

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

#380

NORMAN S. SPITZER

SCHOFIELD BARRACKS

INTERVIEWED ON

DECEMBER 5, 2001

BY ART GOMEZ AND BURL BURLINGAME

TRANSCRIBED BY:

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Art Gomez (AG): The following oral history interview was conducted by Art Gomez and Burl Burlingame for the National Park Service, USS *Arizona* Memorial at the Ala Moana Hotel, on December 5, 2001, at ten o'clock a.m. The person being interviewed is Norman Spitzer, who was a corporal in the infantry at Schofield Barracks on December 7, 1941. For the record, please state your full name, place of birth and birth date.

Norman S. Spitzer (NS): [*Norman S.*] Spitzer, Honolulu, Hawaii, born January 5, 1919.

AG: What did you consider your hometown in 1941?

NS: Berkeley, California.

AG: What were your parents' names?

NS: My father's name was Sidney Spitzer. He was a merchant in Honolulu, ran that shoe store on Fort Street. My mother and father were divorced when I was three. She lived in California.

AG: How many brothers and sisters do you have?

NS: None. They took one look at me and that was it! (Chuckles)

AG: Where did you go to high school?

NS: Berkeley, California.

AG: Where and why did you enlist in the military service?

NS: Well, I came down to Honolulu. My father died in June of '41 and I was a senior at Cal-Berkeley [*University of California, Berkeley, California*] and I came down to settle the estate. I then decided to—I had been flying privately out at old John Rodgers Airport here and I decided to enlist in the air corps. At that time, there was a long waiting period. I was accepted at Hickam Field sometime about August of '41. And then after a period of time, they didn't call me and then they sent several of us up to Schofield [*Barracks*] to go through basic training while we're waiting to be called.

AG: What were you doing on the day, December 7, 1941? Where were you posted?

NS: Well, I wasn't very involved. I actually was in town when the attack occurred. I had a car. I drove out to Schofield immediately, I believe between the first and second attacks, the road ran alongside Pearl Harbor in those days and it was obvious it was a pretty pitiful situation. I reported to my unit at Schofield.

AG: Now you mentioned that you had some experience in Sand Island. How did you get to that...?

NS: Well, sometime in about January of '42, while I was waiting to transfer to the [Army] Air Corps at—three or four of us were sent to Sand Island. Now Sand Island you know was the former immigration station in the harbor. It was an island at that time. And a detention camp had been established that had Japanese Americans, Danes, Germans, Italians—about every race you could think of. It was not exclusively Japanese detainees. It also had the

Oahu prisoners. Martial law had been declared and anyone convicted under martial law was sent to Sand Island. They were in separate compounds.

AG: Before we actually move on to your time at Sand Island, can you summarize from the day of the attack, December 7, 1941, to the time that you were transferred to Sand Island? Can you summarize the events in your words?

NS: First, the confusion of course was tremendous. At one point, a number of us went out and dug into a pineapple field to stop the purported invasion. It was reported that 80 transports were off Haleiwa. Confusion was terrible. And the ships were still blowing up at Pearl Harbor and we thought there were still air raids. This is what went on for two or three days. Finally, I believe it was the second day, I was assigned to the fire station on Kolekole Pass, which had the only surviving fire engine at Schofield Barracks and Wheeler Field area. And I guarded that. I had about thirty-five men and guarded that for six or seven weeks when I was called in and transferred to Sand Island, perhaps because I was assumed to be a local boy. I don't know.

AG: And what was your principle role at Sand Island and can you...?

NS: Well, first I was a guard and I had a background in electronics, so I became a telephone operator. As a guard, we pulled twelve-on, twelve-off shifts. It was not a very easy duty.

AG: And what sort of stands out as the memorable event on Sand Island?

NS: Well of course, the most important event was we had the first prisoner of war, [*Sub.*] Lieutenant [*Kazuo*] Sakamaki. I believe—my understanding, from comments and conversations with Campbell Stevenson, who was a provost marshal at Fort Shafter, Sakamaki had been turned over to a unit of the Hawaiian National Guard to be transported from Bellows Field to Fort Shafter. This unit was mostly Japanese niseis, had a Japanese second lieutenant, nisei, in charge. He became enraged and wanted to kill Sakamaki and was restrained by some men. Sakamaki was quite confused finding Japanese in American uniforms. He was transferred to Fort Shafter and after a period of time was sent out to Sand Island. Now, at Sand Island, they had a one-camp internment area surrounded by barbed wire and guarded. It had a number of Japanese detainees. In this camp they built a special little

building about twelve by twelve that they called Sakamaki's Hotel, and it was surrounded by barbed wire and he was confined to it.

Now sometime in probably the end of January, he branded himself under each eye. These were—he used a pin and burnt matches. Now they brought in an expert and he said these were, this was a Japanese disgrace sign and Sakamaki would be forever disgraced everywhere he went because of this branding that he inflicted on himself.

