

Interviewee: Tom Takeshi Oye

Interviewer: Thomas Saylor

Date of interview: 1 October 2002

Location: living room of the Oye home, Edina, MN

Transcribed by: Linda Gerber, November 2002

Edited by: Thomas Saylor, January 2003

Tom Takeshi Oye was born on 22 October 1918 in Hillsdale, Oregon. The son of Japanese immigrant parents, he graduated from high school in Salem, Oregon, in 1936 and from Willamette University in 1941. After the US entered the war in December 1941, Tom's foreign-born parents were placed in internment camps, first in California and then Colorado. Tom, a Nisei (born in the US to Japanese immigrant parents) was not interned, but rather inducted into the US Army in February 1942.

Tom did Basic Training at Camp Robinson, Arkansas, and then was stationed at Camp Crowder, Missouri, working in personnel administration. He was married in 1943 (wife Martha), while on leave. In 1944 he was posted to Co B, 100th Battalion, 442nd Regimental Combat Team, and shipped to Europe. This unit was attached to the 34th Infantry Division in Italy, and the 36th Infantry Division in France. After V-E Day in May 1945, Tom spent several months on occupation duty in northern Italy, and was appointed sergeant major of the 100th battalion, before being rotated back to the US and, in November 1945, discharged. Tom remained in the Army Reserve, finally retiring with the rank of lieutenant colonel.

Again a civilian, Tom completed his law studies at DePaul University and received his J.D. degree, and worked many years in the credit department of General Mills; he retired in 1984 from the Minneapolis office as national credit manager, with more than 30 years service. He died in 2004.

Civic activities included: the VFW, Reserve Officers Association, the Japanese American Citizens League, and Human Relations for the City of Edina.

Bronze Star recipient.

Tom relates his experience as a Nisei soldier fighting in Europe in the US Army, while his parents remained in a US government internment camp. He also talks at some length about postwar experiences readjusting, and attending law school using GI Bill benefits.

Interview Key:

T = Thomas Saylor

O = Tom Oye

[text] = words added by editor, either for clarification or explanation

(*) = words or phrase unclear**

NOTE: interview has been edited for clarity

Tape 1, Side a. Counter begins at 000.

T: Today is the 1st of October 2002 and this is the interview with Mr. Tom Oye. First, Tom, on the record, I want to thank you very much for taking time today to speak with me. Thank you very much. I have spoken with you a little bit already and let me just go over some of the things that I've learned. You were born the 22nd of October 1918 in Oregon, of Japanese immigrant parents. Your dad came over around 1900 and your mom 1906. You had one sister who lived past infancy. You graduated from Salem High School in Salem, Oregon in 1937. Attended college at Willamette University and graduated in 1941. What did you study by the way?

O: My major was econ, but I continued on. At that time, the major program was still in effect. If you had three years of liberal arts you could get your fourth year in law school and get your degree at the end of that period and that's what I did.

T: That was still in 1941, May or June.

O: June of '41.

T: You were inducted, drafted, into the US Army in February of 1942. You were ultimately discharged in November of 1945. You served in the European Theater from September 1944 until just before your discharge, and you ended the war in Italy. You were on occupation duty in Italy for a number of months. You were married before you went overseas, in 1943, and your wife's name is Martha. When you came back from service you were in Chicago until about the mid-1960s, when you moved to the Twin Cities area, settling in Edina. You worked in Chicago and here in the Twin Cities areas for General Mills, in the Credit Department, and you retired in 1984. It's amazing how we can summarize our life in just a few minutes, sometimes, isn't it? *(both laugh)*

I want to go back to the time when you were in college. In fact when you were just out of college. The United States entered the war in December of 1941 when Pearl Harbor was attacked. Let me ask you, Tom, do you remember what you were doing when you first heard that news?

(1, A, 54)

O: Yes. My wife to be, who lived in Seattle, had come for a visit that particular weekend, and we got the news at the Law School Library about mid-morning, about ten o'clock, and realized that life would be different.

T: How did the news come to you? Was it over the radio or did someone tell you?

O: No, the radio.

T: How would you describe the reaction of your family, of your wife to be, when that news became clear?

O: It was quite a shock because we didn't know, as people of Japanese background, how the general public would react to this. It was a matter of grave concern.

T: You yourself, born in 1918, were of prime draft age. Did it occur to you or did you begin to think that this could mean military service for you?

O: Yes, because as soon as that news came some of my classmates went to Portland, Oregon, to enlist. So I knew that I would get the call.

T: Those classmates of yours who you mentioned went to Portland to enlist—was it your impression they went to Portland to enlist as a response to the US being involved in the war now?

O: Oh, absolutely. Yes.

T: How about yourself? Did you consider going off to Portland to enlist?

O: No, because first of all, I had my family. I had to be concerned about them, as to what would happen to them if I went in the service. No, I didn't consider going to enlist.

T: It wasn't long thereafter that the Army got you anyway, in February of 1942. In the meantime, between December and February, a number of things happened. When were your folks moved to the internment camp?

O: June of '42.

T: So for a number of months they remained in the Salem area. Was there concern on your part about outbursts of anti-Japanese sentiment?

O: I was more curious as to what the reaction would be. Living in Salem I was connected with other people who were not of Japanese background. They were my friends, and I didn't feel that that friendship would cease. I was not really concerned.

T: Was there an impact? Were any of your friends or acquaintances suddenly different towards you?

O: I never felt that.

T: You went off to service in February 1942. Were you concerned at all, leaving your folks and your sister behind?

O: To a certain extent, because my folks were older. My dad was at that time close to sixty-five, and [my mother] was just a year younger so she would be sixty-three, sixty-four. Somewhere in that range. My sister was four years younger [than me], so she was about eighteen or nineteen. I was quite concerned as to how they would get along in retirement because we were very poor. We didn't have a large retirement fund. Yes, I was concerned about them in that regard.

