

JOHN AISO

Biog.

Togo Tanaka's
INTRODUCTION of Honorable John F. Aiso
at the Special Recognition Banquet
Tuesday, June 25, 1985
The Quiet Cannon, Montebello, California
sponsored by
JAPANESE CHAMBER OF COMMERCE OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

Ladies and Gentlemen, Distinguished guests:

It is my privilege to present to you an outstanding American recipient of one of the highest awards conferred by the Japanese Government: The Third Class Order of the Rising Sun.

I have known him as a friend for over six decades. Let me tell you about Justice John Fujio Aiso.

He has asked me to keep my remarks simple and brief. Your chairman has also just announced a time limit on these introductions. But it seems only fitting that I be allowed enough time to relate incidents in John Aiso's extraordinary career that are relevant to our celebration tonight.

John was born December 14, 1909, the 42nd year of Meiji, in Burbank, California. He was the second child and eldest son of six children of Tokichi and Taki Aiso, who had migrated here from Shizuoka Prefecture.

He was graduated from Hollywood High School, Brown University, and Harvard Law School, where he earned the Juris Doctor's degree. He studied the Japanese language and Japanese law at Seijo Gakuen and Chuo University in Tokyo.

In 1960 Brown University bestowed an honorary Master of Arts degree upon him. In 1965 Chapman College conferred on him an honorary Doctor of Laws degree.

He was admitted to the New York State bar in 1935, the California Bar in 1941, and the United States Supreme Court bar in 1960. He served as lecturer at the U.S.C. Law School in 1960-61, and as trustee of the Los Angeles County Law Library, second largest public law library in the country from 1965 to 1968.

John became, unwittingly he admits, a public figure at the tender age of 12. He was elected by his peers to be president of the student body at Le Conte Junior High School in Hollywood. The year was 1921. His election precipitated a mass meeting of parents. They demanded his removal. "No Jap is going to preside over my kid." Student government was suspended. John was not able to assume office. The incident led to front page articles in the Hollywood and Los Angeles press, making John a public personality.

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His involvement in political issues between the United States and Japan also came early to him. As Captain of the Hollywood High School debating team, he spoke against enactment of the then pending Japanese Exclusion Act of 1924.

As a student at Harvard Law School, he was called upon to present the Japanese side of the Manchurian incident of September 1931 before audiences in the Cambridge-Boston area.

While serving his clerkship in a Wall Street law firm, John drafted the original registration applications under the then newly promulgated securities law covering the bonds issued by Daido, Tokyo Electric, Ujigawa, and Shinyetsu Electric power companies in the American market.

From 1937 to 1939, John served as resident counsel in Mukden, Manchoukuo for the worldwide British American Tobacco Company. His task: to adjust conflicts of interest between Japan, the Kwantung Army, Manchoukuo and the South Manchurian Railway on one side, and Great Britain and the United States on the other.

Concurrently he served as legal counsel of the United States Consular Court in Mukden.

Those were rugged, challenging years. Under 24-hour surveillance, the 30-year-old lawyer faced down rough treatment from the Japanese Kempeitai (the pre World War II gendarmerie) which accused him of being an American spy.

Upon the insistence of his mother, who went all the way to Manchuria to fetch him, John returned to Los Angeles to recuperate from hepatitis.

No sooner had he approached recovery when he received "greetings from Uncle Sam" in December 1940 under the Selective Service Training Act. He reported for active duty in April 1941 as a 31-year-old buck private assigned to a truck repair outfit.

His meteoric rise thereafter and his discharge as a full colonel are well known. His military assignments made history. Dubbed by his thousands of students as "kocho sensei" he was director of Academic Training, U.S. Army Military Intelligence Service Language School, still today being conducted as the Defense Language Institute at the Presidio, Monterey.

He was Executive Assistant to General Willoughby, MacArthur's chief of intelligence, enforcing the political purge in occupied Japan pursuant to the Potsdam Declaration. And he was an Inspector to the United States Army Judge Advocate General's School.

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In November 1943, while war raged in the Pacific, John prepared a paper, "The Postwar Reconstruction of Japan," at the instance of the War Department and Ambassador Grew. It set forth John's ideas. He delivered that paper before the New York Herald Tribune Forum. The War Department wanted to test public reaction to the ideas advanced by John.

To his own surprise, most of his ideas were not only approved by the War Department, but they were also carried out in the Japanese occupation. Among the topics advanced at that early moment: Japan's farm reform program, retention of the Emperor system, a new Japanese Constitution, freedom of speech and press, open and free international trade.

When Colonel John Aiso was transferred to the retired reserve of the United States in 1965, President Lyndon Johnson decorated him with the Legion of Merit.

Between his return from military service and his appointment to, and ascendancy in, the judiciary, John served as legal advisor to the newly opened Japanese Consulate-General in Los Angeles. At that time, he recovered for the Hollywood Japanese Gakuen its property that had been taken over by the County.

