Interview of John F. Aiso Observations of a California Nisei: John F. Aiso Interviewed by Marc Landy

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Introduction

John Fujio Aiso, the eldest son of Frank Tokichi and Taki (Ishikawa) Aiso, was born in Burbank, California, on December 14, 1909. The family moved to Hollywood, where his father worked as a gardener in the Hollywood area. Young Aiso attended Ulysses S. Grant Elementary School and Le Conte Junior High School. He graduated in 1926 from Hollywood High School, where he captained the debating team and represented the school in local, state and national oratorical contests. After graduation, he spent ten months studying the Japanese language at Seijo Gakuen (now Seijo University) in Tokyo. In the fall of 1927 he entered Brown University and became a member of Delta Upsilon fraternity. As its captain he led the Brown Debating Team to the Eastern Intercollegiate Debating Championship. In 1931, he received with honors his A.B. in Economics and was selected by the faculty to be the student commencement speaker.

Aiso entered Harvard Law School that same fall. During a visit to Switzerland the following summer he met Harvard law professor Manley O. Hudson, who encouraged him to specialize in international law. Upon graduation from law school in 1934, he became a law clerk for the firm of Patterson, Eagle, Greenough and Day in New York City. He was admitted to the New York Bar Association in April of 1935. Early in

1936, Aiso was sent by the firm as an associate counsel to Tokyo to assist in the registering of the bonds of Japanese electric power companies with the newly established Securities and Exchange Commission. In addition to his legal duties, he also enrolled at Chuo University as a special student.

After concluding his assignment for Patterson, Eagle, Greenough and Day, Aiso chose to extend his stay in the Far East. He accepted a position with the British-American Tobacco Company and was sent to Shanghai and then to Mukden as house counselor for the company's subsidiaries in Manchuria (then Manchoukuo). He remained there until September 1940 when illness forced him to return to the United States.

During his convalescence in Los Angeles, Aiso took law courses at the University of Southern California in preparation for the California bar examination. He was admitted to the California bar in January 1941. In April of that same year he was drafted and was inducted in the U.S. Army at Fort MacArthur. He was eventually assigned to the Fourth Army Intelligence School at the Presidio, San Francisco, first as a student and then as head instructor of this pilot school for instruction of the Japanese language. After Pearl Harbor and with the growing anti-Japanese sentiment in California, the Army decided to move the school to Camp Savage, Minnesota, where it was renamed the Military Intelligence Service Language School and placed under the jurisdiction of the War Department. Aiso became the Director of Academic Training and supervised the teaching of the Japanese language to Nisei and Caucasion officers and enlisted personnel who were to serve as translators and intelligence agents throughout the Pacific Theatre.

After V-J Day, Aiso was sent to Japan, assigned to the Civil Intelligence Section (CIS) under General Charles A. Willoughby. This section of General Douglas MacArthur's Occupation forces was responsible for the screening of Japanese officials to determine if they were to be purged as militarists under the Potsdam Declaration. Aiso advanced to the rank of lieutenant-colonel. He returned to the United States and was relieved of active duty on May 7, 1947.

Upon his return to civilian life, Aiso became a partner in the firm of Maeno and Aiso. In September 1951, he organized and became senior partner of the law firm of Aiso, Chuman and McKibbin. Due to poor health, he decided to leave private practice. He applied for and received a commissionership of the Superior Court, Los Angeles County. He served under Presiding Judge, Stanley N. Barnes. In September 1953, he was nominated by Governor Earl Warren as a Judge, Municipal Court, Los Angeles Judicial District. In September 1957, Judge Aiso was elevated to the Superior Court, Los Angeles County. In June 1965, he was assigned to the Appellate Department and became Presiding Judge of that department the following month. Aiso has been an Associate Justice of the Court of Appeals since November 1968.

In the following pages, which represent a verbatim transcript of tape-recorded interviews with the UCLA Oral History Program on July 23 and August 3, 1970, Judge Aiso recalls in his own words various aspects of his life and career, including his childhood in Los Angeles, his education at Brown University and Harvard School of Law, his activities in Japanese-controlled Manchoukuo, his wartime duties as director of Japanese language training, and his service in the postwar military occupation of Japan. This interview is part of the Program's Biography series and was undertaken as a special internship project. Records relating to this interview are located in the office of the UCLA Oral History Program.

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1. Transcript

1.1. Tape Number: I, Side One (July 23, 1970)

LANDY:

> I thought we might start by simply asking you to describe your family background and early days in California.

AISO:

> I was born on a farm, then operated by my father, in Burbank, California, December 14, 1909. Thereafter, my father became a gardener in the Hollywood area, which at that time, outside of Pasadena, was the exclusive area of Los Angeles. Beverly Hills had not developed yet, and Bel-Air was distinctly a non-entity. It was still [laughter] wild country. The area where UCLA is now located was nothing but bean fields.At that time the family consisted of my father (his name was Tokichi Aiso and at the time he was finally naturalized after World War II, he legalized the addition of an English

first name, Frank), my mother (whose maiden name was Taki Ishikawa), and my sister, Ruth.My parents were both from the prefecture of Shizuoka. They were very proud of the fact that Shizuoka is Mount Fuji country, located on the northern boundary of the prefecture. My parents came from that area of Shizuoka which is called Izu Hanto, or the Izu Peninsula. It is the peninsula on which Shimoda is located. That is the place where history says Townsend Harris, our first diplomatic representative, set up his headquarters. In fact the name Aiso, so far as I have been able to tell, is a contraction of characters meaning the strands, or beach, of Sagami Bay, or of the Sagami Straits. A is the first Chinese character (Kanji) of Sagami Bay and Iso means beach or strand.Coming back to my earliest childhood recollections, my elder sister, Ruth Haruko, was born a little over a year before I was and is currently married to Mr. Mark Yoshio Kamii. There were just the two of us children at the time and we lived in the area of Hollywood that is between Cahuenga and Vine, just about one block away from Hollywood and Vine which for many years was considered the center of Hollywood.

LANDY:

Was this an unusual area for Japanese-Americans to be living in at this time?

AISO:

I would say yes. While Hollywood was not completely devoid of people of Japanese ancestry, they were not too numerous. However, as time went by, over on Cahuenga there were two Japanese grocery stores and also what we call boarding houses, two boarding houses where bachelors lived. A boarding house doubled as an informal employment bureau. People would call in when they had day work. One was called the Sunshine Daywork Company and the other the Sunset Daywork Company.

LANDY:

Could you define "day work" a little more fully?

AISO:

Day work would be any kind of manual labor, from gardener's help to domestic house cleaning. For ladies, it was cooking, washing, house cleaning or laundry work. Day work consisted of odds and ends labor whereby one was

paid by so much per day or so much per hour. In other words, there was no contract by the month or by the week. It was strictly per day that one was paid.Later, the family moved down to a place on Tamarind Avenue, between Sunset and Fountain. Further south was Santa Monica Boulevard. Just a block or so away there was, in later years, a Junior High School called Le Conte Junior High School, which is still on Bronson Avenue. At the present time [part of the site is] occupied by KMPC radio station. That portion was formerly Warner Brothers Studio. During my grammar school days it was still a cow pasture known as Beesemeyer's Dairy. Beesemeyer was one of the pioneers of Hollywood. Going to school, we cut across his dairy and went to a grammar school which was called Grant School.

LANDY:

Do you remember any outstanding events of your grammar school days? Or outstanding personalities?

AISO:

During my days at Grant, I realized, for the first time, that I was a member of a so-called minority group. At that time there used to be Japanese language schools, supported by private funds, to which our parents contributed. An automobile, later a bus, would pick us up at the public school, and take us to the Japanese language school, where we studied for an hour or an hour and a half, and would then take us home. This study of the Japanese language was frowned upon. In fact many people erroneously construed it to be a part of a Japanese plot to keep the children loyal to the Emperor and loyal to the Japanese religion.My parents were very early converts to Protestant Presbyterianism. After we were at Tamarind, our family gained additional members. There was a brother next to me called Paul Togo Aiso, and then a sister, Mary Shizue, now married to a man named Nagashima. Incidentally, she is a school teacher in New York. And then there was another brother, Daniel Iwao Aiso; and then years later, came our final brother, James Kazuo Aiso. There is a gap of approximately sixteen years between Jim and myself. I recall taking him out for his first ice cream soda to a corner soda fountain. In those days a soda fountain was a part of the corner drugstore. I was amazed when some person made the remark, "You have a very fine son, sir." [laughter]But, returning now to Grant School, one of my public school

teachers called me aside one day and asked me, "John, why do you go to the Japanese language school?" I told her that it was necessary in order to learn Japanese so that I could communicate with my parents. Then she said, "Well, that's wrong. This is America and therefore your parents should learn to speak English. It is un-American to study Japanese." This incident symbolizes the evolution our country has gone through. My usefulness, if any, to my country in World War II came out of the fact that I did have a command of the Japanese language. It is also a reflection of the chauvinistic thinking of the American people of that period. I was still at Grant School during the First World War when they abolished the teaching of German in the high schools in Los Angeles, which is a foolish thing to do. At that time I also noticed how neighbors of ours with a German name, Wilhelm, were more or less ostracized and people refused to associate with them.Coming back to the question of abolishing the study of enemy languages, the United States profited from its previous experience, and during World War II encouraged [the study] of enemy languages. After all, one must know the enemy's mode of communication. And language is also, in my opinion, a reflection of the thinking pattern of a people. In order to know the psychology of one's enemy of the time, language is an indispensable part of the picture.

LANDY:

To go back to earlier days for a second, I believe that many Japanese-Americans have adopted the Methodist religion. I was wondering why your particular family chose another church?

AISO:

The children became Christians, or Disciples of Christ. The reason was that the neighborhood Caucasian children, with whom we were very friendly and who have been life-long friends of ours, went to this Christian Church, then located in a bungalow at the corner of Gower and Hollywood Boulevard. The Presbyterian Church, which was also a bungalow church at that time, was located one block north of Hollywood Boulevard on Gower, at the site of the present Hollywood Presbyterian Church. It was simply the fact that the Christian Church was closer and most of the neighborhood children went to that church. That is how we happened to get into the Disciples of Christ church, which is called the "Christian Church."

LANDY:

I gather that the racial segregation that applied in certain Protestant churches was not practiced in this particular denomination.

AISO:

No, in fact we were very much welcomed by the people of this church. The pastor and members of the pastor's family have been of great influence in Americanizing us. They used to call at our home and would invite my parents to church functions to see us children perform in Christmas plays or Easter plays. They were extremely friendly and so I grew up with a very close feeling for the church that continued when the church moved to larger quarters where it is still located at Gramercy and Hollywood Boulevard. During World War II they were kind enough to let me store my law library while I was gone. That is typical of the warmth of the atmosphere we enjoyed. Incidentally, my wife and I were married at the Hollywood Beverly Christian Church. My wife's maiden name was Sumi Akiyama. We were married there just a week after Pearl Harbor.But let's get back to Grant School days. In connection with my study of the Japanese language, it is rather interesting that there happened to be one black family that lived in Hollywood, and then there was also one Chinese boy that came to school. The children would get me on the school ground and ask me, "Did you go to Jap school yesterday or not?" If I would say "no," some of them would come up and say, "We saw you get on the bus." So I used to get physically beat up. Among the people who joined the Caucasian group to administer the beating was this colored boy and this Chinese boy. That's one of the amusing incidents of that time, as one now looks back. It wasn't any fun at the time though.

LANDY:

Was there a Mexican-American community?

AISO:

Not at that time. There was one Mexican family that lived about a block away, but no large colony. Most of the Mexican group that did not live in the Boyle Heights area, lived in the area called Sawtelle which is now West Los Angeles. There used to be a large group of Spanish ancestry that lived there.

LANDY:

You mentioned before that Le Conte Junior High School was nearby. Is that where you attended junior high school?

AISO:

Yes, but may I return to the Grant School days. It was one of the places where I more or less got started in my speaking career. On one of the days when it was General Grant's birthday, Grant School being named after Ulysses S. Grant of Civil War fame, I was asked to give a talk on General Grant and that was one of my first public appearances. The next one was a speech to the PTA in favor of school bonds. They had fiscal problems with schools as early as that time. [laughter]One other incident that I remember took place in the eighth grade of Grant School, or the seventh grade, when I saw my first airplane at close range. I think it was a type of plane they call the French Spad. There was an emergency landing that the aviator had to make. So he made it in Beesemeyer's pasture, which was just a block and a half or so away from the school. We were all so thrilled that we just ran out of the school and went down to see the plane. Also, during that time, as I earlier mentioned, we saw how the nation reacts in time of war, World War I.Then came junior high school. Le Conte was actually built at the southwest end of what was Beesemeyer's Dairy. It was the second junior high school in the Los Angeles City School System. The first one was called Virgil Junior High School and Le Conte was then the second one. The principal of Grant School was designated as the first principal of Le Conte Junior High School.

LANDY:

What was his name?

AISO:

Mr. Moses Chandler.

LANDY:

Related to the other Chandlers of great fame? Or not?

AISO:

No, this gentleman had no connection with the Los Angeles *Times* family. The interesting thing to me was that he told me that he had studied for the bar and had been admitted to the bar but that he did not care for what he called the shady tactis of the practicing bar at the time, and therefore, he gave up the practice of law and turned to teaching as a career. I went to Le Conte Junior High School for just one year, the so-called ninth grade, since I had finished the eighth grade at Grant School.It was at Le Conte where I really experienced the antagonistic racial feelings of some parents and Caucasian students against people of Japanese ancestry. There was an election for student body president of the school. So I ran. Out of a student body of approximately twelve hundred, I was given nine hundred-plus votes by the students. But then--it rather amazes me to recall that some of the leaders of the group were people of Italian ancestry--some of the parents and the local newspaper objected to my taking office, or rather, may-be the newspaper just reported. . .