T: Was your sister still living at home with your parents?

O: Yes.

T: What were you doing at this time? You finished school in 1941. Were you working?

O: No. I was in Law School.

(1, A, 145)

T: That would be the one year program you talked about.

O: Yes. And working on the side too, on the farm.

T: So you were keeping very busy between going to school and working on the farm.

O: Yes.

T: Where is Willamette College, is that in Salem?

O: It's in Salem, Oregon.

T: So school and the farm were relatively close to each other.

O: About six miles.

T: It was quite convenient actually, wasn't it?

O: Yes.

T: When you went to the service, you said you were inducted at Fort Lewis, Washington.

O: Right.

T: Can you describe the induction? Were there other Japanese-Americans there, or were you among a bunch of people who weren't like yourself?

O: Of the ones that were in the immediate group, my immediate group, there was only one other Japanese-American. He was from Gaston, which is a few miles from Portland. A farm area.

T: Nobody that you knew in this whole group.

O: No.

T: How did the induction process go at Fort Lewis? Were you in any way, from your perception, singled out because you were Japanese-American?

O: Didn't feel that at all. Just part of the Army. We were under orders to go to Camp Robinson in Arkansas, and that was it. That would have been the latter part of February [1942 that we arrived there].

T: Now Arkansas is a long way from the Pacific Northwest. Is that the first time you'd been in that part of the country?

O: That's right.

T: What can you say about Arkansas, which is part of the American South?

O: The only thing that I remember about Arkansas, is that Arkansas had separate facilities for the blacks and the whites. One time, going in to Little Rock on a weekend, I used the black facilities because I didn't know the difference. And when I came out, a white person approached me and said, "You know, you're not supposed to use the black facilities. That's for black folks. You use the white." So this was interesting, because the Army had transferred us off of the West Coast because we weren't fit to be there, and here we are in Arkansas and they're telling me that blacks are black and you are not a black, so you have to use the white.

T: That's very interesting. On the West Coast Japanese-Americans like yourself were not white, and yet in the South, because the focus was on blacks, you were, in a larger sense, included with white people.

O: Yes.

T: Did you encounter segregation or those kind of things all over Little Rock or the South?

O: Yes. And the results were a riot there of black troops. They were segregated.

T: Was this at Camp Robinson, where you were?

O: Yes. Not at camp but in town someplace. I didn't actually witness it, but some of the people were telling me that they had a big fight in the city.

T: As far as going into the service, for your folks this meant, of course, that you were no longer going to be around the house to help. What was their response when you told them the news that you had to report for the draft?

O: Woodburn was the draft station for our area. It's about six or seven miles away. A friend of mine came to pick me up because my folks didn't drive. As I got ready to leave, my dad came down the pathway from the house and he said to me, "You're an American citizen. You owe your life to your country." He said, "I'm not a citizen, but you are. Be sure you do your job." He took the time to tell me that. He came out of the house when we were about ready to leave for Woodburn.

T: Around the house, Tom, did you speak Japanese or English?

O: Japanese.

T: Did he tell you that in Japanese?

O: Yes.

T: Tom, how did your mother respond to this news that you were departing?

O: They were carryover from the feudal system of Japan, and under the feudal system what the lord or master said was the law. They translated that to the US citizenship that, whatever the country says, it's your duty to respond to that. That was the attitude of my dad in particular. My mother was not quite as articulate as he was, but she felt the same way.

(1, A, 231)

T: Do you think that understanding made it easier for them to see you go?

O: Oh, yes, I think very much so. I think that's why the evacuation [of Japanese and Japanese-Americans] went without too much trouble, because the US Government was telling them, "You have to go to the camp." There's a Japanese phrase that applies which is *shika taganai*, which means, literally, there's no pattern for us to follow otherwise. I mean, if the government says go, that's it. Whether you like it or not, that's it. We have to go.

T: Do you think that influenced you as well as the son of Japanese parents?

O: I'm sure that a lot of that carried over into our generation, yes. That's why I heard, I didn't hear this directly but my friend was telling me, when the students were raising all sorts of hell with the University [of Minnesota] during the Vietnam War, one of the participants was a third generation Japanese. I heard that her mother was very much upset that here her daughter would be going against the rules of the University and joining that dissident group.

T: Very interesting.

O: Yes. I think a lot of us second generation were very reluctant to march or go against some rule or edict of the governing body.

T: You're saying, I think, that the removal of Japanese-Americans from the West Coast to these camps was made easier because of this understanding of the state and one's loyalty or obedience to the state.

O: Sure, because a lot of people in camps were American citizens. There were maybe a couple or three that resisted this or at least made legal moves, but the vast majority just said, "That's it."

T: And the ones like your parents that had come from Japan were still, they had been born and raised in Japan many of them, and were still Japanese citizens.

O: Yes.

T: When you got to Camp Robinson, your Basic Training group, was it also Japanese-Americans or was it just a normal group of guys?

O: No. Two Japanese Americans were in that training group that I was in.

T: What can you say about Basic Training in Arkansas?

O: It was an introduction to a new way of life. Coming in as a civilian. Interesting. First time I ever saw a flying squirrel (*laughs*).

T: You were there during the summer too, right?

O: Yes.

T: What can you say about the weather down there?

O: Hot and humid, but before it got too bad we were transferred to Camp Crowder in Missouri because our training had ended. We had finished our training period and we got orders to go to Camp Crowder, Missouri.

T: They did a lot of communications training there at Camp Crowder. Were you involved in some of that?

