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*Surviving and Thriving in California and the Pacific Theater:
The Stories of Frank Sosa Masuda (2003)*

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Project: War and Society.

O.H. 4269.

Oral Interview with Frank Sosa Masuda, conducted by Dale Packwood,
November 13, 2003, La Habra, California.

Introduction

The oral history transcribed below belongs to a collection held in CSUF's Lawrence de Graaf Center for Oral and Public History (COPH), titled "War and Society." The interview with Frank Sosa Masuda was conducted by Dale Packwood on November 13, 2003, in La Habra, California. It is 54 minutes and 6 seconds long, and it is archived as a digital recording/audio file at COPH (see "Copyright Advisory" below). The verbatim transcript edited here was prepared in the fall of 2024 by Jack Brown, Joseph Canchola, and Diego Garcia-Salas.

In this interview, Frank Sosa Masuda (born September 20, 1923, in Los Angeles, California; died April 7, 2018, in La Habra, California) recounts his military service during World War II, his postwar life, and the racism his siblings had to face as students of half-Japanese half-Mexican descent in 1930s Los Angeles, resulting in their surname-change from Masuda to Sosa. He takes the interviewer on an extensive journey through his military service: his training and the questions about his racial identity; his U.S. Army combat experiences in the Pacific Theater; an incident when he was almost court-martialed for disobeying a direct order; the medals he received (specifically the Bronze Star); the weapons and ammunition he used; the languages that were spoken among soldiers during the war; and how his faith sustained him in moments of crisis. Dale Packwood, the interviewer, suggests that Masuda may be one of the few World War II veterans who did not face racism for being part Japanese. Masuda asserts that he did not face such treatment and that most of the people who knew of his background were his friends or family. Masuda adds that his brother (Fernando Joseph Sosa Masuda) served in World War II's European Theater as a member of the all-Japanese 442nd Infantry Regiment.

This oral history interview is relevant for our understanding of the experiences of mixed-raced U.S. servicemen during and after World War II. It underscores the significance and richness of studying American history by means of the grassroots approach that oral history interviews facilitate.

Only identifiable individuals, locations, and technical terms have been referenced in the footnotes, usually when they first appear.

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The primary-source edition published below originated in the "History and Editing" course offered by CSUF's Department of History.

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Verbatim Transcript (O.H. 4269)

LAWRENCE DE GRAAF CENTER FOR ORAL AND PUBLIC HISTORY
CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, FULLERTON

NARRATOR: Frank Sosa Masuda [FM]

INTERVIEWER: Dale Packwood [DP]

DATE: November 13, 2003

LOCATION: La Habra, California

PROJECT: War and Society

TRANSCRIBERS: Jack Brown, Joseph Canchola, and Diego Garcia-Salas

DP: (inaudible) at Cal State Fullerton, it's, uh, November the thirteenth, 'bout three o'clock. I'm here at La Habra, California,¹ at the house of Frank Sosa Masuda,² who's a World War Two vet'ran, and (pauses)—where were you born, Frank?

FM: I was born here in Los Angeles in 1923, and, uh, my father's³ Japanese, my mother,⁴ uh, Mexican from, uh, Mexi-uh-Ci-Mexico City, and, uh, there's, uh, four brothers⁵ and mo-and three sisters,⁶ and then, in the time that my oldest brother and sister was going to school, the kids would hassle them, calling them all kinds o' name because we're part Japanese, so—through at—uh, my, my, uh, sister and brother

¹ City in Orange County, California.

² Born September 20, 1923, in Los Angeles, California; died April 7, 2018, in La Habra, California.

³ Yonezo (Yoneso) Masuda (c. 1900–1927), born in Japan, immigrated to the United States.

⁴ Guadalupe Sosa (1903–1997), born in Mexico, immigrated to the United States.

⁵ Including himself (Francisco/Frank) as well as Ernesto (b. 1920), Alfonso (Al) (b. 1921/1922), and Fernando Joseph (b. 1925).

⁶ Anita (b. 1919), Angelina Lucy (b. 1923), and Josephine (1926–1999).

