

(Document A)
Interview of Tom and Georgette Yoshikai
By: Mayumi Maerawa on October, 1996

Question: Why did your parents come to the United States?

Answer: Immigration was based on economic condition. A lot of people immigrated to America from all over the world. When my father came to the states, Japan was in a terrible depression. He had to pay off the debt that his family had, so he decided to come to America and work.

First he went to Hawaii and worked for the sugar plantation, then he worked for the railroad company. The railroad company hired a lot of the Japanese immigrants because they needed massive numbers of workers.

I think one of the other reasons for my father coming to America was because he couldn't get in to the air force or the navy. He didn't pass the test for the physical part so that joining the Army was his only option. The Army was considered to be more harsh and dirtier than other two, so it was better off to come to America than joining the army in Japan.

Question: Did your parents come to America together?

Answer: No, most of the Nisei's fathers came over first and worked. When they reached the age of marriage they either went back to Japan and got married or got picture brides.

Question: Before the war started did you face any discrimination?

Answer: Yes, there was discrimination. We were almost isolated from white people and we never really socialized with them. Also there was the law which prohibited intermarriage between Asians and Caucasians. My parents faced a lot more discrimination than I did because they didn't understand the American culture too well. They always taught us that even though we are discriminated against by whites we should have pride in ourselves.

Question: Did the American people's reaction change after the war started?

Answer: The day after Japan bombed Pearl Harbor, the school bus driver wouldn't pick me up and he just whizzed by. At school most of my classmates wouldn't talk to me. You'd go down the hall and wave "hi," but this day you were the enemy.

America is not a war country. When the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor the Americans had to create this hate against them so they could go to war. That's why the Japanese-Americans had to go to the concentration camps. We certainly felt that we were Americans, but it didn't matter.

But even during this time there were some good and honest people among Americans. They knew what was right and wrong. One was an American couple that wanted to adopt my little sister. They thought these girls were too young to be put in the camp, but my parents didn't want us to be separated. My parents said it would only be a while in the camp, but it was a quite long time before the war was over.

Question: What was the experience like in the internment camp?

Answer: It was terrible. The place was sandy and there were no trees there. The first meal I had was cow brain. Everybody kept looking at me because I was the only one eating it. The camp was like a prison. We had very limited space with no bathroom. It was surrounded by a barbed wire fence, with guard towers every 50 feet.

Question: Did you actually go to the war?

Answer: Yes, I did. When the war started nisei were not able to be drafted. But in 1943 the army had began drafting Nisei. Then I was still too young, but after I turned 18 years old I was drafted in the internment camp.

Question: What was your experience like in the war?

Answer: When I went to war in 1944 it was almost over, so I was only in 2 campaigns. By that time the German army was retreating.

(Document B)

Interview of Mr. Minoru Ikeno

By: Mitsutaka Machida on October 1996

Minoru Ikeno is currently 81 years old. He was 26 during the Pacific War. We are very honored that he accepted our invitation for an interview. Our page would not be complete without such assistance.

Question: Which prefecture did you live in during the war?

Answer: Ishikawa Prefecture.

Question: Where were you stationed, and how long were you in the military?

Answer: I joined the navy in May of 1941 and went to Guam Island in December. After this, I went to New Ireland and to the Solomon Islands and stayed there for a year and a month. Then, I knew the end of the war was near. Although the war ended, I had to go to Noto-Hanto to take the mines away in the area. I was finally released from military duty in March of 1946.

Question: What did you think when you received your "Akagami" (Draft Notice)?

Answer: Due to national military obligation I expected myself to go to the war. If I had refused to go to the war, I would have gone to jail. Moreover, my family would have been called "Hikokumin," which meant unpatriotic Japanese.

Question: What did your family think about your going to war?

Answer: My family was worried about me very much. At that time, everyone was afraid of dying for the war, but he must follow the military order.

Question: What did you think of the war?

Answer: I thought it was a very serious problem. To tell the truth, I thought Japan was not able to handle the war.

Question: What did you think of the U.S.A.? How about now?