O: No. We were in what's known as the Detached Enlisted Men's List, or DEML, which means that we had no real parent unit. We were detached. Most of the people that came through the DEML program were people that were either ready for assignment to another unit or people that were... we had some that were really disabled, either mentally or in some way physically. They were without an assigned unit. They were not part of the Camp Crowder table of organization and equipment. For instance, our promotions were allocated by Corps Headquarters. I think Corps Headquarters was in Nebraska someplace, and then I was in personnel administration, so the first sergeant and I would take this list of promotions and allot them out to various people that we thought deserved that rank.

T: How long did you stay at Camp Crowder?

O: Until we went into combat training. That was from April of '43 until probably about March of '44. Well, let's see... I was at Crowder from shortly after Basic Training until... about a year, I believe.

T: For combat training then, where did you go for that? Were you also at Camp Crowder for that combat training?

O: No. Combat training was at Fort McClellan, Alabama.

T: Well, you're certainly staying in parts of the South here, aren't you? From Arkansas to Missouri, and now to Alabama.

O: Yes, right.

(1, A, 310)

T: This training in Alabama, your time in Camp Crowder, during this time your parents were in a camp at Tule Lake, California, and then at Amache, Colorado.

O: Yes.

T: How close of contact did you have with them during this time?

O: Just letters. I think I made... no, no phone calls.

T: Did you have any leave to go home and visit them?

O: When they were in Tule Lake, that was a restricted area to Japanese-Americans so I couldn't go there.

T: You couldn't even go to see them?

O: No. In fact, one of the dramatic incidents at Camp Crowder was a man whose mother was in a TB asylum in Tacoma, Washington. They hadn't moved her [to a camp] because of her illness. He wanted to go and see her, because he had received notice that she was getting very frail. He couldn't go and I got a call. The first sergeant came and said, "The colonel, the commandant of the camp, wants us to talk to (his name was) Su Yamada, because we can't let him go to Tacoma because that's a restricted zone. He's threatening to go AWOL to go there anyway. So we've got to talk to him."

The colonel came and picked us up and we got a hold of Su Yamada and explained the situation. That the colonel would very much like to see him go to Tacoma but his hand is tied because the orders are that no one of Japanese ancestry can go into that restricted area. So Su was very upset, of course, and we didn't know whether he would actually go AWOL or not. He apparently thought it over and decided that he would stay with the orders and not go. The interesting thing about that is when I got the overseas call, various Camp Crowder people were in the units because they had been sent to Shelby as a cadre, and I had heard that this Yamada was field commissioned as a second lieutenant, so I went to see him. Sure enough, Su was always, he was kind of a thin fellow who had been teased by his fellow soldiers. Here he was with the bars [indicating lieutenant rank] and these guys that used to tease him were now saying, "Yes, Sir, lieutenant. We'll do this. We'll do that."

T: So he had been overseas by this time? He was field commissioned overseas?

O: Yes, because we at Fort McClellan went over as replacements, so these people had been in battle, and that's how he got his field commission.

T: Your contact with your parents, then, was essentially through letters.

O: Yes. My sister used to write. My folks weren't too good in English, so I never got a letter from them. My sister wrote quite frequently.

T: Were you concerned for your folks?

O: I was mainly concerned about what they would do after camp life. In fact, my wife raised that concern when I was still at Camp Crowder. She said, "Well, what's going to happen to your folks?" My attitude was, and I told her this, "Uncle Sam put them there. I'm going to leave it to Uncle Sam to get them out and get them situated." My sister, who by this time had her college degree, decided that... She had contacts, mainly Quaker contacts, and they had suggested that Yellow Springs, Ohio, where [Antioch] College was and also various research stations, that would be the place for them to go to work, as domestics or handyman or whatever. So that's what they did. My mother was a housekeeper for various people. My father was a handyman for one of the research institutes.

T: And they remained in Yellow Springs, Ohio?

O: They remained there until they were, I think dad was probably seventy-five, mother was seventy-four. They joined my sister and her husband in Salt Lake City, where he was professor at Westminster College. So they joined them, and when my brother-in-law got a job at Morningside College they followed and then eventually the same time that I came to Minneapolis, he got an offer at Hamline [University in St. Paul] to head the Philosophy department. I think he got the chair right off the bat. That's where they were and they eventually had to go to a care center and passed away. That would be over ten years ago.

End of Side A. Side B begins at counter 381.

T: How old were your folks when they died?

O: My dad was ninety-four when he passed away. My mother lived a few years longer—she was ninety-six. So that would be more than ten years ago. It was fifteen, maybe twenty.

T: But they were in the Twin Cities area when they passed away.

O; Oh, sure. Yes.

T: The letters that you got from your sister, what kind of things did she relate to you about how things were going for your folks, or for her, in the camp?

O: That was mainly what her letters contained. Some of those letters came after she got into college and she was telling me how things were going with her. What she planned to do. She got her Masters [Degree] in clinical psych, and she was telling me about how she was preparing for that.

T: What tone did her letters have? Was she angry, optimistic, accepting? How would you describe the way she talked about that time?

O: I'd say accepting.

T: How about from your end, then, as you thought about that situation and being in the service? What was your attitude?

O: My thought was that, of course, being uprooted was a terrible experience, so I recognized that. But at the same time there was a dispersing of people of Japanese out of ghettos, out of the West Coast area. Now these ghettos were not always poverty-stricken, by any means, but nevertheless it was segregated. The outlook of many Nisei was pretty much confined to the West Coast. Now they were away from

that environment and the whole field of the arts and business was open. So I felt that that was one of the positive aspects of the evacuation.

T: So a silver lining to the dark cloud, in a sense, that the concentrations of Japanese Americans in the West Coast were now really broken up.

O: Yes.

T: Forcefully, but they were broken up.

O: Yes.

T: For example, your sister never went back to the West Coast.

O: Oh, no. And I might never have left.

