

Surviving and spying behind enemy lines

Richard Sakakida tells his story of wartime intrigue

By HARRY K. HONDA
Senior Editor

MONTEREY, Calif. — As a bilingual Nisei who was recruited in Honolulu in March, 1941, and shipped out a month later to keep an eye on Japanese nationals in Manila, intelligence agent Richard Sakakida literally relived a painful past as a POW in the Philippines that even his wife, Cherry, had not known. Still taking medication for his wartime pains, he stood for an hour-and-a-half to tell that story before a TV camera and a spellbound crowd of some 700 at the MIS 50th anniversary reunion dinner the Hyatt Regency on Oct. 31.

Sakakida spent three years and four months in the Philippines, beginning at the fall of Corregidor in May, 1942, while posing as a civilian interpreting for the U.S. Army and Gen. Wainwright. In October, 1945—unbeknownst to him the war was over—he came upon American GIs looking for stragglers from the northern Luzon jungles.

As for being bitter about the war, Sakakida confessed that he was, "but such is war" and held no revenge upon his captors. In fact, after the war, he found employment for them in Japan and they turned out to be loyal, dedicated employees. "War is hell," he added. "Being a POW is hell, but that experience, as applied to life, was to live each day to the fullest."

Sakakida and Komori

Not expecting a war to come, Sakakida and Arthur Komori (now a retired Honolulu attorney) enlisted nine months before Pearl Harbor as sergeants in the Corps of Intelligence Police (later renamed as Counter Intelligence Corps—CIC) for undercover work in the Philip-

pines. A month later, they were sent to Manila, Sakakida being assigned to stay at the Nishikawa Hotel while Komori checked in at Toyo Hotel. Sakakida got a part time job as hotel clerk for room and board.

The Philippines were still a U.S. possession with substantial military presence.

Noted a friend in the audience, "Can you believe Sakakida was only 19 years old at the time?"

Their cover was that they had jumped ship, were anti-American and wanted to dodge the draft. Sakakida got a job with a trading firm representing Sears Roebuck, while Komori became an English teacher at the Japanese Cultural Hall.

In July when all Japanese assets were frozen, the Japanese nationals had financial statements and claims to file. The Nishikawa Hotel manager, knowing Sakakida was bilingual, asked him to help other tenants with the paper work. Komori and Sakakida were both on the lookout for Japanese military leakers, seeking access to passports of Japanese businessmen and visitors while passing the information as prearranged to their Army contacts.

Pearl Harbor Day

On Dec. 8, Sakakida got arrested as a "collaborator" by the Filipino police with other Japanese at the Miramar Club. As

noted in the Joe Harrington narrative, *Yankee Samurai*, Komori was working with Domei News Agency in Manila, sharing a toast with Japanese newsmen when the constabulary smashed their way into the office. The Nisei were slammed into Bilibid Prison on suspicion of being spies.

Before the Japanese reached Manila,

ian linguist, Clarence Yamagata, Hawaiian-born attorney who practiced law in Manila and was a parttime adviser to the Japanese consulate until the American withdrawal.

Sakakida survived the Japanese occupation as best he could. Author Harrington, in his *Yankee Samurai*, commented that "Sakakida put his life on the

line daily throughout the war, and not many have made a greater single contribution to the Pacific victory than any man, of any race [than he]."

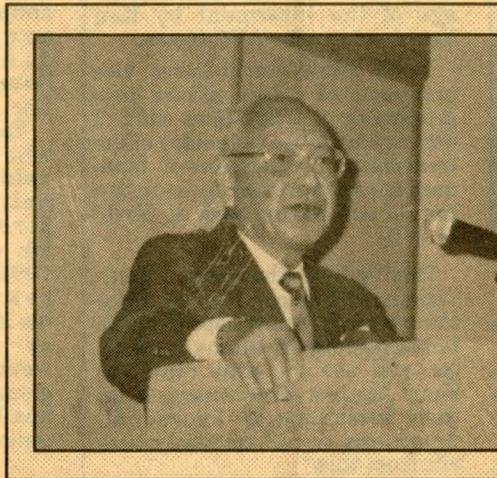
Captured with Wainwright at Corregidor, Sakakida was kept by the Kempeitai for five months at Bilibid prison, questioned and tortured. Sakakida's throat choked up at this point as he described how the captors tortured him with lighted cigarettes while dangling naked from a wooden beam and his

toes barely touching the floor. Sakakida kept to his story — that he was a civilian, a draft-dodging merchant seaman.

Behind Enemy Lines

Beginning to believe he was a civilian, his captors released him to the Japanese 14th Army Headquarters staff to be an interpreter. He was sent to live in the civilian barracks, the former English Club in Manila. As an interpreter, it was the start of his counter-intelligence activities deep behind enemy lines. He often browsed around the office, picking up shipping schedules but he had no way of passing it on until he made contact with Filipino guerrillas, who later assisted in his

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—Richard Sakakida

they were released just before Christmas from prison, bundled onto a ship with other CIC agents for Bataan and retreated to Corregidor, where MacArthur established his headquarters. Sakakida was his personal interpreter. Both he and Komori also prepared wartime leaflets, which were stuffed into pieces of pipe and hurled by a giant slingshot for Japanese soldiers to surrender. It was half-rations for everyone at "the Rock," as Corregidor was called.

After the Japanese invasion and with surrender imminent, Komori and Sakakida were ordered to leave Corregidor, but Sakakida offered his space on a patched-up trainer that had crash-landed on the Rock to another Nisei civil-

POW

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plan to liberate 500 guerrillas from the nearby Muntinglupa (Monte Lupo) prison.

