

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW #452-3

with

Etsuo Sayama (ES)

March 16, 1992

Kapalama Heights, Oahu

BY: Warren Nishimoto (WN)

WN: This is an interview with Mr. Etsuo Sayama on March 16, 1992, at his home in Kapalama Heights, Oahu. The interviewer is Warren Nishimoto.

Okay, we were talking last time about your experiences with the U.S. Engineer [*Department, later known as U.S. Army Corps of Engineers*] . . .

ES: Yeah.

WN: . . . and you know, there were a lot of workers from the Mainland that came in . . .

ES: Right, right.

WN: . . . to work at Punahou School also. Were there any problems with a lot of newcomers coming in?

ES: No. We got along fine. 'Cause they youngsters, eh? And I guess, draft age and one of the reason for coming was, you know, (chuckles) to be on the essential war work, so they didn't have to be in the army. And hardly any trouble really. In fact, one of 'em, George Cuevas, was the one that did lot of designing for me for my covers. My immediate supervisor was Mr. Burton. He was the one that really got me interested in covers, too, because he was a stamp and cover collector. And we used to have our own ball team so you get to know each other. And then you don't have places to go, not like working in town, you know, you go in all directions for *kaukau* and all that. We bring our lunch or I think they may have had cafeteria, I don't recall. So we got along fine. In fact, one of our fellows, Coleman Izu, he became a contractor. He's kind of small guy, but he used to be black belt in judo. (Chuckles) When they learn he was a black belt in judo, all the *Haoles* got respect for him.

WN: You know, like the *Haoles* that you were with before, you know, the ones that you went to school with and became top-level plantation people and so forth. And then, you being Japanese, you didn't get the position. And then now when the war came, you're working with *Haoles* and they're doing more or less the same thing as you.

ES: Yeah, yeah. Right.

WN: Was that a different feeling for you? How did that feel?

ES: No, I got used to. Before the war came, I got used to. We'd be working at Hickam Field. That was with all local boys. But when I went to [Fort] Shafter, then I was in sort of a *Haole* environment, so to speak. But that was military, so you take it for whatever it's worth. And when I went there, I didn't feel. . . . Because civil service is you take the test and they grade you and all that. They don't discriminate [against] you for color line, see. That was the big difference. So you don't feel it. Of course, the supervisors were all *Haole* people from the Mainland. Hardly any local promoted to that level. Except one Chinese fellow was comptroller, which was a high position. But, the feeling was entirely gone, you know. And our focus was on---oh, we had to work, work, work. Saturdays and all. And nighttime you don't go out, so. 'Cause we commute, [but] those fellows, I think they rented places. And one thing, we used to help 'em out. Liquor was rationed, so liquor permit—I don't drink, but I get that and I buy liquor for them (chuckles). One of the group I knew rented a house on Pacific Heights, four or five guys live in the same house. (Chuckles) I used to buy liquor for them. So you know, really friendly. So, you know, when you in the same boat, you get more friendly. Not like before the war when we were on separate strata, so to speak.

WN: Was there a housing shortage?

ES: During the war?

WN: Yeah.

ES: I think so. But not like this kind of shortage [*i.e.*, *the housing situation today, in 1992*]. The only reason why there wasn't a shortage, I think, is people left, too.

WN: Oh, you mean to fight in the war?

ES: Well, in the war, but [*many of*] the [*military*] dependent families all went back to the Mainland. They had a chance to go back and they said, "Oh, we not going to get a boat for maybe one month or two, three months, so if you want to go, go back now," and lot of people sold [*their homes*] cheaply or left it to the real estate [*agents*] and they went back, 'cause they had families back on the Mainland. So, that created a vacancy. But I wasn't aware of those things, because I had my own home to live, with our parents. But for the Mainland boys, they may have had, but I'm sure the Corps [*of Engineers*] had the personnel division helping them out in that respect. Maybe they had a temporary shelter, until they can find a place.

WN: So, in essence then, in the war, it was like maybe upper---higher class *Haoles* with families were moving out and then regular middle-class *Haoles* without families were moving in? Does that sound about. . . .

ES: Well, when you say without families, you talking about single people, yeah? Because all the Hawaiian Constructors that did all the construction was with us, too, at that headquarters at Punahou. And they all came over [*from the Mainland*], eh? And then of course, they just couldn't sign up and come over. They had to go through civil service, take test and qualification and then they shipped over. Ours [*i.e.*, *Army Corps of Engineers*] was the more selective kind

of people. Professional type, so to speak. So I guess we got a little bit more educated kind. But the contractors was different, you know. All kind of carpenters, cement, plasterers. Of course, the manual labor they got mostly from over here, 'cause you didn't need qualifications. But for the crafts, the skills, I think they imported lots from the Mainland, because locals [*alone*] couldn't. And then there was this tension about interning local Japanese. If all the Japanese went, internment, just like the West Coast, the construction here would go down, right down, because the Japanese was the one that skilled, especially in carpentry. And then of course the other kind of crafts too, they were good.