Because of his attitude at that time, whenever he ate with utensils, one of us would sit with him. Now, I probably did it at least two times, perhaps three times. He was of fairly good nature. He was not depressed in my estimation, although he had branded himself. He spoke a little English. I assume some from his experiences in the Japanese naval academy, perhaps some from his, picked up while he was in captivity. He would say things like, "I Sakamaki bad my country. I Sakamaki bad your country. Sakamaki no good."

And I'd say, "What are you going to do after the war, Sakamaki?"

And he'd say, "Come Hawaii. Be citizen Hawaii."

Now I'm sure he realized that Hawaii was part of the United States, but he felt that it was somehow different. It was a territory of course.

Now some of this, after sixty years, I don't know if it was my own personal knowledge or the conversations that I had with other guards. But he told two stories. One that he'd gone into Pearl Harbor and had come out the next morning under a cruiser. The other story was that he had not gone into Pearl Harbor. His gyros had failed.

I personally have a lot of questions. If his gyros failed, how did he navigate from the entrance of Pearl Harbor around Diamond Head, around Koko Head, around to the beach at Bellows? Now the story at that time was that a mother submarine would pick up any survivors of these midget submarines. This seems peculiar because theoretically they were suicide missions. The story was that just as the Japanese were supposed to pick up downed pilots on Niihau, that a submarine would be off Bird Island. Now there are two

Bird Islands. There's the one off Waimanalo and there's one off Kailua.

His statements that the gyros had failed bother me because I don't know how. It was a tremendous surveillance at that time. I don't believe he would use a periscope. How did he navigate that distance to approximately the area of Kailua, where Bird Island was?

I think there's another question I have. Supposedly there was a demolition charge on the submarine. He said it wouldn't go off. That bothers me. I feel there are a lot of questions about actually what he did that day and where he went. Now he died about a year, year and a half ago, and a friend of mine in the submarine service got a notice of it and it said that Sakamaki was the last survivor of the attack on Pearl Harbor of the midget submarines. He was the last survivor the next day!

Burl Burlingame (BB): Right.

NS: Now when he went ashore, I know there were no autopsies performed in those days. How did his fellow crewman die? Did he drown? Or was he injured?

BB: I'll just put out a little background here.

NS: Yes.

BB: Now that it's turned over to me. The rendezvous point to pick up the midget submarines was over by Maui.

NS: Maui?

BB: Maui. And Sakamaki believed he was near Maui when he saw Rabbit Island.

NS: Mm-hmm.

BB: He also claims he was confused by fumes off the batteries and he passed out. When he got off the submarine, at Waimanalo, he set the scuttling charge to fuse, but somehow it didn't go. His crewman was killed, drowned, but there was a—soldiers who examined the body saw a hole in the person's head and

I've got a picture of the corpse. And the rules were in those days for the officer to execute the crewman and then for the officer to kill himself. And I asked Sakamaki whether he had executed his crewman. He refused to elaborate on that. He said he didn't remember.

Let me back up a little bit. What was your rank at the time?

NS: At the time, I was an acting corporal or a cadet. When I reported to Hickam Field, they put USs on my collar, which was a cadet rank. Everyone was aware of the fact that I was en route to flight training.

BB: What unit were you attached to?

NS: At Schofield, I was at the reception center. At Sand Island, I was the 811th MP Company, under Captain [*Carl*] Eifler, who was quite a character in himself, who later ended up Colonel Eifler, starting the OSS [*Office of Strategic Services*] in Burma.

BB: Did you know a Lieutenant DING-MAN? David DING-MAN?

NS: No, I didn't.

BB: Worked for the provost marshal at the time?

NS: No.

BB: Okay. Did you work primarily at Sand Island as a guard for the provost marshal's office?

NS: I worked as a guard for a period of weeks and then I became the telephone operator with the switchboard and that sort of thing there.

BB: How long were you there? What happened to you after that period?

NS: Just before the Battle of Midway, I was located, it seems I had been writing Hickam asking what was my cadet status. The Captain Eifler had not been passing the letters on. One day I, a Captain May, who I had known previously, saw me, came over and said, "We've had you AWOL."

And I said that I had been there the entire time. And he turned to Captain Eifler and he said, “I’m sure you’ll expedite his transfer to Hickam.”

And Captain Eifler said, “If I had known, I would have.”

I then went to Hickam and during the battle—the Battle of Midway started, a convoy was in Honolulu Harbor and they wanted to get it out. They threw on board those who were going to OCS [*Officers Candidate School*], to flight training schools, a number of women, children and went up on the convoy to San Francisco. We in effect were crewmen. I had again the telephone lines to the gun stations and so on. We were escorted by the cruiser [*USS*] *Omaha*. In those days, a lot of the receivers had regenerative detectors and put out a signal, so there was complete receiving silence. We left and for eleven days didn’t know what had happened. After we got into the San Francisco Harbor, they lifted the gates, turned on the receivers and we found out that Hawaii had not been invaded.

BB: So you’re still a cadet during this period?

NS: Pardon me?

BB: Were you still a cadet during this period?

NS: Yes. Yes.

BB: Were you drawing pay and able to live in barracks?

