now this Colonel Tsuji, that was the head of this, was the outstanding officer of the British [shakes head no], the Japanese army, who had worked on this Singapore campaign, very successfully, and he had since then worked in Burma and was a very excellent tactician, but in Burma after several years, the Japanese Army, the high command they came to the conclusion that there is no future. We've gone as far as we've gone, as far as we can go, but that's it, I don't think we can go very much more. This is what the high command was thinking. So they said, they told Colonel Tsuji you go to Bangkok and you head up this

[95 minutes]

MY: secret organization, do what you can. So, this is what Colonel Morris and I were supposed to be doing. Trying to find out what we can find out about that thing. Now we didn't know who else was working on that. None of us really knew what anybody else was working on, at that time. The others- there may have been some others working on the same project from a different aspect, but we don't know that.

All we could do, we follow orders and when the upper brass and them would send us a notice saying "would you check this, would you check that", and we would do that, and send reports back. So we sent our reports to, oh about four or five intelligence groups, based in Singapore and with contacts in, you know, very close contacts with London. But we never got anything back. We would always sent reports out, but we never got any reports of what, how good our reports were, how did it mesh in with other reports, you know, were we on the right track or not? We didn't have any idea, but we just had to keep on working. And for that purpose, we had four Japanese nationals working as spies for us and I had to look after them and they were being paid by the British Army and I had to look after their accommodations. In fact, they were staying at one place there and they got to be a little bit unsecure, one time, so I had to pull them out of there. And they, we were stationed in the Chulalongkorn University, in Bangkok, and a lot the other British staff were also stationed there too and there is an awful lot of civilians from Java, supporting servants and all that from Java. And they were also being held, bunked, in the basement of the Chulalongkorn University. And I finally managed to get our spies located in there too. They would be going, we would give them orders to check this, and check that, and see, you know, if anything could be checked out so we had quite a few activities and a lot of our work, my work too, involved check up on the Japanese nationals.
PW: Were there a lot of them in that area?
MY: Not that many but there--
PW: There were enough--
MY: Enough [nods]--
PW: That you had to keep an eye on.
MY: Yup.
PW: Yeah.
MY: And uh, I think there is also the embassies too. There's an interesting thing which happened,one of our jobs was to, Colonel Morris and I, every month we had to go to all the different foreign embassies and just keep in touch with developments. And the British embassy, the French embassy, the American embassy, and the Japanese embassy was in, was confined to their quarters. But we had to go and check them out too, so every month we went out. But one day we went there and found out that nobody was there in the Japanese embassy. So we had to send out, we sent out an alarm right away and Thai police and the army was set, was set to work checking and about four days later they were found up in northern Thailand. I don't know why the Japanese embassy crowd wanted, you know, why they went scrammed, cause it was a stupid sort of thing. But anyway they were escorted back and not to their quarters, but sent to a secure house, ex hospital and they were held there.

[100 minutes]

MY: And then they were all sent out of the country, and I had to do a lot of checking there in that respect. And uh, I think another part which is interesting was, one day, my Colonel handed me a sheet of paper and said "Min can you read this? Will you