Answer: I did not hate the U.S.A. at all. However, I now think that people who live in less powerful countries than the U.S.A. don't believe that the U.S.A. is the best country in the world, or that whatever the U.S.A. does is correct. I wonder why the U.S.A., France, and Russia sell weapons to other small countries to make money and then American troops and United Nation troops are killed by enemies using American, French, or Russian weapons.

Question: What did you think of Japan losing the war?

Answer: I felt safe when the war ended. At the same time, I had no ideas about what was going to happen to Japan.

Question: What would you like the young generation to know most about the war?

Answer: That they have enough food and clothes to survive. I do not know if they understand what I say, because they have never had to worry about surviving. However, I would like to say one other thing to them: please, try to make an effort to endure hardship; that will make the young generation mature. I also would like the young generation to be warm to other people and to be brave with wisdom.

Question: Is there anything else that you wish to say?

Answer: I cannot tell you what I would like to say in one sentence, because I learned very many things from my experiences in the war. Of these, I would like to say that all things in the world are in flux and nothing is permanent. Even now wars are happening in the world. I wonder when humans will ever be without a war.

(Document C)
Interview of Mr. Itsuji Okumoto
By Yuko Okumoto in October 1996

Question: Where did you live during the war?

Answer: I was 16 years old when the war began. I worked as a welder in Imazato, Osaka. We could not get very much done however, because there were many warning alarms to escape to the "Bokugo" which is a hole underground to protect people from bombs. From 6:00 to 10:00 in the evening I had to go to "Seinengakko," which was a school for boys. It trained them to fight.

I practiced using a spear and a gun. Then one day I got my "Akagami," a draft notice, which ordered me to go to battle. Even if I did not want to go, I could not say so. I had to go. If I didn't, my family and I would be called "Hikokumin," which meant unpatriotic Japanese, and then we would not survive. However, I got to come back soon because of my body's weakness. In 1945 there were air raids in Osaka, and we had to escape to another land. We climbed Mt. Ikoma and saw Osaka city. There was nothing there except fire; everything was gone. I saw many bombs dropped from the sky and after the bombing I saw the aftermath; many dead bodies. I will not ever forget that sight.

Question: How was your diet during the war?

Answer: We could not get enough food by "Haikyu" and "Kaidashi." We always felt hungry, but there was nothing to do about it. Our usual diet was a mixture of rice, corn, or potato. However, as the war became harder, the system of "Haikyu" gave us less and we could not get enough food. Then we even ate weeds. The government encouraged this and even explained how to cook them. There was really nothing to eat. When I saw the aftermath of the earthquake in Kobe in 1996, I remembered the war and my experiences.

Question: How much information could you get at that time?

Answer: I did not know about the war at that time because there was not enough information on the radio. The Japanese government did not tell us much about the war, especially about fighting in which Japan was losing. They tried to encourage people by telling them only about fights we had won. Some people who heard the information really thought that Japan would win in the end. However, I thought Japan might lose this war, but I still did my best. I had to, because everyone else did. We could not act in different ways, or as individuals at that time.

Question: What do you think about the emperor "Showa Tenno" at that time and what do you think now?

Answer: Japan had not lost a war until World War II. Then most people (including the emperor and executives) thought that Japan would win again this time. However, in fact, we lost. I can say that the leaders of the Japanese nation have a great responsibility for this war. They need to bear the responsibility for losing many lives, I think.

Question: What is your message for young generations who do not know about the war?

Answer: The scene I experienced would be unimaginable and unbelievable for those who have not experienced war. I cannot express the cruelties and awful things that happened in this peaceful world. However, I can say that we should not cause any wars in the future.

We are getting used to this peaceful world, and there are only a few of us left who experienced the war. I am worried about that.

Do not forget. We should not revisit the fighting and wars.

(Document D)
Interview of Mr. Hiro Moriyasu
By: Chiharu Ishimara in November of 1996

Question: Did your town experience an air raid? What happened?

Answer: Kure city, where I was born, raised, and attended school was air raided and completely burned down.