NS: Seventy-five dollars a month as a cadet, which was far better than what I'd been getting. (Chuckles) I then went to—because of prior service, they didn't send those of us that were in the islands to pre-flight, where we went almost, two weeks for pre-flight, not the training, but just for record keeping. We went to primary basic and advanced flying schools. I ended up a twin-engine instructor in Roswell, New Mexico, then in Douglas, Arizona, then the ferry command. And then I went over to China, Burma, India as a pilot and I flew ninety-eight round trips over the hump in China.

BB: And when were you released from service?

NS: About January of '46, rank of captain. I had made captain in '44.

BB: And what did you do—what have you done since then?

NS: Well, I went to work for Pan-American [*Airways*] and I was a Pan-American [*Airways*] pilot and the interesting thing was I had learned to fly out at John Rodgers [*Airport*]. My instructor had been [*Robert C.*] “Bob” Tyce, who was killed [*at John Rodgers Airport*] in the attack on December 7. It was quite a thrill for me to be a co-pilot on an airplane landing at this new airport, because in those days, John Rodgers [*Airport*] had no connection with Hickam [*Field*], ‘til this magnificent airport. I flew for Pan-Am until the Korean War when I was recalled to active duty. I had married a Pan-Am stewardess and I might say after fifty-three years, we’re still married.

BB: Did you settle in Hawaii after the war?

NS: No. No. My mother and father divorced when I was three. I had never lived in Hawaii except for occasional summer vacations, when I'd come down to visit my father.

BB: Can you just describe Hawaii in general terms in 1941, when you came back?

NS: Yes. In '41, it was an amazing place. Fort DeRussy, for instance, had a gate at each end. Every evening, the guard would shout, "Dim your lights and dismount!"

Everybody, civilians and all, got out, saluted or put their hands over their heart while the flag was raised. We would go out to Schofield on the train, which people can't believe. Hawaii—the army in those days out there, up until the day of the war, you were on duty Monday and Tuesday, Wednesday, until noon. You were off Wednesday afternoon. You're on duty Thursday and Friday and you're off Saturday and Sunday. It was the pineapple army. You wore civilian clothes. We had our cars. It was an interesting life. I belonged to the Outrigger Club. I left a surfboard in the

rack there and when I came back with Pan-Am after the war, it was still in the rack. It had been a hollow board and it opened up like a piece of celery! (Chuckles) But it was still there.

BB: When you—on the morning of December 7, you say you were downtown and then drove up to Schofield Barracks?

NS: Actually I was at my aunt's house up on Makiki Roundtop.

BB: How did you hear about the attack?

NS: The explosions immediately woke us up. We turned on the radio. There were two radio stations, KGU and KGMB, and they were saying that an attack was occurring, "All military report to their units," and I immediately got in the car and drove out to Schofield.

BB: Did you have any trouble getting out there?

NS: No. Interestingly, it was in between the attacks and they had set up fifty caliber machine guns in the fields, water-cooled. Of course there was chaos. When we got out to Schofield, that night for instance, couple things stick in my mind. The password was Shanghai. Everybody ran around and if you heard anything, you yelled, "Shanghai!" repeatedly.

At one point a report was that Japanese paratroopers had landed on the rifle range. A firefight started between two American outfits, one on each side. I was a runner for the colonel, reluctantly went out to find out what was going on. After a lot of shooting, nobody was hit. That night, a plane flew over and a cone of fire arose over Schofield and the plane went down. A sergeant from our outfit went up and found out it was a navy ensign in a Columbia flying boat, a biplane amphibian. The confusion was unbelievable. [*Note: Mr. Spitzer further states the plane refereed to was of Grumman design, but built by Columbia Aviation. It was a biplane amphibian, and commonly referred to as a Columbia flying boat.*]

BB: What time did you get to Schofield on the morning of the attack? Do you know roughly?

NS: I'd say about nine.

BB: During, while the attack was still in progress?

NS: No. Maybe it was a little earlier. I think it was between the two. Now, to show the confusion, the second day, the morning of the next day, an officer took about thirty-five or forty of us up to the firehouse, which I had mentioned. The ships were still exploding at Pearl Harbor and the sirens would go off and we thought it was more bombing. Everybody bailed out. We were armed with Lee Enfield rifles to shoot at the planes. I had been around firearms all my life and for some reason I stationed myself at the door and I made each one eject the shells before they came in. The officer saw that, took his handkerchief out, tied it around my arm and said, "This man's in charge." And he said, "Set up a schedule. You have no messing facilities," it was about a half a mile to our mess area. He said then, "Pick another guy. In the morning before sunrise, march half of 'em down and then take the other half down to feed twice a day." [*Note: Mr. Spitzer states the Lee Enfield rifles are similar to the Springfield Model 1906, and used the*

same ammunition. British made, they were first used in the Boar War. They had been given to the U.S. during the first world war, and had been in storage since that time.]

At one point, the FBI [*Federal Bureau of Investigation*] called me in and they said that they were going to disarm the 298th [*Infantry Regiment*], which was a Nisei [*unit*]. [*Note: Mr. Spitzer states the 298th was the Hawaii National Guard unit, which was federalized in 1940. It had a number of races in its make up. I would guess that it was about 40% Nisei.]*

BB: When was that?