So, the imports from Mainland was in that kind of craft, I think. But as I said, I don't go out in the field, work with them, so I don't have too much idea what happened to them. Only our fellow draftsmen. And the unique thing about us was the downstairs used to be the surveyors, and we were on the second floor, doing what they survey. We transplant that on the paper. The military had surveyors, too, and civilian surveyors, they worked together. That was our, in Punahou School, in what they call the Old School [*Hall*]. Dillingham Hall, the big one, they put a mezzanine floor over the first floor and then they had two areas for engineers. All the different skills, electrician, sanitary man, estimators, structural engineers, you know, all the different skills were in that building. So, those higher[*-level*] engineers, I didn't get too much contact. Of course, we were on the bottom of the barrel (chuckles) so to speak. Especially guys like me because I didn't have schooling in engineering. The only engineering I had was I used to like math, so I used to take extra courses. Every time I had an opening I used to take extra courses. And sugar technology, we had to take drafting and surveying and things of that nature. Hydraulics, strength of materials, and then electrical, sewer, like that, I didn't take at all. So all those engineers were in a separate building. So all my contacts were with my fellow draftsmen and then the surveyors downstairs. And then we form a baseball team of our own, see. And we had a good strong team. (Chuckles)

WN: So was it mixed racially?

ES: Yeah. I used to pitch and my catcher was a Chinese fellow. And sometimes, I forgot his name, a *Haole* guy used to catch for me. Only thing, I don't know how much I look like Emperor Hirohito, I [*would be*] razzed when I'm pitching. "Hey, Hirohito!" (laughs) especially when we get the different--the core of engineers would divide into different areas. So when you challenge different area guys, they don't know us, eh? And then they had King Kong Kelly, or something, good baseball guy came down for recreation. The troops would go and watch and troops play. So sometimes, the GIs, they get carried away and then (chuckles) "Hirohito," you know, razz like that. I know the officers went after that, though.

WN: Were they razzing you for fun or. . . .

ES: Yeah, you know, to distract you so maybe my pitching would deteriorate or something. Especially when they losing.

WN: Was this baseball? Not . . .

ES: Softball.

WN: Softball.

ES: Yeah. What they call twelve-inch [*softball*]. That's why you play with gloves and everything.

WN: Fast pitch?

ES: Yeah, fast pitch. I didn't have that kind [*of*] fast kind, but I used to fool 'em with those change of pace. I don't know if you watch UH baseball, but Billy Blanchette, he don't have fast one, but he use his coco-head, see? That's how I used to pitch, throw 'em off balance, because they like [*to hit*] home run, eh?

WN: Where did you folks play games?

ES: Right on the field.

WN: Oh, Punahou field?

ES: Yeah, Punahou field.

WN: The front. The field facing Wilder Avenue?

ES: Yeah, that place used to be. Of course they had quonset huts on top, but [*there were*] certain level [*areas*] along that palm[*-lined*] street. Down there was all level. So we used to have field there. In fact, I remember pitching against some of those Asahi players, too.

WN: Yeah?

ES: Yeah. Because all the outside baseball [*i.e., Hawai`i Baseball League*] is *pau*. I mean, they were working for corps of engineers, like that. Oh, those guys they could hit, though.

WN: Yeah, like who? Do you remember any names?

ES: Shee! I used to. One was Higa, I think. And the other one was jolly guy, good fun guy. He was a good hitter too. But every time I give him slow ball and then throw him off track and then he hit foul ball. And then try pushing one pretty fast one in between, see. But they were too good for me. (Laughs)

WN: So when the war ended in 1945, what do you remember about working over there? How did things change as the war ended? Did you folks help with the winding down of the U.S. Engineer [*Department*] at Punahou?

ES: Well, insofar as. . . . That's the part I'm kind of hazy. Before the thing actually ended, I think there was pressure from Punahou School, too. They want the school back, see. And the people were going back already, you know, soon as you were more or less seeing that we were going towards Japan. And, of course, when they dropped the bomb [*i.e., the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki*] it was *pau*. So, the army built right back of the Immigration Station, a three-story building, for the corps of engineers. The corps built for itself.

WN: During the war?

ES: Yeah. And then we moved there [*Fort Armstrong*]. So we didn't stay in Punahou for that long.

