

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW #448-3

with

Manuel Nobriga (MN)

March 23, 1993

Waipahu, O`ahu

BY: Warren Nishimoto (WN)

WN: This is an interview with Mr. Manuel Nobriga on March 23, 1993, at his home in Waipahu, O`ahu. The interviewer is Warren Nishimoto.

Okay, why don't we begin. Today let's talk about World War II in Waipahu.

MN: In Waipahu, World War II as I remember. In the morning between seven and eight o'clock, something like that. The kids were all ready to go to church. Then there's a lot of people kind of gathering in the ballpark. We didn't know what the heck happened. We look, the smoke in the yard [*i.e., Pearl Harbor Navy Yard*] and all. Then somebody said, "Attack, attack from Japan!" Something like that. Then a little shooting came in. Some plane came over and hit two people way in the corner of the ballpark. One must have died because they picked one and the other one they left him there. And I don't know what became of him. And in the meantime, some airplane or something there was a shot came right in my yard. I didn't know that they were shooting. I said, "I thought the leaf from the mango tree fell down." But afterwards I figured that it must have been a bullet. [*Reports of strafing of the O`ahu Sugar Co. mill, hospital, store, warehouses, and cane fields were confirmed, as well as injuries. But no deaths were reported in Waipahu, due to either Japanese or American planes.*]

WN: They actually hit your house?

MN: Hit in the---in my yard, back of the house. We were all there. We were in the yard looking out. And then when the guy got way in the corner, the guy got shot. Take the body away, everybody run away, went to their place. We didn't know it was the war, the kids were all ready to go to church. All ready.

"You kids all dressed up and all that. Go to church."

"Oh, they say there's a war, and all that."

"They not going to shoot the church. You already dressed up and everything. Go to church. God going to protect you guys anyway."

I didn't believe there was a war. All the kids went to church, they went to church. Never take long. They came back.

“How come?”

“Oh, the priest send everybody home because there is a war going on.”

Attack anyway. And they all came home. I used to make breakfast for the kids when they go to church. And after that, the [*plantation*] manager came down. They had a clubhouse. We used to call it a clubhouse in the ballpark. We used to meet for sports and all that. At that time Johnny Yasui was training boxers and all that. I used to take care that---help him with the boxers and all. And he came down and he asked all of them guys to go in the gym in the evening. We all went in the gym. Used to call it ballpark gym anyway.

WN: Oh, there was a gym in the ballpark?

MN: No, very small place. Just a little building, small one.

WN: That's right, that's right. Okay.

MN: To accommodate umpires and baseball and all that. So we all went. Got together, got in the gym. And L'Orange came in and put the lights on. But closed all windows, everything. It wasn't strictly blackout yet. We didn't have no orders at that time. Then we got a meeting and all of a sudden got to the radio, or something, it said, close the windows, everything. Keep the lights low. And then L'Orange said, well there's a war on and everything. Everybody got to strictly blackout. He had all the supervisors there and some mechanics. Then he said, “We got to go around the Japanese Camp and tell the people not to get worried. Stay indoors and don't put the lights.” So I was asked to go. The mill area, all the guys [*living*] around the camp close to the mill, I was the one to go. I went to Kimura's and different guys' place. And all those people were all worried. They didn't know what the heck to do.

I said, “You guys, we don't know what this is yet. You guys just stay indoors, cool head, don't come out. Stay indoors.”

And they come out---they had some other lights, they knew me by the voice. Kimura came out, a few guys knew me. I went patrolling around the area, then came home. The next day everything blackout. We put papers on the windows and whatever. Then L'Orange came again. Had one more meeting. “Some of you have to go back to work in a day or two. Anyway, you'll get your notice.” Then he came around and he wanted to pick somebody to go with him. He wanted to drive down [*Waipahu*] Depot Road and they had plantation police and all that. He said, “Oh, I won't pick a policemen or anybody. George Richardson or Tom Farrell, you're police. You guys stay there.” He picked me to go with him, ride with him. “Nobriga, you come with me.” So I went in his car. He had (chuckles) one of these revolvers, you know. It fell out of his pocket.

I said, “Eh, Mr. L'Orange, you got a revolver full of bullets.”

“Well, you never can tell who's around. You hold it.”

“No, I don't want to hold it.” I gave it back. He put it in his pocket.

Went down the [*Waipahu*] Depot Road, to the railroad station. The railroad was running those days yet. Came back and he dropped me at the house. I lived at the ballpark, see. Convenient for me. I just walk to the gym and ballpark. So every time he want something, he just got to pick me. He knew where I was. And all the meetings was there. So I was always chosen for something. There were guys as good as me or better than me, but he just. . . . He and I became kind of good friends. We became good friends. He was a manager but I used to like him. We used to like one another. So anyway, the third day, he said, "You, you, you, all you guys got to go back to work." I went back to work in the shop. In the night, the whole mill and all run, but blackout the skylights and all. They put tar paper over that and all that. A little light---with enough light to see the mill running, rollers and machinery running slowly. They kept on running it slowly.

WN: They were still grinding cane?

MN: Still grinding cane. They kept. This was couple of weeks after [*the attack*] by that time. Then, I don't know how long it took, but few months after or weeks I don't remember, military [*personnel*] came over there. A bunch of trucks and all that. They took over the ballpark. I had the key to the gym so, "Who has the key?" I gave the key. [*Boxing*] equipment and all, take all that out. The army going take over. And they brought trucks. They call 'em motor pool [*i.e., the army set up a motor pool at Hans L'Orange Park*]. And they came there. From then on they stayed right through to almost the end of the war.

WN: How many people?

MN: Oh, they had maybe a dozen trucks and mechanics. And guys that drove the trucks, they were mostly transportation [*workers*] and stuff. But they had a few guards with guns patrolling right behind my fence.

WN: Did they set up camp over there? Where did they live?