NS: I would say it would be about maybe the twentieth of December. They said, “Up where you are, you only have two or three Japanese in your outfit. We won’t do anything with that outfit,” which was not very reassuring.

The confusion and the rumors were rampant.

BB: How were the Japanese in your outfit treated?

NS: Very—the ones that I knew were treated fine. There was one—the only incident that occurred, there was a Japanese student from the University of Hawaii in my outfit. And he and I used to talk and we were rather appalled at some language of some of the enlisted soldiers. And he was so fascinated, he was keeping a notebook of swear words and such! (Chuckles) And they found that and suspected it.

BB: Uh-oh.

NS: However that got straightened out. So far as I know, there were no problems. Now I can tell you on Sand Island, I have read books and articles by people that seem to have an agenda of some type, of how they were beaten and all of that. None of that occurred that I ever saw.

BB: All right. We'll get to that in a second.

NS: Pardon me?

BB: We'll get to that in a second. Did you see any evidence that Schofield Barracks itself was attacked?

NS: Yes. Our area had tents and there were some holes in the tents. But all over the ground were clips, machine gun clips ejected by planes. Now at one point, a group of us—I was standing next to the colonel, lieutenant colonel, and a P-40 flew by. A P-40 had been shot down. There was a water tank out against the cliff there—had been shot down. A P-40 flies by and he says, "There's a Zero." (Chuckles)

BB: Well, did you have training in aircraft identification? Were the troops trained?

NS: I had been fascinated with aviation all of my life. I had had no training in the military, but I was well aware of aircraft. And I was, I remember seeing a couple Japanese planes, I believe, when I was driving out, that had fixed gears, and this surprised me.

BB: When you were assigned to Sand Island, I mean how did you, had you heard about the prisoner Sakamaki before you got to Sand Island?

NS: I didn't even know what Sand Island was.

BB: Had you heard about midget submarines before that?

NS: No. I had not.

BB: Okay. So how did you first meet Sakamaki?

NS: Well, as soon as I arrived, I became aware of the fact that he was there, who he was and this little compound was called "Sakamaki's Hotel." And of course this group of guards we had were—a number of them were college people, going to other things. One of them was Dick Lindsay, who became a navy lieutenant. All of them were, I think, a cut above the norm and we discussed a lot of things. And Sakamaki was fascinating.

BB: Were you urged to get any intelligence out of him if you could?

NS: No, none. None.

BB: Was there any effort to do that?

NS: No. In fact, that was handled, I'm sure, at Fort Shafter and by the intelligence people. Our function was merely to guard them and keep them.

BB: Were you ever asked about the prisoners' psychological condition or what...

NS: Never, never. Never. They had a bit of problem. Among those that were interned, there was a professional wrestler appearing in Honolulu at the time under the name of Count VonBuesing. Count VonBuesing was a large professional wrestler. He had an agent who we understood was a Danish count, who was also in—does this ring a bell with you?

BB: No. Vaguely.

NS: Okay. Count VonBuesing immediately started taking over the Japanese in the camp by his physical presence and so on. He wore a loincloth type thing. He was a big hunk of man. Captain Eifler, who was—do you know of Captain Eifler?

BB: Carl Eifler.

NS: Carl Eifler he's still alive at ninety-five in Salinas. Carl Eifler was also quite a presence. In those days, we wore the old helmets. It sat on his head like Happy Hooligan. He carried a BAR [*Browning Air Rifle*] as a sidearm. He was a big man. He decided he would have to do something about VonBuesing. So he goes in and VonBuesing had somehow obtained a lawn chair. And he was stretched out in the lawn chair with a bunch of people around, mostly Japanese. Eifler said—I was there—"On your feet."

And [*Von*]Buesing slowly gets up. And—now this sounds corny—there was a pick because we had trenches because of purported air raids. He picks a pick up by his hand and he starts doing an exercise like this with it. He did it seventy or eighty times. He throws it at VonBuesing and said, "You do it."

And VonBuesing couldn't do it as much. And immediately lost a lot of control in the camp.

We had in that camp, I won't mention names, people that were American citizens, the daughter of one of the top families in Hawaii, who had been consorting with officers from the pocket battleship that had been through previously. We had interesting things that I heard. Now I can't verify them. Among the Japanese, we had the beekeeper from Niihau, the wife of the...

BB: Irene Harada.

NS: Yeah, Harada. We had others that were suspect. We had one prisoner who had, was a nisei, who had served in the Japanese army in China. I understood we had about one percent of the Japanese population interned. Not very much. Among them were—at that time, of course, you had the dual school system and the Japanese of Hawaii had bigger, had become bigger war bond contributions to Japan than the people of Japan had. It was

not unusual to see a number of them with headbands of various types and so on.

BB: The...

(Conversation off-mike)

BB: We're going to change the tape.

NS: Okay.

END OF TAPE #1

TAPE #2

BB: Tell me another story about Carl Eifler.