We gradually moved out. Because the pressure was there for us to get out. So, I don't know when it [*the move*] actually took place. But the corps of engineers had one small—back of that used to be Pier 1 or Pier 2, I guess, and then the corps had a small office there with boats and whatnot, because they were inspecting the harbor, like that. So they were strictly there. It's only the war that made the corps of engineers so big. In Hawai`i now. On the Mainland, it was a different story. But Hawai`i didn't have a corps to start and then when the war broke out, the top general was an army man, so different staff was going to control over here, except for maybe navy. So, the corps of engineers, instead of strictly sticking to rivers and harbors, expanded into construction. And as I told you, I started at Hickam Field under [*U.S. Army Air Corps*] Quartermaster [*Department*], but the corps of engineers took over that. So I was shifted to Fort Shafter with the quartermaster. And then when the war really broke out, they took us over and I was too busy with the supply logistics. And maybe the only thing they continued to build until they finished was maybe warehouses to put in their supplies. But that's why in Hawai`i the corps of engineers was the biggest contractor, you know, construction. But then, when we shifted emphasis towards the Orient—occupation forces—the corps of engineers still carried on. Because we were the outer echelon, closest to the Far East, we established district engineers in Korea and Japan and a sub-office in Okinawa. That was the three areas. So that's why eventually I used to go on inspection tours to Okinawa, Korea, and Japan. And then eventually I transferred there because the family wanted to go there too. I was having problem with a place to live in Honolulu. I was living on Nu`uanu Street and the city took over a big area there and eventually that Kukui Plaza came up. So we had to move out and I had no place to go. So I thought, kill two birds. My family was envious I always taking trips—like a tourist, you know (chuckles), going to the Orient.

WN: This is after the war, already?

ES: Yeah. So, I got myself transferred to the Japan office.

WN: This is in '47?

ES: No, Japan office I went when? In '62.

WN: In '62. But in '47 you. . . . Oh no, in '47 you got out of the engineers temporarily, right?

ES: Oh, yeah. I went to work for. . . . You see, by '47, things quieted down. And even at Fort Armstrong, they were reducing the people.

WN: Fort Armstrong is the place that they built behind the Immigration [*Station*]?

ES: Yeah.

WN: Oh, I see. Okay.

ES: And we were there. And they were cutting down people, so I figured, no sense staying there, 'cause that's when I had my first child anyway and I didn't send my wife out to work because of her health. So I went to work for this Ben Hayashi [*in 1947*]. He's a private contractor. And I stayed there for a couple of years [*until 1950*]. And then, the Honolulu district engineers, while I was in Fort Armstrong—before I left, was turning to an area engineer, not a district anymore, one step below, and was supervised by the San Francisco district because the

workload was so small. You need only [few] people to do rivers and harbors, you know. So the military construction was really phasing out. And everybody's going back to the Mainland, even the troops stationed here. Either that, or going forward for occupation in Far East. So the emphasis was work on that side. But it didn't build up that fast. I left because they were phasing down to area engineer. And then when the Korean War start coming up, that's when they gave the district status back to Hawai`i. And that's when I worked myself back into the grace of the district. First I quit Ben Hayashi and I went to work for the [U.S. Army] Signal Corps down [Fort] Shafter [in 1950].

WN: So you got out of the feds and you got back in, in 1950.

ES: Yeah. I had my connections, I mean, record and all that. And my previous supervisors and whatnot was still with the Corps [of Engineers], so go see them and they keep me abreast of openings, like that. But in the meantime, there was an opening with the signal corps in Shafter, so I went there. But I stayed there only short period [four months].

WN: Backing up just a little bit. When the war ended, did you notice a big change in how many people were employed? Did it scale down quite a bit, people going back to the Mainland? So when you went from Punahou to Fort Armstrong, it was already kind of winding down.

ES: Yeah, yeah. Even before we went down, lot of people left because as I said, they came overseas to avoid the draft for one thing. And then they were away so long, you know, their home is on the Mainland—all the single fellows. Maybe some got married, but most of them went back because they were counting the days to go back. And they go by contract so, when the contract is expired, they rather go back than renew it because if they renew it, they have to stay another one or two or three years. In terms of years, not in terms of months, see? That's why the exodus was fast.

WN: I see. Did your work change at all after that?

ES: Well, not too much because I didn't get promoted that fast anyway. I think I was stuck as an engineering draftsman. Then they changed it. When I came back to Fort Armstrong again as area engineer, then . . .

WN: In 1950, yeah?

ES: Yeah, '52.

WN: Fifty-two.

ES: Then I got area engineer so I got a promotion. If I go to my 201 file, I can find 'em, but different grade level. And then, I don't know when it took place, but as I said, we used to have this University of Hawai`i professor come work for us and through my education and my experience, I got an engineer's rating. And after that was nice because once you get into the professional field, you know, less competition and then the jump is greater in money.

WN: So from '52 you were at Fort Armstrong as an engineer.

ES: Yeah, engineering aide. And then . . .

WN: And then from '52 on you were engineer for ten years.

ES: Yeah.