LANDY:

Are you referring to the community newspaper or the city newspaper?

AISO:

I am referring to the community newspaper. There were two in Hollywood, at the time, one called the Hollywood *Citizen,* the other called the Hollywood *News.* Most of the articles against me came out in the Hollywood *News* which was later taken over by the Los Angeles *Evening Express.* The *Express* in turn was taken over by the Los Angeles *Herald,* a Hearst publication. You will recall that the Hearst publications were the ones that ran the agitation against the so-called "yellow peril." Anyway, the parents didn't think that a "Jap" should be a student body president of a school which their children attended. Therefore there were several parent-teacher meetings held, and, to cut it short, the principal was told that either he had to get rid of me or they would get rid of him. So they compromised and abolished student government while I was there.At that time I also found out that for every Caucasian person that would be against me there would be at least one--or in many cases two--who would be for me. In this case I, of course, had the backing of most of the students. When I participated in some affairs at the school in which the students took part-- such as group singing,

sort of an informal glee club affair--some parents were there, such as the late Mr. George L. Eastman, later president of the Hollywood Chamber of Commerce, Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce, and in later years associated with the Moral Rearmament group. His son, George, Jr., has been a lifelong friend of mine and was also a classmate of mine at Le Conte. Mr. Eastman introduced himself and told me, "Well, John, there are a lot of people for you." But the thing that was rather amusing was the technique he employed. He was speaking to a person who was anti -Japanese--Mr. Eastman being one of the leaders of the community, this person wanted to speak to Mr. Eastman at that time--and Mr. Eastman said, "Wait just a minute, I want to go say `hello' to my friend John Aiso." That was the approach he took.With reference to the newspapers, there was then a newspaper called the Los Angeles *Record.* It was in this paper that they first published a picture of me and an article concerning the affair and what I wanted to do in the future. And then I have found all through my career that teachers--I don't know of any that were openly hostile--were extremely sympathetic, extremely kind, and were constantly urging me on towards self-edification. I am very grateful that in my kindergarten days--I forgot to tell you that I did go to kindergarten at Grant School--the teachers were also very kind to me.Although in the main we spoke Japanese in the family, among the children we of course were inclined to speak English. We were told at home to try to practice Japanese so that we would be able to utilize it, but unfortunately, because of the general American feeling against studying the Japanese language, I rather resented having to go to the Japanese language school. We boys were constantly trying to figure out ways of "ditching classes." I am afraid that my parents wasted a great deal of money on me which I did not fully appreciate at the time.

LANDY:

However, I noticed that you speak Japanese rather well and I have heard it said that many, perhaps even most Nisei don't speak Japanese that well. To what do you ascribe your mastery of the language?

AISO:

Between graduation from Hollywood High School and my going to Brown University, I was fortunate enough to spend ten months in Tokyo attending Seijo Gakuen, now called Seijo University. The school was run on the so-called

Dalton Plan. I am not too familiar with its true significance but the idea was that a student was advanced as fast as he was capable of going. You would start at the lowest level, I started with a first-grade reader, and advanced fairly rapidly. However, the necessity of knowing Japanese still had not fully dawned upon me. Then, due to the arrangement that I had about going to Brown University, I had to cut my stay in Japan short to enter Brown in 1927.After Le Conte came Hollywood High School. The first year I was there, being of rather small stature and not being able to go out for a good many athletic activities, I presented myself as a candidate for cheer leader. At that time I was called into the principal's office and told, "You better lay off because we don't want a repetition of the Le Conte incident." Likewise, that was the time when I had my first experience with the military,i.e., the ROTC, but I'll reserve further details until we get into a discussion of my military career. At Hollywood High School I was able to continue taking part in oratorical contests, being the captain and manager of the debating team. In my junior year, I captained the Hollywood High School Debating Team which won the Southern California Debating Championship. My debating coach was Mr. William H. Hensey, to whom I am greatly indebted. He was a Stanford graduate and one-time principal of the Montebello High School, before he came to Hollywood.It was during my stay at Hollywood that the Los Angeles *Times* sponsored an oratorical contest centered around the United States Constitution; it also concerned people such as Marshall and the Constitution, and Story and the Constitution. During my senior year at the regional tryouts I happened to be fortunate enough to be first. But also at that time, with graduation approaching, I had been selected as a commencement speaker. Perhaps I was overdoing it. I did suffer a little from ill health at the time. There is a great question as to whether it was a protest against my Japanese ancestry or whether they thought that there were too many honors being heaped upon one of Japanese ancestry. Anyway, I was told to step aside and confine myself to just the commencement part. My colleague, who was second to me, was Herbert Wenig, my debating partner. He later went on to Stanford University and Stanford Law School, with one year at the Harvard Law School. He is currently an Assistant Attorney General of California. He went on to win the Southern California championship and then went to Washington, D. C. for the finals where in 1926 he won the national championship.At that time, I did not know that the money actually came from Mr. Harry Chandler, the owner and

publisher of the Los Angeles *Times.* It was represented to me that the student body was sending me as a travelling companion to Herbert. So I went back to Washington, D. C. with Herbert. At that time I met Ambassador Tsuneo Matsudaira. You will recall that his daughter married Prince Chichibu. Mr. Matsudaira's son, Mr. Ichiro Matsudaira, is today one of the directors of the Bank of Tokyo. I was introduced also to Mr. K. K. Kawakami, who was the leading Japanese journalist who wrote in the English language. His wife was a lady of German extraction.

LANDY:

They were resident in the United States?

AISO:

He was a Washington correspondent for many Japanese newspapers. He was also a contributer to many American periodicals: *Harpers, Atlantic Monthly, New Republic,* and others.Ambassador Matsudaira attended the finals of the oratorical contest and spotted me. I was introduced to him and a day or so later I met him at the embassy. He asked me what my plans were for college. I told him probably on the West Coast someplace. If I could scrape up enough money, I would go to Stanford, to which I had applied and been admitted. Otherwise, I would go to UCLA. It was at that time called the Southern Branch, University of California Southern Branch.

LANDY:

I wonder if we could go back one second. I am interested in the story about Mr. Chandler financing you to Washington. Did you ever have occasion to speak to him about this incident? How did it come to your attention?

AISO:

Mr. Chandler was very much perturbed when he found out that after I had won the regionals I was dropping out. With a newspaperman's nose, he immediately sensed something was going on. He sent out a reporter from the Los Angeles *Times*--I have forgotten the reporter's first name, but his last name was Smith--who became a good friend of mine while he lived. Mr. Smith came and talked to the principal. Mr. Chandler did not like what had happened. When I went to Washington, I found out that Mr. Chandler had

made all kinds of arrangements for me through his connection with the Washington *Star.* The Washington *Star* was also one of the sponsoring papers in Washington, D.C. Because of the warm welcome I received in Washington, Herb felt a little hurt. At one point he said, "Well, you better take my place." I said, "No, we can't make a last minute switch." It was that type of a relationship.Mr. Harry Chandler was a great friend of the Japanese in Southern California. He had come in contact with them through using Japanese domestic help, Japanese gardners. He was also a large acreage owner of farm lands, particularly in Mexico. He leased them out to Japanese farmers. He found that they were quite reliable. He became one of the very stout friends of the Japanese people. At that time he lived here in Hollywood over on Los Feliz Boulevard. I became acquainted with Mr. Chandler. When I went to Japan after high school he suggested that I write a few articles about my impressions of Japan. They were a boy's contribution. It surprised me that after I sent one in, a check for eight dollars came along.

LANDY:

These articles were printed in the Los Angeles *Times?*

AISO:

Yes, he was kind enough to run them in the Los Angeles *Times.* From that time on I used to drop in from time to time to see him. At that time, Norman Chandler, who had just finished Stanford, had just come into the *Times* establishment. He later became the head of the *Times* and has already retired in favor of his son, Mr. Otis Chandler.To go back to the meeting with Ambassador Matsudaira, he suggested that perhaps I ought to get away from the Pacific Coast, where the racial persecution against the Japanese people was at white heat. He suggested that it would do me good to see the old part of America, particularly New England. He told me that he was acquainted with the president of a small but old and famous university in Providence, Rhode Island, and he suggested that I go see the president of Brown University, Doctor William H. P. Faunce, which I did. Doctor Faunce became extremely interested although he did not commit himself at this first interview. He said, "Let me see what I can do for you and I will get in touch with you." Eventually I became practically an adopted son of the Faunce family.Incidentally, Doctor and Mrs. Faunce, his wife Sarah, had only one son,

Perry Faunce. Unfortunately, their only son passed away in World War I, not in combat, but by illness while he was in the Army. In later years, I found out that Ambassador Matsudaira had become acquainted with Brown University because Brown had given an honorary Doctor of Laws to his predecessor, Ambassador Hanihara. Ambassador Hanihara had said that if the United States Congress should pass the Japanese Exclusion Law it would lead to "grave consequences." The use of the phrase "grave consequences" inflamed the United States Senate and the immigration law passed with flying colors through the Congress. Ambassador Hanihara was recalled. Later on, from private sources, I learned that the then Secretary of State, Charles [Evans] Hughes, had suggested that the term "grave consequences" should be used. The United States Senate, he suggested, would not listen to anything that was softer. I think it was Mr. Hughes, always a very loyal son and fellow of Brown and personal acquaintance of Doctor Faunce, who probably arranged that the honorary degree be granted to Ambassador Hanihara.

LANDY:

Do you think that this seemingly special relationship between Brown University and the Japanese people dates from the intercession of Chief Justice Hughes?

AISO:

Well, I don't know that there has been any special relationship. While there have been Japanese students from time to time at Brown, there had not been many, at least not up to the time I graduated. I had heard of two people from the Japanese Foreign Office who went to Brown.

1.2. Tape Number: I, Side Two (July 23, 1970)

LANDY:

We were discussing Brown University.

AISO:

Yes. I was told that preceding me at Brown, there had been a vice-consul, Mr. Seiki Yano, who had attended Brown for one year. Then during my sophomore year came a Mr. Hidenari Terasaki. For one semester, we roomed together.

Mr. Terasaki went on in the Japanese diplomatic service. He was the one who married the American lady from Tennessee, whose first name was Gwendolyn. Gwendolyn Terasaki is the authoress of the book *The Bridege to the Sun,* in which she describes her experiences as an American woman in wartime Japan. I last saw Hidenari in post-war Japan when I was in the Occupation. Mr. Terasaki was then a personal aide to the Emperor. He died shortly after I came home.Ambassador Matsudaira took a personal interest in my progress. When members of his staff were visiting the Boston area, they would stop off at Providence and check in to see how I was getting along. The one that came most often was Mr. Shigenori Togo. You will recall that Mr. Togo was the foreign minister of the Tojo cabinet, and I think one of those who was tried as a war criminal after the war. It was indeed a period of mixed feelings when I served in the Occupation as a member of General MacArthur's staff, because I had many personal friends of this kind.My life at Brown was an extremely happy one. It is one of the periods of my life that I have no regrets about; except, that in hindsight, I suppose I could have studied harder. Although, at the time, I thought I was working at full capacity. I led a very full life at Brown. Dr. Faunce was quite an exponent of extracurricular activities. He felt that not all preparation for life came in the classroom. He urged me--rather than becoming a bookworm and confining myself to books in order to make Phi Beta Kappa, which I missed--to become an all-around man, as he said, and take part in extracurricular activities. So, at Brown, I ran cross-country on the freshman team and also at one time made a varsity letter in cross-country. I played intramural baseball. I was also a fraternity man. I became a member of the Brown chapter of Delta Upsilon Fraternity. That was the chapter of which Dr. Faunce was a member and of which Charles E. Hughes was one of the founders, one of the founders of the national fraternity itself. We had several other university presidents that had been members of that chapter. [Elisha] Benjamin Andrews, who became Chancellor of the University of Nebraska, and Benjamin Ide Wheeler, who went to Nebraska, and from Nebraska became the founding light of the University of California at Berkeley. So Delta Upsilon was pretty well represented.

LANDY:

Were you the sole non-Caucasian member at the time?

AISO:

Yes. At that time, there was a fraternity exclusively for people of Jewish ancestry. Delta Upsilon did take in one person of Jewish ancestry. I was quite surprised at the extreme social discrimination against people of Italian ancestry, and also of Jewish ancestry, in Providence. For instance, there were restrictive racial covenants on properties along the most fashionable boulevard in Providence. My classmates and friends of Jewish extraction explained how their parents were unable to purchase homes in this fashionable district.

LANDY:

Was there any Japanese-American community in Providence?

AISO:

No, there was none there. There were a few people, I found out later when I went to Harvard, in Boston. But in Providence there were no Japanese people. Because I was the sole one there, I became friends with policemen, streetcar conductors, and other people in the Providence area. They began calling me by my first name. There was a very close town and gown connection between Brown and Providence. I made many friends outside of the university group there. I attended several churches, one of them being the first Baptist church in America, to which Roger Williams came. That old wooden colonial building was built not only to hold church services, but to hold commencement in. For many years the commencement was held in this Baptist church. Now the procession goes back up to the Green, where there is a larger space, to hand out the diplomas.

LANDY:

Had you made your decision to study law prior to attending Brown, or was this a decision that came out of your experience at the university?