NS: Well, when I got over to India to fly the hump, you were briefed on—Burma was mostly occupied by the Japanese. And Burma collaborated with the Japanese thoroughly. Carl Eifler had established at Fort Hertz, the northern part of Burma, a outpost for the CIA [*Central Intelligence Agency*] type operation and rescuing hump pilots. So before I made the first flight, they called me in and they said, “Now, if you go down in this area, the code word is ‘Knot Head.’”

Now, “knot head” had been his term for his first sergeant, Sergeant Curl, on Sand Island. Sergeant Curl was now a captain leading this effort. But what a coincidence. I immediately knew who it was. I never met him over there, but I heard of his exploits. Some of them are rather dramatic.

BB: The Niihau people that had been brought over, Irene Harada and Shintani, the beekeeper.

NS: Well, Harada committed suicide.

BB: The wife.

NS: The wife, Irene.

BB: Irene. And Shintani was the beekeeper.

NS: Yes.

BB: When were they brought over and can you talk about them a little bit? Did you see them...

NS: I don't know when they were brought over. You know, I was there, say, from fifteenth of January 'til the Battle of Midway, somewhere in that period.

BB: How did they behave in that period?

NS: Well, the women were in their own barracks and compound. Carl Eifler's wife was the matron of it. We saw them at a distance. To the best of my

knowledge, there was no interrogations or brutality on Sand Island. Now I would think probably at Fort Shafter is where the truth was sought.

BB: Right. But tell me about a typical day on Sand Island...

NS: Well...

BB: ...for you and a prisoner.

NS: If you want to here a little bit of seamy one...

BB: Sure.

NS: ...at one point, I was a guard. And you took the prisoners with a shotgun down to the laundry, to do their laundry. I was pushing VonBuesing and a local Italian who became well known in Honolulu and several others. And VonBuesing started taunting me. He said, "Look at the little boy with a gun! I could take it away from him."

And I stopped back about four paces and it was a shotgun with about eight rounds of buckshot in it. I said, "Try it."

And this Italian fellow said, "Hey, Count Buesing, shut up! You get another asshole where you got one already! He mad!" (Laughs)

This was a typical thing. You never let anybody get in between you and your prisoner. Eifler would try to do just that, to teach everybody what was going on. The guard duty, twelve-on, twelve-off. You'd walk a guard—and I can remember getting so tired and sleepy, there'd be a water faucet at one end and I'd take my helmet off and turn the water on my head each time to keep going. Eifler would get out and start pacing you and try to take your gun away from you.

Another time, we would lock a patrol out. Now Sand Island at that time had a small golf course on it. And we would have a patrol out at night. I had the patrol one night and I told the guy on the guard gate, "If Eifler comes out, slam that gate."

I could hear in those days. And I'd hear the gate slam, so I knew he was out there somewhere. So we start pacing each other and I finally catch him out in the middle of the golf course and I yell, "Halt! Who goes there?"

And he says, "Commandant Eifler," is the way he referred to himself.

I said, "Advance to be recognized. Bend over so I can see the bars on your shoulders."

That's when they wore them up here. And he came closer and I said, "Halt! What's your first sergeant's nickname?"

"Knot head!" (Laughs)

And finally I said, "You're recognized."

And I will tell you as it was, he grabs the gun out of my hand and he says, "You goddamn little pint of piss! They could have heard you in Honolulu!"

He took a bunch of civilians and turned them into soldiers in a hurry. He would line them up. He ran an OCS. He said, “Every man in this outfit will be an officer someday.”

He lined us up, facing each other and he'd say, “Put that man at attention.”

The guy would say, “Attention.”

He said, “Goddamn it! It isn't attention, you say ten-hut! Let me here it!”

And he ran a training school along with it. He was a fascinating person.

BB: Were you armed with shotgun? Were there any other arms?

NS: He had a BAR [*Browning air rifle*]. There were some—we mainly used shotguns.

BB: Were they army issue shotguns or civilian?

NS: No, they were MP shotguns. They had an extended tube underneath. I think they held seven or eight rounds. [*Mr. Spitzer states we had the before mentioned Lee Enfields rifles, although they were not carried while guarding detainees. The Sergeants on the gates carried 45's.*]

BB: What did the prisoners do on an average day?

NS: Mill around. They didn't really have much to do. They played a little, few games. Now you know one of the several interesting things about Eifler, we had a barge and a tugboat to get out there. He decides we ought to have a fire engine. So he takes about five or six of us and we go ashore and we go up to Beretania Street, to the firehouse. He looks the engine over and he says, "Hey, this is a beauty."

Guy starts telling him all about it. He gets on it, starts it, drives it down, puts it on the barge and we take it out to Sand Island! (Laughs) And one night when the barracks catches on fire, Eifler comes charging down, puts on the chief's hat. I was a hose man. Now a hose man rides on the back. If you

yell, "Nozzle," you put the nozzle on and dive off and they run down to the hydrant. If they yell, "Hose," it's the reverse.