Governor Earl Warren's appointment of John as a Municipal Court judge in 1953 is well known. Not only was John Aiso the first Nisei judge in the continental United States, he is one of the very few California judges to have served on every level of the State's judiciary, including service as a Pro Tem Justice of the California Supreme Court.

John Aiso retired from the bench in January 1973. He wanted to give life to his knowledge of the Japanese language and law before withdrawing from active service. For over ten years he was soecial counsel to the nationally known law firm of O'Melveny and Myers. He acted as legal counsel to many Japanese Banks and commercial companies doing business in Southern California. He has been an outside member of the board of directors of the Sumitomo Bank of California since 1974.

After suffering a slight stroke, John retired from active law practice in March of last year. On November 3, 1984 ("Bunka no hi"), he was decorated by the Emperor of Japan with the Third Class Order of the Rising Sun.

Some sixty years ago, I used to watch John Aiso in the uniform of the Hollywood JBC team play Baseball on week-ends at Griffith

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Park. He was a neat player.

An inspiration to family, to friends, to associates, and to admirers around the globe, he has lived a life of incredible usefulness and far-reaching service and influence. Student, teacher, philosopher . . . soldier, jurist, citizen. His life is a testament to what can happen when human compassion and brilliance are joined by a decent concern for mankind.

Ladies and gentlemen, it is indeed my pleasure to present to you at this recognition banquet of the Japanese Chamber of Commerce of Southern California, the retired Justice of the California Court of Appeal and retired colonel, Army of the United States, Dr. John Fujio Aiso.

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REMARKS BY JUSTICE AISO
At the "Jokun" Recognition Banquet
Montebello, California
June 25, 1985

Probably due to his kind consideration to spare me from publicly struggling with my faulty Japanese when Bishop Kenko Yamashita will be addressing you in his impeccable Japanese, our Master of Ceremonies has suggested that I make my remarks in English. I gladly accept his kind suggestion. However, I warn him and you not to expect too much because even my English has deteriorated noticeably due to the relentlessness of old age and debilitations from a stroke that led to my retirement.

Consul-General Watanabe: On behalf of all of us honored by your Government on November 3, 1984 ("Bunka-no-Hi") and April 29, 1985 ("Tencho-Setsu"), I thank you for your concern and kindness in personally attending and participating in these ceremonies. We realize that you are taking time from your unusually heavy schedule during these days of economic tension between the United States and Japan. Without your presence there would have been a major void in this celebration. We tender to you, as the ranking representative of your Government in Southern California, and through you to the Emperor and Government of Japan our deepest appreciation and profound gratitude for the high honors so graciously conferred upon us.

It is truly significant, I think, that your Government has seen fit to include persons of Japanese ancestry residing in California among the recipients of its highly sought-after Honorary decorations. It is another manifestation that Japan has truly become a leading member of the international society of civilized nations. Her leaders and her people have become more internationally minded and broader in their thinking and outlook than ever before. Concomitant with and as an integral part of this development has come a re-assessment of the roles which the Issei and the Nisei have played and will play in the destinies of Japan and of the United States. The Issei have constituted a beach-head and the Nisei a bridge-head in the promotion of better understanding and goodwill between our two nations. It is a wonderful feeling of genuine satisfaction to receive from the Japanese Government its recognition that our lives have not been meaningless "Senzen-no-Shogai", but that we have contributed, although it may be in only a very small way, to the welfare of both Japan and the United States.

We Nisei and our offsprings are making our contribution as American citizens to the political experiment which is the United States of America. For our unique position in Japanese-American and world history, we Nisei are indebted as no other generation to our Issei parents who migrated from Japan to the United States. They were imbued with adventurous aspirations and permeated with the integrity of character so characteristic of Japanese of the Meiji period. We are grateful and proud of our heritage from such parents, which we have found to be an indispensable factor in making us exemplary American citizens.

Next, we thank each of you, our loved ones and loyal friends, present here this evening, sharing with us your precious pre-vacation time, to grace this celebration with your presence. Accomplishments attained and honors received mean so much more when one's beloved ones and friends spontaneously join in rejoicing with you over your good fortune. Without your life-long encouragement, guidance and support, the honors bestowed upon us this evening could not have been realized. Thank you so much for your love, support, and congratulations.

With your kind tolerance, I now take the liberty of adding a few remarks peculiarly pertinent to myself, but the significance of which I think redounds to many others to whom I am indebted heavily.

So far as I am aware, Mike Masaoka and I are the only Nisei upon whom the Japanese government has conferred the high ranking Third Class Order of the Rising Sun. In humbly and gratefully accepting this unusual Honor, I feel in my own mind that I do so (1) as proxy for my Issei parents, and (2) as a representative of all of my Nisei MIS (Military Intelligence Service) comrades. Without their sacrifices neither my private nor my public career would have been possible.

My parents have passed on to the other world, but some of my MIS comrades are here tonight. I ask them as a favor to stand and take a bow.

My father was truly one of the early "kusawake" pioneers. He migrated to the United States in 1898. America to the then Japanese rural populace was only a far off fanciful place. Emigration was considered such a dubious adventure that my father's relatives gathered together and held a service akin to a funeral since they were doubtful of ever seeing him alive again.

