

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW
with
Paul Oshita

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Paul Oshita is a lifelong resident of 'Aiea. He was born in 1927. His father and mother lived in a plantation house at Honolulu Plantation's Kalauao Pump Number Six camp. His daughter Ann Oshita was at the interview. The tape started as Paul was already describing the camp.

Kalauao Camp before World War II

Paul: The road was Moanalua Highway...Past Scott's house (Alvah Scott was the Honolulu Plantation manager) ...There was a hospital. And you go up the hill and turn left. Come down to a dirt road to our house.

A.C.: Is that were Sumida's watercress farm is?

Paul: Well, they came in after the war.

A.C.: So what do you remember it being like?

Paul: There was a big, big stone wall. My dad used to grow taro leaves. And he had a banana garden. I still remember planting peanuts, sweet potatoes. Yeah. My dad was a pump engineer. Well, the pump was fifty yards from the house. His pump used to push the water up to the reservoir (where) Pearl Country Club (is today).

A.C.: Okay. The house that you lived in---was it a plantation house?

Paul: Yes.

A.C.: Was it (built) on the ground or above?

Paul: Above.

A.C.: And did the house have an outhouse? Or inside bathroom?

Paul: Well, it was connected to the house. It was outside the steps.

A.C.: Did you have electricity?

Paul: Yes.

A.C.: *Furo?* Or community *furo*?

Paul: Family *furo*. My dad built it. He built a fireplace to heat up the water for the *furo*. My father was a smart man. He did everything himself.

A.C.: And your mother? Did she work for the plantation or stay home?

Paul: Stayed home. She was the best cook. I can just imagine. When we used to go to school picnics, everyone used to run for my mother's sushi. She used to make the best sushi in 'Aiea. Roll kind. She made the cone (sushi) too.

A.C.: How did you get to school?

Paul: Well, I used to walk from Kalauao to 'Aiea School. About one mile (along) Moanalua Road. The principal was Dyson.

A.C.: What do you remember about the school?

Paul: What do I remember about the school? Actually I was happy to go to school. The first teacher I had was a *haole* teacher. I remember the third year. Hawaiian lady. Mrs. Wise. She just spoiled me. I was her pet! After I graduated from 'Aiea, I went to Waipahu High School (in 1941).

A.C.: Did you go to Japanese school?

Paul: I used to go there. Not to study! I used to eat cracked seed and sit on the floor. The teacher used to make me sweep it up after school. There was a store next to the school. Next to the theater. One up here on the hill. And one down.

A.C.: What good memories did you have?

Paul: I remember my brother Howard. He was younger than me, about three years. You know. I remember, he didn't like to cut his hair! Whenever he needed a haircut, I had to bring him to Oba Barber Shop. He used to cry, cry, cry! He was scared, I guess, of cutting hair. My mom used to cut his hair. But he didn't like to have his hair cut. He used to run away (and) hide in the cane field! The comic books. The funnies. I used to charge all the comic books at the 'Aiea store. At the end of the month, my mother used to get the bill. She used to go just crazy! I used to buy all the famous comics. I used to charge all the Chinese seed. You know, I grew up lucky. I had everything I needed. I spent my mother's money! Baseball. I used to pitch. I grew up playing with the neighbors. My father worked as a pump engineer. The pump was just a few steps away. As a child, we used to go help my father start the pump. It was a big valve. We

used to have a wrench on the (pump) handle because the pressure of the water made it hard to close. Big wrench.

A.C.: How big was your father?

Paul: He was about five feet two. He was tough, boy. He was one of those recruited to work on the plantation. But they never put him on the plantation. They brought him to the pump. He was a pump engineer from the beginning. You know, the sad thing. My older brother. He was about two or three years older than I was. He drowned in the pump. When I was born, he was already working at the pump. (His father died when Paul was sixteen.) He was my pal. He took me every place he went. I used to have a sailor cap and he'd take me all over town. We used to go to Waikiki. You know where the (Waikiki) Natatorium is? They used to have big events every year. Just a big community thing. Not church. Community. We used to eat there.

A.C.: Why did he take you around to other camps?

Paul: Because there were other 'Aiea plantation pumps. And my father used to be friends with the people that ran those pumps.

December 7, 1941

A.C.: What do you remember about December 7, 1941?

Paul: I heard the planes coming over the house. My dad was in the kitchen and I was on the porch. He said, "Whose planes are those?" I said they were Japanese planes bombing Pearl Harbor. He said, "They cannot. That's not right!" That's how the war started. I heard and saw the planes, before they dropped the first bomb on the (U.S.S.) *Arizona*. And all hell broke loose. If I remember correctly, all the 'Aiea plantation *luna*, you know, the bosses, picked us up because we were just across Pearl Harbor... They took us up the hills, in 'Aiea Heights. And we watched from 'Aiea Heights. We went back (afterwards). It was OK.

A.C.: What changed during the wartime for you?

Paul: We used to work in the plantation. Sugarcane. (They used to cut weeds and grass in the cane field.) The *luna* was my father's friend. So they made me the waterboy. I used to put the container of water on my back. I used to walk down to the store to get the water in Pearl City. The container was about twenty gallons of water. One time, I went to the store. The store had Pepsi Cola. So I threw out the water and I filled the tank with Pepsi Cola. When I walked back to the cane field, all the gas went out of the soda. So it was just water and sugar! I used to have the money to pay for the soda. I was rich! The soldiers came to search for one of the (Japanese) aviators who flew in Pearl Harbor. They said they shot him. He hit his head on the cockpit. So the military came with their shotguns. They said they shot him. My older brother had a toolbox. He

was a carpenter. So, they opened the toolbox. They saw a lot of money in there. My father used to sell football pool at Pearl Harbor, you know. They couldn't do anything. They went to the pump. They went to the Chinese house. In those days, the Chinese, they never banked the money. They used to store all the money and the liquor in the trunk. They came back. They held up the Chinese, and took all the money, the gun, the liquor. But they caught them. The soldiers. They knew who came on the raid. So I went down to the Chinese behind the pump. They were all shaking! White. Because the soldiers came with guns. I was about fifteen. And I thought, "Is this the way we're going to win the war?"