AISO:

No, my general idea of wanting to study law was formulated very early at Grant School. I had a fifth grade teacher called Miss Watson, and I think, at that time, she was being squired by a young lawyer. So, in the course of her conversation to the class, she told us how important a role lawyers played in America. Furthermore, having learned of Abraham Lincoln and having found

out that he was a lawyer, I became enamored of the law.Abraham Lincoln was a great comfort to me, particularly due to his poverty background. We people of Japanese ancestry, sons of immigrants, came from impoverished backgrounds. In fact, I can still recall when we actually sat on appleboxes instead of chairs. Quite often what would now be--I would term definitely a shack--would serve as a home. It quite often had a leaky roof, so that when there was a rainstorm the roof would leak. [There is a] story about Abraham Lincoln's having lived in a log cabin, and having a borrowed book damaged by rain coming through. It was a great inspiration to those of us from the poor class to realize that here was an American that had risen from an impoverished background to the highest office in the land. From then on, in childish terms you might say, I prayed to Abraham Lincoln as often as I prayed to God. That was my inspiration to become a lawyer. Of course, the ideas that one entertained, as to what law consisted of and what a lawyer does were quite different from what I realized, in later years, when I went to Harvard Law School.However, to come back to Brown, I took part in a number of oratorical contests where there were financial prizes, along with medals. I found out that quite often participating in these contests paid just as much as if I had spent the time working. I also was fortunate enough to captain the Brown Debating Team, which won the Eastern Intercollegiate Debating Championship in, I believe, 1928-1929. I recall making trips to Princeton, Yale, Harvard, and then having Bates come to Brown and having Vassar come to Brown. Also, we entertained the University of Pennsylvania at Brown. I debated against all those schools. We also debated with a team from England, which was making a world tour.While I missed winning a Phi Beta Kappa key, I was graduated with honors in Economics from Brown *cum laude.* By faculty selection, I was the student commencement speaker of my class. Along with the fraternity life, came learning how to dance. That was considered immoral by Japanese standards, but it was considered a necessary social grace and Mrs. Faunce kindly paid the tuition for some dancing lessons. [laughter] In fact, Dr. Faunce paid my fraternity dues. Being a member of a fraternity also permitted me to wait on tables at the house and to get my meals. That, with other work during the weekends, helped supplement the necessary income.I had very congenial roommates throughout my Brown days. My last roommate was a great big six-footer called Al Gell, who went with Babcock and Wilcox and later settled in Florida. He was a left-handed baseball pitcher and he used to insist that I get

out and catch him and practice behind the fraternity house. [It] scared the wits out of me trying to catch these fast balls that came down. [laughter] While the people at Brown treated me very courteously, I still felt that I was being treated as a guest and not as one of the group. So I was not completely at ease in that respect. Among the other people that I met at the time was Senator Theodore Francis Green, who was a former governor of Rhode Island and bachelor senator who had served in the United States Senate for many years.There was an education in realizing that people from various parts of the country and various social strata place their value emphasis on different objects. For instance, in California at my time the automobile was a status symbol, and no lawyer or university professor would go running around in a Ford or Chevrolet. They would be driving Buicks or some cars which are now out of existence, such as the Pierce-Arrow, and the Locomobile. But going back to Providence, I found, that Dr. Faunce, who had a driver--I think his car was a Ford or so--looked upon it just as a means of conveyance. There were other people in the affluent class who had just a small car. But when you stepped into their homes, then here were paintings, and people would remark about how many thousands, and ten thousands, and even hundred thousands of dollars certain paintings had cost. That was where they put *their* money. They were also generous donors to opera and symphonies. That was quite a revelation to me.

LANDY:

How did you make your decision to attend Harvard Law School?

AISO:

There were a number of fraternity members from Delta Upsilon who went to Harvard Law School; and there were a number of lawyers in Providence with whom I had become personally acquainted who were graduates of Harvard Law School. In fact, my Brown debating coaches were Providence lawyers, [for instance], the head debating coach, Mr. Fred [Bartlett] Perkins, now Justice Perkins. At that time, he was an assistant United States attorney in charge of enforcing the prohibition law. He was quite a teetotaler and straight-laced person, but extremely human. He was a Harvard Law School graduate. By the way, Mr. Perkins later became secretary of the corporation of Brown University. On the honorary Master of Arts degree that Brown conferred upon

me after the war is his signature. He later became a justice of the Superior Court of Rhode Island. He was offered a position on the Supreme Court of Rhode Island, but he declined, saying that he preferred to mix with the people in the trial court, where he did a great deal of service.I also took an entrance examination for Yale Law School. At that time--I don't know about now--it was much harder to get into Yale Law School than Harvard Law School. Yale gave a number of aptitude tests that you had to take, and the entering class was limited to 100. But they said approximately 97 or 98 out of 100 finished. Harvard Law School at that time followed what I think, and what they later concluded, was a wasteful method. Any person from any recognized American college with a C average was permitted to come in. But they were also given to understand that approximately one-third would be washed out at the end of the first year. My entering class at the Harvard Law School was 750. In the average law school of the other universities, the entire student body ran to only 150 or 250. Here was my class of 750, and I think we graduated finally 455-odd strong. Of course, not all of the dropouts were due to scholastic matters; there were financial and other reasons. The fraternity brothers eventually coming down from Cambridge on weekends finally talked me into going up to Cambridge. And that is how I went to the Harvard Law School.I found the adjustment extremely difficult and I am not sure that I adjusted to it during the first year. My last two years at Brown were conducted on what we call a special honors system. They were experimenting with the so-called Oxford Tutorial Plan. In many of my seminars, advanced classes, there were only six or eight people. We had to write papers but we met in very small groups and had very informal discussions with the professor. Then I went to law school and the 750 were divided into four sections. This mass education, with very little contact with the professors, was a cold treatment to which I did not easily adjust.It was a very Spartan type of education. The very first class you walked into, the professor merely said, "Mr. So-and-so, state the case of. . ." Many of us, coming from college, didn't even know an assignment had been posted on the board. The professor was very severe. He'd say, "Well, that's no way to state a case. The next man," and ask what the case held. He said, "No, that's wrong, that's just dictum." And it was just that type of education so that if you survived, it developed a great deal of confidence. What's more, the professors welcomed debate and quite often they would assume wrong premises to see whether you would pick it apart or not. They

would fight you tooth and nail, but you were supposed to fight back. So after I came out of the law school, as far as appearing in an appellate court was concerned, I was not afraid of any other lawyer. As far as going into a trial court, I didn't know the first thing. I didn't know how to draft any pleadings. I didn't know how to pick a jury. In that respect, there is a great question as to whether it was the most profitable way to conduct a law school.One of the great privileges I had at the Harvard Law School was to become a student of Professor Manley O. Hudson, who later became a Judge of the Permanent International Court of Justice at The Hague. Between my first and second year, I was invited to visit Europe by my sister Ruth and brother-in-law Kamii. My brother-in-law, Yoshio Kamii, was with the International Labor Office in Geneva. They spent a total of seventeen years in Geneva. They invited me to come spend the summer with them. I went to Geneva for two purposes: to take a look at Europe, and also I had some kind of an idea of trying to get a job, after law school, in the legal department of the League of Nations.I found, however, that, at that time, the League was tottering. It was after Japan had left the League of Nations over the invasion of Manchuria. Also, I was an American citizen, and the United States was not a member of the League. The morale of the people in the legal department was very low. They were marking time, and, without their saying so, one sensed that it was just a question of time until the League would fold up.But during that summer I met Professor Hudson, who used to spend his summers there. He insisted that I take his course in international law. During my senior year I did take his course in Public International Law. I also acted as a student research assistant to Professor Hudson.International law, which was then considered a luxury, turned out to be a bread and butter course with the law firm I clerked for in New York. The firm was then called Patterson, Eagle, Greenough and Day, located at 120 Broadway. I was introduced to that firm by Mr. Charles E. Hughes, Jr., who had just left the Solicitor [General's] Office and had returned to private practice. Through the Faunce family I had become acquainted with Mr. Hughes, Jr., and he found this office that had business connections with Japan. I was first admitted to the bar in New York.At the time, the United States dollar bonds, the gold clause decision cases--*Norman* versus *The Baltimore and Ohio Railway et al*--were handed down.I recall, to back up a little bit, the bank moratorium during my Harvard Law School days. Just at the time of the bank moratorium there was an earthquake in Long Beach,

California, quite a severe earthquake. But, due to the Bank Holiday, I didn't have any money to send a telegram. I also recall another incident there, of interest to students. Beer became legalized.

LANDY:

This was 1933?

AISO:

It was in 1932. I was graduated from Brown in 1931 and entered law school in the fall. I think the legalization of beer became effective that fall some time. I got out of school when the depression was still in its depths. I recall people selling apples on street corners. Some of my classmates had to go to work for $5 a week, a tremendous difference from what the graduates of law school start at today. Today even the law clerks, who start working for me, start at close to $900 a month. And the leading law firms in Los Angeles and New York offer from $15,000 to $18,000 for their top men.At that time, the law firm of Patterson, Eagle, Greenough and Day was registering Japanese bonds with the Securities and Exchange Commission. In fact, the Securities and Exchange Commission was a new institution. The Corporate Securities Act was a new law. In that connection, there was a delegation that came from Japan, some Japanese lawyers and Japanese bankers. I particularly recall one name, the head banker was Dr. Takeo Kurusu, who later became the head of the Industrial Bank of Japan and was later the Minister of Finance in one of the post-war cabinets in Japan.This ties in with your question, "Where did you learn the Japanese language?" The Japanese lawyers and bankers were quite fluent in English, I thought. But, in discussing whether or not the gold clause United States Supreme Court decisions were applicable to Japanese bonds, they said they would prefer to speak their own tongue, because they didn't want to make any slip-ups with English. This posed a problem. There was a Mr. Kauffmann, who at one time had taught American law at the Imperial University and had had an office in Tokyo. He was a junior partner in the office in which I clerked, and he said, "We have just the man you need."Unfortunately, I was dragged over there. The meeting was at the office of Root, Clarke, Buckner and Ballentine (I think that's the office where Mr. Dewey later joined up). Also at the meeting was a representative, Mr. Hadley, from the office in which Mr. McCloy is a senior partner at the present time,

located on Broad Street. There was also a representative from Sherman and Stearling and also from White and Case. Well, the conference started, and I can still recall the first sentence that Dr. Kurusu said with reference to this problem. He said, *"Kore wa kokusaishiho no kankatsu mondai desu,"* which translated means, "This is a question of jurisdiction, or competence, in private international law, or what Americans call the conflict of laws." I had not heard any of those terms, so sweat came down my face; I could only stall for time. Eventually they said, "Well, let's recess the conference for a few days; we can meet again."That evening, I went to Dr. Kurusu's hotel and told him that while I had studied some "baby language" at home in California and gone to the school in Tokyo for about ten months, my Japanese really was not that of an adult Japanese; and, of course, I knew no legal Japanese. I suggested that if he would explain what he had in mind, in lay Japanese, that I might be able to find the appropriate English legal counterpart and carry on. Dr. Kurusu was very kind and said, in effect, "Aiso, why don't you make up your mind to study Japanese? Make this your opportunity to study Japanese." So that was the beginning of my first serious study of Japanese. It became necessary during our conferences to get an English translation of the Japanese Foreign Exchange Control Law. They asked me to translate it. So I used a dictionary and in my apartment I pasted up the characters and the English translations for them, so I wouldn't have to keep thumbing through the dictionary. This translation was my first serious study of Japanese.Later on, an opportunity came for me to go to Tokyo, still in connection with these bonds. A dispute arose as to whether or not the Japanese domestic issues and indentures had violated the American dollar bonds indenture. These were the bonds of electric power companies like Daido Electric Company, Ujigawa, and Tokyo Electric. They had spent just about $5,000 in exchanges of telegrams. Five thousand dollars seems like nothing today, but in those depression days $5,000 was a tremendous amount. So they suggested that maybe someone from New York could go to Japan. Dr. Kurusu kindly suggested that I go; and what's more, if I went, they could economize a little bit too. I wouldn't have to go with first-class accommodations. That is why I departed from New York expecting to be gone for two or three months. But as events turned out, I never returned to New York.One of my interesting experiences was my first interview with the presidents or managing directors of these Japanese banks and companies. That was the first, and last, time I ever saw them personally.

Every time I would meet one, he would say, "Mr. Aiso, how old are you?" At that time I was only twenty-seven. They would say, *"Zuibun wakai desune,"* which means, "My, but you're extremely young." In the feudalistic society of the times it simply wasn't proper that people in their station should meet a young brat.Thereafter I had to deal with what they call a *kacho-san,* or section chief who was more in my age bracket. But a section chief in Japanese companies at the time, as I looked at it, was almost a messenger boy. It was a tedious negotiation to tell them what I had to say. Then he would relay it to someone higher. On the third day I'd get the answer back, and so forth.I found out that the difficulty, or the focal point of the dispute, was the translation of the Japanese word *"teito-ken"* into our English word, "mortgage." Now, the legal concepts coincide ninety-eight percent or ninety-nine percent plus with each other. But there is a small area in which the incidents are different. Mortgage comes from Anglo-American law. The Japanese *"teito"* concept comes from the German Commercial Code, which in turn came from the Roman law of *"hypotheca."* That was the starting point of my realization that I had to study some Japanese law.Since there was a great deal of time between these interviews, I arranged through Dr. Kurusu's courtesy to attend Chuo University as a special student, sitting in on some morning and some evening classes. I had hoped to be an auditor at Tokyo Imperial University. I thought that carrying a letter of introduction from Dean Pound of Harvard Law School would be an open sesame, but it turned out not to be. I don't know whether I should mention the professor's name, but the dean of the law department at that time was a person who had studied at Harvard Law School and to whom Dean Pound had extended every courtesy. But when I applied, he told me, "No, why should we let a foreigner like you into Tokyo Imperial when we don't even have room enough for people born in Japan who are loyal subjects of the Emperor?" At that time, of course, there was a very strong nationalistic spirit. In fact, that was just a few weeks after the "February 26 Incident," in Japanese called a *"Ni-ni-roku Jiken."* On the roof of the Tokyo YMCA, where I stayed, there were still squads of soldiers with machine guns pointing down. It was that type of atmosphere.Incidentally, coming from a Japanese background, I might state that among other reasons why I went East to school was that I was told that a person of Japanese ancestry could never make a living as a lawyer on the Pacific Coast. There was a short time just before I was called into the Army in 1941 when I made some court appearances in which the judges were

extremely discourteous to me.I was also disappointed when, about a month before graduation at the Harvard Law School, I consulted Dean Pound as to where I should go for my future career. The dean asked whether I wanted a frank answer, and I said by all means, yes. He told me, "Mr. Aiso, I'm sorry to say so, but, in your lifetime, I don't think you will have an opportunity to give full wings to what you have learned here at this school. Therefore I suggest that you go to the Far East. I think your opportunities are better there." Of course, I didn't know the Far East very well at that time. I can tell you that I was an extremely chastened and disappointed person at the time I got out of law school.