T: That's very interesting. Tom, how often did you write to your folks?

O: Oh, maybe... not that often, because I was too busy soldiering. Maybe a couple times a month, something of that sort.

T: How often did you get mail from your sister?

O: Probably about the same. A couple times a month.

T: Were you in touch with other people from your life, your time in Oregon?

O: To a certain extent. Not on a regular basis, but every once in a while I would think of my friends. For instance, a very good friend of mine was in the Air Corps. I used to write to his sister once in a while. Then he was shot down, so then I sent letters to our mutual friends to see if they knew anything about what had happened to Roger. He was in Europe.

(1, B, 460)

T: You spent a lot of time at Camp Crowder and then in combat training in Alabama surrounded by, what I'm hearing is, by mostly non-Japanese Americans.

O: Oh, yes. They were Japanese-Americans. We were the DEML unit. That was still at Camp Crowder. And then most were transferred to Camp Shelby to activate the 442nd Regimental Combat Team. Those remaining Japanese were sent to Fort McClellan for combat training.

T: So when you went to Fort McClellan you were among Japanese-Americans there.

O: Oh, sure.

T: So the Army, from the group at Camp Crowder, did some separation of people into a Japanese American group, and a group that was not Japanese-American, and sent some to Camp Shelby and some elsewhere.

O: Camp Shelby was the training grounds for the Japanese-Americans in the 442nd Regimental Combat Team. Those of us that remained at Camp Crowder went to McClellan as replacements for combat training, for replacing the wounded and those that were transferred to other units out of the regimental combat team.

T: So the regimental combat team was being trained, and you were in a group being trained as replacements for that group.

O: That's right.

T: So the actual training of the group came first, and the replacement group was trained after?

O: Yes. After.

T: Was this unit, just so I am clear on this, was this basically a Japanese-American unit then?

O: Yes. Except a lot of the officers were white, and the major command was white. The battalion commander, regimental commander was white. All the battalion commanders were white. Until after the war, when the 100th Infantry Battalion came under the command of Lt. Colonel Fukuda. He was the only Japanese-American in that unit that had a major command.

T: For you, in this unit now, Japanese-Americans with white officers, how did you feel about that? That your unit was now essentially racially segregated and that the officers were white. How did you feel about all that?

O: It really didn't make much difference. They were only critical of how this command functioned. If it was a good commander, there was no problem. If the commander was not efficient, then there was some grumbling.

T: When you were in Alabama, what kind of training were you doing? Can you describe the training?

O: It was infantry combat training, which involved long hikes, night maneuvers, also training under adverse weather conditions, crawling through mud, things of this sort.

T: What we think of as typical infantry training.

O: Yes. I think [the training] was at least six weeks.

T: What was the nearest city or town to where you were?

O: We weren't too far from Birmingham [Alabama].

T: Did you have a chance to get off the base and get to town at all when you were in Alabama?

O: Yes.

T: You're slowly becoming familiarized with the South after having been in Arkansas and Missouri. How did Alabama compare to those two places as far as the social surroundings?

O: I'd say about the same.

T: A place where you noticed segregation of blacks and whites, for example?

O: Yes. Yes, same.

T: Separate facilities and these kind of things.

O: Yes.

T: Were you treated any differently from the way you had been treated by the civilian population in Arkansas or Missouri?

O: No, about the same. One incident. I wasn't there at the time, but I think it was before I came in. They tell of a group of Japanese-Americans going in to Joplin, Missouri. It was the closest large city [to Camp Crowder]. And they were in a bar, and I guess someone either made a wisecrack or challenged one of the fellows, who happened to be a judo expert. He threw the guy right through the plate glass window, and that was the last time we ever heard of anyone being challenged (*chuckles*).

T: Hearing stories like that, of people being challenged, were you at all uncomfortable going to town in Missouri or Alabama?

O: No.

(1, B, 558)

T: After training in Alabama, I guess it was clear you were going to be shipped overseas.

O: Yes.

T: Was it clear to you yet where you were going? To the Pacific or to Europe?

O: We were pretty sure it would be Europe, because the people that would be sent to Japan or to the east front would be people trained in military intelligence here at Fort Snelling [in Minneapolis]. At this point we were still at war with Japan, but we were still also at war with Germany. So we knew that we were headed for the European front. The 442nd was in Italy, so we knew we were going to be in Italy. We didn't know that we were going to be attached to the 36th [Infantry Division] in France, so after we got there we learned that we were going to be shipped to France.

T: How long were you in Italy before you were shipped to France?

O: I'd say just a few weeks.

T: So you got to Italy, basically learned your surroundings, and you were shipped immediately to France.

O: Yes. Went through Marseilles.

T: When the war ended, were you in France or Germany then?

O: No, we were in Italy.

T: You were back in Italy?

O: Yes.

T: As I try to get a handle on where you were and when, this was September 1944 you got to Italy.

O: Yes.

T: So by October 1944 you were in France?

O: Yes.

T: Can you help as far as where you were during the rest of 1944 and early 1945 then?

O: We went to Vosges Mountains [in eastern France]. That's where we had the rescue of the Lost Battalion incident. That would be near Bruyeres. Late September, early October, and we stayed in France until the snow came, so that would have been maybe like late October, and then we were transferred to the Riviera [down in southern France, on the Mediterranean]. And we went through a period called the

Champagne Campaign, because we were holding a static front, which means that we were pretty much in a fixed position. Although German shells would occasionally come over, and some patrols would come through. But other than that action was minimal. Our Company Headquarters in Menton, and I was in communications by that time, it was in a mansion in Menton, which is right north of [the French city of] Nice [near the border with Italy].

T: How long did you remain in that area?

O: I'd say about through Christmas, so probably about three, four months.

(1, B, 613)

T: When did you move from there, and where did you go?