END OF SIDE ONE

Paul: He went to the old doctor. The doctor told him he had cancer. He knew what cancer was about. He used to tell me when I was young, if anybody get cancer, they're going to die. They have no chance of living. So he knew about cancer. And he died from cancer. My dad was a smart man. He used to do everything himself. We had six or seven children. They were all born in 'Aiea.

A.C.: Did your mother, did she come to Hawaii as a picture bride? How did your parents meet?

Paul: I don't know. I know my mom was the best cook. The best sushi maker in the world! She just learned by doing herself. She used to catch the bus from 'Aiea to Shimaya Shoten to buy all those Japanese goods from Shimaya. She used to come home and make our sushi. The stuff like that. She used to have something hanging from the wall... I used to eat what I'd like. I told her what to cook. I was a spoiled brat!

(When asked if his parents returned to Japan, he replied.) They went once. I remember my sister went with them (to) Hiroshima. My younger sister.

Army Life at Schofield Barracks

A.C.: During the time, you were in the military---

Paul: I was just one month too young to go into---to be one of the 442nd. I was born in August. So I was lucky then to be drafted. I was drafted to be part of the quartermaster. (He went to Schofield Barracks in Wahiawa, and he knew other 'Aiea boys there. They lived in barracks.) There was no hot water. We used to take a bath. After all---all dirt, eh? In the cold water. And it was cold in Wahiawa. Well, being in the Army was just having a vacation! I used to work for the quartermaster. All I did was drive the car from the motor pool for 51st Quartermaster Depot. I used to go buy lunch for the girls! I used to take the girls home. One girl, in particular, lived in Kaneohe... From Kapalama.

A.C.: About how long was that (that he served)?

Paul: Two or three years...

Sales Representative

(A.C. asked why he was separated from the U.S. Army.)

Paul: I guess they didn't need us anymore. After I got out of the army, I used to work for a company named Standard Brands. I was a sales rep for Fleishmann's Yeast. Those days, they used to make the yeast. For every store, no matter how small, needed the yeast, because the Filipinos used to make all the beer from the yeast.

A.C.: So you used to make the rounds, to help the grocery people decide how much to order?

Paul: We used to check the stores and the yeast used to get moldy. Couple of weeks. We used to exchange whatever was moldy with the good yeast.

A.C.: Did you drive a car from store to store?

Paul: Truck. A truck. It was a panel truck.

A.C.: What was your route?

Paul: Honolulu. All the way to Wahiawa.

A.C.: Wow. Did you even stock the stores in 'Aiea?

Paul: Yeah. I used to have Nagamine store. Santoki store. (And Kazama store.)

A.C.: Can I change the subject, and talk about living in 'Aiea? How about

meeting your wife?

(His daughter Ann Oshita answered that her mother, Kimiko Yoshinaga Oshita, came from Moiliili.)

A.C.: Or did you live in town?

Paul: Live in town. (Ann said they lived in an apartment on Piikoi Street. They moved when they were building homes in 'Aiea in the Enchanted Hills subdivision.) Actually, when we got married, we lived in town in Piikoi Street. Piikoi and Wilder.

(Ann said they moved to 'Aiea because they wanted a house. She remembered living on Piikoi Street. She remembered that they'd drive to look at the lot, as they were building the house. Ann said that she recalls that the house was more spacious than the apartment and that there was a lot of red dirt. They probably moved to 'Aiea in 1961. Ann remembered her father planting tree cuttings from the plantation house yard.)

'Aiea before World War II

A.C.: What do you say about 'Aiea? Was it a good place to grow up in?

Paul: It was a good place, because there was nothing like we had today. Gangs, you know. We were all, I guess, good boys!

A.C.: Do you remember swimming? Or fishing in Pearl Harbor?

Paul: My dad used to have a boat. We used to go to Pearl Harbor to get omaka. It's a small---you know, just like akule. Good. I remember the day, there was so much omaka in Pearl Harbor, we used to let the hand lines with about, four, five hooks down, without anything on it, and when I pulled it up, the fish would be on the line! Without bait! You know, the hook was shiny. The fish thought it was something to eat. We took it home. My dad used to clean the fish, and my mom used to deep-fry it. We used to eat the fish. Everything---the bone, everything. It was delicious... Pearl Harbor was just clean!

A.C.: Did your father take you to the teahouses in Waiiau and Waimalu?

Paul: I remember going to the teahouses in town.

A.C.: Do you remember riding on the train? Did you ever ride the O.R.&L. as a passenger?

Paul: From Kalauao, we used to go to the Oahu Railway depot downtown... I remember the people who lived by the train station were Chinese. I still remember finding the first money at the train station. It was a quarter. That was the first money I found! (Tape turned off.)

A.C.: Who did you used to play with?

Paul: My neighbors. I used to play with.

A.C.: When you went to school---who were your friends?

Paul: I guess. Ronald Oba. He had a brother named Naoki. Most of them. They died.

A.C.: Do you remember Alvah Scott?

Paul: We used to steal his mangoes. He had a big house.

END OF INTERVIEW