LANDY:

At the time that you went to Japan, had you terminated your relationship with the firm that you'd been clerking for?

AISO:

No, I was supposed to come back. The business for the office had been completed in about three months' time. It was just mid-semester time in Japanese schools. (The Japanese schools begin in March or April and go around the calendar. The spring is their break between semesters or school years.) I thought that probably it would be the last opportunity for me to get to Japan, so I asked the office if I could stay on to finish my school year. The office said, "Well, we'll keep a place for you, but we can't keep you on our payroll." I said, "Well, that's all right." The rest of the time I earned my way by tutoring in English and also doing translation work for the International Association of Japan.I recall during that time there was a conference held at Yosemite in California, I think it was called the Institute of Pacific Relations, in which Japan was presenting a series of papers on the small-scale industries of Japan. I recall translating a number of brochures on small-scale industries, such as: making bicycles in the homes, or making electric lamps, or making toothpicks, things of that kind. I completed my school year and was ready to pack and come home.There was a Dr. Gunji Hosono, later president of the International Affairs Association of Japan. He was also in Geneva at the time my brother-in-law Kamii was in Geneva. They were very close friends from the time they both went to the University of Southern California. Dr. Hosono had gone on to get his Ph. D. at Columbia. My brother-in-law had gotten his

Master of Business Administration at the Harvard Business School. Mr. Hosono came and said that he had a telegram from his friend, Mr. Shigeharu Matsumoto, who was then the Shanghai branch manager of Domei News Agency. Mr. Matsumoto said there was a firm in Shanghai that wanted a lawyer who was fluent and knowledgeable in Anglo-American law.So, eventually I went to Shanghai at the expense of the British-American Tobacco Company. After staying in Shanghai for a month, I was offered a position as house counselor for their subsidiaries in Manchuria. In the meantime, I had contacted the New York office. They expected that Manchuria would require the floating of bonds in the New York bond market and they thought that it would be a good idea for me to go on up to Manchuria and see what was what. My contract at the time called only for a six-months' stay. The prime purpose was to convert the subsidiaries, which were Hong Kong juridical entities, into Manchukuo juridical entities. In other words, it was to give up extrality or extraterritoriality. Without giving up extrality all foreign companies were no longer to be permitted to operate in Manchuria.

1.3. Tape Number: II, Side One (August 3, 1970)

AISO:

You inquired whether I am acquainted with Mr. Henry Shimanouchi, who was the former Consul-General of Japan, stationed here in Los Angeles, and currently the Japanese ambassador to Norway. The answer is, "definitely yes." Henry, as we knew him, and I were contemporaries during our high school days. He went to Pasadena High School, and I went to Hollywood High School, but we did meet in a number of oratorical contests, particularly those which were conducted in the Japanese-American community. Aside from the oratorical contests there were social functions, where the young people got together, and so I did have a personal acquaintance with Henry. He was a very active person, not only in forensics, but he was quite an athlete, a hurdler in track. Both of us also had the common background of working during our summers. Henry was out cutting celery in the summertime, out in the Venice celery farms. I was out mowing lawns and assisting my father, who was a gardener, and also working for other gardeners.Later out paths crossed again in Tokyo in 1936. Henry was with the Kokusai Bunka Shinko Kai, that is, the International Cultural Institute, in which Count Kabayama was actively

engaged. I was doing some translation work for the International Association of Japan in Marunouchi and his office was located in the Meiji Building, just around the corner. We used to get together at times for lunch. I think it was either after, or before, that he was on the reportorial staff of the Japan *Advertiser.* And so, I did see him from time to time.Later, we naturally met when I was in the Occupation. Henry was then one of the official interpreters at the war crimes trials. I was over in the CIS section under General Willoughby, who was the Assistant Chief of Staff for Intelligence to General MacArthur. I was in charge of a screening section enforcing the political purge, based upon the Potsdam Declaration. Then came our reunion here in Los Angeles. We had some enjoyable times together. We were sorry to see him leave here, but we were very proud of the fact that one of our number was about to be promoted to an ambassadorship.

LANDY:

Were his reasons for leaving the United States to work in Japan similar to yours?

AISO:

He had what was then an insurmountable handicap. People born in Japan were not eligible for naturalization. Henry was a Nisei for all intents and purposes, but he had been born in Japan and brought to the United States when he was two or three years old. Therefore, he was not able to become naturalized; Orientals, particularly Japanese, being excluded from naturalization at that time. I remarked, at a banquet, that if naturalization *had* been open, it was quite probable that Henry would have stayed here, become a lawyer, and possibly would have been a judge in my place.

LANDY:

Perhaps we should return to your days in Manchuria now. Could you describe your job with the British-American Tobacco Company?

AISO:

The primary target for which I was employed, and it was originally for a six-months' period, was to reorganize the subsidiaries of the British-American

Tobacco Company into Manchoukuo domestic corporations. The legal effect was that we were giving up the right of extraterritoriality and becoming a domestic corporation. Up to that time, the companies had been Hong Kong juridical entities enjoying extraterritorial privileges. After the Japanese set up the state of Manchoukuo, the condition imposed was that all foreign businesses had to give up the right of extrality, or leave. We were the only concern--when I say "we," I mean the British-American Tobacco Company--to remain. Therefore, some of our legal services were in the nature of liquidating other corporations.After the Japanese troops crossed the Great Wall of China, and the so-called North China incident--later the North China War--came about, Manchoukuo and the yen bloc, in fact, were placed upon a controlled economy, a wartime economy. A great deal of my work was in the nature of acquiring permits to import leaf tobacco, machine parts, cigarette paper, and to manage to get our earnings back to our parent company in London.

LANDY:

In the course of this activity, did you have occasion to interact with Japanese officials, some of whom were to be nicknamed "The Manchoukuo Clique?"

AISO:

Yes, particularly in this connection, I am greatly indebted to Mr. Chuichi Ohashi, who was the Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs under Mr. Matsuoka. Mr. Ohashi befriended me when he was the Japanese consul, stationed in Los Angeles. When I went to Manchuria, he said for me not to come to Hsinking until he had laid the necessary foundation for my visit. He kindly took me around and introduced me to Mr. Kishi, who was then nominally the No. 2 man but was the actual Minister of Trade and Industry, and to Mr. Naoki Hoshino, who was in fact the Prime Minister, although nominally the No. 2 man of Manchoukuo.Our import permits had to be coordinated through both the Ministry of Industry and the Ministry of Finance. On occasions, they had to be coordinated with the economic section of the Kwantung Army Headquarters. In many instances we also had to coordinate with the Ministry of Finance in Japan, because money could circulate within the yen bloc. For a while, we were able to remit the company's earnings to our parent company in London by sending our Manchoukuo money to Japan, purchasing cigarette paper in Japan, and then shipping it out to our South China sister companies

without drawing a bill of exchange against it. They would then remit what would be equivalent to the price of cigarette paper to the parent company in London. That, however, was later stopped because it was causing a drain, an indirect drain of moneys to areas outside the yen bloc. Later we were told to try to get our money out by buying soy beans in Manchuria and selling them in Europe. Unfortunately, we had the sad experience of having the Germans buy it at a cheaper rate under the Manchoukuo-German Trade Agreement. When our shipments of soy beans reached Europe, we were undersold. It was that type of activity which I had to undertake. It was extremely challenging. Mr. Kishi kindly granted me my license as a Manchoukuo patent and trademark attorney, so that I was able to register trademarks of the company directly with the Patent and Trademarks Bureau. The cigarette business is such that you spend a great deal of money protecting your trademarks against infringements. In fact, a major portion of the cigarette business expense is in protecting trademarks and in cost of advertising.

LANDY:

Could you describe your reaction to the character of Mr. Kishi?

AISO:

I don't know that I had time to study Mr. Kishi too accurately. He was a rather warm person and did not seem to be quite as stern as some of the other aides of his who were a little bit more belligerent and hostile. But, in the long run, I found out that there was a depth of understanding and intellectual ability behind that apparently taciturn front. I was not surprised when, later on, during World War II, he became the counterpart of General Knudsen and had charge of the Japanese wartime industrial mobilization.

LANDY:

How about Mr. Hoshino?

AISO:

Hoshino, on the other hand, was rather distant, very severe, but he did impress you as having a very keen mind. He was one of those officials that came up from the Ministry of Finance. All of the people who arose from the

Ministry of Finance were known to be intellectually sharp. However, I did not have too much direct contact with Mr. Hoshino.

LANDY:

You mentioned that many of the officials demonstrated belligerence and hostility. To what do you attribute this reaction?

AISO:

At that time the military was intent upon driving the Western interests out of that area of China. It was considered to be against the Japanese national interest that I should represent the British and American interests, particularly the British, who had dominated the area so long. In fact, this company, that I was with, had a very long history. They told me that it had a cigarette factory in Mukden as far back as the time of the Russo-Japanese War. I was only interested in trying to liquidate the company, to get out what we thought to be the fair consideration of our vested interests. We did not care to stay; at least, that was the formal policy made known to me. All we were interested in was to get out what we had invested, by peaceful means. However, a good many people looked upon our company as not only interested in commercial affairs, but acting very much the way, I think, the CIA operates today-- fronting for diplomatic and military intelligence.I found that I was suspected of being a spy. They could not understand why I would be there just for private commercial interests. In later light, I found out that the bell boys assigned to me at the Yamoto Hotel turned out to be *Kempei-Tai Gunso,* or gendarmerie sergeants. My telephone was monitored, and my correspondence from the United States was intercepted. At that time, you'll recall that Japan was isolating its people from knowledge of the West. All magazines such as *Time* and *Life*were shut off at the post office. Even my *Harvard Law Review* stopped coming through for a while.As I became more acquainted with strategic intelligence, during my World War II military duties, I came to realize that many of the things which I did for commercial purposes could have been interpreted as spying for strategic intelligence purposes. One example: We were not getting the freight cars necessary to ship our cigarettes out. In summertime, unless you promptly ship your cigarettes out, they mold. That was particularly true after they shut off our supply of tin foil or aluminum foil. We had to use wax paper in lieu of foil. In order to bargain with the South

Manchuria Railway people, and let them know that we knew that there were cars available, we sent some Chinese factory hands down to the railway yards to watch the number of freight cars that came in and the number that went out. Then we would know the number of freight cars which had come in, the number which the military had commandeered, and the number left for commercial purposes. Well, that really could have been interpreted as observing troop movements. My intentions were good, but in hindsight, there were grounds for legitimate suspicion in that type of situation.My life was very miserable in the sense that I was not able to communicate with others. I was not free to open up with anyone, to discuss matters. I was a bachelor. You had to be careful about who your newly-made friends were, because they might be in the intelligence business. There was very strict surveillance of people of foreign nationality at that time. Even in Japan proper they had the *Tokko-Ka Keisatsu,* the special higher police. They would crop up everywhere and interrogate you sometimes on trains. In Shanghai, where I went, they would appear at the hotel. There would be military intelligence agents aboard the coastal steamer on which I went up from Shanghai to Tsingtao. They would appear on the South Manchuria Railway. Everyplace, they were following, or getting reports on you.I was called up to gendarmerie headquarters on an average of once a month. A telephone call would come at any time from 3:30 to 4:30 or 5:00 in the morning, with orders to be down there in ten minutes. Then, I would be interrogated for the rest of the day. Quite often it would be 9:00 or 10:00 at night before I was released. They were good enough to permit me to go to the bathroom. I underwent an all-day interrogation in the same room where Manchoukuo people were being interrogated. When I say "Manchoukuo," I mean Chinese people. They were given some physically severe treatment. When you sit in a room with wails and cries, it begins to get on your nerves. The reports on my whereabouts would come in delayed about a month or a month and a half. I'd be asked questions such as, "On such-and-such a date, at the bar in the Tokyo Imperial Hotel, you met with certain foreigners and you discussed something. What matters did you discuss?"Once my uncle, who was then working for the Nishinomiya branch of the Mitsui bank, which is just outside of Kobe, was seeing me off. I was sailing, to Shanghai, on the *Taiyo Maru* out of Kobe. He was late. He got there just as they were pulling up the gangplank, and so he handed a package over to the boy at the end of the gangplank, and asked that it be delivered to me. The

gendarmerie wanted to know if there was any message in it. All it turned out [to be] was a box of confections. But they were observing me that closely.We had a sister company in Tsingtao. The best American-type leaf tobacco grown in the Orient is that which is grown in the Shantung Peninsula. We had a sister company there and we had an office there primarily to deal with the leaf end of the tobacco business. It was located in the southwest area of Tsingtao. But it was my first visit to Tsingtao--and I had heard that the German fortifications the Japanese had taken during World War I were still there--so I went up to the north-eastern end of Tsingtao, just as a sightseer. The gendarmerie wanted to know what I was doing in that end of town which was distant from the company's office.Later on I got to know them pretty well. In fact, they were having difficulty translating foreigners' letters, from English into Japanese, with a dictionary. When my letters came through censored, I used to meet them and chide them by saying, "Oh, you did a bad job of sealing this one up." After a while, I said, "If you want me to look through some letters, I'll look through them quickly, and give you the gist of them, so you won't have to struggle through them word by word."

LANDY:

Do you remember any other outstanding personalities among the foreigners with whom you mingled in Manchuria?