WN: Until '62. That's when you went to Japan.

ES: Yeah, yeah. USED [*United States Engineer Department*] Far East, Japan.

WN: So you brought your whole family over there?

ES: Yeah. And that was a good deal for us, because I didn't have a home here. They kicked us out from Nu`uanu and Kukui. I didn't have place to go so we relocated to Japan. And we couldn't get housing right away, so they gave us a housing allotment and they paid our rental for us. And we lived outside until there was opening in what they call Grand Heights. There was a big compound for all the military and the civilian workers for the [*U.S.*] government. We had housing out there, so we lived there. And then when my office relocated to Camp Zama, then we moved over to another area.

WN: Camp Zama?

ES: Yeah.

WN: Z-A-M-A?

ES: Yeah. That was . . .

WN: Where was that?

ES: It's south of Tokyo.

WN: Is it still around?

ES: Yeah. Oh, Camp Zama is headquarters . . .

WN: Oh yeah, that's right.

ES: . . . for the [*U.S.*] Army in Japan right now. And they didn't have housing on the base, so they did have a separate housing called Sagamihara Area Housing. And (chuckles) you know, that's when my big family did me good because they transferred a lot of the military commanders like that to Zama, because the Japan government had to build housing for them at the camp itself. And the leftover, we were given choice, see. And they go by the number of dependents you have. And I had five kids. (Chuckles) So I got the commanding officer's vacated home. The best one in that housing area, because I needed all the bedrooms. So with the bedrooms and all that, the lawn came with it, so I had to keep up the lawn. I can't do that. Our money went far those days. American dollar went to Japanese yen, eh? Big money, see, so I had a yardman and a maid, you know. They don't come every day, but, to help. In fact, I had one massage lady come in once a week. It was a real style there. (Laughs)

WN: Yeah, and your kids were how old by then? Around---were they still young?

ES: Well, some were in high school. In fact two of 'em graduated high school in Japan. The oldest one, Ellen, she went to Lewis & Clark [*University*]. They either flew her or boat, whatever was available, all the way to school on the Mainland. So I didn't send 'em back here [*Hawai`i*], I sent 'em to Mainland. And those are all non-taxable amenities, you know. So you don't declare tax on those things. So was a big break for me. That's why we went for two-year contract, we extended it to five years. Three more years because we were getting all the breaks. And saving money to come back here.

WN: In '67. And then from '67 what happened?

ES: We came back here because otherwise I would have lost my job over here. Because five years was the maximum you can go overseas. And if you don't come back you don't have retention rights to your previous position.

WN: So how did you feel about coming back?

ES: Well, in fact, I didn't care to come back. I wanted to go---the Corps [*of Engineers*] opened up in Italy and in Germany, so I wanted to make a around-the-world circuit with the corps. But they didn't have my kind of position in Italy. Some guys went, you know. Lower classification people, they went to Italy. And some of the fellows that I hired from Hawai`i—lower classification—he eventually went to Germany—Frankfurt. But it just didn't happen because I became an engineer, eh? So you don't have too many of that kind of position. So I couldn't get the vacancy.

So I came back and I was going into the travel industry—travel business, because my friend had a travel industry, Hawai`i Travel. And my wife started to work part-time with him. So we used to take tours out on summer vacations. I would sign up for one month's leave. That's one thing good about working for government, you can sign up in advance. So I used to take tour groups out to [*Mainland*], Canada, come down, all the way down to Mexico and come back. Used to be two to three weeks' tour. And then in the autumn we used to charter one whole plane and take one whole group, whole planeload to [*Las*] Vegas. We initiated all that kind, long ago, you know. And my friend is still in that business. Lot of these things we kind of pioneered long time ago. When my summer tour came big, instead of sending my kids to Hawaiian Pine[*apple Company*] like that—cannery, summer work, I had my second bus load and I made them my assistant tour leaders. And they getting paid, eh? And then they traveling and they getting to see America. So, that's how I used to do.

Then, my son graduated Yale [*University*], one year ahead, so he said he wanted to study aikido in Japan. And my third daughter graduated TIM [*Travel Industry Management*], UH. She wanted to go Japan and learn hotel and the language. When I was first in Japan, I used to teach one fellow. His father used to have a hotel in Hiroshima. Near Fukuyama anyway. And we became good friends with him and he said, “Any time your daughters want to learn those things, send 'em to my hotel.” So I sent Sandy over there. But if I went with them, all free, eh? The flights. They're my dependents. So I got myself re-hired. Pull strings because I was working for the Japan office. So when I got out, I was GS-13 engineer. And the reason I got out was GS-14, my boss—he was two or three months younger than me, he wasn't going to retire (chuckles) so I said, I going retire early. And I retired. But then, I knew the people in

