

## NORTHWEST NISEI IN TOKYO

Impressions of a Seattle-born Japanese-American Serving in Occupied Japan, 1945-46

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On a sunny afternoon in October 1945, less than eight weeks after Japan's surrender in World War II, Roy Inui stood on the deck of a United States Victory ship as it steamed toward Yokohama Harbor. The 23-year-old corporal admired the distant beauty of the rolling green hills and peaceful countryside of Japan's Honshu Island. The tranquil scene revealed none of the devastation that Inui had read about in the papers or heard about from other servicemen. He would see it all soon enough.

"After we debarked in Yokohama, we took the train to Tokyo and everything between the two cities was burned down. All you could see were brick chimneys—basically there wasn't anything else left," Inui said in an interview from his home in Sammamish, Washington, where he is retired and lives with his wife Bette. "None of us (in his unit) were in combat so we didn't have any idea how severe the war had been. Hearing stories is one thing. Seeing it for the first time is quite different."

Inui was part of an early wave of United States forces in Japan, a military presence that grew to 250,000 by the time the occupation officially ended in 1952. But Inui was not just another American GI. Yes, he was born in an American city (Seattle), answered to an American name, attended an American university, and thought and behaved like an American. But none of that defined him. He was a Japanese American, defined not by where he was born but where his parents were born.

Inui would get a chance to redefine himself as one of more than 5,000 Japanese American linguists recruited by the United States Military Intelligence Service (MIS). They translated Japanese documents captured in combat, interrogated prisoners, wrote propaganda, encouraged Japanese soldiers to surrender, monitored radio broadcasts, and, after the war, served in various capacities in Japan under General Douglas MacArthur.

Inui, whose given name was Hiroshi, is the son of Kaikichi and Yoshi Inui, who immigrated to the United States in the early 1920s. As first-generation Japanese Americans, they were known as issei. Their son Roy and daughter Akiko are nisei, or second-generation Americans. The Inuis opened a small store in Seattle, the OK Grocery on Eighth Avenue, between Columbia and Marion Streets, just up the hill from the International District. The store bordered on the predominantly white neighborhood of First Hill, which meant that the Inuis enjoyed a mixed clientele. The family was well-known and respected in the community. In those days, prior to the advent of the "supermarket," people relied on the corner grocery store for their daily needs. Inui, who occasionally worked for his father, recalls the store as a thriving business.

"I remember going with my Dad down to Western Avenue to buy supplies. We didn't have a car, so we'd have to pack all of that stuff up the hill," he said.

Everything changed on February 19, 1942, with the announcement of Executive Order 9066, which called for the internment of all Japanese living on the West Coast. Ironically, Inui was on Bainbridge Island that day, visiting friends during winter break. The large Japanese population on Bainbridge would be the first to be interned. The military issued Inui a pass and escorted him off the island that day. Inui said, "Ever since the bombing [of Pearl Harbor] there was a lot of talk about what was going to happen and about people being interned.... But even though we expected it, it was still a shock."

As a teenager studying business administration at the University of Washington, the curfew bothered Inui the most. "We certainly resented it," Inui said. "I was a student at the university; I was a member of the ROTC; I was a loyal American and felt that I was as good as anyone else. So you do have to ask, 'Why me?'"

A month later the Inui family learned their fate and the resentment grew. They would be among 120,000 Japanese to be carted off to internment camps. In March the Inuis were to be shipped to Camp Harmony, a holding facility at the Puyallup Fairgrounds, and then on to the Minidoka Relocation Center in Hunt, Idaho. A friend operated the OK Grocery in their absence, keeping it open throughout the war. The one remaining question was what would happen to the children. "My parents hoped that they would be the ones that would have to go and not us kids. They felt that because we were nisei and citizens, we should not have to go."

In the end, Roy and Akiko were spared the internment camps. They came under the protection of Floyd Schmoe and the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC), a Quaker pacifist organization. Schmoe initially fought the internment but soon gave up and dedicated the next few years of his life to "rescuing" young Japanese from the camps. He quit his job as a professor of forestry at the University of Washington and moved into the AFSC offices across the street from the campus.?

Inui does not remember how he got hooked up with Schmoe, but in May he, Akiko, and three friends were on a train to North Carolina. Schmoe had gotten them enrolled in Guilford College, a small Quaker school near Greensboro. "I remember family friends taking us to the train station. We needed a pass to travel, and the army paid our transportation all the way to North Carolina," Inui said.

By 1944 the military, in need of Japanese translators, relaxed its restrictions on enlisting nisei. Inui joined the army and attended basic training in Anniston, Alabama. From there he was sent to the MIS Language School at Fort Snelling, south of Minneapolis. The course was cut from six months to three due to a dire need for more linguists. "Most of us had a fairly good speaking knowledge of Japanese because we spoke it at home, but our reading skills were not that strong," Inui said. On August 28, 1945, Inui departed for the Pacific on the Victory ship, *Storm King*. He went first to Manila before heading north to Japan in October (Inui does not recall the exact date) with the Allied Translators and Interpreters Section (ATIS).