would each—they'd lose time at school, they'd play hooky⁷ because they didn't wanna go to school 'cause on account o' the fights and all that arguments that they had, with the kids. So, my older sister went in to the principal, and then she explained to him. She says, "You know, the reason we haven't been coming to school it's, uh, because all this problem, the kids calling us name." "Ch-Ching Ching Chinaman" and other names like that, even the Mexicans would say, "Chino, chino, japonés, come caca y no me des,"⁸ (chuckles) and stuff like that, so, o' course, we didn't wanna go to school, we played hooky and the whole bit, so, she talked to the principal, and he says, "Oh, okay, yeah, I could see all that problem that you've been having." He'd sh-changed, he wasn't supposed to, but he, he used my mother's maiden name, who—my, my father, who was Masuda, so, he put, he let, he put our name Sosa. So, when I, I started grade school, that's when I started with the name Sosa, not Masuda. So, while, uh, during, during, uh, when the war broke out, I went to volunteer to, to join the Navy,⁹ but when they asked me for my birth certificates, I said, "Oh gosh, I'm just going to say that I'm Japanese." So, I knew they weren't taking them in, so, I just, I just didn't go back. So, I figured, well, I'll wait 'till they draft me and see if they would call me in as Sosa. Meanwhile, my brother,¹⁰ yeah, I don't know how he did it, I think he, he, um, on his birth certificate, he erased, uh, Masuda and put Sosa, and then he got in the Navy. So, he was in the Navy, and I was waiting until they'd draft me, and then when they'd finally draft me, they called me in. They didn't ask me for the birth certificate, so, uh, they sent me to Arlington, California,¹¹ at an induction center.¹² Uh, and then from there I went to Camp, I went to Camp Roberts¹³ for infantry training, and while I was there, I just—as I was through with my training, they, um, gave me my furlough.¹⁴ So I went ho-home, I went home, and I went visiting my friends, and went to my school, first school, Roosevelt High.¹⁵ And they, right there, right away, they told me, "What, what are you in trouble? Wha-what's going on here?" I said, "Why?" He said, "The FBI¹⁶ has been coming over here." "What?" I said, "No, I don't know anything about it." So, I was wondering why. It still didn't dawn on me what was going on, so, after I left the school, I went to see my friends at work, where I used to work. And they, and they said the same thing. They told me, "What did you do? The FBI has been checking up on you, they're after you." They, they didn't know I was part Japanese, see, so, of course, they're gonna—my friends, they knew I was part Japanese, so, o' course, they knew me as Sosa, so, they, um, they asked me, "Well,

⁷ Miss school without excuse.

⁸ Vulgar racial slur (Spanish): "Chinese, Chinese, Japanese, eat sh*t and don't give me any."

⁹ Branch of the U.S. armed forces.

¹⁰ Reference to Alfonso (Al) Sosa Masuda. See Robert Horsting, "Japanese-Mexican Background Complicates Military Assignments of Four Brothers," *JAVA Advocate* (Fall 2017): 4–5, [online](#).

¹¹ Community in Riverside County, California.

¹² Location where recruits undergo physical evaluation, screening, and processing.

¹³ U.S. Army World War II training site in central California.

¹⁴ Temporary leave.

¹⁵ Educational institution, founded in 1922, located in Boyle Heights, East Los Angeles.

¹⁶ Federal Bureau of Investigation, U.S. domestic service/agency, founded 1908.

are you in trouble?" I said, "No, I'm not in no trouble," but everywhere I went, my barber, wherever I, I bought my clothes, or I went shopping, they all said the same things, "What, what's going on that you're in trouble?" So, I was young and getting scared. Meanwhile, I didn't know that they were checking on my mother and my father and my stepfather and brother-in-law and sister-in-law, so, they, they didn't tell me anything about it. So, when I get back to camp, as I got off the bus, I think, one of my friends come running and he says, "Sosa! Sosa! The provost marshal¹⁷ wants to see you now!" What? So, I went over there, and as I walked in, I put my arm to salute him, and I, I couldn't even—I didn't have the time to put my hand down, and he says, "You're part Japanese, aren't you?" I says, "Uh, yeah, I am." So, then he had me sit down and was telling me my whole history and everything about me. Then, he says, "You have a brother in the, in the, in the Navy." I think at that time he was in that to—they weren't putting these Japanese in these ships. (inaudible) I said, "Yeah, I have a brother in there." And he says, "Uh-huh. And you have a brother trying to come in," and it was my youngest brother that gave it away because, I think, he told 'em, that we were Japanese, and that's how they caught up with me. Uh, anyways, says—he's, he's—the, uh, the officer said, "Well, I am gonna see you tonight, and I'm gonna read the article of war¹⁸ to you," and so I said, "Good." So, that night, when I'm gone over there, he read the article of war to me, and he says, um, "Where do you wanna, uh, be sent to fight?" I said, "Well, wherever you wanna send me." I think you wanna—'cause he thought maybe I'd wanna, I'd say I wanna go to Europe, and not to go and fight the Japanese. So, the next day, uh, no, I think about a week later now, I was sent to, uh, Camp Roberts, and I did my, uh, infantry training at Camp Roberts. And, uh, no, no, I was sent to Fort Ord.¹⁹ I was sent to Fort Ord for, uh, amphibious training.²⁰ And then from there, then I went to New Guinea,²¹ and we did a little work like, um, loading ships and, and stuff like that, and then from there, I went to (inaudible), and we did a little patrolling over there, too. And, uh, from there, we went for the, uh, invasion of Leyte²² with—uh, September the twentieth, I think. And, uh, we got aboard the ship and got to Leyte, and these troopers were skating off, and I was ready to get off with them, and they say, "No, no," he says, "You're not with this, with this bunch." So, anyway, they all got off, and when the last bunch ca—got off, then they had me, me and some other guys get on a LS-LST,²³ it's a landing craft infantry. And, uh, and then when we landed, they were still shelling us and, uh, and, uh, bombing the beach. So, when, uh, we got there, they said "You, you guys go with the shore patrol, and they'll be over there, and you guys are gonna do the unloading of the ships and ammo."²⁴ So, we went over there, then we start, uh, unloading the,

¹⁷ Senior military police officer.

