

14. Item # MANZ 5161 (100th/442nd-related artifacts)

John Wakamatsu [JW], MANZ 1276, interviewed by Richard Potashin [RP]

Disc 1 of 1 (DVD), 21:53 – 24:29

JW: My father was saying that, for instance, when he came back to the Uni—Los Angeles—because he was actually involved in taking his parents and putting them over, putting them into the assembly center, which then shipped them to Manzanar—he told me that I guess he got leave and they came to Los Angeles and he said that he took them, you know, went down to an area where they were being assembled, and I believe they were sent by bus, I believe to Manzanar from Los Angeles. Like Auntie Uta said, they went to the Venice police station or city hall, and then they sent them. But my dad told me that after he did that, you know, he saw this lieutenant and the lieutenant looked at my dad wearing a uniform, putting his parents in the assembly center, and that guy didn't feel very good about it, and so, they were just following orders.

My dad said he came home and he's sitting inside the old farmhouse, he said, "That's really a low period in your time, when you—when your family's being sent to internment camp, or to some destination unknown, and now you're going to be—you're sitting there and you're just trying to figure out what to do."

My dad said that—and I know that Auntie Uta said that—"Well, we took a sewing machine." But they had a pickup because they were in the farming business and my dad said they took a refrigerator and maybe he took something else. But he put it in the back of the pickup truck, took it to Manzanar, and when he went into Manzanar he asked the administrator, "Is it okay to do—go through the gate?" The guy—the fellow said, "We're only taking care of the civilians, but the Army's taking care of the camp." So the administrator said, "There's no problem. You can do what you want to do."

So my father went inside the camp and he dropped off the refrigerator. He went to Lone Pine, bought milk and things like that, but he said that it was kind of interesting because the administrator asked him, "Well, do you want to stay with the soldiers or do you want to stay with your family?" My father said, "Well, of course you've got to stay with your family." But, you know, walking around Manzanar with a U.S. Army uniform on is a rather strange experience 'cause he could leave, but his parents couldn't leave. So, you know, his parents were considered a risk, and yet he's in the military. So, you know, it doesn't make any sense to my dad.

But he told me that he trained some of the soldiers that were guarding Manzanar at Fort Ord, so he told them that if they could be nice to his parents and his family... So, you know, you can imagine how they felt. My dad said as he left Manzanar he turned around and he said, you know, "This is not good." And then he drove back to Los Angeles and he said it was a pretty lousy experience.