

Harry Urata #84

May 9, 1985

Q: Mr. Urata, what did you do for a living before the War?

A: Before the War I was attending school, high school in fact.

Q: Which school were you going to?

A: Uh, I was attending Mid-Pacific Institute.

Q: What year were you in there?

A: That was last year, Senior year.

Q: What were you doing on December 7th, 1941, on the day Oahu was attacked?

A: Well, I was in that same school, Mid-Pac, uh... I think I was... that's in 1941, so I was a sophomore or... I don't remember, a sophomore or freshman, you know. So that was 19... because I was picked up by FBI in '43, in April.

Q: Where were you when the attack started on December 7th?

A: When?

Q: On that day, do you remember that day?

A: Yes, yes, no that was Sunday. I still remember that clearly because I was washing my face and brushing my teeth and then somebody, my classmate, came to me, said, "I think we are, you know, attacked by enemy plane or something, you know, at War, you know." So I was so surprised and I said, "No, cannot be." I said. So, but "Come and look outside!" So from you know, where that Mid-Pac you know, old building used to be. If you go up the roof, you can see Pearl Harbor side. So I went up the roof and sure enough, the black smoke. So, and somebody had the radio on, says, the announcer was telling that Oahu is under enemy attack or something like that, see.

Q: What did you folks do that day?

A: That day, commotion and oh... everybody going here and there, and somebody said, "Well, we better go home, you know?" Because at that school we are in a dormitory and so they wanted to go home. Then Sunday, we... about 7:50 in the morning, about 7:55 and we have to go to chapel. This is a Christian school and they didn't know what to do. But anyway after that I don't remember too well, but all kind of news are going on. Some said, enemy landed already you know, Kanehoe or someplace you know. So, they were really...

Q: Sounds like a lot of confusion.

A: Confusion, yes.

Q: So, how did that change your life then? Did they have black outs?

A: Oh, black outs, yeah.

Q: What was that like?

A: I think first night, even that authority, they didn't know what to do I think, you know. So I think some people you know, they just put their car lights on and they are... I think they are driving you know? They don't know what to do, so... But anyway, and I heard somebody who was telling some Japanese soldier had landed already and put poison in the water reservoir, yeah. So don't drink water (laughter). I still remember that, you know, don't you ever drink, you know, water.

After that well, I think, if I'm not mistaken, that day.... that night I don't remember but, from next day on or something like that... curfew (8:00 curfew) and black out.

Q: Did that mean you had to be off the streets by 8:00?

A: Oh yes, yes, yes.

Q: What would happen to people that they caught on the streets?

A: I think they got tickets or something. Anyway they, the police arrest them or something like that.

Q: When were you first picked up by military government?

A: I was uh... see after that while anyway, well school was going on as usual and then I remember year of 1943. I don't remember exact day but end of March or so, because I still remember I took the test for UH and I passed the test and I thought I'm going to UH you know?

Then, uh, I was in a class, and I still remember that. One lady teacher, Miss Aperholten(?) was teaching us American democracy. Then principal, Mr. Baken(?) came and said, "Harry, come out." you know? So I went out from the class. Then he told me, "You come with me to the office." Then here the two FBI men was waiting for me.

Q: What did they tell you?

A: "You Harry Urata?" I said, "Yes." "You are under arrest." They gave me this. You read this.

Q: Did they tell you why?

A: No, well it says in the paper already, but that word immin...I'm not sure...

Q: Inimical?

A: Yeah, inimical to the safety of the United States or

something like that.

Q: Did anybody ever tell you what you did or why you were considered inimical?

A: No, no. I thought, well at first I thought you know I was teaching(??) before when I came back from Japan in 1937. Uh, I taught Japanese language school for two years. So, well, War started, 1941, December 7, and after that lots of this Japanese language school teacher and principal, Buddhist priests, and those people went inside camps. So I thought well, maybe next time they're going to come and pick my up, you know? Because I was teaching at my Japanese language school in, I had education in Japan.

Q: Where did they take you first?

A: The immigration station... no, no, wait, wait, wait, no, I think they took me to uh... where is that, I think downtown, Dillingham Building? Do you know where? Yes, up there, that FBI office I think second floor I think. They questioned me.

Q: What kind of questions did they ask?