O: We moved from there to Italy. Rejoined the 5th Army Group. Actually we were attached to the segregated African-American group, the 92nd Division. In Italy. Recaptured some of the areas held by the Germans, and then the war ended.

T: You were attached to this African-American unit. The Japanese-American unit was attached to this African-American unit.

O: Yes.

T: This was in the northern part of Italy?

O: Yes, around Milan, in that area. In the mountains.

T: So for a while there you were in contact with African-Americans on a somewhat regular basis?

O: Not too closely, because they were in their assigned units in their assignment of the battle and we were... there wasn't too much close contact with the troops themselves. They were holding their position and we were holding our position.

T: Was your unit supporting that unit, or was it sort of two units side by side almost?

O: We were supporting that unit. We were trying to take over the positions that they were holding. So they, I think, gradually moved out. We took over.

T: So you didn't have much contact with blacks in that situation?

O: No.

T: Did you come into contact with blacks in the service at any other time, either in the States or while you were in Europe?

O: No. At Camp Crowder there was a, I think he was a Puerto Rican. He was black, but he was quick to point out that he was not a black person. That's why he was with us, because of this. I'm pretty sure he was from Puerto Rico.

T: Had he been African-American he wouldn't have been in your unit.

O: He wasn't in our unit. He was in the DEML.

T: So your contact with blacks very limited.

O: Contact? Yes, very limited.

T: How about women in uniform? Did you come into contact with women as WACS or nurses or USO workers, Red Cross, anything like this?

O: There was a WAC unit at Camp Crowder, Missouri. A lot of them were in postal work. There were some in the medics, too.

T: So you saw them around camp doing different things.

O: Oh, sure.

T: What was your impression of women in uniform?

O: They were doing duty that ordinarily would be assigned to men who should be going overseas. I thought they were very valuable assets.

T: From your perspective, did you see women being treated fairly and with respect by other men in uniform?

O: I didn't have that much close contact with them. I couldn't evaluate that.

T: As part of the larger war effort against Germany in Europe, how did you perceive the Germans? What for you, what had you learned about Germans?

O: One thing that I learned was that, under their command system, if they lost for instance a captain, it was very difficult for others to fill that position. Whereas in the US Army, if you lost a captain, a PFC would fill that position and take over the troops. Under the German system they couldn't do that. I felt they were not as flexible as we were. And then later, I came into contact with POWs. They were just soldiers, soldiering for their country.

T: When you were in the service stateside, did the Army present any kind of information to you as soldiers about what kind of people the Germans were?

O: Not that I recall.

T: Was there any information presented by the military, films or talks what have you, about what kind of people the Japanese were?

O: I don't recall ever having had that presented to us.

T: You mentioned POWs. You were in Europe towards the end, and really until the end of the war, and after. Did you come into contact with German POWs?

O: Yes I did. Not close, not for any long period of time. But from time to time we would see German prisoners.

T: In what circumstances did you see them? Were they people who were just captured on the battlefield or were they large groups that had been collected?

O: The ones that I came in contact with were in small groups. Not too closely guarded. They were, well I remember one group was looking a certain group of Germans that they were going to connect with and they were more or less on their own.

(1, B, 698)

T: These Germans just wandering around.

O: Yes. Unarmed of course. This would be after the war.

T: Did you come into contact or observe German POWs before the end of the war?

O: No. From a distance, yes.

T: But not in any kind of personal contact or up close?

O: No.

T: Can you comment or say anything about how you observed German POWs being treated by Americans?

O: A lot of the ones I observed, I would say they were treated very well. Very well. There was no harassing movement or physically abusing them or this sort of thing. I never knew of that.

T: Especially as the war ended, you must have seen lots of ex-German military by that time.

O: Yes.

T: You were in France and Italy. Were you involved in combat situations at all during your time in France or Italy?

O: In France, yes, very much involved. Infantry man. Rifleman.

T: Can you talk a bit about your experience as a rifleman in a combat situation?

O: The only comment that I can make is that until I actually came into the combat field, I really didn't comprehend what actual combat involved. But when we came into an actual combat field and the bullets began to fly, I knew then that this was no fun and games. And I never saw an enemy soldier until we actually came near the point of rescuing the Lost Battalion. At that point the Germans were holding and, realizing that we were going to be pushing out, retreated. Except for some reason, one officer had somehow remained. He jumped out of the foxhole and started to run and then our riflemen got him. He suffered several shots. Just one individual. That's the only time that I saw a German soldier in combat. When this one soldier fell, he was carrying one of those [German Luger] pistols. The people that had shot that officer rushed to retrieve that pistol.

T: So a scramble for souvenirs?

O: Yes. I thought, boy, this is war. I wasn't surprised [by them scrambling out there for that pistol], but the reality of what war can do to men really struck me. I think it was that day we dug in for the night. Up above my foxhole were two dead Germans. That was the only time that I came that close to seeing an enemy soldier.

T: How did that impact you being right next to dead people, to dead soldiers?

O: I just accepted that as a battlefield condition.

T: Were there other instances, Mr. Oye, where you saw souvenir collecting or displays of things that people had taken?

O: The only other instance that I came to learn, I didn't actually see him do it, but there was a soldier in our Headquarters Company who used to go to the various POW gatherings [at the compounds and] he would get the pistols [from German soldiers]. And he would take this pistol and go to [the Italian port city of] Leghorn, where the Merchant Marine was. What he would do is exchange the pistol for cigarettes, and he would sell the cigarettes to the Italians.

T: He had a pretty good racket going for himself.

O: Oh, yes. It was rumored that he had purchased an apartment in Milan.

End of Tape 1. Tape 2, Side A begins at counter 000.

T: With some of his money?