¹⁸ Reference to the Articles of War, enacted by the U.S. Congress in 1920.

¹⁹ U.S. Army post in Monterey Bay, California.

²⁰ Preparation for military operations attacking a beach from the water.

²¹ Island in the southwestern Pacific Ocean.

²² Campaign during the U.S. invasion of the Philippines in 1944.

²³ Landing ship, tank, intended to transport infantry onto a beach during an amphibious assault.

²⁴ Ammunition.

the ships, with ammo a-and oil and all that stuff. So, at night, at night, uh, we were taking a break, I remember, and, uh, and, uh, they had the lights on, and they said, "Okay, come on, we are gonna have to go unload some more stuff," so, we went back to unload, and we were unloading, and we heard two Japanese zeros²⁵ come by. And, uh, they kept—they were circling, so they turned all of the lights off, and I just dived under a tank, with my friend, and I, I remember this plane kept on going around, and he kept on, uh, gunning his engines. He didn't drop a bomb or anything. All—he was just going in circles and just gunning his engines. Finally, all the sudden there was, uh, only the sound of one engine taking off. One of their aeroplanes, but it looked like the two of them took off 'cause he was making all this noise. So, then the lights went on. And I was still under the tank, and, uh, the guys got up, and he started unloading, and I saw this one truck driver that was just sittin' on a truck half asleep like this and, just then, the Japanese dived down. See, what he did, he turned his, uh, engine off, so he could—while the other one took off, he stood there, probably gliding or something, and he'd come down, and he dropped his bombs right within our ammo and all that stuff, and it blew up this truck, and I could see the guy, still in the, in the truck. And it came down, it came down like that. And then what he did, uh, hit the ammo, and the, and the gasoline drones. And, uh, in the morning, when we got up in the—and they brought in other troops to unload the trucks, and they took us, took us back to another area, where we were gonna be assigned to our, our division, and, uh, while we were there, we got strafed,²⁶ strafed again and bombed, and, uh, one of my friends got wou-wounded. He didn't know how bad he was wounded until after he left the area. Another guy got him, uh, black, I just—and I, and it got another one, shra—another one got shrapnel until there was, there was nothing. And, uh, and then they send me to a service company. From there I went to a service company, and—

DP: Were there artillery guns, uh, shooting at the aircraft—when they were up there?

[00:10:31]

FM: No! They weren't shootin' or anything like that. All I remember is the—they come bom-bombing, but at night I could tell that there was a, a battle with the, uh, with the ships, with the—our, our ships out there 'cause at night you could see that, all this explosion. And, uh, and they put us—they sent me to a service company. And I was with this service company, and we would take ammo and, and, uh, food and clothes and whatever the front troop wanted and we'd take 'em up there. Uh, they ambushed us one time, and, uh, (pauses) the bunch that I was with crossed, it was, uh, Dewey Boulevard,²⁷ they crossed at a boulevard, and I sit behind some jeeps,²⁸ 'cause I didn't move fast enough like they did. So, when they start shooting at us, my sergeant²⁹

²⁵ Nickname for a Japanese fighter plane used during World War II.

²⁶ Attacked by low-flying aircraft.

²⁷ As of 2025, Roxas Boulevard, a road along the shores of Manila Bay in the Philippines.

²⁸ Military trucks.

²⁹ Non-commissioned military officer.