A: Oh, all kinds. Some silly questions. Say, if, if, if, if Japan and Japanese you know come here, land this Island, what you going to do. You going to help, or something like that, and they brought picture of Emperor and Empress, said they're going to watch me, what I'm going to do (laughter). And they said, "Who this?" and I said, "Emperor of Japan and Empress of Japan" you know those things.

Q: How long did they keep you there?

A: Uh, about... the interrogation lasted about hour or so, hour or hour and a half. But they were nice though, very nice, very gentlemen like.

Q: Where did they take you after that?

A: No, I think they released me that time. Just the second time I think. They came again.

Q: How much later?

A: About a week or so. Then this time, they said, "You just come with us." you know, two of them. So they took me to immigration station.

Q: What was it like there?

A: First just like they... you just like criminal or something, you know, they put that number over here?

Q: Oh, on your chest?

A: Yes.

Q: With the sign?

A: Yeah, sign and you know they take picture from front, side, and with that number hanging down. After that they going to check what your belonging. But you don't have anything because they don't even give you a chance to go up, you know, your room, and get your belongings, like toothpaste or toothbrush and those things; just no time at all.

Q: How long did they keep you at the immigration station?

A: For my case, I think.... gee, I don't remember, but I think a week or so.

Q: Did they question you some more there?

A: No, nothing there, nothing there.

Q: What was the conditions like that they kept you in there?

A: You mean in the immigration station? Oh boy, lots of people. Those who like to smoke, they cannot smoke see? They don't have cigarette and they don't give you any cigarette; and even toilet paper too.

Q: Oh really?

A: Yeah. So we had hard time, and uh... I remember one guy named Mr. Sato, he used his head because the guard was reading the newspaper and he can talk English and told that guard "How about we like to see newspaper sometime." So he says "Can I read?" and he got the newspaper and somehow we use that for toilet paper for awhile.

Q: Were you in a cell there? Was it a...

A: Not cell. One very wide room with a bed.

Q: Oh, I see. How many people did they keep in one room?

A: About 10 or 15.

Q: After you spent a week there in immigration station, where did they send you next?

A: To Honouliuli.

Q: To Honouliuli?

A: Yes, because at that I think you know, first, Sand Island, I think the Sand Island closed down; I think early part of end of March, 1943. After that they moved to Honouliuli.

Q: What kind of place did you live in then at Honouliuli?

A: Just a regular Army barracks, yeah. Eight people on shack and two bed, like that, you know, up and down.

Q: What was the food like over there?

A: Oh good, very good. We had, as far as food was concerned we had... only thing, we like to eat more Japanese food you know? But that's Army food so we stay exchange, I remember, with rice, with... We had the Army camp below you see. Then our mess of people use to exchange rice with potato or something and some things that we don't like, we used to exchange.

Q: Were you allowed to write letters and receive letters there?

A: Yes, but sometime lots of holes there... censored.

Q: What about visits?

A: Visits, once a week, uh... Sunday. But if you don't cooperate with authority, for instance, if you don't clean the toilet or you know, if you don't uh, for instance, some people don't go out for what you call, in the morning when they raise the flag... What you call that?

Q: Colors?

A: Reverie, in the morning, yeah. Sometime about three or four people they don't go out you know, then they not allow that meeting... I mean the Sunday privilege going to be taken away, so maybe once a month or so, once you know, in two weeks or so.

Q: When you were out there at Honouliuli, did you... what did you do to keep busy? Did you have a job?

A: Oh right, myself, I wasn't so bad because I was single. I felt very sorry for those who have family outside you know? Like myself, I was single and I like to read books like that you know? And those first.... we didn't have to many Japanese books, but while I was there in Honouliuli, I remember one day we had lots of books by Japanese government through Red Cross and even miso too.

Q: Oh really?

A: Yes. All those things, and uh...so for especially older people, those who cannot read English, you know they used to read all these books and those who can read English you know, what you call, that Sunday when the family come to see them, they can bring newspaper, whatever they like to read; no limit. And uh, I love to play guitar, so I asked my mother to bring guitar. After that, every day I practiced guitar.

Q: Did you organize any kind of musical groups there?

A: No, I remember what I did was I thought even inside the camp, I thought it's better to do something worthwhile you know? So I went to that warden office and I said is it alright to you know, get one place so that we can study English? We had somebody, a graduate from mainland college over here, you know, they're good in English. So they used to teach us English. At first only

about 10 or 15 people were studying and after that only men, Mr. Kawazoi(?) only two continued study that English you know.