MN: They lived right in the gym. They made enough room for them to stay there. It was about ten, twelve men. That's including the officers. Captain Homer, I knew one. He was a Mormon.

WN: What was his name?

MN: Homer, I used to call 'em. Captain Homer. That I remember. Anyway, he was there for quite a while. Little by little they start shipping different guys over. Different bunch come in and all that. I used to go there to the gym. I got to know the guys. They used to have baseball at the old termite stadium [*i.e., Honolulu Stadium*], you know, Mo`ili`ili way. Well, they used to have baseball yet, those days. They kept on playing ball after months or something. They had the Asahis and the Braves and all that [*i.e., the Hawai`i Baseball League*]. So these guys were in the ballpark. This was about a year after [*the attack*] or something like that. They wanted to go to a ball game on a Sunday. So this Captain Homer told me, "These guys complain they want to see ball game. Maybe I could let 'em go. Would you like to go with them?"

"Oh, sure."

So they gave me gas mask, you know the gas mask and all that everything. I dressed like a soldier, like one of them.

(Laughter)

MN: The wife thought I was going to the war. I said, "No, no, no. I going to a ball game."

(Laughter)

WN: You had a uniform?

MN: No, I had to put a khaki shirt, like one of them. But after they left, then they organized the [*Hawai`i Territorial*] Guard and all this stuff. That's when we had pictures taken and everything. Had all Filipinos and all. Drill every day.

WN: You mean after the motor pool guys left they started the [*Hawai`i Territorial*] Guard?

MN: Yeah, they started the home guard.

WN: So the motor pool guys weren't there for very long then?

MN: No, no. They went down under and all over. One of my daughters married one of them. Leo Gollnick married my, the one that died, Josephine.

WN: Leo Gollnick?

MN: Leo Gollnick.

WN: Did you folks get along with those guys pretty good?

MN: Oh, I had no problems with those guys. They used to give me all the beer I want. I could go visit them in the evening in the barracks. I used to go over there visit them. Drink couple of beers. Once in a while I used to sneak in a bottle of hard liquor. Those days I used to drink hard liquor. Bourbon. Once in a while I used to take a bottle. I make sure their captain didn't know anything. Some of them guys were human. Some of them were all like me, they were drafted, that's it. They didn't even know how to drive a truck. Some of them couldn't shoot a gun. But they were in the motor pool. So some of them used to drink and amongst eight, nine guys a bottle was nothing. So they used to drop beer in my back fence, canned goods. Everything was rationed at that time. So they dropped corned beef, pork and beans. They drop 'em in there from the motor pool. I had no problem with food during the war. I didn't have to go down buy lot of food. I lived in the right place at that time.

WN: How about with the [*local*] Japanese? Did the Japanese come around?

MN: The Japanese stayed away from the ballpark. Sports and all that was all cancelled. Japanese were very quiet people. They were more like sad. They weren't the same kind of people. They were so darned sad. Some quiet. They wouldn't hold a conversation in the beginning. Well, my helper was Japanese boy. And all the guys in the mill, well, no problem when we work. But they always were quiet and were afraid to talk in the beginning.

WN: So you mean after the war started they were different?

MN: When the war started everything was quiet. Then they start picking guys here to come to the concentration camp or whatever. They pick old man [*Takeo*] Miyagi. Newton Miyagi's father. They picked on him. Newton Miyagi, by the way, was one of the guys that signed the first sugar contract with me.

WN: Right, ILWU [*International Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Union*].

MN: With me. He was a welder apprentice at the time. I was a machinist. And he was very angry about it.

WN: What was Newton Miyagi's father doing?

MN: Newton Miyagi's father was more like a big-shot of the Japanese society. He was the top man. They had one Filipino, Frank Barcelona, who was the top man for the Filipinos. Then the Portuguese, there was no top man. L'Orange considered me the top man. But I never was the top man. I never did want to be. I would never take anything unless I earned it. But anyway, complaints and all that he used to always come and talk to me about it and this and that. "Mr. L'Orange, I'm not supposed to represent the Portuguese. I'm an American now. That's it. I'm not Portugal anymore." (Laughs) I got naturalized when I was twenty-[*six*]. But that's all right. He come to me anytime.

"I want to talk to you." This and that.

"You know I've been branded as a sucker. Everything you know, they say, comes from me. I don't want that. I don't want that."

So, when he wanted to talk to me, he used to call me to go in the office. Certain things, you know. But the Portuguese never had. Nobody wanted to lead them. Who can lead the Portuguese those days? Nobody. Everybody is boss (laughs). That's the way I felt. That's the way they all felt. But anyway, after everything quiet down I became---I organized the Portuguese social club after the war, though.

WN: What about the Japanese, you said they didn't come around the ballpark? What about those [*Japanese*] that were playing sports? They didn't play sports anymore?

MN: They stopped playing sports till the motor pool moved away, then everybody came slowly little by little. We start making the---the plantation came normal little by little. Then we started forming local leagues. Japanese team, Filipino team, Portuguese. . . . I never went by Portuguese team. I went always by Latin American or. . . . One time I went [*with*] PACs, Portuguese Athletic Club. I got a trophy there. I don't know why. I think it's Portuguese Athletic Club. I took care that. Well, I didn't want to do it, they come and pick me. The guys, "Nobriga, come on. Help us out."

"Okay."

Then I formed the Portuguese Dance Club. Portuguese dances and all. A guy from Portugal taught us how to dance. And we got hold of few soldiers in the socials. Portuguese dance. We got the managers, assistant manager. All used to come to our party, down the ballpark. I told

L'Orange one time, "You know, everybody has a social hall here. The Portuguese, they left out. The Filipinos have one, the Japanese have one."

He said, "The Hawaiians don't have any." This and that. "You guys use this place. Take it all."