yells for me to get my butt over the side there where they're at. And I looked, and I saw the shells hitting the, the freeway there, and I said, "No way I can't make it." And "Get your ass over here!" And, so, I just stayed back, but after that, they caught—they got the snipers and all that, and then he came back to me, and he started yelling and, and telling me, uh, stuff like that. And when, uh, we got back to the camp, the lieutenant³⁰ come up to me, and he told me that, and he told me, "You shoulda order—uh, obeyed what the, uh, your sergeant told you." And I told him, I told him I couldn't cross that there freeway while they were shooting. "But he gave you an order, and you shoulda done it." And I said, "Well would you have done it?" And he didn't say that, he says—he just answers me on that, he just said, "When they give you an order, you do it." And then, uh, and then what he says was, uh, "Well, we're gonna," I don't know if he said "court-martialed"³¹ or do something to me, and I said "Well, what could I do?" (pauses) I, I don't know, he went and talked to the captain,³² and the captain got in the jeep, and the jeep, uh, was going to headquarters, probably to turn me in, and, uh—no, wha-what they did first, yeah, the captain got in the jeep, he took off, and while he was going, he was ambushed and shot at him and at the, uh, driver. The driver's name was Bayless,³³ I remember his name, he was a friend of mine. They shot him, and they, (DP coughs) they wounded the captain and, uh, after a while they came back, and they asked me, I don't know how long after the captain got hit, he came back, and they called me, and he says, "Where were you at such-and-such a time?" I says, "Oh, I was with my friends over there." "What were you doing over there?" "I was just talking." "Where? I wanted you to sign these papers, have you sign them, and see who, where, where you were at, at that time." To me, I thought, "Well, hey, they probably thought I shot at the captain." But anyway, I went over there, and I got the info that they wanted and gave it to them, and after a while—then they did what—the next thing they did was come up to me, and he says, "You know, could be, you could either be court-martialed or go into S troop." S troop was infantry. See, I wasn't in service, so, I told him, "Well, no, I don't want to get court-martialed, so put me into infantry." And then he put me into infantry, which was, uh, line company, and so I stayed in infantry. So, while I was with them, I, I had a lot of close, close calls being with them. But, thank God, that God was with me. I pulled out of it and got home safely (pauses). But that's how I used, uh, how I had that name, Sosa, was through all that I, I couldn't change it. And a lotta my friends would tell me, uh, "Don't go out at night because if you come in you look like a Jap, we'll, we'll shoot you!" (chuckles) The Filipinos thought I looked Filipino, and, uh, some of the guys, they tell me, "Don't go out at night because you look like a Jap, we'll shoot you." But after the war, when I come home and all that, and some of my friends—I told 'em that I was part Japanese, they says, uh, "We don't, we don't care if you were Japanese, you did your job, you were with us." Yeah, um, my friend from, uh, Georgia—his name

³⁰ Lower-ranking commissioned military officer.

³¹ To be tried in military court.

³² Commissioned military officer, ranking above lieutenant.

³³ Presumably Merrill June Bayless (1920–1944), memorialized at Manila's Walls of the Missing.

was, he was an MP,³⁴ his name was, uh, Mevel Beard. And there was another one, uh, Sky, Milton Skybird, that lived in Josoa. And, uh, Roy Norman,³⁵ he was from, uh, from L.A.,³⁶ someplace out here, I can't remember, yeah. Some of my friends aren't with me, and, uh, when they found out I was Japanese, because no one knew it. Only one, one time, when they were giving me my, my physical before I went overseas, this, uh, this Mexican, friend of mine, that trained with me, happened to be next to me, so, when I got my papers, because when they give you a physical they give your whole history and all that, and I was looking at his ancestry, and it says "Japanese." And he peaked over and said, "Es japonés? Are you Japanese?" What am I gonna say? I say, "Yeah!" (chuckles) So, that's, that was the whole story. (pauses)

DP: So, uh, (pauses) when you went into the, um, infantry—

FM: Yeah.

DP: —um, did you, uh—I know there's a lotta stress being infantry—you were on the frontline. Um, did you have any, did you, like—I read a book before I came, that was, um, talked about—it was by E. B. Sledge, it was the *Old Breed*.³⁷ I don't know if you've ever heard of that.

FM: No.

DP: No? Well, they—he talked a lot about how they ended up hating the enemy and stuff just to deal with the stress of having to be there killing them, and, and—

FM: I was too young. I was too dumb and young. I didn't—nothing like that ever bothered me. In fact, my friends that were, were before I, I, I went, in the frontlines—when I was in service company, I used to sneak out and go to—see like this friend of mine, Skybird, he was in H company. That's, uh, I think that was, uh, heavy weapons, but I used to sneak out and go over there and stay with him overnight. And o-one night, I remember, I was there, and he told me, "Watch out for the building back there 'cause it—at night, it lights up and give your-your-you away because it's on account of the—and they're sliding back at you because they could see you." I said, "Okay," I said. He told me, "Well, I'm gonna take—you take the first watch, and I'll take the second one." So, when, uh, when I was up, I kept looking. I couldn't see it—when you look at something whether it's a rock, whatever it is, a tree or something, it seems to move, you know? But I, I never woke him up because he, he used to tell me, that, you know, stuff will look like it-it's moving. And it was, after his, after my hour was over, I woked him up, and I tell him, "Sky, there's nobody out there." He says, "Okay, go ahead and lay down, and try to sleep." So, I took my boots off, it's a no-no, and I didn't know it, like I said, I was new in the frontlines, because I snuck out of my—out of service troop to go and be with him. And, uh, and, uh, as I laid back and was starting to sleep, all the sudden it opens up. And, uh, there was shells hitting my feet, because I didn't have my shoes on, so it started burning, and—so, I got up and said "What's wrong! What seems to," and he says, "There's a Jap over there!" and he kept

³⁴ Military Police officer.

³⁵ Presumably Roy Lee Norman (1921–2012).

³⁶ Los Angeles.

³⁷ Eugene B. Sledge, *With the Old Breed: At Peleliu and Okinawa*, published 1981.

on shooting until he finally got him, and the morning when we went over there, he, he was pretty close to us. He had a big old—I don't know if he had a, a bomb and a, and wra-wra-wrapped around on a bamboo stick, and what they'd do is come and blow, blow you up with them. And so, Sky had just killed him out there, so that's when I remember, that if it wasn't for him, he could have probably got the two of us, because I couldn't see him moving, but he (inaudible)—I, I laid back, and he right away saw him moving, and he came, uh, was coming at us.