read it out for me?" And I looked at it and it was in German. It was a German document. For me it was fairly simple, and so I read it out. And the Colonel said "oh I see, well that's good". And I said "what's all this about?" Eric Morris was his name, and he said, "well, you know during, one of the things that we had heard was that during the war some of the German nationals who lived in Bangkok, or in Thailand, managed to send a load of tin, a war material, to Germany on these, on Japanese constructed cargo submarines. And sent it to Germany". And I said "what!?", you know, "it sounds preposterous but, one of the fellows here was supposed to have successfully sent a shipment over and was supposed to have got an iron cross from Hitler himself. We haven't any information at all on it and we'd like, I was told to keep an eye on things, and see if there was anything, any scrap of information we could get", and apparently, he checked my records. And you know when we joined up, when we joined up, among the things we had to include in our file was all the languages that you knew. And I had put down that I knew a little bit of German. So, so, that's why he, I guess that's why he selected me, I don't know [laughs]. I'm surmising. But anyway, and he said, "well look Min, you know, this is gonna be fun". You know I go to several social events, which is organized by the German nationals here, they have a social order here and there's quite a few of them here, and they have these social events every now and then, including Army, ex-Army and all that too. And they may be talking about this submarine thing, I don't know that, but just in case I'd like to be able to send you there just to listen in on their conversations, you know. And I said "me? A sergeant", you know they're all officers or you know high class people, but the sergeant is such an insignificant person that people will get suspicious. So, Eric said "well look, I'm going to go off to headquarters and see if I can make you a temporary officer, I'll see if I can get a couple of pips[?] for you [laughs] and you can go as an as a lieutenant". I said well, that'd be great if you can work it [laughs] but he went to headquarters, and headquarters said no we can't do that. So, that dashed my hopes, but then Eric said I'll tell you what, you be, I can send you up as a bar attendant. And, you know, you can help out in the bar and you know you can walk around and you can sort of listen to the conversations and see if any mention at all of this submarine thing comes up. So twice I went, to these events, but nothing was [shakes head no] I learnt nothing. They didn't talk anything at all really of any military significance.

[105 minutes]

MY: But anyway, I thought that was an interesting side light. So anyway, after, let's see. Oh then, what happened in spring 1946 was that the King of Thailand, let's see Ananda, Ananda Mahidol, I think was his name. Ananda Mahidol, the King of Siam, a fairly young King, he was assassinated and in our intelligence there, we figured that it was done by a palace plot and there was a Premier at that time [Nye Pridit?], a man named [Nye Pridit?], and he was supposed to have masterminded this assassination. But anyway, so the king was assassinated and his younger brother, Bhumibol, who is still now the current monarch, he was then made, made the king. But he at that time he was only a youngster, only about 19, so- And the family, the royal family, was quite worried about his safety, so they decided to, you know, to

send them to a safe haven outside the country. And so they decided to send him to Switzerland to finish up his education at a private school. And they asked my Colonel, this Colonel Morris, to be his aide-de-camp, so he had to leave. And that was in August when he left and by then all the work that we, that Allied needed in Thailand was pretty well finished, so uh, so all the all the troops except about, oh maybe, some of the military police and about half a dozen of us, our group, were left. All the rest were, had been sent back to, sent down to Singapore. So we, I was one of those left, and the reason we found out, there was one officer left, Lieutenant Thomlinson[?], one of the Hakujin sergeants, Harry Kerrin [?], Sadao Nikaido, , Jack Okee, and myself. We were then told you are to go down, leave Bangkok by train to go to south Thailand, Surat Thani, in Southern Thailand. And there you'll work with a British group whose organized a military train. There's about 140 Japanese surrendered, surrendered personnel, the Japanese- the soldiers were never called prisoners of war, they were called surrendered personnel you see. And there's about 140 of them in Surat Thani area and they have to be sent to Changi jail [?] in Singapore, by train. And we, we, that's the lieutenant and Sadao , and Jack Okee, and myself, and Harry Kerrin [?], we are to be the guard. The escorting party for this troop train. So that's what we did. We had a couple of coaches and then we started going to the west side of, west side of Malaysia. It took us four days to get to Singapore and, you know, we had t arrange everything so that we didn't disturb the regular freight and passenger traffic and whenever there were other trains involved we'd be sitting on a siding. And anyway, the Japanese army, their cooks made all the meals for us and they served us in the stations. They set up all tables, and the benches, and everything, and brought all the meals out to us. Breakfast, lunch and dinners, and

[110 minutes]

MY: in the mornings they supplied the hot water for us to do our shaving and washing [laughs]. And we had the we had the last coach, a box car, as our as our headquarters on the train. So that was, we finally took them down and that was our last big journey. So, after we delivered the JSPs in Changi Jail [?] , then we joined the rest of the Canadians who were in a camp in Johor Bahru . Johor Bahru was just on the south tip of Malaysia, just north of the island of Singapore. We were there for a few more months and that was just sort of a temporary stop over point for us before we could get a transport ship back to England. So, we were there for a couple of months. Then finally we got our transport back, that was, I forget what day we left Singapore but, we left on the SSO Toronto which beside carrying about a couple of thousand of troops also picked up civilians, in India. India had just been given their freedom from England, so India was now, you know, their own, a free country. And an awful lot of British civilians, ya know, from their government posts and all that, they and their families, had to be evacuated back to England. So, uh a couple of thousand of them also came on the SSO Toronto and we picked them up in Bombay. And then from Bombay then we went through Aidan[?], we had to pick up a bunch of Duke of Wellingtons own, whose ours, one regiment of them who were stationed in Port Said. They were supposed to take the train to go to Alexandria, go to Cairo and