So I was in control of that little place for Portuguese. The gym. Then afterwards boxing came in and all. We only could go in there when they weren't training. See, Johnny Yasui, after he was a pro, he came to work in the plantation and he took up boxing for the plantation. And we are the amateur boxing. We had good boxers. His brothers and all used to box.

WN: What happened to sports when lot of the boys got drafted during the war?

MN: Well, during the war the---didn't bother because there wasn't enough [*men*]. Most of the guys used to play ball---I don't remember any of them volunteer. . . . There were quite a few volunteer, but I don't remember. After the war [*ended*], that's when sports everything went great. The union came in. When we got the first contract [*in 1945*] the company quit taking care of sports. The guys go on their own.

WN: Okay, so the motor pool wasn't there for very long. Only about one year or less than a year?

MN: Oh, about couple of years. Oh, I don't know, about a year or something. I don't know. I don't recall. Time was so fast, I used to work overtime and all that. And I used to go to dinner with the motor pool guys up the church. They had another place over there. I never was lonesome. I was so darned busy. I had no time for the family except in the evening you couldn't go out, that's it. And in the evening some guard coming down, "Mr. Nobriga, Mr. Nobriga. Hey, the boys want to see you there." Wants to invite me to motor pool, go over there drink beer. Shucks, I never was a beer drinker. I drink one bottle, I come home. My wife used to say, "Why do you want to go there? You're not a beer drinker."

"Well, be good to these boys. They go down under and die. You'll never see 'em again."

I used to tell her. And she believed that. So anything they wanted, "Okay, okay, okay." But anyway, talking about the war. One night—the motor pool was there yet—they used to grind cane in the night. But everything blackout. They had the locomotives up on the hill. And they steaming and the smoke came down in the ballpark. So (chuckles) one of the guards came in, "Hey, attack, attack! Everybody indoors!" We thought was gas. I came out. I told the kids, "Put on the gas mask!" All the kids put on the gas mask, everything. I came outside by the door. I said, "Wait, stay indoors. Wait." Then I came out.

"Eh, you not supposed to be out, Nobriga."

They knew me by name and everything. Then I smell, I said, "This is not gas attack. I smell oil. Must be oil."

And then I look, locomotives used to sit way on top of the hill, eh. When the mill grinding cane, they pushed the cars in them days. Wasn't mechanical harvesting, yet. They pushed the cane cars in. They had the fires burning. The smoke come down the hill. I said, "Oh, must be the locomotives."

Then they went up there. Oh, everybody got relieved. I was a hero.

(Laughter)

MN: And then I told the kids, “No, there's no gas attack. The Japanese navy is too far away, they not gonna bring gas attack over here. They killing our guys over there not over here.” From that time, everybody relax. But we had blackout for over a year. [*Total blackout was relaxed to a dim-out in July 1942, with further blackout relaxations occurring over the course of the war years.*] When one of my daughters got married, the blackout was on yet. One of the motor pool guys. Yeah, the war was ending. Towards the end of the war. He used to drive a truck. Leo Gollnick. And then he wanted to get married before he go down under. I wasn't for that at all. What the hell, you want to marry the guy? And then if he die, what? I didn't tell her that. But I told my wife, “I don't go for that.”

“The kid is in love.”

They got married. They got married in my house. And I invited a few guys and my boss and all kind. Some of them, they *Haoles*. *Haoles* were big guys. *Haoles* were special them days. Till after the war the *Haoles*, I think, came down little bit. You couldn't go to a *Haole* clubhouse. You know, you not *Haole*. Anyway, discrimination was terrible. That's when the unions came in afterwards. They listen to us. Anyway, they came in there and we drinking little beer and stuff. We didn't have too many guests, but some of these *Haoles* were there. My boss and a few other guys. He said, “Nobriga, I see you got a picture on the wall over there. [*Franklin*] Delano Roosevelt. How come? All the presidents, you only have one? How come? You don't like the other presidents or something?”

I said, “No, I have him there because he's special. He's the only president that talk about the poor people. He's the guy that gave us social security. That's why I have him there. The other guys, forget it.” (Laughs)

So they agreed, they agreed. They wanted to know why. Why that's special. They agreed with me on that. And really I put 'em there for that. Then after things got quiet down after the war [*ended*], then we started make a union, sugar workers' union [*i.e., International Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Union*]. That was rough.

WN: First tell me how you got into the Hawai`i Territorial Guard?

MN: Well, there was nothing to do. There was no sports or nothing around there. I gotta keep busy so. . . . They wanted everybody in. All Japanese, not one went in. So they wanted guys that knew Filipinos and all could get along. They ask me to join, so I went and join. Kill time, eh. You had nothing to do on Sundays, you go drilling and this and that.

WN: So this was . . .

MN: That's how I got in.

WN: Beginning in 1942, September 22, 1942.

MN: Yeah, then we got the home guard and they had all Filipinos and we start all drilling and walking. That's all. Drilling and all.

WN: Mostly Filipinos and Portuguese?

MN: Filipinos and Portuguese and some Hawaiians. Very few.

WN: What about *Haole*?

MN: The *Haoles* were all officers.

WN: I see.

MN: All the top guys. Some of them were from the army, previously. They all became officers. That's how I got named sergeant or something, because afterwards they said, "Well, we gotta have somebody take care the guns. We can't have officers take care that kind of stuff." So they asked me to take care the guns. So okay, I liked to fool around machinery and all that.

WN: What do you mean take care of the guns? What did you have to do?

MN: All they issued was .45s. Automatic .45s.

WN: To everybody?

MN: No, to the officers only.

WN: Oh.