O: Yes. So he had a lot of money, and he also was negotiating with people who were coming back to the States to take some of this money. He had someone over on the stateside who would then take that money. Not dollars and cents, it was hundreds and thousands. I spent four hours one night arguing with him that money means very little. [I said,] "If you have friends, you have treasures." He could never... He said, "Nuts to that." I found out later from my wife that he was married to my wife's second cousin or something like that. I subsequently heard that they were divorced. I said, "Well, she should never have married him in the first place."

T: He had money but he didn't have friends.

O: Yes.

T: Were there other instances of what we might call rackets or black marketing or this kind of trading that you were aware of?

O: That was the only one that I heard of. That I knew of, I should say.

T: You mentioned a few moments ago when you got to combat that it was different than you had expected. In the States had there been training to prepare you for combat?

O: Not until I went to [Fort] McClellan.

T: But at Fort McClellan was there training to prepare you for combat, of what it would be like?

O: Yes.

T: And yet when you got to combat, you said it was different than you had imagined.

O: It was the reality of it. More striking than training. The training helped us to adjust to the reality. Without that training it would have been just very difficult.

T: What did the training fail to get across? Or how was the real combat situation different from what your training had been like?

O: The incoming shells. You don't have that—at least we didn't have it. Even mock explosions, we didn't have that. Now here in battle you've got bullets, you've got hand grenades coming in, artillery shells coming in. So you have all of this in the reality of it that you didn't have in combat training.

T: I guess they can only make it so realistic.

O: That's right.

T: In a combat situation, were you around when there were casualties, American casualties, in the area where you were?

O: Yes.

T: How did you respond to that when suddenly you could see real casualties in your area, in your vicinity?

O: It was a reality that you were experiencing. In actual combat you sort of accepted that. You become pretty hardened to that because... Now some people couldn't adjust to that. And as a result, they suffered emotionally. You had to steel yourself to that and just keep going.

T: How do you do that? How did you do that?

(2, A, 81)

O: I don't know. I just looked upon the reality of the situation that had to be faced. Couldn't get away from it. I had to just take it. Now they used to, in my psychology course [when I was in college before 1941], I remember a professor talking about shell shock. He pointed out that shell shock occurs when your mind is kind of wandering. You know, you're thinking of that beautiful stream where you used to fish and all that, and then when the shell comes in your nervous system just is not able to adjust quickly to that. It just kind of falls apart and then you... more or less it's self-protection. You go into shell shock. I remembered that, so that when I was in combat I was concentrating on what was happening there.

T: Did you observe other people who were less successful at that than you?

O: Not too many incidences. One instance that was brought to my attention was a sergeant who was a top notch garrison sergeant. He was just GI all the way. He had suffered shell shock, and this doesn't make sense, but shell shock was viewed by many as a weakness. He just couldn't take it, which is not the way to look at shell shock. But that's the way they looked at it. Most of the soldiers that I knew were concentrating intensely on what was at hand.

T: And concentration for you was the key for keeping yourself focused ahead.

O: Yes.

T: After a combat situation, was there a let down or a relaxation? How do you come down from that?

O: I don't know. You just adjust to what's there. I guess some people found it difficult, but most of us just accepted that we were going through war. "Now war's over and now we have to concentrate on what's ahead of us as civilians."

T: Very interesting. During your time in Italy and France, did you have free time? What did you like to do when you were off duty, or when you had leave or a pass in Italy?

O: Mainly sightseeing, seeing what was around. Going to various places of interest. The cathedral in Milan, the Leaning Tower of Pisa.

T: So you had some chance to travel around.

O: Yes.

T: In your observation, with a lot of American servicemen in Italy both during the war and after the war, was alcohol consumption a problem?

O: Alcohol was readily available, but I didn't encounter any instance where it was getting out of hand. Although there was a lot of drinking. But it wasn't totally uncontrollable.

(2, A, 149)

T: Also during your time in France or Italy, did you come into contact with the local civilian populations, French people or Italian people?

O: To a certain extent. I noticed that when I was in France I had occasion—I don't know how this happened to be—but I had occasion to observe children. Now in France, if you gave them, at least my experience was, if you gave them a chocolate bar and there were two or three, they would split it. But in Italy they wouldn't do that. I suppose that was because Italy economically was having a tougher time than France.

T: How about adults when you were in any towns in France or Italy, did you come into contact with local adult populations?

O: Not to any great extent. In France, at headquarters we had a cook who was an Italian. She was very considerate and obviously was not too happy with the Germans occupying France or any part of her area. On New Year's Eve she cooked spaghetti and brought out champagne and I asked her, she spoke English, I said, "Where did you get the champagne?" She said, "When the Germans were coming, I buried champagne in the garden, and I just dug that up and you people here can celebrate New Year's with me." The Germans were gone. We had taken over that particular building as headquarters. She found out October was my birthday, and she gave me an opal that her husband had. [He] was gone in the Merchant Marine

and she didn't know where he was anymore. She gave me an opal stone. She said, "I want you to have this."

T: So that's one instance of a very positive relationship with someone. Tom, you were in Italy in April of 1945 when President Roosevelt died.

O: Yes.

T: Do you remember hearing that news?

O: Yes. We were in temporary quarters. We got this news that he had passed away.

T: What was your reaction to that, Tom?

O: As I recall, I was wondering, he'd been such a powerful president, now what's going to happen as far as the presidency is concerned? And also the peace, ensuing peace plans for the US.

T: Was it clear to you before the war ended in Europe that things were coming to a close? That the war would be ended soon?

O: That was not obvious.

T: Would you say that the end of the war in Europe on May 8, 1945, was a surprise then?

O: To me it was. Now others might have been closer to it, but as a soldier out in the field I knew we were making headway in pushing the Germans back, but I didn't know how close we were to peace.