then Alexandria, but Ethiopia would not permit them to go through their country. So they had to wait for us to pick them up at Port Said,and transport them to Alexandria. So, we went through the Panama, the Canal there and out through the Mediterranean and finally we got back to Singapore [shakes head no], to South Hampton. Twenty-two days I think. Food was terrible.
BU: Sorry this tapes about to end

[video cuts]

BU: Camera is rolling.
PW: When you um, volunteered for the army what was the reaction of the Nisei or Nikkei community to you know some of the niseis volunteering? The reaction of some of the parents, your parents.
MY: I think that, on the whole, the Japanese community was in favour. But there were quite a few who were dissidents and they- in fact, some of our boys were referred to as being dogs, but uh, I think generally speaking the community thought that we were doing the right thing. I know some of the parents were kind of very disappointed that their sons had joined, but they said well that's your opinion you know. That's your opinion, and my opinion might be wrong but what, who am I [laughs] to differ with you, it's your own life. In some cases, I know people have told me, you guys were stupid, you're stupid to have joined the army. And I said why, and they said you know if you had stayed behind you would have been

[115 minutes]

MY: economically, you would have been much, much better off. During the time you had very little competition for jobs, you had high quality jobs and you could have gone in there and advanced economically, so you know, you were stupid that way. I was told that in my face by some people. And I almost came to blows with them. You stupid and so on [laughs] they had no sense of values at all you know. Your morals are wrong, but anyway. I was glad that I was able to go I felt very happy and I felt that, all along I had been feeling this is something we had to do we're Canadian citizens and that's a duty of a Canadian citizen and we- there's no reason why we should not be.
MY: And as I said, you know, a lot of my- when I was in school a lot of classmates where members of the reserves, you know. And in our particular case, a lot of them were cadets in the Seaforth Highlanders so you know, in our conversations with my classmates and all that we were asked, I was asked, anyways, several times, why don't you join us? Why don't you join the Seaforth Highlanders? And I said gee that would be great you know but do you wear anything under your skirts, under your kilts [laughs] you know that old joke? But anyway, uh you know, a lot of my Hakujin friends said you should join us and I felt perfectly at home, you know, with a lot of Hakujin friends and um, a lot of the other Nisei boys whom I knew, they're all the same, you know, we're Canadians this is what we're taught to do as a duty of a citizen, you know. And a lot of us were sorta thinking ahead, by us being in the army it'll help to get the franchise for the whole community, and then we get army

benefits too after demobilisation, of course, so there is several of us who managed to get our university degrees, you know, education, from the army, from DVA. And um, people like Frank Moritsugu, Fred Kagawa and others I knew who went through university on DVA.
PW: So after you came back from overseas you went to university at UofT [University of Toronto] is that correct?
MY: Yes, but not right away. Uh I, I went back to my company that I was working with, they held my job for me. But then after after [a little while] I began to feel, you know, this company has been good to me, but there's really not that much chance to advance further. And technically it's not that strong, technically, and I might be wasting my time so I might as well go on and finish my engineering. So that's why I decided I better go back. So, I was out of school for seven years and I didn't take, one of those prep courses. The army had set up what they call rehab classes, in Hamilton, for sort of a prep school to, to introduce you- reintroduce you to your schooling.
PW: [to review study habits?]
MY: [nods] yeah. It's about a year's course, a rehab course, but I decided I can't afford to wait like that I'm too old for that. So, I went right in. That's why it was kinda hard you know after seven years of not going to school, you know, immediately going into a demanding course it's kinda tough, but I managed.
PW: And you went into and got your degree in chemical engineering?