MN: The officers were issued .45s. Nobody else had a gun. We had hunting guns kept in the gym. I was taking care that. But they never used those guns. Repeaters, for shoot birds. They had couple of dozen of that. And we had that in the gym. They assigned me to that. But the officers could go and shoot, practice, you know. I also had the bullets in the gym, ammunition in the gym. So the first time they went shooting, "Eh, we going shooting Sunday." Half a dozen officers wanted to go and I went to the gym, gave 'em the gun and the bullets and all that. They all went. The following week they---more officers wanted to go. And they came and see me. I'm thinking to myself, what the hell, I take care every goddamn thing and I not allowed a gun.

So I told 'em, "You guys want to get the gun and all that, here's the key. I quit."

"Hey, you can't quit."

"No, I quit! If I can take care guns and take care ammunitions, issue everything, I can't go with you guys and shoot? I don't want that. I don't want the job." (Laughs)

Then they got together, "Wait a minute now. No quit, no quit. You can come. You can shoot."

But I already had a gun at home, but no bullets. I practice to take 'em apart, put 'em back in one minute. But then they told me, "You can do it in one minute, you supposed to be able to do

it in one minute with your eyes closed.”

I told 'em, “Eh, nobody does that.”

“They do it in the army, some. The .45.”

So I told 'em, “Well, I want to keep this gun home. I'll practice. No ammunition though.”

Bring the gun home. I practice for one week. I got so I could make 'em in one minute. And they didn't believe me. Finally one day, I demonstrate to them. Take 'em apart, bring 'em all back. I used to make 'em in one minute. My hands were good then. Then I used to go shoot with them.

WN: Where did you go shoot?

MN: Up in the cane fields, way up, where they had the pump. They used to go shoot over there.

But I joined everything because everything was. . . . I wasn't lonely with sports and all that. When I wasn't working I had to do something. Then I got into social Portuguese clubs and all that. Then when I retired [*in 1963*], after many years, I promised my wife, “From now on, I go every place where you go. Everything you do I go. I go with you.” She didn't believe me, you know, because I never was home.

(Laughter)

MN: This, that, this and that. So when I retired—she used to sing and all that. She used to sing in Kalihi Holy Ghost. She loved singing. So I went. And I took care her for the rest. . . . When I retired, until she died, I went everywhere with her. I said, “You don't do no breakfast. You don't do no lunch.” But she used to do the lunch anyway. But breakfast, my wife never did---I never did let her make breakfast for me. Always did my own, even when I used to work. That's why I used to fix my breakfast and fix their breakfast and go to work.

But I hardly spent time with my family before I retired. I was always with this or that or this or that. Sports, around-the-island relays, cycling, all that. I was involved in every goddamn thing. One or the other. L'Orange gave me a truck, gave me car, gave me a chauffeur. “Go here, take care this.” I used to go. I used to love that.

“Where you going again?”

“Well, you can't have a good house and paint and all that if you don't do these things for the company (chuckles). If you want something you gotta sacrifice, too.” I realize that. Politics, I was involved. I tell you, I was involved in everything. The old man (chuckles) used to come and see me.

WN: What were some of your [*wartime*] duties besides watching the guns for the home guard?

MN: Nothing. Just make sure that the guns were returned by the officers, were clean and all that. But we just kept 'em in the locker. We had all the guns in there and the motor pool was there. Nobody could go in there for those guns except me. The motor pool, Captain Homer, they

knew me and I had free passage anytime. I could go in or out. All the guys knew me. New bunch used to come in, eh. Captain used to take me. . . . Well, the last captain was, I forgot his name now. He was there only short time. But I got introduced to him too. This one captain I used to know, Homer, he was a Mormon. He was there quite a while. On Sundays, all my kids used to get ready to go to church, dress up and everything, and my wife, they all go to church. They walk to church. Farrington Highway, the church is still there, St. Joseph's Church. And this guy [*Homer*], he called me one day, he said, "Nobriga, I see your family go to church. I like that. Your wife, all the kids. Don't you ever go to church?"

I told him, "Well captain, I don't need it."

"Why?"

"Well, I don't need it. I don't feel like it. I take care the kids and all that. They need it. I send 'em. 'Cause they got to learn like I did. But I don't need it anymore."

"Oh, you must be wrong."

"Well, that's the way I think." I told him, "That doesn't mean that I'm afraid of Jesus Christ." I respect and all that. That's my religion but. . . . When my dad was eighty years old, he stopped going to church. And the priest came down there and told my dad, "That's okay. As long as you believe in God, that's okay."

So that in my mind, I was in my fifties, I never go to church already. So I never did go to church after that. But after I retired I start going to church. In Lahaina, I went to church. And I met lot of people. And some *wahines*, too, going to church. And I joined Holy Name Society and I joined all kind of religious organizations. I join the Holy Name here, I join Sacred Heart of Jesus in Lahaina. Pa`ia, I didn't join anything but I used to go to church there once in a while. Pa`ia wasn't too active. When I came back from Maui I joined all the organizations here. This was years after, though. I was a Holy Name man and all that. I still support the church. They had a drive the other day for schools and all that. You can pay in three or four payments. I joined that. Cost me about \$150. I subscribe to the *Catholic Herald*. I keep in touch all the time. I know what's going on in the church more than those who go to church. They go to church and that's enough. They don't read, they don't do anything. God forgive 'em for everything because they went to church. I used to think like that.

WN: In the Territorial Guard, did you go on any patrols or anything like that?

MN: During the war, I never did go. They used to get guys going to patrol for blackouts and all. I never did go. I had no time, because I was excused. Little breakdown, anything break in the factory [*i.e., sugar mill*] or something, I was the target. I live right close.

WN: I see.

MN: So. . . .

WN: So the guard was more for when you weren't working?