Q: Was each of the people there at Honouliuli, each person assigned a job to do?

A: Well that's all voluntarily, you know? That's up to you, because I think... what I heard is we not prisoner of War so you know, kind of lenient you know. They said, for your health, if you think you like to do little work and it's up to you. So some people who I know, old folks, they like to raise vegetables, you know, so they go out with a guard and they used to raise vegetable at the center. They can make Japanese, what do you call, pickles, like that?

Q: Oh, skimono?

A: Yeah skimono, yes. Even at mess hall too, sometime they used to cook for us Japanese style things you know?

Q: You know, were a lot of the people uh, feel bitter or angry?

A: Yeah, some of them, yes, yes, yes.

Q: How did you feel, you know, being a young man, being pulled out of school?

A: That, even now I thought well gee, even if I didn't pull me, I had better chance because those days when I was attending school, I had really fight to study you know, really... and uh, I wanted to go through with all this study you know, and if possible I like to go to mainland college and master, especially English. I had really urge to study in those days. So, but since they put me in there, all those things there you know, uh... I couldn't do it and you only talk Japanese inside there, because of more Nici people over there and Orkibe(??) like me, myself.

Q: How were you treated by the guards?

A: Oh, yeah, guards uh... some guards just came from mainland like that. They don't know. That's the first time they see Japanese you know. They think, oh, Japanese, only good Jap a dead Jap or something like that you know. So they had some kind of, that kind of idea so like some... I remember I fought with one guard too myself, because you know work detail they cannot force us to work you know? But this guard, young guard, from Texas or someplace and I said, "When we tire and sit down?" He said, "Come one you folks get up and work!" all that you know, just like he likes to shoot us or something like that, you know?

Q: Was he holding his rifle at you?

A: Yeah, holding his rifle at us. So I told him "If you like to shoot go ahead." you know. But I know he cannot shoot so... but I said, "You know you not supposed to do that. You think you areright? If you are right

let's go to warden office." you know. So all those things but after that they you know...fought us after that. And some guards are really very good men. They ask me, "How come you're here?" you know. So I said, "We're under suspicion I think." you know, and my brother in fact now in US Army, my own brother. You know, my own brother. But you know, I mean he said, "What!" (laughter) He said, "That's funny." and uh... So, but, as a whole, I think we didn't have too much trouble in there.

Q: Do you remember, who was the camp commander?

A: From what I know that warden, the Lt.... I remember Lieutenant, Name was Burger(?), Lt. Burger we used to call, and oh one Sergeant... Sgt. Loveless. He was a really, really nice guy.

Q: What did he do for folks there?

A: Well, he take care of us, and sometime, for instance, if you like something you know, for instance tofu, or something like that, Japanese food, and well he go out and get those things you know. And even I talk to other people the other time he said you know when you go to work detail and he showed the place that's getting lots of mango like that, you know? So we go pick the mango that's ripe already, so... (laughter)

Q: Did they allow you folks to bring mangos back to camp with you?

A: Yes, yes, or papaya....yes. So... because they know that lots of them they know that we're you know, Hawaiian people you know, born here, or Nisei people they have a home here. That's one reason too I think, they're not so... we're not treated so bad. And one time, same barrack, about eight people. One day, that was as soon as I got in there, one old man, he holding one letter. I said, "From War Dept." I asked what happened you know. He said their son was killed in action in Italy. He was telling and he said, "Why my son is in Italy killed in action. Why I got to stay over here!" you know. So I thought it's so funny, you know. What is this you know? Of course he got released but....

Q: That's really sad. Ironic...

A: And another thing is, I had over here some kind of a anyway I need a operation you know.

Q: In you neck?

A: I don't know, something was formed over here... gland.

A: In your mouth there.

A: Mouth there... and we had Dr. Uchida you know, internee doctor who was treating the minor things. But operations, he not allowed to do. So that guard took me to Ewa, that station hospital and there War time so that War was going on in South Pacific. So lots of wounded soldiers line up you know. But two guards took me to that place that they're going to take out that something for me... gland. Well, I was talking to a guard and

the guard was talking to me in English and all these soldiers say, "Hey this Japanese prisoner I think must be officer because he speaks English." (laughter) and then I went inside that place that you know just like dentist like because that surgery going to be over here you know. And I sat down and I think one Major and a Captain. were there and the Major said, "How come your name is Harry?" So I said, "I'm American citizen by birth. I was born here, Honolulu." and he said, "What?" He asked me, he said, "Then how come you in there?" (laughter) So then he turn around to the Captain, he said, "Don't you think that's funny, this guy Harry is American citizen and why he gotta be in that camp?" you know. And uh... and they were talking and then I told that Major, "Yeah, if fact in the US Army." "Really?", he was surprised.