[00:20:07]

DP: Your boots were—(coughs) got shot? What happened?

FM: No, no, no. I took my boots off, because I, I wanted to relax my feet.

DP: Um-hm.

FM: And—but while he was shooting the shells, the—kept on fall—the—so, they're hot! And I, like I say, I was just new in the frontlines, so how do I know about that? (chuckles) You're not supposed to take 'em off! (chuckles)

DP: So, you'd actually leave your post and sneak back to the—

FM: Well, that's a no-no. They never found—they never found out. There were a lot of crazy things that I did, like that, because I wanted to be—go with my friend, and, uh, and, uh, I did it, I remember another time I did that, and I was trying to get back to my, my company, which was service troop, but I couldn't do it because the guys told me there's machine guns over there, and they're gonna think you're a Jap, and they're gonna shoot you, shoot you, so you better stay there. So, in the morning I—I'd get up, and I'd go back to that, and I'd get help. Because I wasn't at my post, they'd ask me, "Where were you?" and all that.

DP: Yeah, because that's one thing that we read about in that book, that same book I was tellin' you about, that you didn't leave your foxhole,³⁸ because they'd shoot you.

FM: Yeah, right, yeah. That's true. But, uh—and I had another friend of mine, Roy Norman, he's a—that's the one that—he's from, uh, he's from—L.A., but, I remember, uh, one day, we were talking, and he says, "I'm gonna have to be leaving," he says, "because I'm going up on a patrol." I says, "Where're, where're you going?" "Well, we've gotta go up on a patrol and see how ma-many, how many Japs³⁹ are up on that hill there." I says, "Well, here, why don't you take this," because over there, the Filipinos gave you a bunch of rosaries,⁴⁰ so, I say, "Here, take one of my rosaries." And he says, uh, "No, no, no," he said, "I'm, I'm Protestant." I says, "It's okay, it's just a," "No," he says, "I am, I am Protestant." "Yeah, but just take the rosary!" And he said, "Okay, I'll take it," so, he took it. And when he went up there, they all got killed but him. And he came down, and I understand—when that happened, they told me, that they thought he died, he got killed, but I'm just—but what happened, he comes down, and he says, he was all shot with not one wound on him, but his pants had holes, canteens, and

³⁸ Small hole, dug by infantry as a defensive position for one or two soldiers.

³⁹ Derogatory term: "Japanese."

⁴⁰ Strings of beads, used in the Catholic Church to pray a set of prayers known as the "Rosary."

his rifle, and they thought he died. I mean, the guys thought he was—when I asked, they said, “Oh, he got killed with the rest of the guys.” And, uh, after the war, I went looking for him. And, uh, I wen—I went to his hometown, and I can’t remember what, but I went to his hometown in L.A., and I asked them, uh, I went to a (inaudible), and I told them, “I’m looking for this man, Roy Norman. He lives here, Port Torrance!”⁴¹ I say, “He lives in Torrance, and he was one of my best buddies in the service, and I’d like to see if I can get his address.” I, uh, told her that I was in the Army⁴² with him, and I told them just what happened. Then she told me “You know what?” And she had a big old book in front of her, and she says, “You know what? We can’t give no information of no one around here.” But she was holding on this big book, and she says, “I have to leave.” She left the book down, she walked out, she had, she had the book open where his name was. So, I went over there, knocked at the door. He opened the door, and it was him. He says “Oh, Mr. Moto!”⁴³ he says, “Come on in! Come on in! Let me show you something!” I said, “What?” He says, “Come in,” and took me in, and in his room, he had the rosary I gave him. Then he told me, “I told my wife: This is the reason I’m here.”

DP: What is a rosary?

FM: A rosary is, uh, a—beads that we had, that we prayed with. Each, each bead’s—is a “Hail Mary, full of grace,”⁴⁴ and then the “Our Father,”⁴⁵ and stuff like that, it was a bead that we have, that we’d pray.

DP: Was he—did he, uh, receive a medical discharge?⁴⁶

FM: He did? No.

DP: He didn’t get hurt?

FM: He didn’t get hurt or anything! (laughs)

DP: No? Didn’t he get shot in the legs?

FM: No! No! He was just shell-shocked, I think, and, no, he wasn’t—he didn’t—not one wound, not one bullet hit him. But he told me what happened, and I asked him, “I understand that all those guys,” and he says “Yeah,” he says, “the last guy got up and was tellin’ him: ‘Get help, Roy!’” And when he turned around, they shot him, the shot got him, and his friend, he was right there. But he come down and, thank God, that he come out. But the rosary is the one that—what he told me, “My wife wanted to clean the drawers and all that,” and he says, “Don’t you throw that rosary away.” That’s something there. So, that’s—(pauses) there are other things that I can’t remember that has happened, but those are the ones that are more—that I could remember about things like that. Yeah. (pauses)

DP: How did you feel about entering before the war?