MN: The labor was frozen and I lived close and I was the guy, the machinist. I had experience from

outside. I worked outside a few years as a machinist. I did work for Von Hamm-Young, automobile shops, [*Hawaiian*] Tuna Packers [*Limited*], City and County [*of Honolulu*]. I had good experience outside. I went out for little over a year. Then I came back to the plantation again. But I never went and guarded, because the manager used to pick guys. You guys go guard and all that. Blackout, make sure the lights are all out and this and that. One guy used to live next to me, [*Frank*] Gouveia (laughs). He used to go out, by the garage outside, and the kids put on the light. He go around raise hell with everybody, "Put out your lights!" He was a funny guy. I used to like him, but he never mess around me. He was my neighbor, but everything he sees, he see the boss. The boss never liked him for that.

"Why don't you tell Gouveia to keep his mouth shut. I don't want to know anything from him. When I want to know something I want it from you."

"Eh, I'm not telling you everything." I tell the boss (chuckles).

"I know, that's why I like you. When you tell me something, it's for real."

I said, "Of course it's for real. Mostly for me when I tell you something. Not somebody else." He used to get a kick out of that. So anyway---Gouveia noticed that the lights was on. He went out and I waited for him when he came back. He come back after about half an hour, hour patrol. He come back. And before he got in the front, I said, "Frank, you go around telling everybody put out their lights. You better put out your lights."

"What?"

"Go look in the back."

The light was on. He went in and he raised holy hell with the wife and the kids, you know. Big racket. And then I told him, "Don't blame your wife. Take the goddamn globe off, then she won't put 'em on anymore."

"Oh, but the switch there, they forget."

"Take the bulb off."

"Fine."

"You don't need it in the night. It's blackout anyway."

"Yeah, yeah. I never think about that."

So he took the bulb out. He was raising hell with everybody. He was this kind of guys say, "Hey, what you got your light on for? You don't know there's a war on?" Oh, raise hell with the people. But his own place the light was on.

WN: You told me plantation workers were frozen?

MN: The labor was . . .

WN: They didn't move around too much to other plantations or jobs?

MN: The plantation, they froze the labor. Had lot of guys running to navy yard [*i.e., Pearl Harbor Navy Yard*] and this and that. They were draining the plantation for little experience, welders, carpenters. One machinist went there.

WN: Could they go?

MN: One machinist went there. One went there. He wasn't quite a machinist. He was apprentice yet. When they start taking welders and all that, they closed the labor in the plantation. Any skilled labor or anybody want to go navy yard had to get an okay. 'Cause they [*plantation*] needed all that [*labor*]. [*On O`ahu, plantation labor was not frozen, but the military services and their contractors informally agreed, in return for the loan of plantation workers, not to hire anyone known to be a plantation employee.*]

WN: What about you? Did you ever think about . . .

MN: I was frozen from the beginning.

WN: Did you want to go?

MN: No, I didn't want to go. I was at a comfortable place.

WN: There were some people who went to Pearl Harbor navy yard?

MN: They went. Some went. Quite a few.

WN: This was before they froze? They froze the labor.

MN: Yeah, a few went. Quite a few. Some even ordinary labor got jobs over there. Some of them went pick up some dead [*after December 7*]. Guy got a job there picking up the dead.

WN: Did they pay more?

MN: Oh, they were special. Had one guy, I forgot his name. Portuguese guy lived down the alley there. He died afterwards from picking up the dead. He got kind of disease.

WN: Was the pay better?

MN: He never did get better.

WN: No, was the pay better?

MN: Oh, yeah pick up the dead (laughs), you get more than a mechanic's pay. He did that for about five, six months. He made enough money to build a house down the corner.

WN: What about a welder on the plantation compared to a welder at the navy yard? Was there a big difference in pay?

MN: Oh yeah. From the plantation to the navy yard three times more money than the plantation.

WN: Okay, so three times more money.

MN: Yeah. One of my nephews, Raymond Moniz, I told him, “Go apply fast before you get frozen.” He was pretty good welder already. He went down the [*Pearl Harbor Navy*] Yard. And he made real good over there. Top pay, big pay, I don't know what was top pay was down there, but. . . . Three times more than what he was making in the plantation. And he finally made certified welder. He made one of top welders. They sent 'em to the Mainland, train 'em some more, bring 'em back. They had another guy used to be plumber here, the same thing. They train 'em. They had the start, but they want to make 'em full-fledged. Send 'em there, bring 'em back. My nephew, Raymond, he made certified welder. [*When*] they used to have boats in trouble, submarines, way down, way back, somewhere, where they gotta go down in the hole and weld or something, only certified welder could go down there, do that kind of work. They used to pick 'em down there. Fly 'em over and all that. Take 'em there, bring 'em back. Special pay. He made enough money, he moved to the Mainland. He bought a home in the Mainland. This Raymond Moniz, my nephew, he was a cyclist at that time. Well, he made junior champion Hawai`i, sprints championship, he went for trial in the Mainland. Represent the cycle league of America or something. He went over there for sprint, he didn't make it. His brother also went, but was for long distance. He didn't make it. They had too many riders up there better than them. But this Raymond made one of the best. Then had one other guy, he became top man on plumbing. From the plantation he went down there, they send 'em to school, he's retired. They all retired with good retirement [*benefits*] from the shipyard.

WN: So how long into the war, how many months went by into the war did they freeze the position? I mean, as soon as the war broke out, is that when Moniz those guys went to. . . .

MN: The war was on yet. They need lot of people there because boats were there and lot of trouble down the yard from the attack, eh. They were looking for any kind of help down there.

WN: How did they find out about the openings in the navy yard?

MN: Oh, the newspapers. Newspapers. They looking for apply. They need this, they need that. They needed all skill mechanics everywhere. I was frozen. I stayed back, but I used to do work for military, through a contractor.

WN: Oh, what was that?