During Inui's brief but memorable 10 months in Japan, he witnessed the worst sort of destruction and human suffering; he saw entire cities that had been reduced to ashes by the fire bombing; and he saw women and children left homeless and suffering from malnutrition. Most of all he developed respect for a Japanese people who managed to bury their shame, embrace American ideals, and set about rebuilding their country.

The bombs that rained down on Tokyo during the last year of the war turned a vibrant city into a charred landscape. "Japanese homes are built very close together. They're basically wood construction. So once you start burning a few of those buildings, there's no way you can stop it. The only buildings that remained were all steel and concrete," Inui noted.

In *MacArthur's Japan*, Russell Brines writes of how the Japanese slums "vanished in a welter of ashes and broken rubbish, lending Tokyo at the war's end an unfamiliar air of cleanliness and depth. Everything had been flattened for miles between Yokohama and Tokyo and in the outlying districts of the capital." About a third of Japan's factories and half of its dwellings were destroyed (2.2 million total and 700,000 in Tokyo). Estimates published by the American military reveal the human toll of the war: 2.7 million Japanese killed, 4.5 million injured, and 9 million homeless and seriously malnourished.

Inui said American bombers deliberately avoided the Imperial grounds and adjacent government buildings. "That part of town wasn't touched at all, but everything surrounding it was pretty much demolished. I think our air force did a very good job bombing Japan. The gossip was that we spared the major office buildings because we wanted to use them for occupation." (Inui is right in principle, the American air forces tried to avoid the Imperial grounds, but they were partially damaged during one raid.)

Inui was transferred to Nagano City, a five-hour train ride northwest of Tokyo. There he interpreted for the United States medical officer, whose job was to collect all of the medical supplies and medications held by the Japanese military and redistribute them to civilians. "We called on all the hospitals in the prefecture. We handed out a lot of antidotes for diseases like typhus and smallpox.... A lot of people were undernourished. They had lice and ticks.... We passed out a lot of DDT and spray equipment."

Signs of hunger and malnutrition were everywhere—stick-thin women and children, milling about or waiting in long lines for meager rations. Recalling a chaotic scene at a Tokyo train station, Inui said, "People would line up for hours at a time trying to get tickets and get on board these trains to go out in the countryside and buy food. The inside of these cars would be jammed. There would be people standing between the cars; they'd even be in the coal cars just behind the engine, sitting on top of the coal."

Food was a valued commodity. Inui would take it with him when visiting friends or when walking around the city. "I remember going sightseeing. We'd pick up a few candy bars at the PX, something for us to munch on. Oftentimes we'd see these little kids, and we'd give them candy. The parents would tell us that the kids hadn't had any candy for years. The stores had very little merchandise in them."

Inui remembers Japanese soldiers bringing home the cremated remains of fellow soldiers killed in combat. "They'd have these small boxes or urns filled with the remains of soldiers. They'd have a white cloth hanging around their necks and they'd be carrying these urns, waiting at the train station to turn over the remains to the families."

The friendliness of the Japanese people and their ready acceptance of Americans impressed Inui, who came to Japan expecting to be hated or, worse, attacked by women and children brandishing homemade weapons:

*I was told that they had bamboo spears. They didn't have guns, the ammunition had been pretty much depleted. But the Japanese military had spread propaganda that the American soldiers*

*would rape the women. I remember the women all wore knickers that came clear down to their ankles so it would be harder for the GIs to rape them.*

It didn't take long for respect and kindness to replace the fear. "As a general rule, the American soldiers were extremely sympathetic and understanding and very kind. I can say we were very well accepted. The Japanese I met were thankful that they were occupied by Americans and not the Russians." People of Japanese descent wearing American uniforms drew long looks from locals. "You could hear people talking amongst themselves. 'Hey, I think he's Japanese!' I don't think they had any inkling that there were Japanese Americans serving in the U.S. forces. But they learned soon enough."

Many Japanese were still in shock that they'd lost the war. The first certain sign of defeat was Emperor Hirohito's national radio broadcast on August 15, 1945—that by itself a historic first. Addressing his "good and loyal subjects," the emperor said Japan would "accept the provisions of the Potsdam Declaration," the conditions of Japan's surrender drawn up by the Allied Powers. He spoke of the "new and most cruel bomb," which had flattened Hiroshima and Nagasaki. "Should we continue to fight, it would not only result in an ultimate collapse and the obliteration of the Japanese nation, but also it would lead to the total extinction of human civilization."

Inui recalled, "Until the bombs were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the military continued to tell the population that it was possible for Japan to win the war. No one really expected Japan to surrender until the emperor made that speech that the war was over.... So the people felt that they had been fooled or deceived by the military." The Japanese word for the deception, Inui learned, was *damakasareta*.

