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Iakuchi, [Bill?]

(Bill Isurda)

83/115

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BILL TSURUDA

1981

On November 24/I had a long talk with Bill Tsuruda, Bob's brother -- and then found that my tape recorder had not been functioning properly.

I will call him again, in a month or so, but will now record all I can remember. He was born on January 26, 1917, in ^{Sacramento} ~~Stockton~~, Calif. Before ~~the~~ Pearl Harbor, ^{he} ~~and~~ had finished high school ^{after which he} ~~and then~~ went to work as a farm laborer. ~~XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX~~ But he found that he could earn more money as a fisherman, got a job, and ~~then~~, after a year or so, he heard of an even better job as a ~~d sard~~ sardine fisherman. He applied for the job and was accepted, ^{he} ~~was~~ very happy about this, ~~and~~ then came Pearl Harbor. He was at work when the Japanese bombed ~~the~~ Pearl Harbor, and when ~~that~~ ~~xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx~~ a fellow worker came and told him about it he ~~xxxxxxxxxxxx~~ couldn't believe it. Nor, he told me, could he believe ~~that~~ that the ~~xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx~~ decision to evacuate the Japanese Americans applied to him. He was a citizen. It might apply to Issei, but not to him.

Unlike many other respondents, he ^(Turlock) ~~seems to have~~ regarded ~~the~~ life in the Assembly Center^s as a joke. The grass was growing through the floor, but he and his friends ~~(the~~ (male peer ~~group~~ group) slept in the grass and thought it was funny. They expected to be released ~~at~~ at any time.

When I asked about ~~Gila~~ Gila, the ~~Relocation~~ Relocation Center to which he was sent, he had more complaints. When they arrived, there was nothing in their barrack room but a couple of beds and some blankets. "No tables - no chairs - ~~nothing~~ nothing!" Getting wood ~~to~~ to make furniture was the problem. So one day, when there was a terrible sand ~~storm~~ storm - "the sand was so thick you could not see more than a yard ahead," he ~~decided~~ decided to steal some wood from WRA woodpile. It was very fine wood - ~~redwood~~ red-wood. So he crept up carefully, groping his ~~way~~ way, and suddenly, a yard ahead of him, he ~~saw~~ saw a soldier with a gun. So he crept ~~back~~ back ^{very} ~~and~~ carefully ~~and~~ made his way to the other ~~side~~ side. The wood was tied in very large heavy bundles, but he managed to get one on his back and made away with it.

Then, as he was staggering along, he saw someone else through the sand. It was his friend _____, "who had had the same idea".

I asked Mr. Tsuruda how he had felt about the military question. He responded, "Oh, the No-No Yes-Yes thing." He told me that he had been very angry. At the meeting held in Gila at which ~~the~~ an American Army officer presided, Bob had ~~asked~~ b If I remember correctly, he ~~xx~~ began his answer by explaining that ~~his~~^{his} mother was ~~xxxxxxx~~ ill and frail and that his father had had several strokes. In consequence, he felt that it was his obligation to stay with them and help them. ~~Infamously~~ Had he answered "Yes Yes" ~~he~~ and relocated he would have been drafted, leaving his ailing parents alone. His older brother, Bob, was married and had a child. Then he began to tell me about the meeting held in Gila at that time at which an American Army officer presided. ~~Re~~ Bill had asked the officer boldly: "If I say 'Yes-Yes' why can't I go ~~to the mainland~~ back to California?" The officer ~~he~~ replied by saying that California was a restricted area. Bill indicated ~~that~~ by his tone of voice that he was very angry and ~~indignant~~ and that the indignation is still with him. He answered, No-No.

Bill had nothing good to say about Tule Lake. It was a sad, dark, gloomy place, everything always getting dirty because of the coal dust. (This was volcanic ash and not pleasant to walk on.) He disliked the Kibei, and ~~he~~ he told me that the man ~~him~~ who was murdered lived right across from him. He liked Mr. Noma (the man who was murdered) and could not see why "the ~~gangs~~ gang" had killed him. He had no use for the "hard-heads," his name for the Sokoku and the ~~Hakok~~ Hokoku. I asked if they had ever threatened him, ~~and~~ and he said "No". But they ~~did~~ were always "talking to" him, to get him to join their group and he thought they were stupid. He ~~said~~ repeated the word "stupid" several times. ~~He said that he just left them alone.~~ I asked how he coped with them and he said that he just left them alone. They could go their way and he would go his.

Bill Tsuruda

I asked if there were any person he respected in Tule Lake, to whom he could go for advice and he told me that there had been ~~such a~~ an older man ~~fr~~ to whom he went when he had questions. I asked about friends of his own age (~~he~~ ^{he} apparently ^{he} had many friends in Turlock and in Gila), but he said that in Tule Lake he had none. He spent much of his time with his family, and was able to get a job as janitor in the "Caucasian Recreation Hall." He said he had worked in the "Rec. Hall" until the end of 1945, when two WRA personal had suddenly taken hold of him and thrown him out. *He did not know why.*

He told me that all of his wife's relatives had repatriated, though she remained in the U. S. with him. He told me that ~~he~~ ^{his in-laws} they had had a terrible time in ~~Japan~~ Japan, ~~and~~ but ~~that~~ after 17 (?) years, they had been permitted to return to the U. S. Many had been minors and had not renounced their citizenship.

~~Bill Tsuruda Tule Lake California February 1946~~

I asked if he could remember any happy or pleasant experience at Tule Lake. He thought ^T and long time and then said he could not remember any.

He spontaneously began to talk about the Kibei again ~~and~~ and about how stupid they were. ~~As~~ For example he said that ~~the~~ immediately ~~after~~ after his family arrived ^{at Tule Lake} ~~there~~ there, a social dance ~~event~~ had been scheduled for the young people. But ~~this~~ ^{the} gang of stupid Kibei had come to the dance, armed with sticks and baseball bats and had denounced the dancers for participating in ~~un-Japanese~~ this "un-Japanese" activity. "One of them even wore a kimono!" ~~Obviously~~ I asked specifically if this had ~~happened~~ happened before the farm accident in October (1943). ~~xxxxx~~ He said it happened before.

I asked what he had done after Tule Lake and where he had gone.

~~He said he had returned to California to work for Mr. Buckerman on his farm - the Buckerman had a vineyard - But when Mr. Buckerman had died he had had moved about, looking for work - and had finally been given a job as a Checks Maintenance Man. (He sounded happy about this.) He had continued to work as a Checks Maintenance man, until a year ago when he retired.~~ He said he had returned to California to work for Mr. Buckerman on his farm - the Buckerman had a vineyard - But when Mr. Buckerman had died he had ~~had~~ moved about, looking for work - and had finally been given a job as a Checks Maintenance Man. (He sounded happy about this.) He ~~had~~ continued to work as a Checks Maintenance man, until a year ago when he ~~retired~~ retired.

I asked, "Looking back, is there anything you did or other people did in the camps that makes you feel good when you think of it? He thought a long time and then said: "No." "It was four years cut out of my life.# "