MN: The boss allowed two machinists, Lino Souza and I, we were top machinists then, can do any work that can be done in the plantation. If you can do it, the money is for you. We couldn't go down there [*Pearl Harbor Navy Yard*], we were frozen. The wages were set, eh. So I used to do work for a contractor. Hydraulic lines, you know. Four-inch, three-inch fittings. Nut, male and female nut, where they put the water hose, you know. So they used to get those. They bring those casted. Then you had to machine 'em, straight 'em. Male and female. So this contractor brought 'em over and they asked me how much would I charge for one. After work, overtime, we go on our own. The company said, you could use the machine and all that. The manager said it's okay. First one I took I said, “Wait, how much is the pay an hour [*for an*] outside machinist?” At those days was about dollar and a half [*\$1.50*].

WN: Where? You mean navy yard?

MN: Yeah, outside.

WN: Oh, outside.

MN: Navy yard was more than that, I think.

WN: And plantation was less?

MN: Plantation, we weren't even getting a dollar an hour.

WN: Oh.

MN: [*Including*] free house all that. So anyway I worked outside machinist in my time. In my twenties I was getting a dollar an hour. That's journeyman's pay, those days. Dollar an hour. Plantation we were getting about fifty cents an hour. But I came to plantation for housing and everything. I came back to plantation. But anyway, we took the contract. The guy wanted to know how much for one fitting, male or female. "Wait, give me two and I'll tell you how much."

"No, I want to know now."

"You want to know now, take it, I don't want it. I'm gonna do the job, I gotta know how much I gotta charge you."

"Yeah, but I gotta know how much." The contractor said.

"You want to know how much, well, give it to somebody else. I don't want it."

"Yeah, but I gotta have it. Okay, okay, you do it and tell me how much."

Okay, I go by the time take to make the male and the female. Take big holes, you know. The fire department got those big ones on those stands over there. So I make one, well, half an hour, average one hour a nut. One hour, two hours overtime. Two hours, let's see. Five bucks. Two dollars and a half [*\$2.50*] an hour, that's good pay compared to. . . . We weren't even getting a dollar an hour. Two nuts, five bucks. I work one hour, hour and a half, I make five bucks. Where I work the whole day plantation, those days was ten hours yet, for six dollars (laughs). So I told 'em, "Five bucks a nut."

"Oh, kind of. . . ."

"Give it to somebody else."

He say, "Hey, wait a minute. Jeb told me your name Nobriga."

"That's right."

"You had any outside experience?"

“Yeah, I did lot of work for Von Hamm-Young. I worked Downtown. I did work for everybody. I worked tuna packing, American Sanitary Laundry, the city and county work I used to do for them. I even did work for windmills, the other side of the island.

He shake his head, “Okay, when we have no more of this kind of work, we have something else. Can we bring it here?”

“Go ahead, bring it here.”

WN: This was from the navy yard?

MN: No, this was outside contractor.

WN: Still outside contractor? Doing. . . .

MN: Outside contractor do that---they do that for the United States Government.

WN: I see, okay, okay.

MN: He gets that. And then he pull the work out. He gotta see how much we charge, and then he charge.

WN: What contractor was this?

MN: His name was Mullen. That's all I knew him by.

WN: Mullen.

MN: And so we did that for quite a while. After a while they used to bring this shafting for these carts where they load the ammunition and all of that, they wanted the wheels, eh. So we took that. I had lot of spending money. My [*plantation*] wages, I just give the wife that. “You not going take any money for you this time?”

“No, that's yours.”

“Where you have the other money?”

And I used to tell her, sometime left over. So during the war I wasn't worried about. . . . The food was expensive, but I had lot of food from the motor pool. They throw 'em in the yard, all that. I used to save money during the war. I lived in the right place at the right time. And I used to tell my wife, “You know, if it wasn't these guys came and attack Pearl Harbor, maybe we wouldn't be so well-off now.” (Laughs)

She said, “We not well-off.”

“Oh, we better much well-off than the rest of the people around here.”

WN: They paid you cash?

MN: Yeah, the contractor paid me cash.

WN: Did other mechanics in the plantation do that too?

MN: No, the only ones that had that one job was Lino Souza and I. We got all the jobs from him [Mullen]. I think he was the only guy that had trucks with the piping and all that. We did that for quite a while. That money, we used to buy hard liquor or whatever. Beer or what. You stand in line, everything was ration. They got to punch your card.

WN: Where did you go?

MN: Go down Waipahu Depot Road, yeah. The drinking place there. They sell liquor and all that. They allow twelve bottles of beer. Most of the beer used to come in bottles those days. Could buy beer and one quart whiskey per week. Was ration. So I had this card and I go over there and they punch. So I had a card, my dad had a card, my mother had a card, my wife had a card. Some days I used to go there three times a week. So I used to pass some of that to the army guys. When they had a party or big dinner, they drop stuff in my yard, see (chuckles). Corned beef and stuff. And then they give me beer if I wanted. But I never did buy beer. I used to drink hard liquor. This guy Lino Souza, he used to buy his beer. So in the morning, just tell the boss, well, we going down buy some beers.

“You can't leave the shop.”

I told Lino. I told him, “Like hell, I can't leave the shop.” I told him, “Let's go.” We walk out of the shop.

The foreman (chuckles) say, “I'm gonna take your time off.”

“Take 'em off. I gotta have my whiskey.”

Jimmy, the other guy, “And I gotta buy beer.”

We went down, you know. We got kind of independent with the boss. We were stuck [*i.e., frozen*], we couldn't go anywhere. They couldn't fire us. They wouldn't fire us. So we took advantage. Went down in the morning, line up. All guys to get their booze, eh. Used to go early so we don't stay there too long. Used to stand by sometime almost an hour. Big line before we get there. I think they got there before daylight, lot of people.

WN: What about the other stores, like you know the neighborhood stores like that, they had liquor too?

MN: Well, yeah, most stores had liquor. It wasn't one liquor store, they carry everything. And most merchants were Japanese merchants. Down the hill was just this. . . . Arakawa's wasn't where it is now. Was where across [the present] Arakawa's, that's where it was.