Japan, so instead of going back to engineering, the only opening was in construction, so I took the construction job. But since I was in retirement, I was getting retirement money, they couldn't pay me regular money. So they gave me the rating, but they paid me what the rating would have given me minus what I was getting as retirement. So I ended up getting GS-2, 3, clerical kind [of] position pay. But I had housing. I took my two children over and then I can go to the PX and the commissary and buy things and give my two kids things that would--if they cannot live on the local economy. Because they not used to Japan style of living. But my oldest boy, he really got lots out of that. He got his black belt and he got what is known as *shugy*. When you go to apprentice for Japanese *sensei*, you start from the bottom. You do the laundry, you do the cooking, you do everything. He was living with about three *senseis* in a apartment in Shinjuku. So he really got the training there. But before he got to there, I left him with this Fujima *sensei*, that I had made good friend, he's a dancing teacher, you know. And he was the one finally, got my son and his bride to be together. So all those things happened because we went there.

WN: So then you retired in '73 then, actually.

ES: Yeah.

WN: Right. Then you went back to Japan in '73.

ES: Yeah. And then came back '75 because my wife got sick. I supposed to stay until '76, but I came back in '75. And then she died six months later. So, that was the whole postwar existence. But in the meantime, after the Korean War, construction really phased down in Japan and Korea, Okinawa. So, the forces pulled back. Even the engineering forces, the engineers and everybody came back and they formed a division office here. So, Korea became a district and Japan became a district. And Honolulu had a district, but also to supervise these three districts, they established in Honolulu, the Pacific Ocean Division. And I was part of the Pacific Ocean Division, actually, if I had stuck on and all that, but I had left. Then when I went to Japan, I retired from the district office, USED—U.S. Army Engineer District—Far East, you know in Japan.

WN: USAED.

ES: Yeah.

WN: I see. Okay so, you know, you spent a lot of years with the engineers.

ES: Oh yeah, practically my life.

WN: So what I want to do now is sort of shift gears and have you talk about your hobby of stamp collecting. And if you could tell me how you got started and then your activities during the war and then the postwar.

ES: I think I gave you one. . . .

WN: Yeah, a lot of this stuff is documented.

ES: Yeah, I think I gave you something. Anyway, I was living Downtown, all by myself, because

my parents were out. My mother was working as a maid. So YMCA was my best place to go. And of course we don't subscribe to newspapers, so I go there and read. And then, I saw on Sundays, they used to have a special pen pal columns and stamp and cover collecting. I was more interested in pen pal, you know, writing things. And I corresponded mostly with Mainland, some with Japan, but my Japanese not that good, so. (Chuckles) Then, I stayed Nu`uanu YMCA, went through the Hi-Y, I was one class ahead of my friends, because I told you how my schooling got all fouled up. But I stayed with them and then we formed the Young Men's Division. After Hi-Y, they didn't have any higher division, you know. But we pioneered the Young Men's Division over there and formed lot of different clubs. And my club was called Torii-kai.

WN: Torii-kai?

ES: Yeah, you know that *torii mon* eh? That was our symbol. So every time we hold that, we made one *torii* for the entrance. Made of flowers and you know, benefit dance, like that. And of course, when I used to come home, I had nothing to do too much and so I was collecting stamps and covers too. You know, from pen pal you jump into that kind of line. Because your pen pals happen to be collecting and then they pass your name around. And those guys, they want me to send them Hawaiian stamps. And the postcards. Postcards I used to send 'em. But Hawai`i stamps, out of the question because costs too much. We used to have the old Hawai`i stamps but they were expensive. And it was not used. The Hawaiians under their own sovereignty had Hawaiian stamps.

WN: Oh, you talking about the old. . . .

ES: Yeah. See, I cannot. . . . So the other kind is U.S. postage, that's easy, but an American is not going to tell me go send him American postage, eh? So I used to write to Australia like that too. And then when you go into stamps, you get interested in what they call first-day covers. When the stamp comes out, there's a first day of cancellation. So I start gradually collecting that. Another one to collect was naval covers. You know the navy ships, when they cancel, they used to have "USS *Arizona*" like that, on the cancellation. And everybody was collecting those things.

My immediate supervisor at Punahou School was a longtime collector. So he really got me going. So I used to buy extras from him and whatnot. And then, when the war broke out, I didn't think of covers because we were really restricted. Blackout, you know, you can't go out. My wife was in the hospital. I can't even visit her. So, what you going to do? You stay home, you put a dark screen right around the window, so light won't go out. All you can do is listen to the radio, read. So I started to think of making covers. And that's when . . .

WN: What is a cover? Describe to me what a cover is.

ES: A cover is an envelope with certain stamp and certain cachet—cachet is the picture—commemorating the event. [*Etsuo Sayama shows WN a cover.*] And this was my first cover. The first anniversary of Pearl Harbor.