⁴¹ City in Los Angeles County, California.

⁴² Branch of the U.S. armed forces.

⁴³ Presumably a nickname, based on the fictional Japanese agent I. A. Moto, created by American author John P. Marquand in 1935.

⁴⁴ Ave Maria, traditional Catholic prayer.

⁴⁵ The Lord’s Prayer. See *Holy Bible*, Matthew 6:9–13 and Luke 11:2–4.

⁴⁶ Release from military duties due to a medical condition.

- FM: I wanted to get—go in but, like I said, I, I tried to join, uh, the Navy, and they asked for my birth certificate, and I said, “I know that’s a no-no,” because I’m part Japanese, and they weren’t going to take me.
- DP: Did your brother get to continue being in the Navy?
- FM: No, he *did* get in the Navy! But, uh—
- DP: Did they kick him out? Or did he get to stay in?
- FM: No, he stayed in, but what they did, to me—he didn’t think it was kind of odd, but after a while and after the war, and I kept thinking about it, why would they send you—you’re over here in Alaska, right? You’re in the Pacific, but then all of the sudden they send you to the European Theater. You know what I mean?
- DP: Um-hm.
- FM: To me, all that, and, uh, besides that, when I went in, the first rifle they gave me was a thirty-aught-six.⁴⁷ You know what that is?
- DP: Yeah.
- FM: Bolt action?⁴⁸
- DP: That holds three doesn’t it?
- FM: Pardon me?
- DP: It holds three in its chamber or, or was it a clip, or?
- FM: It hol-holds only about six, uh, shells, I think. It’s a bolt action. Do you know what a bolt action is?
- DP: Um-hm.
- FM: Okay, they gave me that, and all my friends would ask me, “Why do you have the 03’?⁴⁹ Are you gonna be a sniper?”⁵⁰ I said, “No.” I didn’t qualify to be a sniper, I just—I only qualified marksman⁵¹—which is—you can’t be a sniper being a marksman. You have to be, be expert⁵² or better. So, they says, “No, no, you’re gonna be a sniper.” And when I went to a patroller, that I could remember, they never gave me no ammo. They didn’t give me the clip. There’s a clip, it’s only, like, like that and can hold about six shells. They didn’t give me that, so, what I had to do was get the M-1. Do you know what the M-1 rifle⁵³—
- DP: That was—
- FM: —that’s the new rifle, the M-1.
- DP: Okay, I don’t—but it’s a machine gun? The M-1 was a machine gun, or?
- FM: No, no, it’s a rifle. But the way you load that, you—I think there’s eight shells, and you load ‘em and put ‘em down. In fact, here, let me, let me show you, so you have an idea. Here, I have my rifle here.
- DP: Now is this the rifle you have from the war, or is it a different one?

⁴⁷ Presumably the M1903 Springfield rifle, chambered for the .30-06 Springfield cartridge.

⁴⁸ A firearm requiring the manually loading and ejecting of cartridge cases.

⁴⁹ Presumably the M1903 Springfield rifle.

⁵⁰ Exceptionally qualified long-range and concealed-position target shooter.

⁵¹ Long-range target shooter.

⁵² Highly qualified long-range target shooter.

⁵³ Standard semi-automatic U.S. armed forces service rifle.

- FM: Yeah, no, no, no it's a different one. This one, I, I, I won it through the NRA.⁵⁴ But anyways, it's a—it's a new rifle that came out, the M-1. The 03' was during 1903.
- DP: So, what happened? I wanna see it! You brought it out, I wanna see your—
- FM: Yeah, well, I'm trying to get it out.
- DP: Okay, well, maybe I'll just look at it without you having to get it out.
- FM: Okay, see, this one is the 03'. The old one from the, uh, 1919, when they—and this one (clock chimes) is the new model.
- DP: Okay.
- FM: So, everybody had this—I only had this one.
- DP: They gave you the—that's not a good one, huh? (laughs)
- FM: Why, why would they do that and—
- DP: With no ammo—
- FM: —yeah.
- DP: —with no ammo either!
- FM: Why would they do something like that? The only thing I could say is, they probably didn't trust me—
- DP: Yeah.
- FM: —until after I went on my—I went on my other patrols, then they gave me this one, and they probably think, "Oh, well, he's doing okay." So, (chuckles) it's kind of weird that—
- DP: And you've got medals here, too, from the war?
- FM: Yeah.
- DP: Which medals do you—
- FM: They're liberation, uh, Philippine Liberation,⁵⁵ the thin one that's gold. Is it gold?
- DP: Um-hm.
- FM: The top one is a Bronze Star.⁵⁶
- DP: Now, what do you get a—what do you get the Bronze Star for?
- FM: Uh, okay right here, right here I—see, if you're in combat and you do so—you do something. This is the certificate that they gave me for the Bronze Star, and, uh, and I—this one, what I could remember, this one time, this my friend of my mine, his name was Bully Beef,⁵⁷ (chuckles) oh, that was his nickname! And, uh, we, we overshot our field. We were in service company, and we were delivering ammo and all that, food and all that, to the frontline, and the frontline was here, and we overshot 'em way out here. And when they realized that we were way out there, my sergeant came, and he says, "You guys go up on the hill there." And then up there, the shoot—uh, the Japs spotted us.