[120 minutes]

MY: Yeah in '52 I got my degree and uh--
PW: And what did you do after graduation?
MY: Well, actually I had pretty well made up mind as to what I wanted to do. And that was uh- in all my summer, my summer jobs, I was working for the department of health, in their sanitary engineering branch. And one of the first jobs I had with them was to work on a, one of those environmental jobs on the Spanish river, with the so called KVP pollution case on the Spanish river. Which is uh, you know, that river that starts in Sault Saint Marie and goes into Lake Huron, is it? Yeah. And along the way there is a KVP paper at Espanola, which has been putting all their waste into the river--
PW: And polluting the river--
MY: [nods] And polluting the river and so the people who had camps, owned property on the river downstream, they got so fed up so they sued the company and they were successful in suing the company. So, the original judgement against the company was that they were to shut down. Completely. But then the company protested and said look this means that there will be hundreds of jobs lost in that area. So what can you suggest that there be some sort of solution where we- you can do a study, and see what the, actually what the amount of pollution is, and you can come up with some idea as to what we can do to stay alive. So then uh the department of health then said, okay, we'll agree to that. We'll stay the conviction but you have to have one year's study a complete year study on every aspect of your discharge into the Spanish River and the uh, the research council there's a research

council which be overseeing the whole job. So, a team was built up from the department of health, including civils, uh chemical engineers, biologists--
PW: Multi-discipline-.
MY: [nods] Yes.
PW: investigation.
MY: And I was put on that team. And so I spent one whole summer, my first summer job was with them, and I set up a laboratory and did a lot of testing, and sampling, and got an idea of just how these things work. Then we finalized everything, the amount, and the degree of pollution, and the effect on the rivers and it was- A report was made, and it was a very, very interesting one, and I decided this is the field I want to be in. And then the years after that, the summers after that, I'd be working in the laboratories and doing all the analysis work, and also going out with the teams to different water plants and sewage treatment plants, and also, some industrial plants, getting samples and doing the studies and all these so that's what I wanted to do. But when I graduated there was no real openings at all at that time, and the chief uh, Cap Delaport[?], he was very sympathetic to me, and he really liked me, he was an old English artillery officer, he's a real military man, and my having been in the army, I became one of his favourites. As a matter of fact, you know, because I got to know him very well, other Niseis who went afterwards to look for jobs in the department of health, they were referred to him you see, Cap Delaport[?]. And Aki Oda[?] for instance, he said you know he went up to Cap Delaport[?] and, to be interviewed, and the first thing

[125 minutes]

MY: He was asked was, "do you know Min Yatabe?" And Aki[?] said "yeah not too well, but I know him", so Cap Delaport said "you're hired". Just like that. [nods] Others were like that. But anyway. I couldn't get a job in that field right away, so he said you know in the future, I can see that there is going to be a big future, later on. The government has some sort of thing, programs, lined up but they take a little while to get anything concrete done. So why don't you just get anything else but be prepared to come back to us. So, I joined CIL, Nylon, plant in Kingston, but I didn't like that at all. I didn't like the atmosphere and I didn't like the people. Some of the factory people when I went out to the machine rooms and all that, you know, say "oh you damn Jap" and all that nonsense. I didn't like that at all, so I wasn't happy at all.
MY: Then shortly after that Professor of Sanitary Engineering from Queen's came up to me, I had met him before, you know, in some of our studies, and he said "I understand that you're here," and said, "I'm looking for somebody to help me out to design and build a pilot plan for a water treatment and wastewater treatment, and set up the laboratory, so that I could use that as a teaching tool for my sanitary engineering class. Right now, I have nothing and yet, I'm supposed to teach sanitary engineering. So, I said "okay, that sounds interesting". He said "the research council is sponsoring a lot of this and they'll be sponsoring some of the programs". So I said, okay. So, I joined them and I was there and actually, I wanted to get a graduate degree out of this, but I couldn't manage to get one in civil engineering because that was the policy of the Dean there. He said since I was a chemical engineering