T: Was there combat action, at least in the area where you were, right up until the end of the war?

O: Pretty much.

T: How did you react to the news that the war in Europe was over?

O: Of course I was completely happy, because in combat I used to wonder, when is this going to end? I couldn't see the end of it. Here it was a reality—the war had come to an end. Of course, the next concern was, I had heard that the 442nd Combat Team was going to move to the other front, [to the Pacific] when the war ended, so now my concern was, will we go over there and continue on?

T: So did that kind of keep the celebrating to a minimum, the fact that really only one part of the war might be over?

O: Yes. There was no great big celebration.

T: So looming in the background, or really in the foreground was this knowledge that the war in Europe is over but we might be headed for the Pacific.

O: Yes.

T: When did it become apparent to you that you were not going to the Pacific?

O: I guess the news was that Japan is close to surrendering, so then we knew that we would not have to go.

(2, A, 234)

T: But for some time there was this concern that you might go.

O: Yes. We wondered. I was looking at it in terms of combat conditions, and I couldn't quite imagine what it would be like in a combat situation on the Pacific front because the weather conditions were different, too. So how do you adjust to that? That was my concern.

T: You didn't ship out to the Pacific, and indeed V-J Day came on August 15, 1945. How did you react when you heard that news that the war was now completely over?

O: Because of my concern over what war is, I of course was quite relieved that now we can have peace.

T: Was there more of a celebration in the area where you were for your unit than there had been for V-E Day?

O: Not to any extent that I recall. The war is over. It was just kind of a sigh of relief—we did not have to be in combat.

T: Now by this time, your folks were no longer in a detention camp, is that right?

O: Yes. By this time they were out. They were in Yellow Springs, Ohio.

T: Were you thinking about your folks a lot and how they were doing while you were overseas?

O: I had pretty much accepted the fact that they were adjusting and things were going along okay.

T: Because your sister was there with them, right?

O: Yes.

T: I want to spend a few minutes talking about your time in Italy after the war ended, because you were there for a number of months. Can you describe in a couple sentences what your job was in Italy between when the war ended in May and when you shipped home, which was in November?

O: I was battalion sergeant major, so I had my duties to attend to there in the way of personnel administration. Citations were being written up, and the staff was one of my responsibilities. To see that they functioned properly.

T: You were involved very minimally, it sounds like then, with any kind of interactions with the local Italian civilian population.

O: No.

T: You did get to travel though. You mentioned a bit of sightseeing during your time when you were there after the war ended.

O: Yes. When I became battalion sergeant major I was just too busy to do much traveling.

T: So any traveling you did was really before that time?

O: Most of it, yes.

T: In the times that you were able to see any of the Italian countryside, what was your impression of Italy then in 1945?

O: My impression was that they were economically hard pressed. People themselves were very warm, warm people. Country didn't impress me as having progressed as much as a lot of the US, for one thing. There were a lot of pushcarts and this sort of thing. Although they had this wonderful highway built, those highways were built in preparation for moving military vehicles. Civilians were technologically not up to the US. You would see cartloads of beef, carcasses, being hauled down the street in a wagon rather than refrigerated cars.

T: So a pretty stark contrast between the American society that you had known before going overseas and what you observed there. From your perception, how were you treated as a Japanese-American, a person that to the Italians, was visually different than the other Americans.

O: Quite well. Quite well. I mean, we were treated like any other soldier I guess. They'd had a lot of military contact... the Germans, the French and so forth.

T: From your perspective, how were the American soldiers treated by the Italians in general?

O: I'd say quite well. Quite well, because for some it was a means of getting money from them in various ways. Little kids would approach you. They were acting as emissaries for their sisters or cousins or what not, who were prostituting.

T: Was prostitution something that was quite visible and quite evident?

O: Oh, yes, quite. And in some of the brothels there would be a weekly visit by a physician, who would test the girls for venereal disease or whatever.

T: On that subject, were American service personnel cautioned or warned about possible risk of venereal disease by American military people?

O: Not to any great extent. Of course they passed out condoms, but other than that, no.

T: Was there any attempt at a policy of non-fraternization, like there was in Germany between the American military personnel and the Italian civilian population?

O: Not that I was aware of.

T: Americans could come into contact with Italians pretty much as they chose.

O: Yes.

(2, A, 322)

T: You did finally ship back to the States, returning in November 1945. You were discharged that same month I guess, right?

O: At Fort Sheridan, in Illinois.

T: What was your initial reaction, Tom, to being out of the military?

O: I just felt that, now I'm entering a new life. I wanted to finish my law training. So where shall I go? University of Chicago, Northwestern? I finally ended up at Northwestern, and then the next problem was, I've got a family, my wife and son. How am I going to support them?

T: When was your son born?

O: Son was born in 1944. He was born just before I went overseas. When I was in combat training [in Alabama].

T: Was your wife down in Alabama as well?

O: No, she was in Chicago with her folks. [Our son] was born in March [1944]. About a month later she and another friend came with their young children down to Alabama, so I could see him before I went overseas.

T: How hard was that for you to be overseas and have your wife and your small child here at home?

O: There again, that was the situation. I wasn't concerned about my wife and son, because they were with her folks and they assured me they were being taken care of.

T: That was one less thing for you to worry about?

O: Yes.

T: Did you and your wife correspond a lot when you were overseas?

O: Yes, quite frequently.

T: When you sent letters to her, what kind of things did you talk about in those letters?

O: She mentioned some of the things that were going on in her life. The progress that our son was making. I would tell her about what was happening over in Italy. That's the way it went.

T: Did you have to sort of censor what you wrote to her?

O: No. I don't think, as I recall, I don't recall writing anything that would be subject to censoring. No. More or less personal type letters.

T: Sort of what you were doing day by day.

O: Yes.

