University of Utah Marriott Library
Manuscripts Division

Accn 1002
Topaz Oral Histories

John Hada

THIS IS SANDRA TAYLOR. I'M INTERVIEWING DR. JOHN HADA IN SAN FRANCISCO, NOVEMBER 2, 1987.

ST: Dr. Hada, would you like to tell me a little bit about your background and your family?

JH: Oh, my parents came to this country in 1894 from Japan by way of Hawaii. My father was a merchant. He had the Hada Dry Goods and Parts shop here in San Francisco until the early 1930's, and then he went to--then the depression came along and he was like many Americans, victim to the depression, and he went to work for Gumps assisting that very famous store in San Francisco in their Oriental department, and he worked there until the beginning of the war which we were interned in Tanforan. I'm the only child, and I grew up here in San Francisco, went to primary and secondary schools here. Tanforan which was a racetrack and is now a large shopping center in San Bruno, housed many of the Japanese-Americans who were from San Francisco, San Mateo, and also from the East Bay. We were there approximately six months awaiting the completion of construction of the quarters at the war relocation which we ultimately were sent. That was in central Utah. We were rounded up by the United States army as a result of President Roosevelt signing the Executive Order 9066, and we joined a number of Japanese families in March of 1942 who were

loaded on buses and sent to Tanforan. We were housed in horse stables [of which were horse stables] and so the accommodations were not very nice. But what made it interesting is that the people that were sent to Tanforan were all from the Bay Area and we pretty much knew each other. So, we tried to make the best of a bad situation, and we helped each other particularly those who were infirm or who had a difficult time adjusting to that situation. I was fifteen or sixteen years old at the time, so it was just like perhaps going on a trip to the outback, but for others who were much older, I'm sure the experience was a very, very traumatic and affected their lives probably a little more severely then myself, because I was a teenager and as all teenagers, we probably did not concern ourselves with things like this.

ST: What happened to all your family's property here in San Francisco?

JH: Well, we were very fortunate. Our neighbors were willing to take care of our property. That's something that I'd like to comment on just briefly. We had marvelous neighbors before we were interned in Tranforan, and they used to come to see us on Saturdays with baskets of fruit and they were just

very, very supportive and were appalled that the situation where we had to be interned for any number of real or imaginary reasons that the government gave. But I think one of the things that sustained my dad--my mother passed away just before the evacuation, but my grandmother and my mother and my dad were very, very appreciative of our neighbors who came to see us and told us, "Don't worry. All things come to pass and things will work out for you. In the meantime, you needn't worry about your property or your stored things. We'll take very good care of them." And they did, indeed. They wrote us as often as once a week while we were in camp and my father was just so grateful that people would, in this situation, would open their hearts out to us, and I'm sure that many of the Japanese families had similar situations where their Caucasian friends and neighbors would come and see us. My high school teacher came to see not only myself, but others while we were in Tanforan. We all met in the large club house, which was a large hall, and these visits were very welcomed. We didn't know how long we would be interned, and yet people were willing to come and say--express their outrage and also their support and their friendship which I thought very, very nice. I

stayed in the center until the summer of 1945, and then I joined my uncle in Cleveland, Ohio, and from there I was inducted into the army, and I served in the army in the far East--in Japan and in Korea. I got out and went to college. But I was commissioned while I was in the service and so when the Korean war broke out, I was a commissioned officer in the infantry officer. I was recalled during the Korean conflict, and I was sent to Korea as an infantry officer and served with the infantry during the Korean war, and I stayed on for about twenty-eight and a half years.

ST: Oh, so you're career military?

JH: Career military so I retired as a colonel, but that experience is an entirely different story.

ST: Yes.

JH: In all my experiences, I think people have been very kind to me, and very tolerant of my ineptness and very patient, but I had the very good fortune of working for several people. General Paul Wyatt Carroway who was the high commissioner of the Ryukyu Islands prior to the restoration of the administrative rights--Ryukyu Islands by the United States--Japan. The name Carroway may not mean anything to people who do not know his family. His

mother was a senator from Arkansas as was his father, and General Carroway was a graduate of the military academy in 1929 and served with distinction. He's now a lawyer in Washington D.C. I also served for General Maxwell Davenport Taylor who was the Far East commander, and General Lyman Lemnitzer and a number of other flag officers. One of my dear friends is General Robert C. Kingston who was recently the commander-in-chief of the central command at Fort Mendell. His area of responsibility was the Middle East.

I guess you want to know about my experience in camp. Well, of course, I was a teenager and I was going to high school in camp.

ST: What did you think of the school?