graduate, he wouldn't consider me at all. So anyway, I made plans to eventually apply to an American university for Master's. And actually, after several years I did get accepted but, at that time I was also being approached by another consulting firm here in Toronto, the biggest consulting engineer in that field, in Canada, at that time [Gordon Story?]. I had done a little bit of technical work for them in the laboratory when I was at Queen's you see. So uh, so I finally gave up the idea of going down to the south and started working with this consultant here. That was in '56. And I was with them for about almost forty years. I had a great time, I really enjoyed working in that company. When I joined there was only about, oh a dozen engineers, one civil, [shakes head no] no one mechanical engineer, one electrical engineer, one architect, and all the rest of the engineers were civils. I was the only chemical, in fact in this business, in this whole industry, there are hardly any chemical engineers. They all thought oh chemicals don't have any place in sanitary engineering, 'cause they look at it from bricks, bricks and concrete and all that, not from the process point of view.
PW: Just as a matter of interest did that plant in Espanola, was it able to still keep on working?
MY: [nods] well they had to, we had, we suggested, we had to go into their plant too you see, go through their whole process, and see what was involved in their pollution: which department was responsible for this, what could be done to reduce this? And, but, above all, they had to put in a waste treatment plant. Which the company

[130 minutes]

MY: said they would. So with that, and the improvements in the process to cut down on the pollution and they were allowed to stay.
PW: To continue.
MY: [nods] yeah.
PW: So you were earlier in the environmental field way back then [laughs].
MY: Yeah.
PW: In the '50s.
MY: Yeah. Anyway, so as soon as I joined the company I- you know, I was set to work, and I was employed as an engineer, not a chemical engineer, as an engineer, and you're supposed to know every aspect of engineering. So, one of the first jobs I had was, "Min, I want you to do a survey a water current survey in Brockville, near, near an area where we want to establish an intake for a water treatment plant. We want to see how the currents go. So, I want you to take somebody, one from our company, you know, a survey man, and another, there will be another from the Brockville commission, water commission, who will be there, so you'll be the instrument man. So, you'll organize everything [laughs]". So right away I was doing survey work but actually, I had done one semester of surveys in chemical engineering, one semester, but that was enough anyway, so I was able to do the job. And then I started doing sort of testing, all sorts of equipment and then we, I was involved in the Guelph sewage treatment plant, right away. Then I was going through all the design work and all of that, and then I discovered, "hey where's the

laboratory. There's no lab here". They said "oh yeah we forgot to put it, so we'll give you give you a cupboard". And I said "a cupboard?" I looked back on all the other reports and plans, and I found there's hardly anything allowed for an analytical lab, and I said this is stupid, you've got to have a good lab and they said "okay, then you, you, you build one. You design one". So, it ended up, my designing labs, good labs, and I was, I was in conflict with engineers but, because they thought that was you know uh--
PW: [unclear] [laughs]
MY: Yeah. But anyway, it turned out they did finally agree that it was the best thing. All the labs that I did was copied by other consultants. And not only that I also introduced to all sorts of new things from my background to this field. Like introducing glass, pyrex glass piping in certain areas so that we can see how the liquid flow is and so on and so forth. Up to then in the field no one had ever used glass, Pyrex, tubing and certain arrangements of pumps and valves and all that. And then dewatering, they knew how, that we needed to dewater sludge and on and so forth, but they couldn't do any of the calculations because those are chemical engineering processes, you see. So, to say calculate this is how you work out the efficiency and so on. So anyway, I got involved with all sorts of things right across the country. When fluoridation came in, I did all the conceptual design for the fluoridation in all of metro plants. And- and I think we, our company did about, at least a third of all the waste water plants and water plants in Ontario.
PW: Yeah they were very well known. Consulting firm and engineering firm actually, in Ontario.
MY: [nods] Yeah.
PW: In Ontario. On another subject, were you involved n the redress movement--
MY: [shakes head no] No.
PW: In Toronto?
MY: [shakes head no] No.
PW: Too busy during your work.
MY: I was across the country and travelling so much. That's why when S20 was formed I really couldn't do a heck of a lot, and uh, quite often, quite often what happened was this, there was a convention, conventions out in Western Canada on the wastewater

[135 minutes]

