



NEWS RELEASE

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PCA Release

No. 78-70

Headquarters, Pacific Communications Area, Hickam Air Force Base, Hawaii.....When the Chief of Staff of the Japanese Air Self Defense Force visited the Commander in Chief of the Pacific Air Forces (PACAF), Lieutenant General James D. Hughes, here, recently, the man selected to act as interpreter for the talks was the Pacific Communications Area (PCA) Historian, Joseph I. Muratsuchi.

In Hawaii it is not unusual to find Japanese Americans who speak Japanese, however, Muratsuchi wasn't born in Hawaii, he was born in Twin Falls, Idaho, in 1921 and he didn't learn the language at home.

He learned it in the Army during World War II--the wrong Army and the hard way!

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Shortly after Muratsuchi graduated from high school in Twin Falls, in 1938, his folks made the decision to return to Gifu, a city in central Japan near Nagoya.

Muratsuchi, who was seventeen at the time and spoke no Japanese, began attending a technical school and started learning the language.

During this period Muratsuchi came to the attention of the Japanese Military Police who called him in for interviews and began monitoring his mail to and from the United States.

Even so, he said, he had no premonition that Japan would go to war with the United States until he heard about the attack on Pearl Harbor over the radio.

At this time in Japan all males reaching the age of twenty-one were automatically inducted into the Army. Because Muratsuchi was a U.S. citizen, he didn't realize what was going to happen to him until he was called in by his local draft board to report for a physical.

"I told them, there must be some mistake, that I was a United States citizen." Muratsuchi smiled ruefully, "they told me that I was a Japanese.....or else."

Or else was explained to him -- those who disobeyed military orders usually went before a firing squad.

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So, in March 1942, two months before he was officially twenty-one, Joe Muratsuchi, from Twin Falls, Idaho, became a member of the Japanese Imperial Army.

At that time Muratsuchi's comprehension of Japanese was about like that of the average American stationed in Japan for two years, he could speak and understand simple words and phrases, but he couldn't read or write.

In his four months of basic training, Muratsuchi learned to memorize such things as general orders strictly by sound. "I had no idea what they meant, but I had to be able to spout it back when asked."

At the completion of basic training Muratsuchi was shipped out to an Army Air Corps unit in central China where he spent the rest of the war as a private in the motor pool.

"We never did see any actual combat," he explained. However, China was considered front line duty, eyeball to eyeball with the enemy, and the strict discipline that the Japanese Imperial Army was noted for, was a way of life. He explained, "if you made a mistake, you got knocked down."

The false teeth that Muratsuchi has today are a result of that fabled discipline.

However, all things pass, and when the war ended in 1945, Muratsuchi's unit was still doing business as usual.

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"On 15 August 1945, we heard that the war was over. The Chinese Army moved in around our base; however, they made no attempt to take over. Then a couple of weeks later a U.S. Army Air Corps C-46 landed to survey the runway for an emergency landing strip." The Japanese base commander called upon Muratsuchi to act as interpreter. A few days later more planes arrived and a U.S. detachment was established.

"The Americans wanted me to go to work for them, but my commander wouldn't release me," Muratsuchi said. The Americans didn't press it and Muratsuchi stayed with his unit until March 1946, when they were sent back to Japan.

Thirty days later Muratsuchi went to work as an interpreter for the U.S. Army, but as a Japanese National. At that time U.S. officials were sympathetic but needed proof of U.S. citizenship before they could accept Muratsuchi as really good old Joe from Twin Falls, Idaho.

It took two years of investigation and statements from everybody from friends to the Japanese draft board commander, admitting that they knew Muratsuchi as an American, before his U.S. citizenship was officially recognized.

Muratsuchi stayed on with the U.S. Army in Japan as an American until 1959. During that time he married a Japanese girl and they have two children born in Japan.

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In 1959 he moved to Hawaii and continued to work for the Army until July 1974, when he became the PCA Historian. His son is now a Captain in the United States Army, the right Army, and his daughter is a CPA.

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