AISO:

Yes. There was the American Consul General in Mukden. His name slips me, but I worked very closely with the American Consul General there. In fact, I was the assessor of the consular court. An assessor is a lawyer who sits with the consul general, and, in fact, instructs him on what the law is in these consular trials. We used to have several misdemeanor type trials in which we would apply the Washington, D.C. criminal code. These were primarily vice cases and things of that kind.One outstanding personality was the American vice-consul, U. Alexis Johnson. I recall him and his newly arrived bride. I think they were married there in Mukden. Mr. Johnson was the classmate of Henry Shiminouchi in the class of 1931 at Occidental College. After the war, I ran into Mr. Johnson. He was then the American consul stationed at Yokohama. He had work to do with the GHQ-SCAP. During the last ten days or so that I was in Japan on Occupation duty, I was suddenly given the job of screening Germans

who were to be deported from Japan to Germany. In connection with that work, I had occasion to work with Mr. Johnson.

LANDY:

To return to the "Manchuria Clique," were their grandiose ambitions evident at that time or were they pretty adept at concealing it?

AISO:

No, I think they were bent on a very aggressive type of action. I thought it was just a question of time before war between the United States and Japan would break out. The United States couldn't keep on taking what the Japanese military was doing in the China area. For instance, when I was at the Mukden station getting ready to take a train for Hsinking, the *Asia Express,*which was then a super luxury express, much better equipped than the American trains at that time, came down the other way. There were several schoolteachers strolling along the station platform, and this sentry said, in Japanese, *"Oi, Meshi Dase,"* which means "Give me your card." They just asked, "I beg your pardon," but, not getting any cards, he gave them a slap on the face. I ran up and told him, "All they said was, `What did you say, sir?'" I got shoved away. That type of treatment just couldn't be tolerated too long.I did notice that the Japanese people did not realize how great an economic power the United States was. For instance, I used to tell them about how the wheat and the corn in our Midwest was machine harvested, in contrast to the hand harvesting of soybeans in Manchuria. From time to time, some of the younger officers would boast that, "We're going to hit Hawaii, to take Singapore, and bottle up your fleet." I thought they were just "talking through their hats" but surprisingly, that's what later happened. They expected the United States to act somewhat in the manner that they are acting today, with reference to Vietnam. They figured that Americans would say, "Well, it's not worth going to all-out war for." With the immobilization of the American fleet--and the crippling of the British fleet--the Japanese thought they would be able to get away with it much in the same way that they were able to get away with the so-called Manchurian invasion. You will recall that the League of Nations found itself impotent in stopping that invasion.

LANDY:

What caused you to leave Manchuria?

AISO:

I came home on a sick leave. Unfortunately, I came down with the so-called endemic diseases. They used to say that you had become one of the old China hands after you had had hemorrhoid trouble and dysentery. But in my case, these diseases brought on hepatitis, a very severe case of hepatitis. I went down to negotiate with the Tokyo Ministry of Finance with reference to one of our economic deals. I arrived in Tokyo on a Saturday, so I went down to Atami for the weekend. It was at Atami that I was confined to bed with a very severe case of hepatitis in which my urine became just like soy sauce, dark. There commenced a five-months' confinement at St. Luke's Hospital.

LANDY:

In Atami?

AISO:

No, in Tokyo. St. Luke's International Hospital at Tsukiji. This was the hospital that the Occupation troops took over as their hospital when they occupied Tokyo. It was by far the best hospital in Japan, in terms of standards that Americans were accustomed to. In Japanese hospitals, even in the prewar Tokyo Imperial Hospital, it was customary to take your own bedding when you went there as a patient, whereas St. Luke's was done up in the American style, under Episcopalian missionary direction.

LANDY:

Were you treated by Japanese doctors?

AISO:

Yes. The staff was entirely made up of Japanese doctors and Japanese nurses. The nurses, however, were supervised by American headnurses. I met a Dr. Joe Ohno who had played football at Hollywood High School, later had gone to Lafayette College on a scholarship, graduated from Jefferson Medical School in Philadelphia and then went back to Tokyo. He was not a Nisei, but one who had emigrated from Japan. I believe he became an eye, ear, nose and throat specialist.My mother kept on having dreams of me being ill every night until she said she just couldn't stand it anymore. She decided to come after me and

asked Dad if she could take my brother Daniel along. The two of them came to bring me home. They sent a cable from the *Taiyo Maru,* then a day out from Yokohama, which they were on. It was directed to the company in Mukden, saying that they were on their way there. The cable was then forwarded back to Tokyo, where I was confined in St. Luke's. I had a wire sent from Tokyo to tell them not to go to Manchuria, that I was hospitalized in Tokyo.

LANDY:

Had you informed your mother that you were sick?

AISO:

No.

LANDY:

She just intuited it?

AISO:

Yes. In those days I just didn't write to my family because of the censorship. I thought it was best not to communicate at all. And what's more, you just don't tell your parents that you're ill. Besides, my parents were against my going over into areas like China, and Manchuria, which were considered quite hazardous at the time. But now, as I look back, my experiences in China and Manchuria added a great deal of richness to my life. I wouldn't have missed the experience and adventure for anything, now.Mother insisted that I come home. She would not leave until I came home. So she traveled with me, when I was able, down to Shanghai and up to Mukden and then brought me back home. I was on sick leave here in Southern California recuperating from this hepatitis.

LANDY:

What did you do after your convalescence?

AISO:

During the latter part of my convalescence, I decided to take the California bar examination, and went back to take some courses at the University of Southern California Law School. This was about six years after I had been admitted to the New York bar. As any lawyer will realize, a lawyer in practice

goes in depth in certain areas. It is very seldom that he has all the law on his fingertips the way he had at the time he took the bar examination. Besides, in California, there was community property law, which we did not have back East. There were other courses, such as constitutional law, which I had not taken primarily because I had to take a course called Future Interests, which is really difficult and cannot be learned by yourself; at least, it was so told to me. It has to do primarily with the questions of estate planning, trusts, and so forth. It so happens that I have very seldom had occasion to use Future Interests, whereas my bread and butter today is constitutional law, particularly with reference to its application to criminal law.

LANDY:

Were there any other Nisei practicing law in the state of California at that time?

AISO:

Yes, at that time there were Nisei practicing here, in a fashion. We were not on the main highway, as it were. We never appeared in court by ourselves. An associate Caucasian counsel did the courtroom advocacy. There were a couple attorneys here who had been born in Hawaii. There was an attorney called John Maeno who was also a contemporary of Shiminouchi and myself. He was practicing here.

LANDY:

Did these lawyers represent exclusively Japanese-American clients?

AISO:

Yes. Primarily clients who required knowledge of the Japanese language.Right after I got started, with admission to the bar, along came greetings from Uncle Sam. I was called up for the fourth or fifth draft of the Selective Service. At that time, you were scheduled to be gone for only one year. In 1939, of course, the war had broken out in Europe but we had not become active in it.My own doctor told me that I had not recovered from hepatitis sufficiently, so that I'd never make the Army physical. But I reported for my physical examination at the Hollywood Legion where doctors were donating their services. People weren't taking military service too seriously. One doctor said,

"What's the matter, old-timer, you get hooked?" And he added, "Oh, well, it's only a year's time." I was 31, but I was still a bachelor. That's how I happened to be picked up in the draft.

LANDY:

If you had not been drafted, was it your intention to practice law in California?

AISO:

I was not sure what I would do. I wanted to be admitted to the California bar to see what would develop. The British-American Tobacco Company was very generous. They said I could even take as much as two years off. They kept on sending me my salary check, much to my embarrassment. Eventually, when I decided that I would not go back there, I felt obligated to refund a great deal of the salary that they had sent to me.By that time, Japanese-American relations were turning from bad to worse. The normal commerce between the United States and Japan was being interrupted. Particularly, when President Roosevelt declined to meet with Prince Konoye in Alaska, and there was an embargo imposed, the so-called ABCD embargo (America, Britain, China, and the Netherlands). Then, war definitely came to be just a question of time. People of Japanese ancestry, such as myself, were hoping that somehow the evil day could be averted but, on the other hand, intellectually we knew it was inexorably moving on a collision course.My army career started at Fort MacArthur where I was inducted. Even at Fort MacArthur, I thought I would be sent home as being unable to pass the physical. So, I declined to have a send-off party. It was the custom of the Japanese community to have a send-off party for people entering military service. I was very surprised to see the Presiding Judge of the Los Angeles County Superior Court present to see us off. I gave him credit for being a very civic-minded person, interested in our community. Later, I found out that he was actually, in civilian clothes, doing his duty as an officer in the Naval Intelligence. [laughter]One amusing thing occurred at Fort MacArthur, when a private first class interviewed me. He asked what I did in civilian life. I told him I was a lawyer. He remarked, "Another lawyer. Dime a dozen." He scrawled across my paper: "Man with no special aptitudes. Mark for basic training."

LANDY:

Were there many other Nisei at Fort MacArthur?

AISO:

At that time, no. I was put in a group that was predominantly Negro, with a few Mexican-Americans. The very first day after I was inducted I was put on the garbage detail. When the mess sergeant talked to me, he spoke to me in broken English. I thought, for a while, it would be fun, so I replied to him, "Sergeant, you haulum garbage this-a-way?" And he said, "Okay, Charlie, that-a-way." At the end of the day-- I had not been used to lifting heavy loads--my hands were scarred and my feet swelled up. I literally had to crawl back to my barracks. Nine of my ten toenails turned black from the fact that the shoes were not the proper size.

LANDY:

Were you well accepted by the other men?

AISO:

Fort MacArthur was such a short stay that I don't know that I observed enough to comment. Fortunately, after just three or four days, I was shipped out to Camp Haan, which is across the field from March Air Force Base, outside of Riverside, California. I was glad to stay in Southern California, but I was rather disappointed that I had been sent to a truck maintenance outfit. I had asked for signal corps service, if anything, in the Army. They did not have Reception Centers built yet. So, I was sent to Company D of the 69th Quartermaster Battalion, which was an independent company engaged in second echelon light maintenance and repair of vehicles, primarily trucks.Actually, my military training started in the high school ROTC back in 1923. I applied for training in the Hollywood High School ROTC, but the sergeant in charge told me he didn't want any Japs in the Army and so they would not take me in. I protested. I recall making a trip downtown to the City Board of Education, meeting a Colonel Clark, and putting my case before him. He asked me how old I was. I told him and he said, "You have to be fourteen." I was not fourteen yet, so I had to reapply when I was fourteen. A semester later, when I did reach fourteen, I promptly applied. There had been changes of personnel. I met a new master sergeant, who had seen service in north China and with Japanese troops in Siberia in World War I. He was very

sympathetic. Also, there was a Captain Ryan, who was a student of Lafcadio Hearn's works. Finally I had a professor of military science and tactics who was a major, a Major D. M. Cheston. His son was also in the ROTC as a classmate of mine. His son went on to West Point and is today a retired colonel, residing in the Baltimore area. Major Cheston was very kind to me. Eventually, Major Cheston awarded me with a warrant qualifying me for a sergeant's position in the Organized Reserves. In the summer of 1926, I also went to CMTC camp (Citizens Military Training Camp) and completed the white course. That left only one year to qualify for a commission, the blue course. But I never had an opportunity to complete it, as Brown University did not have a university ROTC and there were no summer CMTC encampments near Rhode Island.This training became valuable because at Camp Haan, another buddy of mine, who was a graduate of the UCLA Senior ROTC, and I acted, more or less, as drill sergeants for the group that had been sent to the company. Infantry drill regulations had been changed from close order to extended order, but I did have familiarity with that. Al Sims, the graduate from UCLA, and I took turns acting as drill sergeants for the recruits.

LANDY:

Were the men sympathetic with having a Japanese-American as their drill sergeant?

AISO:

Yes. There was quite a mixture of people at that time. Most of the people were not college graduates. Most of them were mechanics and people who had worked with their hands.Two men in that company used to bring their letters to me to have them read to them. I also used to write letters for them back to their parents, who lived in northern California. Possibly they came to me because they felt less embarrassed than going to another Caucasian buddy in the same company. I was quite surprised that, in that day and age, when California had compulsory education, there were people who could not read nor write. These two chaps, however, were damn good mechanics. They really knew how to repair trucks.I was like a square peg in a round hole in light maintenance. When I was sent down to the garage to become a parts clerk, the sergeant asked me for a carburetor, with a venturi sidewise, for a certain type of truck. I asked the sergeant, "What's a venturi?" He proceeded to

explain but it was still unintelligible to me. So I asked, "What's that?" He said, "Aiso, what the Sam hell are you doing here?" And I said, "I don't know." [laughter]

1.4. Tape Number: II, Side Two (August 3, 1970)

AISO:

I was inducted in April of 1941. It must have been May or June of that year, that a Major Kai E. Rasmussen, who became my commandant at the Fourth Army Intelligence School, later the Military Intelligence Service Language School at Camp Savage and Fort Snelling, came through interviewing people of Japanese ancestry to test their Japanese language ability. In the company, there were, ahead of me, three people of Japanese ancestry: a chap from Hawaii, and two mechanics from the Stockton area. I just ran into one of them, Susumu Ito, who is today a professor of anatomy at either Tufts Medical School or another medical school in Boston.I recognized Major Rasmussen as an officer that I had seen in Tokyo in 1936. I was going down through the Marunouchi area one time when I saw this red-complexioned person, wearing a gray tweed suit, jump out of a car and go into the American Club. That happened to be Captain (then major, later colonel) Rasmussen.When I first went to Japan, in 1926, on my second afternoon there, I got lost in Tokyo. I wound up in an area where there were barracks for Japanese troops. I saw a sign, "Captain Cresswell," in English, outside of a dwelling, so I went to see this officer to ask how to get back to where I was staying in Tokyo. He turned out to be one of the officers--the same as Colonel Rasmussen--American officers, attached to Japanese troops. They had studied the Japanese language as language officers in Japan for about two years. The third year they spent with a Japanese company. They would act as a company commander of Japanese troops. This was on an exchange basis. There were Japanese officers doing the same thing in the United States.Captain Cresswell, later Colonel Cresswell, was a compiler of the then only extant Japanese and English dictionary of military terms. He later became, for a short time, my commanding officer, as Colonel Cresswell, when I was serving in the Civil Intelligence Section at MacArthur's Headquarters. By accident, people you casually meet turn up for more intimate association.Returning to Camp Haan, Major Rasmussen tested my conversational Japanese, and then gave me a manual called the *Sakusen-*