Question: Did you have to move to the countryside to avoid air raids (Sokai)? Or did anyone evacuate to your home town?

Answer: Our whole class of 3rd grade was relocated to the countryside about 20 or 30 minutes from Kure. About 30 students stayed in a temple. The whole class had to walk from the temple to the village school. We had one male and one female teacher. After the bombing we were given the option to go back to Kure which was burned down. All opted to go back. We saw our school was gone; 80% of the students were without homes. Our classes were held under the open sky.

Then 3 months later Hiroshima City was destroyed by the A-Bomb. Some of our family friends were affected. We had an elderly maid who was in Hiroshima City doing errands (in place of my mother). She suffered 60% burns and survived. Miracle! She had a very pleasant and loving, positive attitude.

Question: How did you feel when you knew that "Japan was lost"?

Answer: Uncertainty of what would happen to people.

-People were glad that no more destruction would continue because the war had ended.

-People were concerned about how to survive and rebuild.

-People were sad but not bitter.

Question: What did you think about the war itself?

Answer: War is a game of the military; only citizens suffer.

Question: What would you like all young people to know about war?

Answer: War is destructive, but the mind of the people need not be destroyed by it. People can get up and look ahead to discover a new life, hope, and joy. Even in little things they can find happiness and joy.

Question: Any other comments?

Answer: It is an un-publicized story but true. With all the cities burned down, the oldest city in Japan, Kyoto, was not destroyed. It would have been no effort with one bomb to destroy Kyoto with all its wooden structures. Later we learned that General Douglas MacArthur who commanded the Pacific War made strict orders not to destroy Kyoto. He had a humanitarian side never seen in any other war general. He also was a gentleman asking and honoring the emperor to remain the symbol of Japan. He did not dishonor him as a war criminal. MacArthur was a tough powerful general who led to win World War II, but he did humanitarian things for Japan. He also stood strong in his position against dividing Japan into two parts, a communist zone (Hokkaido), and the rest democratic. Japan was the only nation which escaped becoming a communist territory. (Berlin, Germany, North-South Korea, Red China, Taiwan, North & South Vietnam etc. didn't) Thanks to MacArthur!

Even though many Americans did not approve of MacArthur and President Truman fired him, for Japan it was fortunate that MacArthur was the general to conquer Japan and ruled Japan as head of the occupational forces and stopped the Korean War. Communism could easily have expanded the war into Japan.

(Document E)
Interview of Mrs. Tamaka Saitou
By: Mitsutaka Machida in October 1996

Question: What occupation did you have before, during, and after the war?

Answer: Before the war my occupation was in agriculture. During the war I worked at military factories. After the war I got married and had three children, so I started raising them.

Question: Could you describe what your life was like?

Answer: Before and during the war, even though food distribution was limited, I did not have any trouble getting food because I grew vegetables on the farm. After the war, since the U.S.A. troops brought relief goods to Japan, food and other distributions became much better than during the war.

Question: How did you feel when your relatives had to participate in the war?

Answer: I was proud of them for their participation in the war because they were going to work for their country and our emperor. On the other hand, I also felt very sad.

Question: What did you think of the war at that time?

Answer: I did not think Japan was going to win the war, and the war itself was wrong.

Question: What did you think of the U.S.A. troops?

Answer: I was very afraid that the American troopers might attack me, so I changed my hair to a male style.

Question: What did you think when Japan lost the war?

Answer: I felt relieved from the tense feeling of the war. Ending the war did not make a perfect, peaceful world, but I felt that ending the war was good.

Question: What did you think of the emperor and the government at the time?

Answer: I thought the emperor was being used by generals who dominated Japanese politics, and the emperor did not have enough power to resist the government order. I felt sorry for the emperor.

Question: What would you like younger generations to know most about the war?

Answer: I would like the young generation to know how horrible the war was, and that all wars, inherently, are wrong.

Question: Is there anything you wish to say?

Answer: A war is extremely horrible, and I wish that developing and making war weapons would stop.