WN: First anniversary of Pearl Harbor, okay.

ES: And the name Cuevas is in here. He's the one that used to make all kind of sketches, you know,

in the drafting room. He's a jolly guy, George Cuevas. And he used to . . .

WN: December 7, 1942 then.

ES: That's the first anniversary, yeah.

WN: So George Cuevas was a draftsman. So he designed the design on the envelope?

ES: Not on the envelope, he sketched it out. And then I refined it on a much larger basis, being a draftsman, I improved on it. And then, brought it down to the printers and they would photographically reduce it to this size.

WN: To fit on the envelope.

ES: Yeah.

WN: I see.

ES: And he furnished the envelope too. 'Cause fortunately, the fellow I went to see, *Nippu Jiji*, which is now *Hawai'i Times*, Mr. Furukawa was the printing manager.

WN: Furikawa?

ES: Furukawa. I think Kiyoshi Furukawa. And I used to see some of his work, because when the Japanese training ship used to come down or when Japan used to have certain stamps or when the American ships come down, the navy collectors used to have special covers for that occasion. And *Nippu Jiji* used to print 'em for them. So he became a collector and when I went to see him, was duck soup for me, because he knew more than I did. And the reason I went there was because my mother's cousin's son-in-law was the photographer there. And the poor guy, he had education in Japan, so he got interned in Tule Lake. A lot of those people [*got interned during World War II*]. Those days, they concentrated on [*Japanese-language*] schoolteachers and *bon-san* like that, too. And then influential people in the community. But Mr. Furukawa was just the printing manager, I guess. And they had to keep the bilingual paper alive, otherwise the Japanese not going to know what's going on. I think you've heard of Mr. Makino, yeah?

WN: [*Fred*] Kinzaburo Makino?

ES: Yeah, Fred Makino. And Mr. Soga.

WN: Yasutaro.

ES: Yasutaro, yeah. Ordinarily, I think the two would be interned. But they were too precious. Nobody to take their place, so they were kept, I think. At least Mr. Furukawa was and he helped me with all this. All the December 7, '43, December 7, '44, it's all George Cuevas' design. And then December 7, '45, the war ended already, he had gone back [*to the Mainland*], so I had to make my own. (Laughs)

WN: So you would get the design, put it on an envelope, get a stamp—the first . . .

ES: Yeah, whatever stamp. And then I get the cancellation on that day.

WN: So you go to the post office and get it canceled. I see.

WN: So this Mr. Cuevas, he left after the war ended then and so you had to do your own.

ES: And this [1944] was considered one of the best designs concerning December 7, you know, nationally. In fact, I got write-up by from a professor at New York University. He said he considered this the most outstanding patriotic cover of the war. I explained we were winning and we were going towards Japan already. And using the Japan flag.

WN: With the grim reaper.

ES: Yeah. Grim reaper, and called it “sunset and shadows.” That guy [Cuevas] get really good ideas, you know. And this was his last. And then the next one I didn't know what to do, so I came up with---when we used to buy war bonds during those days, they used to stamp 'em—so this is victory loan stamp.

WN: Which is the one that you got questioned by the [army] intelligence [for]? The 442nd [Regimental Combat Team] one?

ES: Ah, I think it is. They won't tell me, see. But, even before the war, the questioning, I don't know which one they question me on, they wouldn't tell me. But later on when I was trying to send this 442nd one, so that they can send it [back]—you know, I didn't have this part here, see. I just had this much and I wanted them [442nd men] to write their name and where they staying and what outfit. And then get free mail or whatever come back. Then I have a collection, see. But they [army intelligence] didn't want me to mail too much of this because the picture [i.e., 442nd logo] is over here, you know. To me, it was minor stuff. But they said, “No, don't send that kind over.”

WN: Go for broke, a picture of the 442nd.

ES: Yeah. This part here. Gives the 442nd combat team. And I guess they could tell it's Oriental faces and whatnot. So, the censors didn't want me to ship 'em, send over to my friends in Italy. I used to write to them and they would mail it back to me. All kind of covers. Like this here, mailed back to me by Arthur Komori. He used to mail back to me this kind because he didn't have stationery, so he used to use this and I used to send plenty of this in the early time. But, this one I think was the one got me in trouble. But before that, plenty guys in the military used to write to me from the front, that used to be my pen pals. Or cover collectors club member. They went forward and they get nothing to do, so I used to keep their address and I used to send 'em to them.

WN: Send them what?

ES: Covers. Every time I sponsor, I used to send 'em. But other collectors, civilian collectors in the United States, I used to charge them. Ten cents or whatever. Was really cheap.

WN: Because they wanted Hawai`i on it and everything.