[00:30:53]

⁵⁴ National Rifle Association of America, founded 1871.

⁵⁵ A medal awarded for participation in the 1944–1945 liberation of the Philippine Islands.

⁵⁶ Awarded for heroic or meritorious service or achievement in a combat zone.

⁵⁷ Nickname for a person, referring to canned corn beef, a common staple in the Allied forces.

FM: Meanwhile, we were going to make a U-turn and go back. So, Bully Beef and I went up on a hill there, and we could see them, from a distance, we could see the Japanese, what they were doing, they were killing the civilians. We could see them running, and "Where did you guys get a good" (inaudible), and on our right-hand side, uh, on the right, uh, the line troopers were there. So, they were shooting to the right, and we were looking like this, to make sure that they didn't spot us from going, but with the dust and the trucks going around, they finally (pauses) saw the dust, and knew that we were there, too. They didn't know where we were, but they knew, so they start shouting and—so, when they start shouting, I kept, I kept watching them (inaudible), um, boom-boom-boom, side to side, and another, if they get you, and you put it here, you're gonna run this way, then the next shell will get there, then you're gonna try to go sideways as soon as they hit—so, I kept watching the patterns, and I finally told Bully Beef, "Let's get our ass outta here," I said, "because I think they, they're coming up our way." So, he says, "No, no, no, I wanna look," so he kept on looking to see, and he says, "We were supposed to warn the troops down below that, you know, they spotted us, but since the shells were so far away, we figure, well, let's give them a chance to get out." So, we were lucky, the shells came closer, closer, and then it got so close, I finally told him, "Bully Beef, get your ass out of there. The next shell's gonna be right here." So, I jumped, backwards, to a big old hole where a shell had fell before, and water in it, so I fell in that water, and I looked up, and I kept on yelling, "Bully Beef, get your ass out of there!" And finally, when he did jump, where I was, the shell hit there, and so at that time, the sergeant came to tell us, "Let's get our ass out of here." But he thought we were, he thought we were—he probably thought we were hit!

DP: Um-hm.

FM: So, he, he—the sergeant took off, and we couldn't even talk, you know, like when you're cold, (chatters teeth) and how your teeth chatter, chatter?

DP: Yeah?

FM: We couldn't even tell him, "Wait!" We couldn't even talk to each other, we were so scared. And, like I said, like it's—if you were cold you, you, you can't say anything. Meanwhile, they were already taking off. (chuckles) Finally, we got our marbles around town, and we couldn't, we still couldn't, uh, talk or yell, but we ran down and got on, on the trucks, and when we got over there, the sergeant says, "We thought you guys had—were blown up?" "No, no, we jumped out of the hole," and explained to him and all that.

DP: So, the Bronze Star you got for bravery, for going up and scoutin' the area?

FM: Probably, that's what it was, yeah, because they—what they did, they just give me the Bronze Star, but they never did tell me what, what was it for. But that's the only thing that I could see that we did was—(chuckles) that we stood our ground, so I do, well, they kept on, uh, coming but I, I, like I said, this friend of mine, he didn't wanna leave that hole. But I kept on him and said, "Bully Beef, the next one's gonna be there," because I was watching all the patterns, was—and I said, "No, no. It's getting too close to us."

DP: And the pattern was coming from your own bombs, from your own troops, right?

- FM: The bombs were coming toward us. The Japs were shoot-shooting toward us. On the right-hand side, the Japs were shooting AT-KAK,⁵⁸ you know, what you use to shoot an aeroplane?
- DP: Um-hm.
- FM: They were shooting that, like, pow-pow-pow, pow-pow-pow, and it was the AT-KAK, that was shooting that way. So, they knew we were there, but, uh, they didn't know who we were. And, like I said, we didn't have any ammo or, uh, guns or weapons to be able to fight, uh, the Japanese. We only had, like I said, enough to protect our own self, and the ammo, and the ammo we had and, uh, the clothes and the food and whatever we brought to the line, our line troops, but that's all we had. But we overshot our, our field that night. But that happens to them a lot! I mean, look at how many, how many of our own were shot down by our own men.
- DP: Yeah.
- FM: I saw that on the beach, too, when they were shooting it down, and the plane was coming, he would do this, to try and let him know and identify that he's an American with the (inaudible).
- DP: Now, when you got that gun, with no ammunition, do you go to battle with no ammunition? What happened? I mean—
- FM: No, no, no. We went to, uh, we had gone to a patrol, I think, (pauses) we had gone to a patrol and nothing happened, I mean, there was no shooting that I could remember. But then when I came back, the next day or so, they finally gave me the other rifle. But I did have ammo because, I figured, if they gave me a rifle—so what I did was take the ammo from the newer rifle, and I took the clip, and I took all the ammo out, and I put it in my—'cause I figured, "Well, I'm going to have to protect myself someday. So, that's the only way," I said. And to load that, uh, that 1903 rifle, you have to put—I had to do it one at a time, because the other way I didn't have a clip. They didn't give me a clip where I could put, uh, six rounds or four rounds, and then just push it in, and that's it. So, I have to put one, two, three, and that's what I did—I left them shells in there, and that's where I carried them. And then I had my, I took the ban-bandoliers,⁵⁹ and I took the ammo off there, and that's about—but now, like I said, when the guys that asked me, "Well, you're going to be a sniper, huh?" and I said, "No way, I didn't qualify for a sniper." But, like I said, after the war, it kind of dawned on me, why would they give me no, no ammo. They probably wanted to try me and see what I would do. I, I really don't know. I, I didn't—that's the only thing I can think is, that they probably didn't trust me.
- DP: Do you feel you got a hard time from—for being, I mean—
- FM: Japanese?
- DP: Japanese, or?
- FM: No, no.
- DP: No? From our own military? I mean—