JH: Well, I think the teachers did a remarkable job with the limited resources that they did have. I was not a very good student I'm afraid. [laughter]

ST: Was it you or the general surroundings or lack of order?

JH: Oh, no. I suppose, of course, I could always blame the loss of my mother and the loss of my grandmother as having a very adverse impact on me.

ST: Did your grandmother die in camp?

JH: Yes, she did. And she raised me because my mother had

pulmonary tuberculosis and so she was hospitalized for the good part of, I think, when I was two or three years old. So I never really knew my mother and so my grandmother sort of raised me with my dad.

ST: Would you like to take a break and we could eat? Maybe, I think that would be-- [interruption]. I'm still eating but I'm slow.

JH: I think if I were to characterize the conduct of the Japanese and Japanese-Americans who were interned in Topaz and in the other war relocation centers--I think there were ten (i.e. centers) of them in the United States. I would characterize that conduct as being extraordinarily exemplary. I say that because any ill feelings towards the United States for placing people in that situation was not openly hostilely expressed. People ---?--- tried to make something of their lives. Parents were concerned about their children's education and the teachers at the high school working through various organizations like the Quakers Friends, arranged for students to relocate to places like Michigan and Chicago, other places in the Midwest to continue their education. So from that prospective I think much can be said about not only the Japanese-Americans but also the administrators and the schools and camp

administrators who worked very hard irrespective of how they felt whether this was justified or not. Whether the incarceration of a hundred and twenty thousand Japanese-Americans from the western littoral of the United States, was indeed legally or morally justified. Irrespective of that feeling, once we were in camp these people worked extraordinarily hard in my view to help the people carry on with their lives. Americans, someone once said, are very resilient, very resourceful people. We are culturally pluralistic so I suppose those qualities come from many cultures. But when I was in the war relocation center for almost three years, I could reflect back and think of the many kindnesses and the many courteous that were accorded to my father and to our family particularly when my grandmother passed away in camp. We received a nice letter from the camp superintendent and also from Dilion Myer who was the superintendent of the War Relocation Authority expressing his condolences. As I say I was a youngster then but mature enough to recognize that this was not a normal situation.

ST: No.

JH: I would have not wanted to grow up as a teenager and going to high school in a situation like that, but

the realities of it is that here we were immersed in that environment in that milieu. And the thing to do is vacillate from the tearful prayers, the prayerful tears but get on with our lives and try to do something whatever that something would be.

ST: Did you feel that your family stayed together in camp, just you and your father, that you maintained the kind of closeness you would have outside?

JH: Yes. Well, my father and I were always very close. He regarded me very much like a brother and my father was ninety-five years old when he died in 1969. He came to this country and worked for Douglas Fairbanks, Sr. and Mary Pickford shortly and they set him up in business, but he had a very interesting career, a very interesting life. My father was bilingual. He was able to read and write and speak English very well. When my father returned from camp from Topaz to San Francisco he went to work for Herbert Law who was a very prominant lawyer here in San Francisco. He was one of the lawyers who defended Tom Mooney and Warren Billings.

ST: Oh, my.

JH: These two were accused of setting off an explosive device in the Berguess parade in San Francisco if you remember San Francisco history in 1912 and Herbert

Law lived in Atherton and my dad went to work for him as a gentlemen's gentleman. I think when you speak to others in my class and, Tomoye was the class ahead of me, you'd get probably a different perspective because I suppose I regarded myself as--not a socially activist. Those were people who were at camp. And the reason for that was I had my dad and I was most concerned about him, you know.

ST: What did he do in camp.

JH: Well, he worked as a cook. He's a marvelous chef and so he was a cook in the mess hall in our block. He was known for his pastries. He's a marvelous pastry chef. Yeah, he made very nice hot-cross buns ---?---

ST: Oh, yeah. Did he get involved in camp politics at all?

JH: No, he did not, no. My dad--he was in the Japan Society before the war. He was a prominent businessman, but I remember when I was inducted. Of course, my dad was still in camp and I told him in a letter that I'm being inducted and the war was still going on. He wrote me and said--he gave me the Spartan Mother's Admonition. He said, "Come back with your shield or on it."

ST: Oh, my.

JH: He didn't say, "Take care of yourself." In other

words he said, "Don't disgrace yourself." But that's how close my dad and I were, you know.

ST: So there was no feeling that you should not do this because of the internment.

JH: No, indeed not. My dad was--well, I suppose the inculturation and the assimilation process was not as acute as perhaps as Japanese-Americans. My dad never took up citizenship. "The reason for that is," he said, "Is because there is very little I can contribute." He's very sensitive about that, but he said, "This is your country. You were born here so you're an American," and he respected what had happened. "It's still your country." He is very chauvinistic in his speech about this country, very chauvinistic. My grandfather was a senior army officer in the Japanese Imperial Army, so there's a lineage of military service in our family. And his father, my great grandfather, was of the Samurai class so there is that lineage.