T: How was it to see your wife, your family, your loved ones when you got back to the States again?

O: It was great, but it was, for me, it was adjusting to a new way of life. Also, living with her folks.

T: How long did you do that?

O: About three years.

T: That's a pretty substantial period of time. You mentioned the word readjusting. I wanted to ask you, what was the hardest thing for you readjusting to civilian life?

O: The principal concern was financial, getting into something where we would be able to provide for ourselves.

T: When did your law school training end?

O: I went to Northwestern [in Evanston, Illinois] for two years, and it was physically too much for me. I was working, too, and I lost a lot of weight. So I quit for a period of time and finished up at DePaul University, at a night school.

T: What part of Chicago were you living in?

O: North Chicago. The law school was on the Chicago campus.

T: So you were working and trying to go to school, and trying to find time for your family. At the time, what job did you have?

End of Tape 2, Side A. Side B begins at counter 378

O: I was working for the American Bar Association. It was part time. I was going to school in the morning, and going to work there about one o'clock.

T: And then try to do whatever studying you had in the evening.

O: Yes.

T: So you were on the go all the time.

O: Yes. All the time. [At this time my wife] worked part time.

T: Now you didn't have to look for housing because you were living with her folks.

O: Yes.

T: Did you consider getting a place of your own at this time?

O: Not at that time because I knew it was just impossible.

T: Impossible to find, or impossible to afford.

O: Impossible to work, go to school, and also pay rent. We weren't paying a very substantial amount of rent living with her folks. Economically, it was just not feasible for me to do all that.

T: When did you finally finish your law degree then?

O: DePaul University, in 1953.

T: So it was a number of years that you went to school, and then you worked, and then you went back to DePaul and finished your law degree in an evening program.

O: Yes.

T: Was that hard for you, to have to admit that you couldn't manage job and school and family at Northwestern?

O: Yes, it was very difficult. At one point I realized I was just trying to do the impossible. So I quit school and found a full time job, and went to night law school. That was much easier. By this time my wife was working full time, too.

T: Did you still only have one child?

O: Our daughter was born fourteen years after our son was born.

T: So she was born when you were finished with law school and working.

O: Yes.

T: Did you use the benefits of the GI Bill?

(2, B, 438)

O: Absolutely—that's how I got my law degree. The GI Bill.

T: When did you become aware of the GI Bill? Was it while you were still in the service?

O: Yes. I believe they told us about that when I was discharged.

T: So you heard about it when you were back in the States here.

O: Yes.

T: Tom, were you thinking about life after the military while you were over in Europe? Were you making plans already for, "what am I going to do when I get out"?

O: Yes. More or less.

T: How concrete was your conception of that?

O: I knew I wanted to finish law school. That was set. How I would get that law degree wasn't quite set. I knew I had to find a job.

I stayed in the Reserves, though, after my active service ended. In March 1950 I was commissioned as an officer and served as a personnel officer, and instructor at Chicago US Army Reserve School. Later at the Minneapolis USAR School. I was pensioned in October 1978 in the rank of lieutenant colonel.

T: When you got to Chicago, end of 1945, how easy was it to find a job?

O: Quite difficult. I had to depend on acquaintances and people who could guide me.

T: And you were a person with a college degree here.

O: Yes. I had that law school to worry about, so that meant that I couldn't go to work full time, in a full time situation. It wasn't too easy.

T: To conclude, I want to ask just a couple questions. When you were in service, you were in the service for a number of years, when you were overseas as a soldier, what did the war mean for you personally at that time?

O: For one thing I was focused on fascism, Nazism, and what that would do to the United States if they were to prevail, and I just couldn't see that at all. There was no fit there at all. Somehow we just had to get rid of that. Both in Germany and in Japan.

T: As a soldier, did you see yourself as part of that?

O: Of the getting rid of process? Yes, very definitely.

T: When you think back now, fifty some years later, what has changed in the way you think about yourself and the war and what it all meant?

O: It actually hasn't changed. I still feel the same way. I really can't even imagine if we go to war with Iraq what that conflict would do to us. Particularly if somehow we did not win that war.

T: Which is something that one never hears discussed—the possibility that we will do anything but win any war with Iraq.

O: Yes.

T: What's the most important way that the war changed your life, Mr. Oye?

O: For one thing I realized that war is just pure hell, and if you're not careful it can change you from a human being to something other than a human being. You have to be careful, because you're in there doing things that ordinary society does not condone, and that's killing people, and you've got to be sure that you're focused on the purpose of you're being there. If you just let your animal instincts take over, you become something far less than human, and that's what...

And also very, very acutely I realized that war fought upon your land is just pure hell. I saw this in France, where we were in the battlefield and digging trenches to keep ourselves from being shelled and so forth. Here out in the field, unprotected, are the farmhands harvesting their crops, because that's what they're living on. That war on one's land is devastating.

T: You mentioned this kind of animal instinct that is almost required in a combat situation. How do you shed that when you take the uniform off and go back to civilian life?

O: For one thing you tried to focus on the purpose of the war, but not to concentrate on the killing end of it and accept that as something great and good. And the purpose of the war was to defeat the enemy. Killing is killing, but it has to be done because this was war.

T: You tried to separate those two, the actual act of having to kill or be part of that from the purpose.

O: Yes. And that's obviously hard to do, because a policeman who is authorized to use his weapon, if that weapon kills someone, they put him through a period of readjusting. It's not natural for humans to kill each other.

T: So for you, the process was again to separate those two things.

O: Yes.

T: That's very interesting. Anything else you'd like to add, Mr. Oye, before we conclude?

O: Oh, I think you've got everything.

T: On the record, let me thank you very much for your time today. I've enjoyed very much talking with you.

O: I can say the same.

END OF INTERVIEW