Q: So a lot of those soldiers didn't know?

A: Oh, they didn't know. They didn't know. They didn't know, especially the mainland soldiers, they didn't know. Yeah, but that camp in there I don't think that's a real mistreated like that though. It was really I think too... what I think, alright, and whenever we had time, especially this Nisei people, they make there nice garden you know, in front of the shack you know? And everyone that, from that uh Army side, they used to comment, "Look at the garden. How you folks do all this nice stuff." you know. Japanese are good at all of those things, you know garden making you know. So, and uh... and so... not uh, bad in there for me, but I still think those who have a family then, they had hard time.

Q: Yeah, it must have been a big strain.

A: Yeah, because I know one fellow, if I know the name.... Kubasan(?), yes, the day before he was normal and in the morning he was walking say, "Hey, how are you! Good morning! How are you Kubasan!" He looked straight and he walked so I thought what is you know man, even he doesn't answer me you know. Sure enough, he went Kanehoe.

Q: Did he have a family?

A: Family, of course, yes.

Q: Probably worried about what was going to happen to him.

A: Worried, yeah worried.

Q: O.K., well, do you have anything else?

A: What you like to know about?

Q: Well, just anything else you can remember about Honouliuli.

A: Honouliuli. Oh, there, that's right, they didn't have any trouble you know. Only thing, sometime the young internees (Japanese word) they had strike like that, you know, small strike.

Q: What did they...

A: They said they don't want to clean latrine and all that.

Q: What did they do, just...

A: No, they don't come out from that shack.

Q: They stayed in the barrack?

A: Yeah, barracks, and I still remember that our commander you know, Mr. Sumida, all by himself, he was cleaning it. Then we are Captain under him and no good you know, commander doing all that dirty work. So we all helped. So after that, we lectured those young internees.

Q: Did the guards know anything about what was happening there? Did the guards know that the guys were on strike?

A: I don't think so because that was in the morning, and they don't come around you see. They don't come around, only morning and what do call it, when they turn off the lights time, yeah?

Q: Lights out?

A: Yeah, lights out time. So... they didn't have any riot or all of those things you know. Very quiet over there was.

Q: When were you finally let out?

A: No, no, I was so... I remember that uh, they had uh, rehearing or something like that at that time. Colonel or Captain you know, the big shots, they came and said, "Go out, they going to close down over here." But we hard head you see because now they say go out. They going to release us you know. So we said, "No, No, we don't want to go out yet."

Then 69 of us, those who didn't go out at that time, they sent us to Tule Lake, during the War. That was next about '44, next year. You know, I was interned in '43 and '44; one year I stayed over there. So what I'm sorry was no way scary (??) And one time on the ship, the ship stopped you know, and all these soldiers said, "Hey, your cousin came." something like that. You know, I think submarine or something. But that was a false alarm I think. So we went to Seattle, Washington after that went to Tule Lake. Tule Lake is right by the border of Oregon and California.

Q: Must have been cold there in winter huh?

A: When we reached there, yeah, we were shivering, because we had only on our shirt. Yes, and I remember when we reach Tule Lake, lots of this West Coast people were there already. Oh, that was the biggest, I think, relocation center. I think about more than 10,000 people were there. But they didn't.... right away they didn't put in with them you know. They put in, you know, 69 or us, they put us in a stockade and they watched two months what we going to do.

So... (laughter) that's a funny story but so they let you but some kind of belonging you know, some cigarette, or candy, or whatever it is you know, and my tank came so I went to that Canteen, you know inside that big relocation center, they have you see, each block, canteen, small store like. I went there, first time I saw young girls. When I ... all the things I bought everything at the window (laughter). I was so excited. I still remember that (laughter). That's almost 2... 3 years I didn't see girls.

Q: That's a long time.

A: Yeah, so, but I found out if you in that condition, you have to have some kind of hobby you know. Then the thing gonna help you out. Myself, I like playing guitar, you know, music. I like to read books and all that. That help a lot.

Q: O.K. thank you.

A: Oh, I don't know...