

Interview questions specific to MIS

PRE-WAR NIKKEI, PRE-WAR AMERICA: THE DUAL CULTURAL LEGACY, CULTURAL ROOTS
OF THE NISEI; AMERICANIZATION; ECONOMIC LIFE CHANCES

1. In your understanding, why did your parents come to America? What did they expect? What did they find?
2. What kinds of work did your mother and father do?
3. By the time of Pearl Harbor, how were your parents doing?
4. When you think of your mother and father in their work life, what images remain in your memory? From your point of view, what was your mother like? What was your father like? What were they like to other people? How did they treat you?
5. What did your parents stress to you, as their son, as being important in your behavior? Especially behavior they expected of you as someone with a Japanese background. How did they convey this to you?
6. In your family, did you particularly take part in various Japanese traditions such as special holidays, religious services, family gatherings, or training in sumo, kendo, or karate?
 - a. Did you like doing these things, or were they more like things that were expected of you?
 - b. Did your mother or the girls in your family have special activities that they took part in?
7. Did you go to Japanese language school? What was it like for you?
 - a. What kinds of things did you learn there?
 - b. Did it make you feel different from, or like it took you away from, other American kids?
 - c. Did you hesitate to let other American kids know you were going to Japanese language school?

immigration

issei work

issei family values

8. Did your parents send you to Japan for part of your education?

kibei Tell me about it: how old you were, where you stayed, who you stayed with.

- a. At that time, what did you think were your parents' reasons for sending you?
- b. How did you feel about it?

9. When you got to Japan, what happened?

- a. What do you remember noticing about Japan -- the place, the people, the way they treated each other, the way they treated you.
- b. Was it a hard adjustment for you?
- c. Did you like or dislike being there? Did you finally feel at home there?
- d. Were you homesick? What kinds of things did you wish you could be doing back home?

10. When you were growing up, what did you do for fun? Who did you do these things with?

*American-
ization*

11. What were your relationships like with caucasian schoolmates, neighbors, fellow workers, etc.?

12. Did your parents sometimes worry about you and your sisters and brothers becoming "too Americanized?" Were there things about America or being American that they wanted for you?

13. What kinds of things would they worry about, or want for you? What did they say to you about it, and what did you say to them?

14. Growing up, do you remember particular things that would happen to you, your parents, or other relatives because of being Japanese?

racism

15. When you were in high school or college, what did you think you wanted to do with your life?

*life
chances*

16. Was there something you wanted that you felt was unlikely for you because of being Japanese? How about an older brother, sister, or other relative?

17. What do you think were your parents' highest hopes for you?

PEARL HARBOR AFTERMATH: FORCED EVACUATION AND INTERNMENT; CITIZENSHIP AND JUSTICE DENIED

1. What were you and your family doing at the time of Pearl Harbor?
2. What was your reaction, and did you realize what the bombing meant?
3. What did you know about Japan then?
 - a. How did your parents feel about Japan? What kinds of things did they tell you about it or about relatives there?
 - b. Did your parents want to go back there to live, or did they like living here?
 - c. Did your parents make a distinction between their relationship to Japan and yours?
4. How did your neighbors, schoolmates, fellow workers, or employers treat you and your family after Pearl Harbor?
5. What did you and your family lose as a result of the evacuation? What was most important to you personally?
6. What did you think was happening to you and those around you, and what did you think was going to happen?
7. Besides physical necessities and valuables, what personal items did you or your family try to put in safe keeping or take with you?
8. Did you take any of these things into military service with you?

Essei
&
Japan

evacua-
tion

THE CAMP EXPERIENCE: A QUESTION OF LOYALTY; PROVING THE UNPROVABLE

1. How did you feel about what you saw in the assembly center, or in camp, that is, the conditions, and the way people were acting.
2. At that time, why did you think the evacuation and internment were happening?
3. What was the effect of evacuation and camp on your mother and father?
 - a. Did their behavior change?
 - b. Did their relationship to you and other family members change?
4. When you saw the questions on the loyalty oath, how did you feel and what were your thoughts?
 - a. Did you and your family members differ over the loyalty oath?
5. Did you feel you were being pushed and pulled between different factions in the camp, competing for your allegiance?
 - a. How would you describe those factions as you saw them then, and how did you feel about it at that time?

