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NOTES ON RALPH YEMPUKU

Ralph is eldest of 4 boys in the Yempuku family
DONALD (KAZUKUKI) is second oldest;
TORU is third - he served in Manchuria
GORO is fourth - also served on Japan side during WWII
PAUL is fifth, youngest - too young to serve. Now is the publisher
of the Hawaii Hochi newspaper in Hawaii

Ralph served with Office of Strategic Services, forerunner of CIA
He volunteered in 1942 - trained first with 442nd in Shelby
Then went to Fort Benning, Georgia - officer's training for
handful picked for OSS
Went to Camp Savage for intensive 6 wk. Japanese training

Further trained in Aurora, Napierville, Chicago - OSS camp where
he was taught special communications skills such as Morse code,
how to build radio. Lasted 6 wks.

Went to Catalina Island off Calif. - 6 weeks hand to hand combat
training. Not the usual regular military coursework
Learned to defend, attack with explosives, knives, etc.

Ralph and other handpicked Nisei were kept secret and separate from
others in OSS. Gave fictional names.

Ralph shipped to Florida, then to North Africa and Middle East.
Finally to North Burma, where he entered combat against Japanese

Purpose of mission in Asia: so could work with OSS units in no. Burma
first as interpreter in 1944. Basically, he and others were con-
sidered and used as "wild cards" who were highly mobile

Put behind enemy lines for intelligence/scouting purposes. Then formed
native guerrilla units in the area (which was mostly mountainous,
most heavily forested terrain in the world, he says)
Very unpleasant experience.

Ralph served as co-commander for 150 guerrillas (Cochin people), who
were armed and trained to fight Japanese
For six months, the guerrilla units ambushed Japanese, finally
drove them out of Burma.

Then Ralph went to China, where he started training as paratrooper.
He says his superiors planned to jettison him into Japan as an
intelligence plant, but the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki
intervened. He says he knew he could not effectively operate
within Japan by covert means, he would be easily identified by
the Japanese as being an outsider. But apparently he said nothing
to his superiors about this, or couldn't convince them that his
mission as a "native Japanese" spy wouldn't work.

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After the bombing, Ralph was sent on "mercy missions"--which were meant to recover American POW's in different areas, to prevent their possible killing at enemy hands. Units of 6 to 8 OSS men were parachuted into POW compounds in China.

Went to Hainan Island (south of China) to tell Japanese that the war had ended, and to be sure they didn't execute prisoners, as was rumored to occur. They found there, instead of Americans, Australian and Dutch troops; also British.

(Went to Kungming, China *later*) ↓

After escorting prisoners from Hainan Island to Hong Kong, he attended the surrender ceremony there, in which the Japanese officers gave their swords to the British. Unknown to him then, his brother Donald (Kazuyuki) was there interpreting for the Japanese officers and recognized Ralph watching the proceedings from the balcony of the Peninsula Hotel. Donald said nothing at the time to let Ralph know.

However, afterwards, when Ralph had gone to Kungming, Ralph's friend asked him if he had a brother, saying, "I saw a Japanese guy at the ceremony who looked exactly like you. I thought you were on a secret mission so didn't say anything then." Later, though, Ralph's friend approached Donald and asked him if he had a brother.

"I thought, Jeezus, what'd hap-pen if one of my brothers was a prisoner?" In Europe, Japanese could never be mistaken for German, but in Burma, "I looked exactly like the enemy."

"But you have to fight for the country that feeds you.."

After bombing of Hiroshima, Ralph returned to Japan to look for his family, who lived in a tiny fishing village on Atata Island, behind Miyajima near Hiroshima. The bomb miraculously didn't affect them. Ralph had been assigned to CIC (Counterintelligence) near Kyoto, and recalls going through the destruction of Hiroshima, which was barren, devastated. Found someone who knew where the island was, and Ralph went by 2 hours by boat there

At that point, Ralph had had enough "points" to go back home to Hawaii but had to search for family. All three brothers below him (all except Paul) had been in the Japanese army. Ralph served 9 months to a year in Japan in counterintelligence

When Ralph came to the door of his parents' home, they thought they were seeing a ghost. Thought he was dead. They'd been told, like the rest of the population throughout the war, that the American military was using Nisei as cattle fodder in Europe. Japanese propaganda powerfully concocted messages from Nisei, which said they had been treated very badly by the Americans, and used ruthlessly.

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"War is playing for keeps. No second best in this game."

"I kept thinking, 'Gee my luck is running out.' So I was glad they dropped the bomb. The peaceniks nowadays look back and say how much cruelty that was, now they sit in their comfortable chairs and talk. But Japan would've done the same thing if they had the bomb. That's for damn sure."

"After what I went through, it got to a point where I realized all's fair in love or war. It was a big relief: ~~now~~ now I have chance to live. Chance to see my wife again."

He came home late part of 1946, saw wife and 2 kids in Hawaii

Franklin Odo is commissioned to do book on the VVV ("Varsity, Victory Volunteers") group he was part of. After bombing the Nisei were kicked out of Home Guard, so formed the VVV to help out in a way they could: helped as labor battalion prior to the formation of 442nd.

In 1932, Ralph's father had stroke, and premonitions of war clouds forming between Japan and U.S...took family back to Japan

Ralph stayed in Hawaii, went to the University of Hawaii. He was then 17, 18 years old.

10 to 15 years after surrender, Ralph went back to Japan with wife and 2 sons, to reunite with brothers since war. (Late 1950's)

He returns there to Japan quite often on business.

Writer Tomi Knaefler had written a piece on the Yempuku family in the Honolulu newspaper (I'll try to find this)