WN: You mean on Depot---still on [Waipahu] Depot Road?

MN: Arakawa's had a small shop over there. The two boys Takemi and Shigemi were in high school

yet. And the old man, I forgot his name. I always forget his name [*Zenpan Arakawa, founder of Arakawa's*].

WN: Arakawa.

MN: He was kind of go-for-broke guy before. And he had a little hotel above that place there. And I slept there one night in that hotel. Anyway, the story ends right there.

(Laughter)

MN: Anyway, I slept there one night. I was around seventeen years old. My first experience with a woman, you know, them days. Dance hall, I used to go down taxi dance. So the old man told me, “Nobriga, you come bring in your friends come sleep here.” So I went. I was around seventeen. But those days, they had Iwilei. You ever heard about Iwilei [*“red light” district*]?

WN: Mm hmm [yes].

MN: Wide open. So actually young men, their first experience. . . . If you were tall enough and all that you just take your pick. And then women call to you, “Come in, come in. Come on honey, I give you.” All that kind of stuff. So my first experience was there. Iwilei. Maybe sixteen, I was tall enough.

A guy took me there, Gouveia, not my neighbor, his brother. “Eh, come on Nobriga.”

“You bigger than me. You taller. Go, go, go.”

That's it. Then from that time on I respect all women. Those that you pay for, it's okay, that's their job. The rest, I never take advantage. Never did. So when I start raising my family, I really told my kids, my wife told 'em. But the times are different. What was wide open. Kaka`ako was a bad place to go to. But Iwilei was wide open. They were licensed, they were checked every week or every day. They were healthy and all that. And we felt it was safe. And all my life, no problem.

WN: What about during the war in Waipahu? Were there prostitution houses over there?

MN: Yeah, they used to get. We never call 'em. . . . I don't think they were called streetwalkers at that time. But they had, they come around, you know. But most kids---most guys stay away from that. I was one. I stay away from that. Not healthy. You don't know what the hell. But Iwilei was. . . . You figure they were checked by the doctor every week. We felt safe. And I never heard of anybody get the disease. But it was common for all of them. Before you marry and all that you gotta know what the heck's gonna happen. My dad never did preach, talk that kind of stuff to me. But you get it from outside people. Some give you bad advice, you listen to 'em. When you a kid you listen to everything. If it's bad especially. Oh, wide open the ears.

(Laughter)

MN: But the way I was brought up, my sisters and all, chaperone. When I got engaged, I had a chaperone. I never mind. Some people they---that's old-fashioned. They used to know some families allow. I never did like that. I wanted a chaperone. I can control myself, by real

discipline, but I would want to go the same way so there wouldn't be any talk after I got married and all that. So when you got married those days, there's a bunch of woman, they put down the date. If the baby is born before time, they all point the finger at you (laughs). After I got married, eh, some people say, "Eh, Nobriga, you all right. Not too soon."

"What do you mean? What do you mean?"

"Oh, you was married eleven months [*ago*]. So it's okay."

They counting. "How the heck you know eleven months?" I got kind of mad with that. But that's the way it was. They put the dates down.

"Eh, that guy's a gentleman."

(Laughter)

MN: They blame the man all the time.

WN: Was there taxi dancing and things like that during the war in Waipahu?

MN: During the war everything went kind of dead until things got. . . . When the motor pool moved out was towards the end, was ending of the war. See, this guy married my daughter, went down, the war was finished. They went down for clean up and he came back in about couple of months. He came back, stayed with me for a week or two, then he moved to the Mainland. He got two children up there, then he moved back to Hawai`i. Gollnick.

WN: So the motor pool guys were the only military guys in Waipahu?

MN: Yeah, that I know of.

WN: No other military?

MN: Well, I think they had military all over the place [*i.e., O`ahu*]. But Waipahu was convenient for the trucking. They call 'em motor pool repairs and all that.

WN: What about defense workers from the Mainland? Did they come and live in Waipahu?

MN: No, the defense workers. . . . The only people that came to Waipahu was the motor pool. Nobody else. Of course the ballpark was convenient. They had the house over there, they could stay. And they had water, running water. And they could entertain themselves at that. And they get the place where they could park all the trucks. That's not the only place they took over. They must have taken over all over the island where it was convenient. You know what I mean, eh. And we could get along without baseball and all that. So that's the sacrifice.

WN: So had no baseball during the war?

MN: No sports.

WN: No sports. Okay.

MN: Everybody just stay home and play your radio, whatever you had.

WN: So from '42 to '44 you were with the [*Hawai`i*] Territorial Guard. And in '44 you joined the O`ahu Volunteer Infantry? What was the difference between the [*Hawai`i*] Territorial Guard and the O`ahu Volunteer Infantry?

MN: The Volunteer [*Infantry*] became [*part of the*] regular [*U.S.*] Army [*because*] in case we were having an attack they would take me as a prisoner of war, as a soldier. And in the other one [*i.e., as a civilian*], they could shoot me right there.

WN: I see.

MN: If you were in the [*Volunteer*] Infantry you would go in as a prisoner of war, because you're [*classified as*] a soldier in the service. They said for your safety, for your sake, you get a gun and they look you wasn't soldier, they shoot you right there. But if you belong in the service, bonafide guy, that's it because when they capture a plane, they take all those prisoners. But if you not one, they shoot you. That was the reason they told me.

WN: I see, I see. So then when you were with the [*Territorial*] Guard, it was like you were a civilian?

MN: Civilian.

WN: So did most people who were in the [*Territorial*] Guard become Volunteer Infantry?

MN: Well, they asked, lot of them didn't want to get in there. But I went in. The other guys, "Oh the war is almost over." This and that.