They yell, "Hose," I fall off and we don't have a coupler to the hydrant! At which point we sit and watch the barracks burn up and Eifler is ringing the bell and blowing the siren! (Laughs)

BB: Were any of the prisoners put to work or school or anything?

NS: They, he ran an inspection of some type. He would come in and make sure the tents were perfectly aligned. They dug trenches for protection. You know, a couple of Japanese planes sometime in February or so dropped a couple bombs and Sand Island was the only place that was allowed to keep the lights on. Every place else went out. Eifler, I can hear him now yelling, "Shoot the first man that moves."

He was a dramatic person.

BB: Were the prisoners allowed visitors?

NS: No. No.

BB: When were the first prisoners shipped off to the Mainland?

NS: I have no idea. I probably, I left—I think I was the second person to leave. Dick Lindsay had gone to the navy as a naval training. And I left, as I said, sometime just before the Battle of Midway.

BB: The internment camps were moved out to Pearl City at a later date.

NS: Yes, yes. Now I read one book by, I think it was *Incident on Niihau* [*Note: The Niihau Incident by Allen Beckman*], in which the guy talks about Irene, the wife, could hear the prisoners being beaten by Carl Eifler. But they didn't mention his name, they said the husband of the wife of, the matron, who had been in the customs service. Eifler was not even on Oahu at that time. He had been a customs agent on the Arizona border, had known Stillwell when Stillwell was a major. Stillwell called him—they made him a

major while I was there and Eifler left. This story of beating people, I felt an agenda on the part of the person who wrote that book.

BB: Were any—did any prisoners ever get to a point where they had to be restrained or anything?

NS: There was a different category. After martial law was declared, we got the Oahu prisoners.

BB: Can you tell me about them?

NS: Pardon me?

BB: Tell me about the Oahu prisoners.

NS: Now they came out and were put in their own stockade and carted. One of them became our cook, a large Negro fellow by the name of Sugarfoot. He was a cook. One of the more amusing things, somewhere maybe in about March, they had drafted some locals and they sent them out to be with us.

One of them shows up in a private's uniform, but it was an officer's uniform, all cut. Big diamond on his finger. He was a wheel, you could tell. They put him out on guard duty and the guard duty consisted of about a ten-foot piece between two barbed wires around this compound. His shotgun starts going off. They rush out to find out what was going on, turns out he'd been the stoolpigeon that had turned in some of the Oahu prisoners and they had gotten a hook and were trying to drag him through into the compound! He didn't last long. (Laughs) They shipped him out immediately.

Now some of the Oahu prisoners were treated a little rougher than the detainees.

BB: What were there—do you know what crimes...

NS: Pardon me?

BB: What crimes they were in for?

NS: I understand everything from car theft, rape, robbery, anything. It was martial law. This is interesting to me, now with this present situation, with Afghanistan and the proposal of [*President George W.*] Bush's. Hawaii existed under martial law for about three years. Sometime in '44, I believe it was ended.

BB: What—do you remember when Sakamaki left?

NS: No, I don't. I left before he did. He was still there, to the best of my knowledge, when I left.

AG: When did he arrive?

NS: Pardon me?

AG: When did he arrive?

NS: I don't know. I think he was there when I got there, about the middle of January.

AG: How did the other Nisei prisoners... [*Note: Mr. Spitzer states that in several places in this oral history the interviewer refers to Nisei prisoners. At the time most of the Japanese detained were foreign born. They were considered to be enemy aliens. I would believe that less than 20% were Nisei.*]

NS: Pardon me?

AG: How did the other nisei prisoners receive him?

NS: What was that?

BB: How did the nisei prisoners react to Sakamaki?

NS: I think they held him in awe. You know...

BB: Was there any contact?

NS: They...

(Taping stops, then resumes)

NS: I was at Hickam.

BB: Okay. How did the other nisei internees react to Sakamaki?

NS: I think they held him in awe. You know, at that time, most of the internees were not nisei. They were first, they were the original arrivals. The niseis were very young. Some of 'em were in their teens, I suppose. I don't remember too many niseis. The people that they had picked up, the FBI had kept track of things like war bond contributions, contacts with Japan. Don't forget, some of these, a number of these Japanese went back and forth to Japan quite frequently. In fact, a number of them were in Japan when the war started.

BB: Do you know anything about the relationship between the FBI and the provost marshal?

NS: No, I don't.

BB: Did the FBI agents ever visit the camp or...

NS: Not the camp. The only one I ever saw was that incident up at Schofield. I understand they did a very good job and were not overly harsh.

BB: What was security like? Were you...

NS: What?

BB: What was security like at the camp? Were you able to take photographs or...

NS: No, no.

BB: ...talk to people?

NS: Security was tremendously tight. Our phone lines were tapped. Somehow someone had gotten our phone number and I had to do with the switchboard and that stuff. And a woman would call us occasionally. Then a man's voice would break in, who had been obviously listening to it. And she would get off. I don't believe she was with security. I believe she was someone that obtained the number and they were watching the line.

BB: So Mrs. Eifler was the matron of the women's camp?

NS: That is correct.

BB: What was she like?