ES: Yeah. I was the only one in Hawai`i that made patriotic covers. On the Mainland they had all kind of what they call cachet makers. You know, making covers—patriotic covers. The patriotic covers became famous during the Civil War. They made all kind of patriotic covers and those things became real valuable. So when World War II started, they started to make patriotic covers. But, the war in Europe was not officially a war until December 8, yeah? So Gimble's and some big stationery department stores, they used to issue envelopes, they used to sell and people used to use, but the real emphasis didn't come until after December 7. So, we start exchanging all this and get thousands of different covers. My room back there is nothing but shoe boxes and all stacked up. I don't know how many thousands I get.

WN: So when you send a cover, you would put the design on the envelope, go to the post office and they would stamp it and mail it out.

ES: Yeah.

WN: But how would you assure that they would stamp it well? You know, clear.

ES: Well, the post office people know. Enough collectors and philatelic societies go up [to the] postmaster and squawk if we don't get service, eh? And now, it's a big business. You know when they first celebrated the anniversary of Pearl Harbor—fiftieth anniversary. Post office came up with this special cancel. Look at this. December 7, 1991, last year, USS *Arizona* and they show the [USS] *Arizona* Memorial. They made a special cancel and this stamp was part of the ten different stamps they issued in commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of Pearl Harbor. And then the next four years, they going to issue ten stamps each year, commemorating events that took place during that period. One year period. So for five years, from '41 to '45. So it's a big business. So now, you know what they do? It's really not right, but what they do now is to get the first day cover, you have thirty days to do that. But, soon as the stamp comes out, you have to make whatever design you have, print it, put the stamp on. And if you want ten stamps, ten covers, you put 'em in an envelope and you mail 'em to one specified post office, somewhere in the United States that's authorized with that cancel—"First Day [of Issue] cover." And as long as you mail it in and reach them within that thirty-day period, you'll have the original first day date on.

WN: Yeah? That's not that . . .

ES: That's not legal.

WN: Yeah.

ES: But that's what I mean. It's a business with the post office now.

WN: Yeah, takes sort of the skill out of the whole thing.

ES: Right, right, right. But in my case all those dates that I have, except for this kind, I couldn't get 'em on December 7, '41, but all these are dates that the actual date of happening. When blackout was lifted, I got it "blackout lifted." And this was easy for me because I [went to the] Punahou campus station [post office], see.

WN: May 4, 1944. "Blackout of homes lifted after 879 dark nights. December 7, 1941 to May 4, 1944."

ES: And this was my standard. This one I designed my own. And this is kept blank and I can put all kind inside, see. You know how I don't want to make new design, eh.

WN: You have one for . . .

ES: "Martial law abolished."

WN: "October 24, 1944."

ES: See, October 24, 1944.

WN: And you have pictures of Lieutenant General [*Robert*] Richardson, Franklin Roosevelt, and Ingram Stainback.

ES: Yeah. They were all involved, you see.

WN: Oh, you got that from the newspaper? Oh.

ES: So Mr. Furukawa, he has these cut, so I prepare this but he furnish me with the cut, so I don't have to go out take picture or go out buy the cuts, eh? So that's big help to me. Even this, when the title was . . .

WN: "Military governor abolished."

ES: Yeah, and in the early days, the war bond stamps used to be big ones, so I used to have that. I used to get navy cancel, too. And the navy censor would put down, it's censored. So I used to go through all. . . . This one here, July 27, 28, 29, I got 'em on the twenty-eighth when Roosevelt came here and met with [*General Douglas*] MacArthur and [*Admiral Chester*] Nimitz.

WN: Oh, in 1944, the Waikiki Conference. How much money you think you spent on your hobby?

ES: Oh, big money. (Laughs) Because as I said, you know how many I printed? I got plenty left over, too. I printed 16,000 covers altogether.

WN: For one?

ES: For the whole work. For the whole five years.

WN: During the war?

ES: Yeah. And then of course, in return my friends would send me. And then others would make their covers and mail it to me. And then later on, just to get rid of them I advertised in the philatelic magazine and I used to sell 'em. And one interesting one, you know, like this one here. I took it out for auction, just to get a feel of the price. You know how much this thing

sold for? Twenty-two dollars.

WN: Yeah? One?

ES: One. But I was selling 'em for ten dollars.

WN: You made more money than you spent on this hobby?

ES: No. No. Cannot catch up. At least I left something for, you know, a record. This album, I made it for my grandchildren and all my children. And I had one extra, so I brought it to the McCully Stamps [& Coins], and I told the guy, if I add up all these covers that I've been selling at certain price and then this album and these things, it came up to over \$200, \$300, you know. He's been selling individual covers for me at auction at his shop, see. So I said, "Why don't you try with the whole album." And then two weeks ago I went to see him, he said he sold 'em for \$310.

WN: Yeah. Wow.