Yomurei, which means "The Essentials of Military Strategy," and had me read it. I wasn't too fluent in reading it, but I could understand its meaning. The "Kanji" or Chinese characters are ideographs. So one may not be able to read it orally, but the meaning is discernible. I did not know the technical English military language. For instance, the expression, *Sokumen-Kogeki,* means, "Flank attack." I didn't know the military term, "flank." So, I just told him, "attack from the side." He said, "Well, that's the idea."I heard no more of it. I went on Fourth Army maneuvers in August of 1941 in which I drove a truck from Riverside, to the state of Washington, and back. At that time, they were discharging people who were over 28. After my furlough, I expected to get my walking papers. In the meantime, I had become engaged to marry my present wife. I had also made plans to return to practice, in Los Angeles.When I went back to pick up my papers, after the furlough, I was called to headquarters to see the G-2 there. They inquired where I had been. I said, "At home." They inquired, "Do you recall that military intelligence school that we were talking about last spring? How would you like to go to it?" I said, "No, I came here to get my walking papers," to which the major said, "Want to go to that room next door and think it over for twenty minutes?" I said, "I've become engaged now. Can I make a phone call to my fiancée?" He said, "No, you can't." I looked at the major and I said, "Well, it's a question of go or else, isn't it, Major? Let's quit fooling around." He replied, "Well, that's it." He ordered me to go down immediately to the station hospital to have a physical examination, for a change of station and of branch of service.There, I met my company commander by chance. I told him what had happened. He was quite furious. He said, "Don't you know it's military custom to discuss these things with your company commander before you leave the unit?" I told him, "I was told to get over to the hospital, sir, and here I am."That afternoon I was taken by jeep to pick up a train at the Union Terminal in Los Angeles. I managed to get a telephone call to my fiancée. She met me at the Union Station. From there, I went on to the Presidio of San Francisco. I was then assigned to the Fourth Army Intelligence School. It was a pilot school in which they were going to undertake instruction of the Japanese language to people of Japanese ancestry and to people of Caucasian ancestry as well.At that time I was a private first class and a second class specialist. That would be a specialist PFC, drawing a buck sergeant's pay. I was assigned there first as a student and a part-time instructor. After a week or so I was told that I was going to be an

instructor. Later they said, "We can't have you, as a non-commissioned officer, instructing, because we're going to have some full colonels in the school. Here's what we'll do. We're going to furlough you to the Enlisted Reserve and you're technically going to become a War Department Civilian Employee. But if you try to leave, you're going to be called right back. Several weeks later, I found myself designated as the head instructor of the school.

LANDY:

Were you subject to very stringent security checks?

AISO:

I imagine that checks had been made on me.There was a Colonel Pash, an officer of Russian derivation, a naturalized American. He was a former member of the Physical Education Department at Hollywood High School. He came to me and inquired, "How do you expect the Nisei to act in this situation?" I told him that I thought there was no question about how the Nisei were going to act. But I said, "The way the people react depends very much on how you treat them. If you will trust them, they are not going to betray the trust. On the other hand, if you're going to treat us like traitors, I'm afraid some of us are going to react accordingly."I did meet another civilian instructor, a Mr. Akira Oshida, who was a graduate of Meiji University, and Mr. Shigeya Kihara, who had been studying Japanese at the University of California and had his Master of Arts in that area. The three of us set up and started this language school on a pilot basis.

LANDY:

Did you have to devise a new curriculum for this school?

AISO:

Yes, we took up what they called the Naganuma readers. These were the textbooks that these American language officers had used in Tokyo. We improvised upon them. The faculty was rapidly expanded to six or ten civilian instructors. It was November 1, 1941 that we had our formal opening exercises.American intelligence, at that time, was very naive. There were two Japanese tankers sitting there, right by the Golden Gate. Allegedly, they were there because they couldn't purchase oil to go home. I had read in the

Japanese vernacular newspaper, published in San Francisco, that there were all naval reserve officers on those tankers. I promptly reported to my headquarters. The commandant of the school was Colonel Weckerling, a career officer of German extraction. Major Rasmussen was his executive officer. I reported through Major Rasmussen to Colonel Weckerling that he should let them have their tankful of oil and get them out of there. They were sitting right in the bay, where they could observe all movements of our military craft, in and out of San Francisco Harbor.The first class was composed of approximately sixty students: about forty-five Nisei, and fifteen Caucasian and Chinese officers. Some of these officers knew some Japanese; others knew very little. One major, from Hawaii, conversed in pidgin Japanese with people in the plantations. He had put down as his foreign language qualification, Japanese. We had to send him elsewhere. One of the interesting things was the Domei shortwave overseas newscast, in which the opening of the school was broadcast from Tokyo, and the names of the instructors were given.We settled down to work and then Pearl Harbor came along. It was something we had hoped would not come and still we knew it was coming. It was a mixed feeling. It was Sunday morning. I had planned to get married on my birthday, which was December 15. They were having a shower for my fiancée, Sumi Akiyama. I started to go into town to send her a telegram, and then, lo and behold, in the streetcar and along Market Street, the radios were blasting about this attack on Pearl Harbor. I immediately turned around and went back.I recall on the streetcar back to the Presidio there was a hysterical woman saying, "There's a Jap there." She was telling all the males around there, "Haven't you got any guts? Grab him!" [laughter] I was very happy when the streetcar got back into the Presidio area.That afternoon, the Nisei soldiers were assembled together and their side arms were taken away from them. Their weapons, bayonets and rifles, were taken away. I recall at this time one of the students, who was a *kibei,* came up, and asked, *"Sensei"* (meaning instructor), "shall we go over the hill, or can you tell me that we're going to be safe? Do you think that we're going to be taken out and shot next morning?" I told him I didn't know; I couldn't guarantee it. But I told him that throughout my experience, for every rabble-rousing American, there was at least one, or two, cool-headed people who played fairly and squarely, sportsmanlike. I was going to take my chances with that group. I advised him that he ought to stay. I am proud to say--I do not feel free to give

his name yet--he was one of the first men that went out to the Pacific and won a Silver Star.The Friday before Pearl Harbor broke out, General DeWitt inspected the class that I was teaching. He said, "John, you're doing a good job. If there's anything you want, just come see me and you can have it." That was the last I saw of General DeWitt. [laughter]When the war broke out Colonel Weckerling was returned to other duties. Temporarily, a Captain Dickey, also a language officer and a West Point graduate, took over. Major Rasmussen was then in charge of an artillery battalion at Fort Baker. In a few weeks, he returned to become commandant of the school.

LANDY:

Did you ever find out what forces within the Fourth Army were responsible for insisting that the Nisei be returned to active duty as soldiers?

AISO:

This group that I was with never did terminate active duty. In fact, Colonel Weckerling, when he got us together on the afternoon of Pearl Harbor, said, "I'm of German extraction and I went through the same thing that you're now going through, in World War I. Be cool and do your duty." That was a word of encouragement. There was no interruption of duty with the Nisei at the school. There were others, we were later told, in line outfits, who were sent home and furloughed to the Enlisted Reserve. We were a select group. We continued our teaching.We had a special speed-up class of those who had basic Japanese training in Japan, the *kibei's.* They were sent out after a month's training or so. Then came evacuation in the city affecting the people of Japanese ancestry not in military service.A couple of the graduates were sent out to Guadal-canal. Later, another group of our graduates was sent into action in Kiska and Dutch Harbor. That was the beginning of the work of these Nisei interpreters, prisoner-of-war interrogators, translators. At first, they were looked upon with suspicion. They were not welcomed by some commanders in the field. But, as time went on, the Nisei proved themselves. We were never able to supply as many as were thereafter requested.In May of 1942, it was decided that, due to the evacuation and the hostile feeling in California, the Presidio was not an appropriate place for the school. The Army authorities searched over the country and decided that Minnesota would be the ideal place. In that area, there were German-speaking people and

Scandinavian-speaking people; they thought that there would be less hostility from this group. So the school did move to Camp Savage. This was an old men's camp which had been turned into a military camp. We passed from Fourth Army jurisdiction to that of the G-2 of the War Department. The school was renamed the Military Intelligence Service Language School.About that time, came a very large contingent of people from Hawaii. I was very much surprised that in this group were many people who were prominent leaders of the Japanese-American community in Hawaii. One of them, who came as a private, was Masaji Marumoto, who is now a justice of the Supreme Court of Hawaii. He was my predecessor at the Harvard Law School and was a very successful attorney in Honolulu. Another person, who later became a judge, was Ben Tashiro. He was the county civil service examiner. An high school principal, who was forty-five, came in with his seventeen-year-old son. A father-and-son combination had volunteered. There was also a branch manager of a bank. I thought it was going to be quite difficult to handle these people who were older than I. But they turned out to be excellent soldiers. Some of them were added to our enlisted faculty. I am greatly indebted to Justice Marumoto who, as a master sergeant, served as my personal clerk. When the opportunity came, I did recommend him for officer candidate school and the Judge Advocate General's School on the University of Michigan campus. He went there and was commissioned a first lieutenant. He later performed outstanding service in Okinawa.

LANDY:

Were you the highest ranking Nisei officer?

AISO:

At that time, I was still not an officer. I was still technically a War Department Civilian Employee. I was called the Technical Director. Later, my title changed to Director of Academic Training. I was like a dean of a school. The actual language training was under my direction.One time, when the commandant was away touring the Pacific bases, there [arrived] a new G-2 from the War Department, a General Clayton Bissell. It was rather surprising that General Bissell was a career officer. He had joined the Army in World War I, but had been a lawyer in Illinois. I don't know whether we talked the same language or not, but he asked me, "Mr. Aiso, what are you doing in civilian clothes here?

It's not right for a civilian like you ordering military people in uniform around." I told him that I had asked to be returned to active duty in the grade of master sergeant. There had been several attempts to commission some of us as officers. But the commissioning of people of Japanese ancestry had been suspended for part of the war.

LANDY:

As official Army policy?

AISO:

As official Army policy. When I was first considered, the AUS system of appointments had not yet been instituted. You had to come up through the ranks. In order to be a second lieutenant you had to be under twenty-eight years of age. I was already past twenty-eight so that avenue was not open. Later, I came up before a board that considered me for a first lieutenant's position, and then for a captaincy. But, in each instance, it was still the policy not to commission people of Japanese ancestry.The war was coming along, and I asked to be returned to uniformed service as a master sergeant. Then came a telegram saying, "Your request to return as a master sergeant is being rejected because you're being considered for commissioned service." That was followed a day later by a telephone call recommending me for a direct commission as a major in the AUS. It came through, and I continued with my duties in my capacity as a major.

LANDY:

Did this commission come through at the intercession of General Bissell?

AISO:

Yes, I think it was General Bissell's work. In fact, General Bissell is the one most responsible for the Nisei's winning commissions as intelligence officers. Possibly, also, a good word was put in for me by the deputy commandant of the school, Lieutenant Colonel Archibald Stuart. He later rose to be a major general in the Korean War and retired as a major general. [He was a] West Point graduate, also a language officer. When General Bissell made inquiries of him, he said, "Ask Mr. Aiso. He's running the school." So I think that was the combination that brought it about.

LANDY:

How were your relationships with the commandant?

AISO:

My relationships with the commandant were very good until I became commissioned. Then they cooled off somewhat.

LANDY:

Could you describe the personality of Colonel Rasmussen?

AISO:

Colonel Rasmussen was a naturalized Dane. He still spoke English with a Danish accent. He had some very fine qualities. He went to West Point, having been selected for the academy from the enlisted ranks.I would not say that it is a characteristic of Colonel Rasmussen alone, but I have found in my experience that Army officers are a very close-knit clique. They act differently from lawyers and law professors. When I did research for Professor Hudson, and when he passed this on to the State Department, particularly a piece that had to do with reforming naturalization laws as they referred to women, Professor Hudson wrote, "This is the work of my students." Among our number was John Hazard, now a professor of law at Columbia Law School, an expert on Russian law, and myself. There was also a Naval officer called Nunn, who was to become a Judge Advocate General of the Navy; there was also Lieutenant Perry. We all worked on this, and Professor Hudson wrote in his covering letter, "I have been busy, and so this work is the work of my students." He enumerated us by name and gave us credit. But that is not the way the Army worked. Often I would write reports and all the senior officer would do was to change the front page and the signature page. Then the report would go forward as his own personal work.When I was in GHQ Tokyo, I had several West Point company grade officers under me. I made it a practice that whenever they wrote up papers, I would add a cover sheet, stating this is the work of so-and-so, and pass it on, to give the author credit. They were very delighted.I thought it was going to be very difficult with these West Pointers for a civilian major, as I was called, particularly because I had the habit of speaking up when I thought some of my senior officers were about to make a mistake. One of the major reasons why I did not accept a

commission to become a Regular Army officer, a career officer, is the practice of the senior officers taking all the credit. This feudalistic practice is something that one trained in the law, and one who is taught to speak his own mind, simply cannot live with over an extended period of time. Until V-J day came along, I played along with my immediate officers, regardless of my personal assessment of them as individuals.

LANDY:

You attribute this suppression to the feudal qualities of the hierarchy rather than to anti-Nisei sentiment?