ST: My, yes.

JH: Someday I was going to write maybe a sociological study on one aspect of Topaz and Tanforan, but I haven't really gotten around to it. My thoughts are along the lines of, maybe, a contrasting and comparative analysis of a Japanese family who was

deeply rooted in Japan and they came to the United States and then Japanese-Americans are not unless they have received education in Japan. Many Japanese-Americans do not read, write and speak Japanese well at all and so their thinking process, their values--maybe Harry Kitano could probably help you more authoritatively than I can. But there's a dichotomy here as I see it. Japanese-Americans have some of the cultural values that their parents subscribe to, but then again, they also have the kinds of cultural values never to be enjoyed here in the United States. Sometimes there's a conflict. Oftentimes there's a conflict, but then during the war I think those kinds of values rather complemented each other because Japanese-Americans were willing to accept their plight. They were willing to say, "Well, there really isn't anything that we really can do about this situation." There wasn't any significant political figure that would stand up and say, "Hey, this is all wrong. What are you doing to these people?" Wasn't anybody that would do that. There were people I would like to think that found the evacuation as terribly wrong, but because of any number of reasons political or otherwise they kept silent and did not speak out. But there are people like--I can't think

of his name but he was a tremendous supporter of Tokyo Rose ---?--- and he died in an airplane crash. He was a entrepreneur. He was a broadway producer. Sorry, the name escapes me but he was going to talk to people like Walter Winchell, the attorney general, Tom Clark, to say we should ---?---People like Walter Winchell and Kate Smith were all people who were against her coming back to the United States when she did come back. She'd be tried for treason, but the army cleared her.

ST: Yes.

JH: You mentioned high school. There's a gentleman here. His name is Goodman, Dr. Goodman.

ST: Oh, yes.

JH: It might be well to, if you have time and he has time, to speak with him. He taught chemistry. He's now with the Veteran's Administration hospital here on Clement Street. He's pretty much up there in age but he is still very lucid. You might want to get his impression of Japanese-Americans students that studied. I think he'll probably say in the main very, very fine students, but like any high school you have the range. I don't think we had too many students failing. I think, on the contrary, we had more students who probably could have been national merit

scholars. The GPAs were very high.

ST: Well, when I talked to Harry, he was very critical of the school. He said that mainly that there were very few good teachers and that there were a lot of people who were not prepared and didn't really know how to teach, and that he and the kids in his class really took advantage.

JH: Well, I suppose that could be true but I found particularly in one teacher whose name comes to mind, Rose Watanabe. She's a--or Mrs. Lyle who taught English. Very, very, very good. I have a degree in education. The pedagogical implications education of the camp. Some people like Eleanor Sekerak, Eleanor Gerard would say that well, that the resources were not there. But I think education--anything that you teach and be packaged in any number of ways and so the physical plant was bad but nevertheless--

ST: Did you have enough books and things like that?

JH: No, we did not. We did not, but in my case these Caucasian friends of ours used to send together things when we were famous.

ST: Oh, yes.

JH: Any serious student could enroll in college extension courses.

ST: Oh, really. I didn't know that.

JH: Oh, yeah, or any number of universities that offered an extension program of correspondence courses and were able to continue their education that way. I suppose if you compared schools--well, look at San Francisco or Oakland. They don't enjoy a very good reputation as a ---?--- school that offer academic excellence so I suppose from Harry's point of view, and, of course, he's an educator, what he is saying is correct. I'd like to say, yeah, we should have had a nice chem lab. We should have a nice biology lab. We should have a nice and well stocked library but we didn't. But the education process was started and continued. I don't think all of us suffered as a result of it. If we did suffer somewhere along the line we made up for it. I am not as bitter about all this experience as perhaps somebody like ---?--- or others, and that's why I said at the outset that maybe it might be well to get a perspective of someone who doesn't feel as strongly about it.

ST: Yes, surely.

JH: I would say very emphatically that I would not want to go through that experience again. I don't want to see a replication of that experience and I wouldn't want that for anyone to have to endure. But I think I guess I've grown a little philosophical in my age and

I've seen a lot of suffering. I was an infantry officer. I served two tours in Vietnam. I was in combat in Korea and this experience, that horror has changed me or maybe altered my thinking about things.

ST: Yeah, war is horrible.

JH: And I would like to say that the people who were the administrators at any management level in camp had to endure this process as much as we did. But I look back at them and I say God bless them, God bless them because they did whatever they could within their capabilities and the capacities that were available to assist us. There's a divisiveness or there's a cleavage, there's a schism that has occured in the Japanese American community about this redress reparation.