MY: and water conventions. And my company sent me out to all of those western Canada ones, because you know, out in the west, they considered anybody from Toronto, as you know "eastern bastards", you know [laughs], out to screw the western Canada. The company realized I was the only employee from Western Canada and I made sure of that when I went out there, and Lydia too. She's an Edmontonian you see. So, the company liked to have me go out to every one of those Western Canada things, and not only just the conference but I also used to do a lot of organizing of the company affairs when I was out there, and I'd combine a lot of business with the conventions. So that's why I wasn't able, and these conventions all met at the same time as the S20 meetings, annual meetings, so I had to miss an awful

lot of it here. It wasn't until the last eight years of the S20s existence that I was able to be on the executive and uh really put heart and soul into it and I didn't make a big difference to the way the S20 operated. But uh I also had joined the legion too. So, I'm a member of branch 10 Legion, in East York, and uh, Lydia is also a member too. You know Lydia's brother was also in the army.
PW: And her brother was? Who was her brother?
MY: George.
PW: Oh, George okay.
MY: Yeah he was in the signal core.
PW: Okay.
MY: He joined earlier, and he went overseas, but he got sick, and pneumonia and pleurisy. And finally, they had to send him home on a hospital ship. And uh, and of course you know Agee was my, was in the army with me but uh, Agee went, you know, he already had his Master's in chemical engineering, and shortly after he came back home, he applied to Chalk River and he was accepted after, you know, quite a background search by the mounties. So, you know he did quite well that way. Uh and, Frank Kagawa was also, he went through mechanical engineering in Toronto. And oh, [Joe Shintani?] went through Ryerson, which was not a university at that time, it became a college, you know, he was doing a lot of work on the [DEW Line] and everything you know and did an awful lot of computer work.
PW: So, you made the right choice in joining the army and then--
MY: Yeah most of us did.
[unclear speaking over each other]
MY: It would have been nice if I had been able to enjoy, you know, doing work in Europe too with my German [laughs]. And you know get German experience in, European experience, you know.
PW: So were most of the Niseis in the far east um war versus the European, European war? Were most of them in the, were involved in the west, in the Far East?
MY: The ones who were not S20?
PW: Yeah. Other than the S20s. 'Cause there was the S20 group and then there were other niseis who joined some other.
MY: Yeah
[unclear speaking over each other]
PW: I would think.
MY: Yeah they were yeah in different groups, yeah, other than language.
PW: Yes.
MY: Uh.
PW: But there wasn't anybody really in combat as they say, the [442nd or the 100th battalion?].
MY: Uh no, no that's not correct.
PW: No.
MY: There were individuals.
PW: Oh there were? Oh, okay.
MY: Yes. Uh

[140 minutes]

MY: in fact this [Roy Kawamoto?] uh who lives in Kelowna now, he post war he joined the army and he was became an officer, he was in there for quite a number of years, maybe about 30 odd years or so. And when he was station in Ottawa, he did a lot of research into the nisei, the Japanese Canadian, the Nikkei connections within the army. He's the chief, he's the most authoritative person on Nikkei, you know military experience, by far, 'cause he was able to go through all the files. And as a matter of fact, he told me at the very beginning that he knew about 30 people who were in the army, outside of our S20 and India group. Uh but, he said, I keep on getting more and more every now and then I'll get a reference to someone else. In fact, there is another, just in the last year, he said I came across somebody who was who landed in Juno beach.
PW: Really?
MY: Yeah.
PW: A Nisei?
MY: Yeah.
PW: So, there are these plot[?] nisei people who were involved?
MY: Yes. He said every now and then another name comes up, so he's added an awful lot of names since the first assessment.
PW: That's very interesting.
MY: And those things, you know, Roy Ito's book, you know, went as far as he could but you know there's an awful lot of coverage--
PW: That's still missing.
MY: That's still missing.
PW: The history of the Nikkei and--
MY: Now, referring to, with reference to, Roy Ito's book, there is a reference to Colonel Nelson Spencer in that book. The man who called Mitch Hepburn.
PW: Yes.
MY: It turned out that Colonel Nelson Spencer was the commanding officer of the 175th battalion of the Canadian Expeditionary Force, CEF, in World War I and he was from Medicine Hat. In fact, one time he was the mayor of Medicine Hat, and he was the CEO of the 175th battalion and he went overseas with them. Now, a lot, there were an awful lot of Japanese in that company. In that battalion and these are the ones who originally wanted to serve from B.C., you know. They're part of that 200 core in the south trained core and all that, and they were not accepted in the Canadian army. But when the Alberta companies started to loose a lot of their force, their forces, due to attrition from the European war, they looked around and saw these Japanese from BC as a possible source, so they called them over and they were very glad to come and they were accepted. And a lot joined this Colonel Nelson Spencer's outfit too. So he went overseas with these Japanese Canadians in his command.
PW: So that's why he's quite sympathetic to the Japanese?
MY: Oh yeah. And afterwards, when after, [d-mob?] you know the Japanese veterans they started up a branch, 9 of the royal Canadian legion. And Colonel Nelson Spencer was very instrumental in helping them set that up and he used to come to a lot of their meetings. In fact, I have a picture, a large picture of the veterans at World War I