JAPANESE AMERICANS IN UNIFORM

1. How did you first hear about volunteering for military service?
2. What do you remember about what the recruiter said, and how did you feel about it?
 - a. Where were you, who else was in the room, what did you think about what the recruiter said, and did you talk with other young guys about it?
3. In making up your mind, what were the pros and cons of volunteering?
4. How did your family members feel about the possibility of your signing up? What did your father say? What did your mother say?
5. What finally made up your mind? What did you hope to accomplish by signing up?
6. How did others in camp treat you or your family because of your decision?
7. Did it make a difference to you whether you served in Europe or in the Pacific?
8. What did you think at that time about other nisei who didn't volunteer, or even eventually resisted the draft?
9. Did you feel that your constitutional or human rights were being violated while you were locked up?
10. Did you consider the position of those who refused to serve unless their human and constitutional rights were restored? What did you think about it?
11. When you left camp, what was your departure and farewell like? What did your mother and father do or say as you parted?
12. What did you feel they expected of you?
13. What was the language training experience like for you? e.g. the curriculum, relationships to teachers, relationships to other MIS students, the general atmosphere.
14. What were the worst and best parts for you?

*recruit-
ment*

*rights
issues*

*MIS
language
training*

15. How did you like being in Minnesota, and the people you met there?
How did they seem to react to you? Was it very different there from what you had known before?
16. Aside from what was happening to the Japanese in this country, were you aware at that time of racial tensions such as the Zoot Suit Riots in L.A., black riots in Detroit, or Jim Crow laws in the South?
17. Later, when you were out of school and in the field, what was most useful from your training?
18. Did you think then that your performance would reflect on the MIS school? Did you feel your work would reflect on other members of your team, or on Japanese Americans in general?
19. Did you go back to visit your family just before leaving for service abroad? How did the visit go, and how did you part?
 - a. Did you have any feelings about going into the barbed-wire camp wearing an American uniform?
20. At that time, when you said goodbye, was there a feeling that it might be the last time you'd see each other?

THE LINK BETWEEN WARFRONT AND HOMEFRONT

1. When you were serving abroad, what kind of contact did you have with your family and relatives back home in the U.S.?
 - a. What kinds of cheery things were they doing to improve their lives in camp?
2. What was happening with your family while you were gone? What were some of the things that were most worrisome to you?
3. Did your awareness and concern about your family back home affect your work in the field?
4. Do you remember what you were paid? Did you have life insurance, and who did you name on it?
5. Did you send money home, or take on family responsibilities, such as mortgage payments, health problems, the question of how the family would resettle after camp, etc.
6. Did you depend on a sister of yours to look after the family and its interests while you were gone? What kinds of things would she do?
 - a. What was your sister like, and what was your relationship with her like?
7. Did you feel you had to be an example to your younger brothers and sisters?
8. While you were abroad, what did you think would hold the family together?
9. When you imagined going home at the end of the war, what was the best situation you could picture? What did you find?
10. In your mind, as a young man, what did you think the war was about? What were you fighting for?
 - a. What kept you going? When things got tough, what really mattered to you?
11. Did you have any particular feelings about the politics and actions of Japan or Germany?
12. Were you thinking about the possible benefit to your family of your military service or record?