ES: Somebody bought 'em. So, I sent one complete one like this to my friend that initially auctioned my other thing for me. And that auction is going to open in June. So I'm waiting to see how much he can get out of it. 'Cause if he gets a good price, then I can make plenty of these [albums]. You know, I still got left over. Except a lot of 'em, I issued only around ten, like that. That's why you see lot of these photocopies. I don't have the original already.

WN: Okay, well, you know, I guess we're ready to wrap it up. You know, do you have anything you want to say about your life in general?

ES: (Laughs) Well, just this morning I was talking to this [cousin] of mine. She's one of the only blood relatives I got left in Hawai`i, I think. I invited her to my son's wedding. And she said she'd like to see the ceremony, but she get bad tooth loke that, she don't want to come to the *kaukau*. So I was making arrangements for her to come to Kalihi Valley. She doesn't know how to come, see. And she doesn't drive, no more car, and the son is away. So she call up and said, "Oh, I *wen* send in the invitation and I said I going attend the ceremony and the *kaukau*" because I told her I going to get somebody in my family to pick her up.

Then my daughter tells me, "Hey, why did you promise her that because you got to be there before the ceremony, you got to go take picture. . . ." And I wasn't going to pick her up myself anyway, I was going to have one of my daughters that live out that side—she lives in Wai`alae Iki see, so one of my daughters living out that side to pick 'em up. So I said, "I don't know which daughter going to pick you up."

So I guess my relative must have had second thoughts. She just called up this morning. She said, "Hey Etsuo-san, I'm sorry but," I think she made it up, but, "my gum is giving me trouble," and then she hinted around that, "your daughters might have to go there early." She cannot come early, so she want to withdraw out. And I was talking to her and she finally said, "You know, this is your last and only boy, Sayama name going to carry on."

And I said, yeah, hopefully. But, you know, I told her, "Take-*chan*, you live Wai`alae Iki with

a nice house all paid for. Me, I'm living here with my daughter, so I get no place.”

She tell me, “Oh, what's the matter with that condo you had?”

I said, “I gave it to my son.”

“And [*the house in*] Kapahulu?”

I said, “Oh, I gave 'em to my youngest daughter, because other three daughters married and they all got homes.” I've never owned a car in my life, you know, and I never had a home of my own.

So my friends in Japan tell me, “What you do with all the money? You work like hell.”

And so I said, “Sorry, but I put 'em all in the kids' educations. So I told my cousin, “Well, my friends in Japan tell me, `*Ko ga takara,*' the kids are my treasure, you know.”

She tells me, “Yeah, *mukashi*, Japan, the poor farmers, they no more nothing, but they get children, so that's their *takara*, you know, treasure.”

I had a poor start in life because all my classmates and friends, they had both parents. And they earn enough and the parents got a house of their own. Like me, I'm just going back and forth all kind of place, no place to live. Because my father died. I've never had a place of my own to live. After I retired, by luck I got that lottery [*for the*] Kapahulu house. But I didn't know whether I was going to qualify [*for financing*].

So I told my cousin here this morning, “Maybe I went too far out for my kids, but I think that's what my wife wanted. Yaeko [*who died in 1975*] really loved children.” So when she came out of the hospital and couldn't get children, she used to go to the neighbor and borrow children and bring 'em home, take care. 'Cause she stayed home. She cannot go work. So I think I just carried on what she wanted me to do, so I'm satisfied.

And so she [*cousin*] said, “Well, you think so much of your children, so I think I'm going to cancel out from the wedding 'cause I don't want you to get into trouble with your children,” for picking her up and bringing 'em to the reception and all that. And picture taking.

I told her (chuckles), she should have been a reverend. I said, “You think of all these different angles.” She's from Japan. The poor girl, she was match mate. She went to live in--we were in Yamaguchi, she went to live in the husband's place in Hiroshima. The husband go bring home a mistress. They stay in the same house! So she said she walked out. She came to Hawai`i. When you get divorced those days, they don't look good upon you, no matter what the cause. So she came Hawai`i by herself and she owns a nice place in Wai`alae Iki. I said, “You did much better than I did.” So, you know, like this [*saying*], *kodomo no tame ni*.

WN: For the sake of the children.

ES: And the other one that Okinawa [*community*] used was *okagesama de*. No matter what my problems were, *okagesama de*, everybody help me move my life, good or bad. With their help I made it, and then for my children, *kodomo no tame ni*. I carried on my wife's wishes. I got

them all through college. One is a Ph.D. Two of 'em I think got master's. So I think, thinking over my life, I think I did pretty well. I didn't come out to be a name, personality in the Japanese community or our community, but I think I did my share. For my family anyway.

WN: That's a good place to end.

ES: Yeah.

WN: Thank you very much.

ES: You're welcome.

END OF INTERVIEW