Once the Japanese recovered from the shock of defeat, they quickly accepted their fate, said Inui. "They were obviously disheartened that they had lost the war. But it's the Japanese nature; when they were told by the emperor that the war had been lost, they accepted that. Their main concern then was to get their lives back in order and try to rebuild the country."

There are many explanations for how the Japanese evolved from defiance to shame to total acceptance of American occupation. Inui credits the Japanese "nature." Historians cite Japanese respect for authority and obedience to the emperor. John Dower, in *Embracing Defeat*, describes a "populace sick of war, contemptuous of the militarists who had led them to disaster." Kazuo Kawai, in *Japan's American Interlude*, points to the "thoroughness" of Japan's defeat:

*Their world as they had known it had collapsed. Not only were their cities in ruin, their economy shattered and their manpower mangled and strewn over nearly half the globe, but the dreams of national greatness which had sustained their spirits had evaporated. They were disillusioned, demoralized and paralyzed.*

In July 1946 Inui was discharged and returned to Seattle, giving no thought to reenlistment. "Military life was too restrictive for me," he said. Post-war America is viewed as a land of opportunity and growth, but for a Japanese American in 1946, war veteran or not, opportunities were limited. Jobs were scarce as tens of thousands of former GIs flooded the labor market. Inui sidestepped that problem by reenrolling at the University of Washington.

Racial prejudice, however, would be harder to avoid. Even in total victory over Japan, some white Americans were slow to forgive. "There was definitely some of it [prejudice]," Inui said.

"Although I didn't run into much of it. I remember going into a restaurant [in Seattle] and they wouldn't wait on us. So we finally got the signal and just left."

Inui earned a bachelor's degree in business administration in 1948. Later that year he married Bette, and the couple eventually had two children. Inui went to work for C. T. Takahashi who, after returning from the internment camps, opened an export-import business. They traded Northwest lumber for Japanese "sundry items" such as toys, binoculars, and canned goods. That was the beginning of a 30-year career in exporting mostly coal, iron ore, and other raw materials that would help fuel Japan's industrial growth and position of prominence in the global economy.

Business took Inui back to Japan in 1948, and he was amazed at the transformation brought about in just two years. "When I was riding in that train (in 1945) from Yokohama to Tokyo and looked at that devastation, I thought it would be a generation before it was rebuilt. I felt that very strongly, but it didn't take very long for Japan to rebuild."

Inui credits the Korean and Vietnam wars with boosting the Japanese economy. "I think those wars played a major role on the road back to reconstruction," he said. Supporting this thesis, historian Mary Hanneman has written that the rise of communism in Asia caused America to "reverse course," from remaking Japan into a "relatively weak agrarian economy" to "building Japan into an economic powerhouse that would serve as a bulwark against communism in East Asia."

Interestingly, Inui's reaction to his experiences in Japan was at the time distinctly "American," he said. As a Japanese, it would have been easy to justify mixed feelings about what happened or very different feelings from those of white servicemen. His parents were reared in Niigata Prefecture, and his aunt and uncle still lived there. He had visited them and seen what they had to endure. But, nisei or not, Inui was all American:

*You hate to see anybody suffer—enemy or friend. But I didn't think of it as my 'homeland' that had been bombed, and I certainly didn't feel any guilt.... If it hadn't been for the Japanese bombing Pearl Harbor, the life of my parents and other Japanese would have turned out quite differently and the internment might not have happened.*

Inui also believes Japanese American contributions in the war helped overcome the prejudice that led to the internment:

*When I got back I wondered what there was for me in this country. But I think over the years our military service helped to prove we were loyal Americans. We certainly are well accepted today, and I'm thankful for that. My children and grandchildren had every opportunity to lead a decent life in this country. People don't seem to be as concerned with people's color any more. You're accepted for what you are as an individual. Having gone into the service was very beneficial—at least for the young people.*

Inui feels that much of what he has today is due in part to the kindness of Dr. Floyd Schmoie, the pacifist who kept him out of the camps. Schmoie dedicated his life to helping others and became a world-respected humanitarian, peace activist, and environmentalist. After the war, he went to Japan and built homes for the people in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. He later extended his humanitarian efforts in South Korea, Africa, and the Middle East. He was awarded Japan's highest civilian honor in 1988, the prestigious Order of the Sacred Treasure of the Emperor, and was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize four times (1994-97). He led the effort to build the Seattle Peace Park in 1991. Schmoie died in 2001 at the age of 105.

Inui eventually met Schmoe and took the opportunity to thank him. "I really was shocked that he remembered helping me," he said. "He was one of a number of very brave individuals who came to our aid during the war.... These people should be remembered."

So, too, should Inui and the thousands of other Americans of Japanese descent who silenced the drums of fear and prejudice in 1941 and 1942. They helped to restore peace in the world and lay the groundwork for what is now a 57-year alliance between Japan and the United States.

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