NS: She was—Eifler was in his thirties. I'd say he was thirty-four, thirty-five, thirty-six. She was approximately the same age. I had very little contact with her. I saw her quite frequently.

BB: Was she a civilian or a...

NS: She was a civilian. Eifler made major just about the time he left for the CBI
[*China, Burma, India Theater*]. And he's a story in itself.

BB: Were you guys deputized by the military government in any way?

NS: What was that?

BB: Were you guys deputized by the military government?

NS: He?

BB: Any of you?

NS: No. No, we were all in the military. Now one instance, when I was transferred out, I was called in to the lieutenant colonel of my outfit in Schofield and he said, "You're going to a very dangerous assignment." He said, "If you have to shoot them, shoot them," and he gave quite a pep talk.

About five or six of us end up on a truck. We didn't know really where we were going. They drive us down to the waterfront, herd us onto this barge and took us to Sand Island, where Eifler immediately, last guy on the track, he gave him KP or something! (Laughs)

BB: Did you live on Sand Island in separate barracks?

NS: Oh, no, it was the old immigration station hospital. And we were assigned rooms in it. After several months, we even got a ready room. No liquor or anything, but I don't even remember any Coke. Every evening we had a sunrise, sunset ceremony. It was quite impressive.

BB: Did Sakamaki ever leave his compound?

NS: No.

BB: I mean, did he walk around?

NS: To the best of my knowledge, he never left it.

BB: Stayed in his room?

NS: Yeah, well or in the barbed wire surrounding it.

BB: How was he dressed in that period? Was he given a uniform?

NS: In a prison uniform. Well, by that I mean dungarees. (Laughs)

BB: My understanding is that he was given cigarettes and he used cigarettes to burn his face.

NS: Well, I don't know whether cigarettes or matches. The interesting thing, I've seen a number of articles about him and they always have this picture. And they mention the three burn marks under each eye. And it's the impression that he had them when he was captured. That is not what happened. It was later.

BB: And it appears, in those photographs, he appears, he's smiling.

NS: Yes. This is another reason I have always questioned in my own mind some of his statements. You know, here's a person that was forever disgraced. He was a non-person in Japan for years. He ends up head of the Toyota [*Motor Corp.*] distributorship in [*Sao Paulo, Brazil*]. He rehabilitated himself, as many of the Japanese have. Now I probably shouldn't say it, but this gentleman who was the dive-bomber pilot from Japan, he dropped on a bomb that didn't go off.

BB: Um...

NS: He flew prior to that in China. He flew at Pearl Harbor.

BB: Right.

NS: He flew all during the war. Now he's a revered person. I have a little different feeling. I suppose there are few of my generation are going to have to die off before the happy face comes back. You know when China, when the war ended, the Japanese were executing American pilots five days after

the war was over and the Japanese emperor sent one of the crown prince or somebody to get the army to surrender.

BB: [*Manchurian*] Kwantung Army.

NS: Yeah, Kwantung. The most—that army was the most vicious army that ever existed.

BB: What—did you have any—what was Sakamaki's, whenever you saw him, what was his general mood like? Was he depressed? Was he goofy or...

NS: No, he seemed quite happy, yet he had branded himself. I imagine what he mentally was going through was tremendous. I still don't believe his whole story.

BB: Do you know if he was ever examined by a psychologist?

NS: I don't know. I would think that would be a very interesting subject.

BB: What was the attitude of the guards towards Sakamaki?

NS: You know this group of guards that we had were all a fairly well educated people. They were interested. They felt a little pride, I think, in having the first prisoner-of-war. I didn't find any antagonism as such. They were rather high caliber bunch of people.

BB: What was the feeling of the guards towards the internees?

NS: You know, at times we were pretty disgusted. At night, they would bow and certain rituals. They'd wear their headbands. There were a number of them—and now, I think an interesting subject would be how many of them returned to Japan after the war was over. Do you know?

BB: A number of 'em and a number were repatriated before the war was over.

NS: Yes.

BB: What about the European prisoners?

NS: Well, the American—you probably know about Dr. Zimmerman. He was a constant problem in arguments and so on. There was this Count VonBuesing was a tremendous problem. His manager, who was a, looked like he was about thirty-five, a good-looking, bubbly Danish fellow. Seems to hold some weight in the camp. That was really not in my area.

BB: What was—do you have any idea as the ratio of Europeans to Japanese?

NS: I would say it was about fifty-fifty. Well, maybe after the Oahu prisoners started coming in. I'd say probably Orientals were thirty percent. The Oahu prisoners rapidly built up.

BB: The Oahu prisoners, did they include military prisoners?

NS: Pardon me?

BB: Did the Oahu prisoners include military prisoners or were they all...

NS: Not that I know of. They were—those who violated the military law in effect.

BB: So there's a separate stockade for military prisoners.

NS: Yes, yes.

BB: Where was that at?

NS: It was on the island. You had interestingly, the prisoners had to build their own things. When originally Sand Island was established, Eifler received a bunch of prisoners, some wood, barbed wire and so on, and the prisoners actually built their own facilities.