with Colonel Nelson Spencer there in civies and, and, anyway, I gave a copy of that to some other people, but I still have the original. [Roy Kawamoto?] gave me a copy of that you see, first.
PW: So now you're the contact person for the S20 now. Are you-?
MY: Well not that I want to but--
PW: You were left with it.
MY: Yes I'm left with it.
PW: Contact as a contact person for any information on the WWII

[145 minutes]

PW: veterans especially the S20 group, is that right?
MY: Yes, and I get called on to make speeches here and there.
PW: And you still do that to groups in schools, school kids, classes?
MY: Yeah, from S20 I used to go join other people, people like Frank Stum [?] and uh, Fred, they used to go to various schools, you know, for Remembrance Day ceremonies and all that, then I started joining them and I went to several of them. But um, lately, I gave a talk at the library, the University of Toronto library, the Asian section, there is an Asian section there. At the opening of that section I was asked to give a talk. So, there's a Chinese, and a Korean, and myself, we all gave a talk. But, and I was invited to come again and I was asked to even supply more veterans, Nisei veterans to come and be interviewed and all that, something like this, you see. And that was the first one, was the original one, was three years, two years ago in the Asian month of May. You know. And I was asked approached to give a talk there so I gave a talk, they were quite impressed, so they asked me to come back again, but [shakes head no] things never worked out right, time wise and the guy who was on the other side he was so enthusiastic, but he had an accident and he was in a wheelchair for a long time and then he got transferred to another branch and so he kinda lost contact, so we never did anything more and then last remembrance, the day before Remembrance Day, I had to give a talk at the 404, 437, air force wing, air force veteran association wing, up on Steeles, up Sheppard and Allen. Yeah near where, opposite where the Buddhist church is.
PW: Downsview.
MY: [nods] in that area.
PW: In that area.
MY: So, I had to give a talk there on the Japanese, the whole picture about the Japanese situation and the evacuation business and also our military involvement.
PW: So, the Nikkei history?
MY: Yeah.
PW: In Canada.
MY: So, I gave a talk there. And I think I told you the reason why I was asked to give a talk there was, I, you know, the year before I had to give the eulogy for George Suzuki's funeral. That was the last minute uh assignment for me. Did you hear did you know about that did you?
PW: No, I didn't actually.

MY: Somebody else was supposed to give the eulogy and then one, one hour before the funeral he phoned me and said "I can't do it. I can't do it. You'll have to do it for me". He said, "I'm not a public speaker, you know, speaker and I can't do it, I can't do it."
PW: Well you're very articulate and it's very, the amount of details in the memory that you have is just fantastic.
MY: Oh, I don't know.
PW: So, I thank you very much for giving out your time and telling us your really interesting story, so, we certainly appreciate that so thank you. Thank you.
MY: I guess I yacked off enough [laughs].
PW: Well, the problem is you know it's, its, so many people are passing on, I mean, your generation is getting older, it's for us the heritage group to capture these stories and at least have these stories on record. So it's important to us that we capture all these stories so thanks again, we appreciate it.
MY: Okay.
PW: Thank you.

[Interview ends]