I said, "Oh, I'm not taking a chance. I don't want them to come here and kill me over here. If they take me away prisoner, still I can come back someday." Then my son was around eighteen, he got drafted. He went to Germany, was just about the end of the war. Just over there to clean up. He was over there about a year, I think. Then he got discharged, honorable discharge, everything. Private first class, anyway. He got married and he went on his wife's side. He didn't become a Nobriga anymore. You know what I mean? This girl he married, she kept 'em in her family. And in my case, my girls marry somebody, say, "You make a home for yourself. Never mind the Nobriga. I want you to remember this and that, but don't make a Nobriga out of your husband. I don't want that. He's his own man." Of course, they stick to their [*Nobriga*] side, you know. Women always stick. More aloha. That's the women, that's natural. In my family, my dad's side of the family, we were more my dad's side, Nobriga, Madeira people. My father came first. I always thought my father was always right. My mother was over there, female, Portuguese. You took his name, so you come number two. So one time, my wife, she told me, "You know, I could be the boss here, you know."

I said, "I'm sorry. I would like you to be the boss, but I tell you why you could never be the boss."

"Oh, well I'm not trying to be the boss, but I'd like to know that."

“Okay, you was a Perreira. When you became my wife, what was your name, what you became, Mrs. Perreira? No, Nobriga. So you took my name, because I'm number one. You number two. Okay, satisfied?”

“Oh, I don't know.” (Laughs)

Lot of people, Portuguese, ask me. My wife used to say that. Tell her name first. My friends say, “Eh, Nobriga, how come? How come? What makes you think that way?”

“She told you the story, eh. She took my name because she wanted to be a Nobriga. Not Perreira anymore. So I'm number one. (laughs)”

But there's no number one in the family. In fact, in my house number one was my wife. With the kids and all goes to her. If she couldn't handle it, “I'm gonna tell your father today. And he'll take care you.” Sometime I used to hear that in the other room. And then I come out, “Eh, what's this I heard? Something mentioning my name or something? I'm a father. You mean this father?” She just (laughs). You know what I mean. And the kids they listen more, you know. I never bother with the kids, I let her handle it unless she stuck.

WN: During the war, what about your parents? They were still. . . .

MN: My parents . . .

WN: They were never naturalized, eh?

MN: They never were naturalized. During the war, my dad and my mother, good thing I stayed back. None of my brothers were here anyway. My sisters were worried about their husbands and all that. My sisters had good schooling and they married guys that couldn't read and write, you know. And they were kind of boss, the place.

WN: You mean, your sisters?

MN: Yeah, they were kind of boss the house. So they couldn't go out and take care my father and my mother. So I took care of all that. Gas masks, everything. Get ration stuff and all that. I used to take care of my dad and my mother. Then every year you had to register in the post office, alien. I used to take care that registration. Every year you go down there and register. I took care of my dad's money in the bank. He couldn't write. He couldn't go and cash it unless he go with me and make a cross. I fixed that up. Told the bank I'd like to collect the money for him when he wants. And I make a cross and sign my name. They accepted that. So after that I used to take care of my dad's money, bank money and all that.

WN: How did they feel about the war? Were they pro-American or what?

MN: My dad and my mother they never talk much about the war. They were old and they were very quiet people. My mother was a big talker, but my dad, you had to be close to him to hear him talk. Soft-spoken. None of us came like him.

(Laughter)

MN: None of us. He couldn't hear. The only thing I inherited from my father was my ear. I didn't like that. He was---hearing problem. You had to talk to him loud, eh. And my mother used to scold him. He got so he could read her lips I think. And then when she got through he kind of smiled, eh. I used to tell him, "You heard what she said?"

"I heard what she said. She think I'm not hearing, but I can see. I can tell when she talks. She makes motions. I know what she said."

"It doesn't bother you?"

"No, no. That's entertainment." He used to tell me (chuckles).

My dad never fight my mother in his life. He was soft-spoken. For Portuguese, unusual (laughs). You know, it seems the people who talk the loudest are the guilty ones. Other ones are not at fault.

WN: So did he say anything about the war, what he thought?

MN: No, my dad and my mother they were frightened, you know, old people. And I used to go and visit them every day. Take care them and. . . . My dad he start drinking little more than usual during the war, eh. I used to buy him a bottle now and then. And my dad retired when he was eighty-four years old. He worked till he was eighty-four years old in the plantation because he couldn't get social security [*benefits*] because he was working for the agriculture. Agriculture, when they first got the social security wasn't covered. So he had to come and transfer from the agriculture department to the mill, mechanical. To make a quota so he could get social security. The company gave him a house and everything after forty-two years service, twenty-six dollars a month. For him and my mother to live. That's all they used to get from the company. So when he first went into the mill department he put in to cover the quotas. He got the quotas in and he retired. So he got on social security. He got sixty-two dollars and something from social security. And the company used to give 'em twenty-six dollars. All those forty-some-odd years he put in the company they give 'em twenty-six dollars a month. Social Security, sixty-two dollars. See the difference? That's why I had that picture on the wall (laughs). President Roosevelt. I went out and got a picture some place, frame 'em and put 'em on the wall. Then my dad, the house, everything was free. Everything was free. He only pay lights. So my dad say, "Oh, I can put money away."

I say, "No, you're gonna blow this money. You not putting money away."

So my mother used to buy stuff for the daughters. They [*parents*] could live on forty dollars a month.

WN: Did the plantation change a lot because of the war? Did they---were they growing less cane or more cane or . . .

MN: The plantation, after the war, the plantation change all together. They mechanize the plantation. Then we got the unions changed a lot.

WN: Okay, what I want to do is talk about the union next time. And we'll get into the union and the postwar part.

MN: But the plantation after the war changed a lot. But actually never change until really more . . .

WN: More later, yeah?

MN: Changed a hell of a lot when the unions came in.

WN: Okay, so what we'll do is we'll talk about the union time, next time, okay?

MN: Yeah.

END OF INTERVIEW