ST: Oh, yes.

JH: And I think it probably hinges a great deal on the monetary [compensation] that people were expecting for the government to pay. But forgive me for philosophizing but I would like to hope that out of all of this that it springs forth better understanding by not only Japanese Americans who have gone through that process but also all Americans who could see the injustice in incarcerating people for whatever reason. And also that this experience sort

of brings all Americans together, that we are "culturally pluristic" and unlike what Michael Novak has to say about the melting pot. We are not, in my estimation, and Daniel Patrick Moynihan and Nathan Glazer's perspective that we are culturally pluristic.

ST: Yes.

JH: And I think that's fine with me. We are culturally pluristic, and if the Chicanos or the Koreans or the Japanese want to enhance and cultivate their culture here in the United States for, oh, generations to come, I think that's a wonderful thing. But somewhere along the line this bitterness that people are ---?--- has to stop. I think in the Biblical sense we hear over and over and over again--I'm not so sure it's good for all Americans, not only Japanese-Americans abroad. If anything comes out of this interview I would like for you to state what I feel that I would like the result of all of this, your hard work in doing research and the choreographing, that it brings a good understanding by all Americans ---?---

ST: I would certainly hope so.

JH: Yeah, so if something that evolves from all of this, I think it's well worth it.

ST: Did you experience any of the divisiveness in camp

with the kibeis the whole controversy over this segregation?

JH: When we were asked to sign a questionnaire, I think the two famous--

ST: The two famous questions, twenty-seven and twenty-eight.

JH: Yes, caused some concern. There was some agitation by those who were--wanted to become renounciates, wanted to go to Tule Lake and were very, very bitter about the evacuation process. I had some very interesting talks with my dad about this and he said, "You put yes and yes on those two questions because one; you're too young to understand about this situation." That's what he called it. But he said, "But you are old enough to recognize that you are an American. In a year or two you may have to lay down your life for it." So on the one hand he's telling me, "You're too young to understand," but the other side of the coin it is a paradox that he placed before me. He said, "In a year you are going to be in the armed forces and you may have to lay down your life for all of this." He said, "You cannot afford to be bitter about all this. You cannot afford to be bitter although you may be." And the reason for that he was thinking, "For your children and your children's children sake,

you cannot afford to be bitter."

ST: Ah. Well, he was a wonderfully wise man.

JH: Because he said, "You have got to think about a place in the sun in this country for your children and your children's children."

ST: Oh.

JH: So I think people who, however they feel about the evacuation, probably their feelings won't change.

ST: No.

JH: They won't. But somewhere in their heart I hope they would come to, when they hear the final benediction, I would hope that they would conceive that, well, I might have been unbending but--perhaps when I go to my eternal reward I would forgive those that did this to me. I would hope so.

ST: Well, that's important. It's a long time to go through your life being bitter like that.

JH: Yes, it is. It is. But I look at people who are Nobel Laureates today, and I look at the kinds of education that they received and in some respects some grew up in their formative years in worse conditions out in Topaz, and here they win the Nobel Laureate. Dr.--- ?--- Ukawa, for instances, who's a Nobel Laureate for physics. Won the Nobel prize in 1949. His formative years were certainly very hard. I think we have an

obligation that was given to us by almighty god, that if we have the cognitive capabilities and temperamental characteristics, [we are] supposed to do something. It's incumbent on us to do it irrespective of the environment. We can complain about, oh, what lousy teachers and we weren't prepared, but well, that's all we have.

ST: Yes. Well, you seemed to have done none the worse for it.

JH: Well, I'm sure you're going to be talking to a great many people, many distinguished people, and I would hope that from all of this, you get a pretty good balance of the kinds of attitudes and feelings that people still hold as a result of the experience. But, you know, it's been very nice talking to you. If you need anything from me, my curriculum vitae, things like that, I'll be very glad to send it to you.

ST: Oh, thank you.

JH: I could send it to Fumi and she could get it to you.

ST: Sure.

JH: And if you need follow-up questions or some areas for expansion, then I'll be very happy to--

ST: Yes, or if you think of things that you'd like to have me, you know, be aware of, you know, little anecdotal things or, you know, things that you

remember later, just don't hesitate. I'm in the University of Utah, Department of History so it's very easy.

JH: Very good. Well, Professor Tomenago visited your lovely campus and was very impressed with it.

ST: Oh, my.

JH: Yeah, he said it is a beautiful place at Salt Lake City.

ST: Yeah. Well, wonderful. Thank you--

[END OF TAPE]