AISO:

Yes. I would not say there was anti-Nisei sentiment. In fact, as far as that element goes, I think we Nisei are indebted very much to Colonel Rasmussen and also to Colonel Dickey and Colonel Stuart. I think that they stood up for us. The Nisei had a great friend in former Ambassador Joseph Grew. Ambassador Grew visited our language school several times. He was one of those that suggested that greater use should be made of Americans of Japanese ancestry, particularly in planning postwar policies in occupied Japan. It was through his auspices that I was given the opportunity of outlining a general blue paper on major reforms that should be carried out in the post-war reconstruction of Japan. This was presented to the War Department and, with their blessing, I was permitted to give a summary of that study before the New York *Herald Tribune* Forum as early as 1943, a year and a half before V-J day. I want to pay our gratitude to Ambassador Grew and also extend our accolade to him for his discernment in realizing that Americans of Japanese ancestry could be of help, as Americans. He was one of our friends throughout the trying war days.

LANDY:

You mentioned before that the names of the instructors at the language school were broadcast by Tokyo radio. Was any recrimination taken, on the part of the Japanese government, against relatives of instructors living in Japan?

AISO:

I don't think so. However, we were told to be prepared for the worst.The understanding people, the responsible people of Japan, said that as Americans, it would be in keeping with the spirit of *bushido* that we should act as loyal Americans and, if necessary, fight against Japan. Mr. Ohashi was one of those that told me, "Aiso, when the crisis comes, I expect you to take up the *hoko*" (which is an ancient armament) "against the homeland." There were others, too, in the United States, who told us that according to *bushido* the sense of loyalty and the sense of gratitude were things that make up a proper human being. You've been raised in America; you've gotten your living from America; you must do your duty to America. Likewise, this was the sentiment of ranking general officers I had met in Manchuria and elsewhere. I found out that the people in the lower ranks were not that way. They accused me of being a spy. But the people that I would put in the statesmen class saw things in the long light of history. And so, when the actual emergency came, I think we older Nisei were spiritually prepared to take the course of action we did.We did have to instruct our students, however, that they were going to be in a crossfire when they went out to the Pacific, which was true. One of our most famous graduates was Sergeant Frank Hachiya. He won a Silver Star and a posthumous Distinguished Service Cross. He was sent out on a very important, one-man, scouting mission in Leyte, and as he was returning to the American lines, he was mistaken for a Japanese infiltrator, and killed by friendly fire. That is the type of life that the fellows in the Pacific went through.

LANDY:

Did any of your students express hesitancy at going off to fight against, perhaps, their own relatives?

AISO:

I think the time is not ripe for me to answer this question in its full ramifications. There were certain instances. Fortunately, after having had a talk with them, they were the ones that came off with all the distinguished decorations in the Pacific, so we did not have any real difficulty in that way. I think that later on I will have some further comments, but at this time I think that's the extent to which I care to comment.

LANDY:

To what do you attribute the extraordinary bravery of the Nisei soldiers, not only in the European Theater, but also in the Pacific Theater?

AISO:

We were on the spot. I think we had to prove our loyalty. We had, all along, been told that we could not be assimilated, that we were different from European immigrants, that all we cared for was our loyalty to the Emperor. But human nature is the same everywhere. We wanted to prove that, as human beings, we longed for liberty. We longed to become an integral part of America, just like any Europeans.It is an irony that civil rights made their greatest progress in time of war. In time of war, especially in the heat of battle, you're not going to notice the color of the skin of your buddy. Regardless of color, if he's on your side, he is respected and treated equally. That's why we are indebted to the military of the United States for first [giving us] a feeling that we were wanted, a sense of belonging. It was the first time I was told, "John, your country needs you." I think that is the experience that most Nisei went through. For the first time, we felt that we were wanted. We became an integral part of America. The military, in one sense, had a statesmanlike outlook and did a job of amalgamating a group of people who were misunderstood and had not been given full opportunity to take part.

LANDY:

Did you know Colonel Mashbir at this time?

AISO:

I only knew of Colonel Mashbir. All I knew was that he was out in the field and in charge of the boys after they left us. There were recriminations back and forth: Mashbir out in the field, and Rasmussen at the school. Later I got to know Colonel Mashbir. Colonel Mashbir was the one that took charge of the boys, particularly in the pool called Allied Translator and Interpreter Section. The acronym was ATIS. After the war, I got to know Colonel Mashbir.After V-J Day I asked to be released. It [had been] quite a considerable number of years, and I desired to return to civilian life. Before that time, I had asked for overseas duty, but I was told, "We're holding you back until possibly there will be action required in Manchuria." One theory was that the Kwantung Army, which was the flower of the Japanese Army, would take the Emperor and hole

up in Manchuria after Japan proper was occupied. There were plans in effect for a showdown in Manchuria. It didn/t turn out that way, but that was one of the theories of what might possibly occur.When I asked to be let out, I got orders that I was headed for service in occupied Japan. The only irony of it was that I eventually had to go to the hospital to have a double hernia repaired before they'd let me go overseas. Then they put me aboard a ship that was headed for the Philippines. And so, when I went down to the Philippines, they asked me what I was doing there, and I told them I didn't know.My impressions of the Philippines at that time are still very vivid. I was told not to walk the streets alone. I had to be accompanied by two Caucasian officers at all times. As we went from place to place, a Filipino woman would bring up a maimed child, and, in Japanese, say, "The Japs did this." Then, she would spit at me. I was surprised [at] the amount of Japanese that the Filipinos learned during the time of the Japanese occupation.There were two brothers who were graduates of the Military Intelligence Service Language School. As they were sorting out prisoners of war in the Philippines, they came across a blood brother of theirs, who had been caught at the outbreak of the war in Japan and had been pressed into Japanese military service. This is one of the touching experiences. The brother that was in the Japanese forces died shortly after that from illness. But I have often wondered how these two fellows must have felt when, in sorting out enemy prisoners, they came across their own blood brother. It's one of the experiences that should be highlighted to preserve the spiritual shock and trials that the boys who went out in the Pacific ran into.From the Philippines, I hitched a ride to Tokyo, and there another incident happened. I called up the motor pool for transportation to a billet, after registering at GHQ. Lo and behold, my brother was on duty at the motor pool in Tokyo, my brother James. He said, "I'll be right over," and he came over with a pickup truck and took me to my billet.The next day I reported to General Willoughby's assistant, Colonel Bratton. He was the colonel who was on duty at Army Headquarters in Hawaii on Pearl Harbor day. Though he had a low serial number, because of that catastrophe at Pearl Harbor, he never rose higher than a colonel. In fact, he had been a colonel at the time of Pearl Harbor. I found that there was already a desk in GHQ-SCAP with my name plate on it. I found my name in the GHQ telephone directory, and a desk stacked high with papers. They were asking me, "Where have you been all this time?" [laughter]

1.5. Tape Number: III, Side One (August 3, 1970)

LANDY:

What was your official title with the Occupation forces?

AISO:

I had been assigned to two different sections. One was called the C.I. and E., Civil Information and Education. That section had charge of the educational reform and the restructuring of the press and mass media. The other one was with the Civil Intelligence Section, attached to the G-2, General MacArthur's headquarters. They decided that my assignment would be decided by which cable had gone off first, and so I found myself assigned to CIS. I was a section chief in charge of screening Japanese officials as to whether or not they should be purged under the Potsdam Declaration.

LANDY:

Would you describe your duties?

AISO:

There was no orientation as to what the Potsdam Declaration was. I inquired as to what the Potsdam Declaration provided. It's one of the quirks in military security that I, as a field grade officer, was permitted to see parts of directives from the Far Eastern Commission at different times, but never the whole. The Far Eastern Commission was set up in Washington, D.C., to prepare directives to General MacArthur. Even as a field grade officer, with top secret clearance, the document could not be given to me in toto. It was given to me in parts, half an hour at a time. I was not permitted to let any of my company grade officers see it.After about a week at GHQ-SCAP, I picked up a Japanese magazine, and the whole thing was in this magazine. I took it to my superiors, and were they surprised. The first thing we did was go out, have the editor-in-chief of the magazine picked up in custody, and brought to GHQ. We had to play it coy. We merely asked him, "Where did you get this information," and so forth. This was in the spring of 1946. This magazine had been published in November of `45. He informed us that they just took it from an AP broadcast that came out in the clear, from Washington. It was reproduced. We didn't tell him, [but it was] top secret, so even the company grade officers in the

intelligence section of headquarters weren't permitted to see it. There it was, produced in [its] entirety, in the Japanese press.The nature of the work was to screen the personal histories that came across your desk, from the prime minister on down. If there was anybody that was, what we call, a militarist, he was purged. I very much opposed the mechanical method of screening which was applied. As one legally trained in America, I thought guilt had to be personally proved. The fact that a person was a member of a certain society, and so forth, didn't automatically make him a militarist.

LANDY:

Could you describe in a little more detail the criteria that were used?

AISO:

People who had direct connections with military operations were naturally militarists. But there were others who had expressed military sentiments. If a person had written a book, or he had made speeches, and so forth, advocating the aggressive policies of Japan, he was classified a militarist. Then other criteria came in, such as, was he a member of certain societies like the Taisei Yokusan Kai. But here again was, I think, a defect in our intelligence. This Imperial Rule Assistance Association (the English translation) was originally created by Prince Konoye and, in its early stages, was an organization to combat the extremists in the military. Later, the military infiltrated it and took charge. I objected and said, "You have to check to see at what time the person became a member of the organization in order to see whether he was militarily motivated, or not." But I did not get my way in that regard.Later, there was a situation where we had a great deal of internal conflict in GHQ-SCAP. Our duties in the political purge were split between the Government Section headed by General Whitney and a Colonel Kades, and our section, headed by General Willoughby, Colonel Bratton, Colonel Cresswell, Colonel Wood and others, during the time I was there. The purge of Prime Minister Hatoyama was not the work of G-2. The Government Section pulled it on their own, and we faced it as a *fait accompli.* The Government Section--and this marked one of the reasons why I came home at the time I did--tried to make it look like a Japanese suggestion, that every person who had been a director of a corporation with a capitalization of more than a half-million yen, should, *ipso facto,* be classified as a militarist. A corporation of that size, a

sizeable corporation by the standards of those days, either helped finance the war, or had some part in the manufacturing of munitions, it was argued. I opposed this very much, because it caught a good number of people, like Mr. Takashi Komatsu, a Harvard graduate. He had been with the Asano interests before and during the war. He went into the business area because the military simply would not have anything to do with him. He, who later became president of the American-Japan Society of Tokyo, was an exponent of democracy. It was just the time to give an opportunity to people with a democratic frame of mind, such as he was, when along we came and purged him. Here again was a situation where, I thought, there should have been screening on an individual basis.I happened to discover this, because I had an engagement with the people from the Central Liaison Office at the time, a dinner engagement with members of our CIS section. The Japanese were late. We were meeting at some teahouse in Tsukiji. I had a phone call saying, "We're going to be late but please wait for us." It was nine o'clock or nine-thirty before they finally showed up for a six o'clock engagement. After there had been a few drinks passed around, one young fellow on the Central Liaison Office staff was feeling pretty good, and he spilled the beans to me in Japanese. They'd been kept in Colonel Kades' office, up to this time, with this plan and were supposed to present it to the GHQ officers the next day. He said, "It's not our plan at all; it's Government Section's plan." The plan had been proposed to me earlier by a person that used to be a T-5 under me (technician fifth grade). [He] returned to the United States and came back as a civilian expert on Japan. I had turned the plan down when he was with CIS, and later he went to the Government Section.

LANDY:

This was the plan to purge directors of all corporations over a certain size?

AISO:

Yes, and to expand it to catch people who had been in journalistic work as well. I reported what I learned of Government Section's activities in this respect to General Willoughby. He became quite incensed. He contacted General Marquat, who was in charge of Economic and Scientific Section, and a Colonel Nugent, who was in charge of Civil Information and Education. These three heads of G-2 and Special Staff were against it, but in the final analysis,

General Whitney got his way. I was threatened by Colonel Kades, who stated to me that any officer of GHQ who would make known to the Japanese government that there wasn't a solid front on the issue within GHQ would be court-martialed. I reported this to General Willoughby. He said, "Don't worry, we'll stick up for you." Anyway, I got tired and said, "General, it's going on six years now. If you will let me do legal work, I'll be happy and I'll stay. But this kind of work is getting on my nerves."

LANDY:

The final decision on all these matters was made by General MacArthur, is that correct?

AISO:

Yes. Eventually, it would be his say-so.

LANDY:

He eventually decided to side with the Government Section against you?

AISO:

Yes. Well, anyway, General Whitney had his day.

LANDY:

Could you amplify other areas of disagreement between the Government Section and G-2?

AISO:

I think the only other area was with reference to the purging of Premier Hatoyama. I don't think we were quite ready to purge him. But some people in Government Section got out the purge order, and it came out in the evening, before we were able to study it.There was a Colonel Markham, who was my superior, a lieutenant colonel. He was extremely anxious about freeing Japanese political prisoners, particularly Japanese Communists, for example, Tokuda and Nozaka, and others. Eventually, Markham was discharged, after he came back as a civilian, for certain leftist connections. At that time, I ran across this Colonel Pash again. From Colonel Pash, I knew that at least fifty percent of the intelligence activities, even at that time, were directed against Russian infiltration. I think the Japanese people owe a debt of gratitude to

General MacArthur, in that he kept the Russians out of the actual Occupation. Incidentally, I might add that although General Chiang Kai-shek himself was quite magnanimous in letting the Japanese prisoners of war return, there were other Chinese, with the Communist elements it later turned out, that would have mistreated the Japanese people. At least, the Japanese would not have had the opportunity to reform, and to rebuild a nation on new principles, if either the Russians or Chinese had stationed troops in Japan during the Occupation.

LANDY:

Was your desk concerned, at all, with purging Russian-influenced people, or was your desk strictly concerned with militaristic activities?