*sister**motiva-
tion*

13. Did you ever think about going back to your home country?

13. Did you ever worry about parts of Japan being fire-bombed when you had relatives or friends?

INTERNATIONAL AND CROSS-CULTURAL PERSPECTIVES

1. What campaigns or headquarters were you part of?
2. What services or units were you attached to?
3. What was your work in these assignments?
4. When you first met American GI's and Marines from other parts of the U.S., what was your experience like?
 - a. What kinds of things did you feel you had in common with the other GI's?
 - b. Did other GI's seem to know that Japanese American families like yours had been locked up? Did you ever tell GI buddies about it and discuss it? What kinds of things were said about it?
5. What was your relationship like with servicemen and officers of the Allied Forces, such as the British, Australian, Chinese, Burmese, etc.?
6. In the field, as someone who looked like the Japanese enemy, what were all the kinds of misunderstandings and physical risks that you might encounter from both sides? Did you have any close calls?
7. Did you know personally any nisei MIS who were either seriously injured or killed while serving overseas?
8. What kind of special protection were you given to avoid being taken for the enemy? Did you devise any special precautions yourself to avoid that?
9. Were the risks of your position ever explained by your officers to the other GI's?
10. Did you have relatives in Japan during the war? What did you imagine they might feel about your serving in the U.S. Army?
11. Did you find yourself thinking about what it would be like to meet a brother, relative, or former schoolmate as an enemy Japanese soldier on the battlefield?
 - a. Did the military ever mention this possibility to you, or did other niseis or GI's ever bring it up?
 - b. Did your parents ever bring it up? What do you think they would have expected of you?
12. Did anything like that ever happen to you?
13. Did you ever worry about parts of Japan being fire-bombed where you had relatives or friends?

physical
risks

INTELLIGENCE CONTRIBUTION

1. What kind of contact did you have with Japanese prisoners and civilians?
2. What kind of work did you do with Japanese military documents, diaries, or personal effects?
3. What was the attitude of the Japanese POW toward you?
 - a. What kinds of things would they say to you? Did they seem puzzled, or ask you about your speaking Japanese or your American uniform?
 - b. Did you get their cooperation and respect, and how did you get it?
 - c. Was there a difference in the way they treated you and other white GI's or officers?
 - d. Did any of them notice your rank or comment on it?
 - e. Did they seem to think of you as Japanese or American or neither?
4. What do you think you were able to do with Japanese prisoners and civilians because of your Japanese background?
5. In dealing with POW's or civilians, were there times and incidents when you felt a special closeness? Were there times and incidents when you felt particular differences between you and them?
6. Of all the intelligence activity you engaged in -- radio interception, documents decoding, interrogation of prisoners, etc. -- what were some of the most crucial kinds of information you got, either for immediate field combat or for overall strategic value?
 - a. How did you get this information? What was your approach?
7. Were there some moments when you felt you were caught in the middle, in some kind of double-bind, because you were both an American soldier and someone of Japanese ancestry?
 - a. Were there times you had to intervene to prevent things you thought were wrong?
 - b. Were there things you felt you had to explain or defend to other GI's about the behavior of enemy Japanese?

END OF WAR

1. What was your reaction to the dropping of the atomic bomb on Japan?
 - a. What did you know about the atomic bomb at that time?
2. After the war, did you go to Japan while in uniform to visit relatives or acquaintances? What was that like?
3. Did you go to the families of any POW's to take messages or return personal effects?
 - a. Did you do this because a prisoner had requested you to do it, or because you felt an obligation?
 - b. What happened when you went there?
4. Of all your wartime experiences, what gives you the most satisfaction, or do you feel most gratified by?
 - a. What did you find most frustrating or disheartening?
5. How did you feel about the way other GI's and American officials were acting during the occupation?

OCCUPATION

1. What assignments and responsibilities did you have as an American soldier during the occupation?
2. What did you think were the goals and purposes of the occupation policies and programs?
 - a. How did you feel about being part of it?
 - b. What did you find particularly gratifying or difficult about your activities?
3. Did you consider staying in Japan, or making some career based on a relationship to Japan or the Japanese?
4. Did the Japanese in Japan seem like your parents and their friends?
5. Did you feel that you had some special understanding or feeling about Japanese people because you yourself have a Japanese background? What were those things?
6. How did you feel about the way other GI's and American officials were acting during the occupation?

HOMECOMING AND BEYOND

1. What kind of situation did you come home to when you returned to the U.S.?
2. What kinds of things do you think have changed in you as a result of your military service?
3. Would you do anything different if you could do it again?
4. How would things have been different for you and your family if you had not been evacuated and interned?
5. How would you be different if you had not gone through those experiences?