Typical of his sacrifice for us children was the period in which he engaged in heavy physical garden work from 4:00 a.m. in the morning until 8:00 p.m. at night. There were no pick-up trucks nor motor-driven lawn-mowers at that time. He rode a bicycle to work, carrying a lawn mower on his left shoulder and hanging a 50-foot garden hose on his handle bars.

Mother came to California during the Russo-Japanese War. Out of her meager earnings as a laundry-woman for an American family, she purchased framed prints of George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, and Jesus Christ; hung them in the parlor of our modest home; and instructed us to emulate the admirable qualities of these historical characters. She encouraged us to affirmatively develop friendships with the American church people who were especially kind and friendly to us.

Both parents insisted upon our observance of proper etiquette, the development of upright moral character, and the inculcation of the qualities characteristic of the Meiji Japanese, such as "giri", "on", "jin", filial piety, frugality, high evaluation of education, and courtesy and consideration for others. They constantly reminded us that our conduct vis-a-vis the Caucasians would mold the image in which all Japanese persons would be held.

Truly they, not I, were worthy of the honor now being bestowed upon me.

The "Kunki" (citation) accompanying my decoration bears a recondite message to me. It reads in part, "I, the Emperor of Japan, do hereby confer upon JOHN FUJIO AISO, an American ("Gasshu-Koku-Jin") the Third Class Order of the Rising Sun." Noteworthy is its characterization of me as an American (a "Gasshu-Koku-Jin").

Even after the incomparable feats of valor and loyalty performed by the 100th and 442nd comrades in Europe, the anti-Japanese die-hards calumniated us Nisei by invidiously accusing, "American-Japs may fight in Europe, but you'll never get them to fight in the Pacific against Japan!"

To safeguard and to complement the proof of loyalty won at a costly price by the 100th and 442nd, we in the MIS (Military Intelligence Service) had to prove beyond all doubt that we Americans of Japanese ancestry were not one whit inferior to the Englishman who fought his motherland in the War of 1812, or the German or Italian Americans who fought against Germany or Italy in World War I.

For my part, I was called upon by my country to personally supervise the training of some 5,000 Nisei and 1,000 Americans of other racial extractions to become Japanese language specialists to engage in war in the Pacific against Japan. During the 14 months when I was an Executive Assistant to General Willoughby, General MacArthur's Chief of Intelligence, I carried out orders to enforce the Political Purge ("Koshoku-Tsuiho-Rei") as mandated by the Potsdam Declaration. Some Purgees were personal benefactors of mine.

During this period of service in the Japanese Occupation and on several later visits to Japan, I noticed that the Japanese unanimously eulogized the exploits of the 100th and 442nd, but that in some quarters of Japan they spoke disparagingly of us who served in the MIS (Military Intelligence Service) as "Hikoku-Min" () or as "Koku-zoku" ().

Due primarily to the United States security regulations that forbade public disclosure of the MIS activities in the Pacific Theatre of Operations until the 1970's when these prohibitions were lifted, the mass media in Japan made no attempt to inform the Japanese public of the unenviable position in which the MIS personnel found themselves in, sandwiched in "itabasami" fashion between the country of their birth and the country from which our parents came. You will recall that our parents were still subjects of Japan, only because the American naturalization laws had declared them ineligible to naturalization until the McCarran Act was enacted after the war in the 1950's. Only through Mrs. Toyoko Yamasaki's "Futatsu-no-Sokoku" were the trying challenges faced by and the spiritual and mental agony suffered by the Nisei MIS made generally known. Our duty as American citizens ("Gasshu-Koku-Jin") was clear, but we couldn't dismiss entirely the tugs of the heart for our relatives and close friends who might become personal victims of our acts of loyalty to the United States.

So with this military background, when my 70th birthday had come and gone and no "jokun" was forthcoming, my close friends began speculating whether my military activities during the Pacific War would disqualify me from ever receiving a Japanese decoration. As Togo Tanaka had mentioned, I had already been decorated by President Johnson with the Legion of Merit in 1965.

The gracious act of the Japanese Government in conferring upon me the Third Class Order of the Rising Sun therefore brought me a joy and a sense of satisfaction probably experienced by no other recipient of a Japanese Government decoration. The gracious act conveyed to me a warm sympathetic understanding of the position in which I and my fellow MIS comrades found ourselves during World War II. From this gracious act I also sense a recognition that our course of conduct in the Pacific War and in the Japanese Occupation was honorable and commendable even in the light of Japanese criteria of honorable conduct and that in demonstrating our loyalty to the United States, we contributed also to the long run understanding and goodwill between the governments and people of Japan and the United States. I believe that this stamp of approval redounds to all of my MIS comrades, dead and alive; that's why this decoration means more to me than I can express adequately in words. Perhaps, the maxim, "Umare-no-iyeyori Sodachi-no-iyeyori" is still respected in modern Japan.