By October, 1943, everything was arranged. Sakakida's plan called for a small group of guerrillas disguised as Japanese officers with Sakakida himself leading the charge to overcome the prison guards and release the inmates — inside two hours. (He spent five minutes relating how it came about.) It was the biggest prison break with nearly 500 guerrillas, including its leader Major Ernesto Tupas, being liberated that night. Sakakida was back, unsuspected, in the civilian barracks for morning roll call.

By December, 1944, with heavier U.S. air attacks over Manila, the Japanese commander of the Philippines, General Yamashita, the legendary conqueror of Singapore, moved his headquarters to Baguio and then further into the Luzon mountains to Bontoc. As the Japanese retreated, the time had come for him to make a break (food rations were getting scarce) and hide in the mountains.

In early June, 1945, he escaped

into the mountain jungles, and joined up with a small band of guerrillas. During heavy shelling by Japanese, the guerrillas made good their escape, but Sakakida was injured and was to spend the next four months wandering with his stomach wound, subsisting on grass and wild fruit, and enduring the tropical summer rain and insects. He stayed with Igorot natives for about a month where he removed a shrapnel from his abdomen with his own razor as the stench was becoming unbearable. He was also suffering from malaria, dysentery, beriberi and body lice.

Reasoning that by following the Asing river downstream he would reach the sea, and noting there were no more American planes overhead, he proceeded carefully, eating river crabs, and when he finally spotted a Hakujiin sentry (of the 37th Infantry) wearing what he thought was a German uniform because the shape of the helmet was unlike the saucer-type of those used in Bataan and Corregidor. The Nisei had to repeatedly holler, "Don't shoot!" The sentry didn't, but he also didn't believe Sakakida's tale.

Sakakida had been listed as

missing in action since March, 1945. He not only looked scraggly, long haired, and bearded, but his skin was covered with sores. He had lost 50 pounds and, of course, he didn't know the war was over. It was October, 1945. Two hours later, after he had identified himself as an intelligence agent, two Counter Intelligence Corp officers arrived and took Sakakida back to Manila.

He was home for Christmas, 1945, in Honolulu. Later he went back to Manila to locate and identify Japanese for the war crimes tribunal. Back in Honolulu in 1947, he was commissioned and assigned to a post in Japan. He retired as a lieutenant colonel in the U.S. Air Force in 1975, living in the San Francisco Bay area. His appearance at the MIS 50th Anniversary reunion was his first public address of his experiences, which is being considered as an autobiography.

[Following his speech, the press table received a copy of a chapter on Sakakida from *America's Secret Army: The Untold Story of the Counter Intelligence Corps*, London: Grafton Books, 1989. The more painful memories were not found in the chapter.]

Opinions



From the frying pan

BILL HOSOKAWA

Anecdotes by Nisei MIS veterans

The most interesting part of the recent Military Intelligence Service 50th anniversary reunion in San Francisco was the anecdotes told by the veterans. I've omitted some good stories since, sadly, the narrators cannot be identified because my notes are messed up, but here are some of the more notable yarns:

The first assignment for the the first graduates was in the Aleutians where the enemy had landed in the spring of 1942. On Kiska island some Japanese were believed to be isolated in a cave but no one could be sure. The U.S. unit commander said something like, "I want one volunteer who can speak Japanese to go in the cave and get them out." "Suddenly," recalls Sats Tanakatsubo, "I realized I was the only guy who spoke the language." He persuaded 26 men to surrender.

Nob Furuiye was trained for desert warfare, then sent to the Aleutians. After that came a Pearl Harbor assignment. Only with an armed guard was he allowed to enter the base to pick up secret documents which he took outside to translate. He landed on Iwo Jima 15 minutes after the first wave and was pinned down

on the beach for three days. Both he and his bodyguard were injured in the same explosion; the bodyguard was awarded a Purple Heart medal for his wound soon afterward but Furuiye didn't get his until two years later when a general he knew heard about it.

Hank Goshō was among those who volunteered for a super-secret special mission which was to last no more than six months. Goshō figured if he survived he could return to the language school as an instructor, expecting to be back in time for his first child's birth. The mission was to Burma behind Japanese lines and Goshō was gone for two and a half years.

Art Kaneko was sent to the Heart Mountain WRA camp to recruit students for the language school. He encountered so much hostility that he interviewed and tested prospective recruits after midnight in a room with blankets covering the windows.

Jerry Shibata, who also had recruit duty, was struck by the resemblance between military bases and the WRA camps. "My most memorable impression," he says, "is that what the people missed most was their freedom. There was mutual respect between Nisei in the Army and the people

in the camps—respect for what each was going through."

Harry Fukuhara, who had gone to school in Japan before the war, was recognized as a former classmate by a prisoner in a POW camp in the Southwest Pacific. The prisoner called Fukuhara aside and said "Please help me escape." What Fukuhara said, roughly translated was, "No, I can't do that."

Tom Sakamoto, who landed at Atsugi two hours before Gen. Douglas MacArthur's party, by chance saw a Hawaii Nisei who had been a classmate in prewar Japan. Sakamoto gave him everything he had in his pack before hurrying off with his unit. Sakamoto was within a few feet of MacArthur during the surrender ceremonies on the battleship Missouri.

Sohei Yamate's assignment in Sugamo prison was to see that Gen. Hideki Tojo didn't commit suicide. Yamate was threatened with dire things if Tojo wasn't delivered whole to his military trial.

After being mistaken for a Japanese and looked or with suspicion by some of his fellow GIs, one of Phil Ishio's warmest memories is the elderly Australian civilian who saluted him and exclaimed, "Good show, Yank." ☐