AISO:

My activities, primarily, were to enforce the Potsdam Declaration, with reference to what had happened in the past. It was after I had been relieved and was supposed to go home, when I was a floating officer, that I suddenly got this job of screening people to be deported to Germany. This was something that had hung fire for about a year and a half. Then the time came when there was a boat available. We had to select some people to be deported to Germany. There were some extremely trying situations where families had to be broken up. Some of these people of German extraction were second generation and actually didn't know German. But there again, by these mechanical screening methods, if he was a member of Hitler's party, he was classified a militarist.

LANDY:

The same criteria that were used for Japanese militarists were used for these German-Japanese?

AISO:

Yes. I think the mechanical aspects were too bad.

LANDY:

What kind of system would you have advocated? Would it have been similar to that used in the occupation of Germany?

AISO:

I don't know about the occupation of Germany. I thought the standard of justice which we apply at home should be applied in judging guilt.

LANDY:

A judicial system.

AISO:

Individual guilt. Whether it was possible or not, because of our lack of personnel, was another question. But to put people mechanically into categories, and then classify them as militarists, defeats your own purposes in the long run.

LANDY:

I remember in your excellent speech to the *Herald Tribune* Forum, you advocated retention of the Emperor. Was this a hotly debated item in the Occupation?

AISO:

This was prior to the Occupation. There was a question as to whether the Emperor himself should be classified as a war criminal. Also, there was a question whether the emperor system should be done away with and a new democracy brought in. Particularly in the Orient, the people have an attachment to persons, not to institutions. Therefore, even with a democratic type of institution, it's somewhat like the British system. The British are sentimentally attached to the crown, although, in the actual everyday workings of the government, they exercise a parliamentary system. That is the type of democracy that Japan has preferred. The Emperor has become a very much revered, and venerated, and respected person. He is now thought of in terms of endearment by the Japanese people.

LANDY:

How would you evaluate the results of the purge? Was it an important element in the democratization of Japan?

AISO:

It's rather difficult to assess that, because with the conclusion of the peace treaty with Japan, all of this purge business went overboard and was undone. The people who came in to the government after that were people that we had technically purged. Premier Sato, Premier Kishi, *et al.,* are people that were on the purge list. A number of people who have become foreign ministers are similarly those that were purged.That's why I think that these people in Japan, while realizing that I had a duty to perform, nevertheless could not avoid a certain amount of--I won't say antagonism--coolness toward me. I am not sure, to this day, whether the Japanese government and the Japanese people accept the role which the Nisei played in the Pacific in the same light that they laud the work of the boys in the 442 in Europe. The 442 people have been acknowledged publicly, in government announcements and so forth. But the work of the boys in the Pacific and in the Occupation has not received public mention at all.

LANDY:

How were your relations with the Japanese people, on an individual basis, while you were in Japan with the Occupation?

AISO:

On an individual basis, it was very friendly. I thought it was my duty to act as an interpreter (intermediary) to both sides. There were a number of old friends in the government. Mr. Togo, who was convicted as a war criminal, was a personal friend. Ambassador Matsudaira was in retirement, but he was there. He had been the *Kuhai-Daijin,* that is, the Minister of Imperial Household Affairs, extremely close to the Emperor. There were individual friends all through. Particularly under an enlightened type of occupation, there was an opportunity to work as an interpreter of each nation concerned. I objected to policies, on the American part, which I felt were not fair and would not be considered fair in the light of history--for instance, this mechanical purging. On the other hand, I did suffer under the Japanese militarist regime prior to the war. I was looking for a number of the majors and lieutenant colonels that I had run into in Manchuria, to see if they would not show up someplace. I was hoping to smother them with kindness, to show the difference in treatment. For that reason, I felt that I could be helpful to both the United States and Japan.There again, working in a military hierarchy,

you don't always get your wish. I would have loved to have had, at least, one personal interview with General MacArthur, but I never got the opportunity. I stood as close as ten feet from him, but there was always a wall of colonels that would not permit me to speak to him personally. In fact, one colonel--I will not mention his name--was frank to say, "Well, John, you think I'm a damn fool to let you in and have you take *my* job." There is that narrowness of feeling in the military establishment. There might be some of that in the civilian bureaucracy, too, but not quite to the extent that there is in the military.

LANDY:

What was your relationship with General Willoughby?

AISO:

My relationship with General Willoughby has been very warm. In connection with the deportation of Germans, in which I was called up to represent the CIS section, General Willoughby indicated something, and all of the staff officers said, "You're right, General, yes, sir, yes, sir." He'd come around and ask in the circle. I was at the table, and when he came to me, I said, "Sir, I think you're wrong." [laughter] I was reprimanded by my immediate colonel, but General Willoughby called for me that afternoon and said, "It's rather refreshing. After this I want you to report to me directly." And so I got to see him on some occasions. But that was about the time I was ready to go home.In the postwar days, I met him in Washington, D.C. on several occasions. Our relationships have been very cordial throughout.

LANDY:

How did you come to leave the Occupation?

AISO:

I was getting fed up about being threatened with court-martial, and the period of service was getting on--six years. I had been requested by a number of sections to engage in legal work. For instance, there was, in Government Section, a group working on the legal reform of Japan. There was a Professor Wapler, a German, and a Tom Blakemore, Captain Blakemore. He is a member of the Oklahoma bar, the only American who has taken the Japanese bar

examination in Japanese. I had known him from earlier times. They were working on the human rights law. They would explain what the *habeas corpus* was in American law and then have a counterpart drafted in the Japanese law. That type of work I would have loved to have done, but I was not permitted to do it.I was asked to take part in a war crimes trial both by the prosecution, headed by a Brown man, and then also as a defense counsel for Marquis Kido. Likewise with reference to the Economic and Scientific Section. But on all of these occasions, I was told that requests could not be self-emanating, that if another one came through, they'd court-martial me. That's the type of language the military used. I thereforth asked to go home.I did get orders to go home. Then suddenly the orders were cancelled. I found out that someone had changed my military classification to a "scarce category officer." I picked it up on my 66-1, which is my classification card, and I made a big fuss about it. I took it to Colonel Bratton and I said, "What is this, an army that changes an officer's record behind his back? If you'll notice, Colonel, this is back-dated to a time when I wasn't even a commissioned officer." I made a complaint to the Inspector General's Office. There was a board meeting held and [they] said, "Well, Major, you've been working hard, you need a vacation, go on home for six weeks and we'll have you back." So I came home. Also I was promoted to a lieutenant colonel, terminal promotion. I came home expecting to be called back, but I never was called back. That terminated my Occupation duties.I came home. One of the interesting experiences I had was meeting a classmate of mine on returning to Los Angeles. He was a naval officer, during World War II, in the Pacific. I was still wearing my lieutenant colonel's uniform on my terminal leave, and I ran into him. He later became president of the Beverly Hills Bar Association. His name is Stanley Gleis. We were friends from kindergarten days. He said, "Well, Johnny, I have to apologize to you." I said, "Why?" He said, "Here I was expecting you to come up in a Japanese admiral's barge all the time that I was in the Pacific, and here, when I see you, you're wearing a lieutenant colonel's uniform of the United States Army." [laughter]After the war, I was transferred to the Judge Advocate General's Corps. The fact that it dovetailed with my daily occupation was challenging. The new Uniform Code of Military Justice had just been instituted. I really learned my criminal law there. Eventually, I was designated a mobilization designee, as a head of the International and Comparative Law Section of the Judge Advocate General's School.

LANDY:

This was after your return from Japan?

AISO:

Yes. This was a number of years after my return to civilian life. After I had become a judge. I won my promotion to a full colonel. My last tour of duty was as a member of the Board of Visitors to the Judge Advocate General's School. The Judge Advocate General's School is a school that trains people in post-graduate military law for a military judge advocate's work. It is considered a post-graduate law school. At one time, they thought they would confer a master of law's degree on the graduates of the school, but we did not get it through Congress. The American Law School Association and the American Bar Association did approve it and did recommend it. It is a school of that caliber.I was retired, but before I was retired, the Judge Advocate General of the Army nominated me for a brigadier generalship. At that time there was just one general officer's grade in the Judge Advocate General's Reserve Corps. I had not dreamed of ever being nominated to such a high rank, so I had not completed my command and general staff courses. This nomination came just at the time when Secretary MacNamara was right at the zenith of his austerity program, before they had to start building up again for Vietnam. I was not appointed. I was retired as a colonel. I am today a colonel in the Army of the United States: Retired.When I returned to California, the Japanese-American community had not fully recovered from the evacuation. Little Tokyo was still not reoccupied by all of the former owners. In fact, much of my early work consisted of unlawful detainer actions, enabling owners to get back into their own houses. There were various rent control regulations; so you could not just walk into your house. In the case of my parents, they came back from a relocation center, and for two months they lived in a garage, because they were unable to get the tenants out. The tenants would not voluntarily move out. You had to give them a 90-days' notice to get them out. That was the type of situation they were in on their return home from the WRA camps.

LANDY:

Were you in practice by yourself at this point?

AISO:

No, I came back, and I happened to call on some of my friends, and one was Mr. John Maeno. He was up to his neck in work, particularly with cases before the various control boards, for example, the OPA [Office of Price Administration]. These regulations were something that were not well known by lawyers, so he asked me to help him. I started immediately, without taking any vacation, appearing before hearing boards, defending against black marketing charges against confectioners. They said that they had to have this black market sugar in order to keep their shop open. I recall one case that I kept on appealing until finally the controls went off. So my client got off. Then, there were these unlawful detainer suits.I got very busy, and, for a while, I went in as a partner of Mr. Maeno. I was with him for about two and a half years, then I decided to try practicing by myself. But I found out that it's pretty hard to practice by yourself, because you cannot cover all the courts where you have conflicts. So, I organized a partnership called Aiso, Chuman, and McKibbin. Mr. Chuman was another Nisei lawyer, considerably younger than myself. But he had handled some of my cases while I was down with what they diagnosed as a heart attack. I was confined for a summer.I did not have combat or hazardous duty during World War II. In fact, the only overseas duty I had was setting up a language school for the Canadian Army. I was stationed at the National Defense quarters in Ottawa for one month, and traveled through parts of Canada and set up a school for them in Vancouver. But I did work long hours, often working completely through the night. The years of fatigue had mounted up and that landed me in the hospital.Mr. McKibbin was a New York lawyer who had headed the civil division of the United States Attorney's office in New York. He came out here in connection with the Japanese evacuation claims program. By that time, the Nisei had been able to have passed through Congress first, a naturalization law, so our parents could become naturalized; and also, an evacuation claims law, that compensated, in part, for the economic losses.Shortly after, due to my ill health, it was thought that I ought to leave private practice and get something which was a bit less physically trying. I applied for a commissionership of the Los Angeles Superior Court. A commissioner is an assistant judge and also sits as a judge *pro tem,* by agreement of the parties. He is appointed by a majority vote of the Los Angeles Superior Court judges. I was fortunate enough to get an appointment and came under the supervision of Presiding Judge Stanley M. Barnes, who was an all-American football player at California under Andy Smith. He was a

contemporary and a good friend of Earl Warren's. Judge Barnes gave me what he called a roving assignment as a commissioner. I moved from department to department, handling domestic relations matters, probate matters,*ex parte* orders, and sitting as a *pro tem* judge.After about a year of that work, some municipal court judgeships opened up. Like a bolt out of the blue came a telephone call from Governor Earl Warren. I took the call not at home. I was at a client's house, and the phone call was relayed there about eight o'clock. The operator said, "This is the Governor's office. Are you Mr. Aiso?" I said, "Yes." Then, on the other end the voice said, "This is Earl Warren. Are you Mr. Aiso, Commissioner Aiso? Would you turn me down, if I should nominate you for a municipal court judgeship?" I said, "No, sir!" That was the beginning of my judicial career.I did not know Governor Warren; I had not met him. There was this incident, though, that I think I am now free to disclose. He was running for Governor of California--it was during the war--he was making public declarations about how he would not let Japanese people return to California. I voted for him by absentee ballot. I wrote him a letter saying that I thought, at heart, he was a very religious man. I wanted him to know that some of us so-called "Japs" were in the United States Army. I felt that after the war was over he would change his mind and let us come back. I never heard directly from him, but I did get a letter from my high school debating partner, Herbert Wenig, who was then an assistant attorney general in Attorney General Warren's office. I got a letter from Herb saying, "The Attorney General acknowledges your letter and thanks you." I am not sure whether the Chief Justice remembered that incident or not.Several years later, when I was admitted to the United States Supreme Court, the Chief Justice immediately recognized me and invited me to have lunch in his chambers. I spent an entire afternoon with him. At that time, he disclosed that it was Judge Barnes who had brought me to his attention. From that day on, I have had a very close relationship with the Chief Justice. On occasion, I have taken groups of Reserve officers from Southern California, numbering anywhere from sixty to one hundred and fifty, to get admitted to the United States Supreme Court. Each time, the Chief Justice was good enough to meet our group in a small anteroom. He always asked, "Where is Judge Aiso?" and I said, "Here." [laughter] We have had very cordial relationships since that time.

LANDY:

In your conversations with him, has he ever expressed regret for any of the incidents that happened during the war, or prior to the war?

AISO:

No, I have not brought it up with him directly. Recently, there have been attacks on him by the Sansei, who were demanding a public retraction. They have picketed him when he has appeared publicly. I have written him. I said, "If there's anything I can do, I'd be happy to do so." He has replied that he is grateful for my offer. He looked at it this way, "Those were war days, and in hindsight, I was in error. But the bell has been rung, and what has been rung cannot be unrung." He saw no good coming from trying to unring a rung bell. I have often wondered whether this experience of the Chief Justice has not had an influence upon him in his outlook towards civil rights. I have always found him a man that grew in stature with new responsibilities. If, in an indirect way, this experience led to the opportunity of taking a new look when he was free of direct political pressures, then I think the Nisei have in that way also had a minor role in the future destiny of our country.