BB: You guys have anything else?

AG: We've got about five more minutes to wrap up. I just want to ask you about three more questions.

NS: Sure.

AG: Your personal feelings.

NS: What?

AG: Your personal feelings about Sakamaki. What's your personal opinion about him?

NS: Well, I think, as I've indicated, that he was rather devious. I'm not sure that we really know what he did on December 7. That is my personal feeling.

AG: And you expressed to me that you thought he was a very intelligent man.

NS: Yes. Obviously. He'd graduated number two in his military class. I heard it was [*nineteen*] forty, but I think it was before that.

AG: Now, you've read articles about him since his return to Japan. Do you know if he ever came back to Hawaii in any capacity?

NS: I—Sakamaki?

AG: Yes.

NS: I believe he did. He visited Fredericksburg, Texas. He became quite a celebrity in some areas.

BB: One of the things that surprised him when he went back to Japan after the war is that women were throwing themselves at him.

NS: Really.

BB: But the men wouldn't talk to him.

NS: Yeah. He became a non-person for a while. But then he obviously overcame that as he rose rather high in the Toyota [*Motor Corp.*] business.

BB: But he had to go to South America to do it.

NS: Well, now is it true that he was a Christian, that he turned to Christianity?

BB: No. He—you may be thinking of [*Commander Mitsuo*] Fuchida.

NS: Well, I've heard he'd been a Christian missionary to Latin America shortly after the war.

BB: That was Fuchida.

NS: Oh.

BB: The head of the air attack.

NS: Yeah.

BB: Did you, as guards, did you hear, what did you hear about what happened on Niihau?

NS: We heard—we knew pretty well what had happened. We also heard about other things, which I don't know whether they were true. Supposedly we had a Japanese prisoner that had a radio station at Wahiawa and near Schofield, possibly. He'd had a restaurant out there. We heard all—you know the rumors were all over the place. We heard that there were internees that had been spies. Now, I don't know.

BB: There was a Japanese gentleman killed in Kaneohe, in the summer of '42, signaling a submarine.

NS: What was that again?

BB: There was a Japanese guy killed in Kaneohe.

NS: Yeah.

BB: During the summer of 1942, he was on the beach signaling a submarine.

NS: Really.

BB: Did you guys hear anything about that?

NS: No. We heard of spy efforts. HA-SA-BEE is the one that I remember. And I remember it for one reason, somebody sees him and recognize him and they said, "There's the many time killed HA-SA-BEE."

Supposedly he had been killed at Wahiawa, yet we had him in the camp.

BB: What about Otto Kuehn and his family?

NS: I don't know about that.

BB: He was the German spy.

NS: Yes, yes.

BB: Were his people put in the camp?

NS: I don't know. There were a number of Italians in it. But the number, of course, against the population, was very small. There was not a massive roundup down there.

BB: Was the roundup very selective?

NS: I would think it was. I believe, from what I heard, the FBI were well on top of the situation, except (laughs) for December 7!

BB: Right.

NS: Well, who did the actual roundup? Was it FBI agents, or were they aided by the army?

BB: I don't know. I think we're done.

NS: Okay.

AG: Great.

NS: And I've gotten some information I didn't have and I appreciate it. It's been a fascinating theme to me all my life.

BB: See, judging by the evidence, I firmly believe Sakamaki killed his own crewman.

NS: Yes.

BB: And he's had problems ever since dealing with that.

NS: This is the first time I've heard that and I always felt that. The story we heard, Sakamaki's vessel hit the reef so fast, at three knots, (chuckles) that he was killed by a blow on the head.

BB: I can tell you that in Sydney Harbor, the midget submarines that were captured there, the skippers there executed their crewmen.

NS: What is that?

BB: In Sydney in Australia.

NS: Oh really.

BB: And also in Madagascar where they had been.

NS: I was amazed how many they had. They had eighty or ninety of them, didn't they?

BB: Midgets?

NS: Yes.

BB: Not here.

NS: No, no. I mean total in their fleet.

BB: Oh, no it was more like 300 or 400.

NS: Really? And were they effective anywhere else?

BB: Philippines they worked pretty well. They were not made to do what they did at Pearl. They were made to attack very fast on the ocean.

NS: Now...

BB: They weren't made to sneak into harbors.

NS: Now, you know, my own personal feeling, I get rather upset with this business of interning the Japanese. They were interned on the Pacific coast after word came back from Hong Kong, Manila, Singapore and Niihau, and it was the prudent thing to do. And the East Coast, they were not interned. In fact, I've had friends that were in war defense work and they actually employed them. Even on the West Coast, they were allowed to go to schools. Contrast that to what happened at Santo Tomas [*University, POW camp Manila, P.I.*] or what happened at Hong Kong to the Canadian civilians.

BB: Yeah.

NS: This reconstruction that Japan has accomplished with the public is unbelievable. I have been to Japan a number of times. I stay at the military hotel there. And it bothers me.

BB: It bothers a lot of people.

NS: Yeah, but you don't hear 'em say it. It's not popular...

END OF INTERVIEW