⁵⁸ Anti-aircraft gun, also used against ground targets.

⁵⁹ Large-quantity ammunition sash or belt, worn over the shoulder and across the chest.

- FM: No, because, like I say, they didn't know who—no one knew it until after I came out of the service.
- DP: Um-hm.
- FM: The only one that new was that one Mexican guy that looked over and asked me "Are you Japanese?"
- DP: And the officers, they didn't know it either?
- FM: No! I think the officers knew it.
- DP: And did they hassle you all the time?
- FM: They had to know it. The officers have to know it, and I think the sergeants knew it. But no one gave me a bad time and (snickers)—well, one sergeant in service company, he, all he, all he—he just told me that, what was it, we were at a risk camp, and a—and the Filipinos would come and bring you food and all that and talked in Spanish. And I would answer them with the little bit that I knew with my Spanish, I'm not too good at it, but I would answer them, and he heard me talking to 'em, and he came over, and he told me, "I don't want you to be speaking Spanish to these Filipinos!" "Hey," I says, "What the hell do you think I'm getting my ass shot for?" and I says. I said, "Freedom of speech!" "Oh!" he says, "I feel like kicking your ass!" And I said, "Well, go ahead, if you want to." And that was it. That was the only time I had anybody ever tell me that. But otherwise, officers or anybody, no.
- DP: Do you think the gun was because they didn't trust you? So, that was given to you—
- FM: Well, that's—what else could I think?
- DP: The officers gave you the guns, or they gave out the orders to—(talking over each other)
- FM: No, no, no. The officers didn't give me the gun. It was the guy at the ordinance that was in charge of the ordinance. He gave me that, but like, like I say, I, I, I never got any ammo for it. I didn't get a clip for it, because that takes a special clip.
- DP: Um-hm.
- FM: Like I say, it either holds four, four bullets or six. I'm not sure, I forgot now. But, uh, it takes a special clip, and when you push it—the bullets down, it goes into the chamber there, and they're ready to fire.

[00:40:12]

- FM: But, uh, no one that I could remember ever gave me a bad time, that, that I know of.
- DP: You had two brothers that were in the war with you, too, right?
- FM: Yeah.
- DP: One was in the Navy, and—
- FM: I have, uh, three brothers. One was, one was in the Navy, and the young one, the one I was telling you that gave it away, they, they put him with the 442.⁶⁰ Have you heard of the 442?
- DP: No.

⁶⁰ U.S. Army infantry regiment, comprised primarily of second-generation Japanese Americans.

- FM: The 442 is a regimental team, uh, Japanese, all Japanese. They were all Japanese, and they fought in, in, uh, Europe, they fought in Italy, and I forgot where else. So, my young-youngest brother⁶¹ was—they put him with the 442, and, uh, he went about the, he went in about the end of the war, and he, he got—he was able to go in for occupation troop of Germany. And my oldest brother, he got in, an-and, uh, he didn't stay there long, I think because he had a, a big family, I don't know, I don't know too much about him. About him and his service. But my other brother, that was in the Navy, he was in Attu,⁶² and then the next minute I knew it, he was in Europe. (pauses) Uh, I forgot he, he, he was in, in, uh, he was in a carrier. First, he was in, I think, in, uh, Attu, he was with the Nevada,⁶³ that's a battleship, I think he was in—and, and then from there, then they transferred him all the way to Europe.
- DP: Did all you—your whole family make it out of the Army alive?
- FM: Yeah, thank God, that's why I said, thank the good Lord for that.
- DP: Good. And did you guys talk about—did you guys talk about your war experiences after the war?
- FM: No. We never did.
- DP: No?
- FM: No.
- DP: You didn't share any experiences with your brothers, and they didn't share with you, huh?
- FM: No, they never did.
- DP: Do you feel—did you feel—how did you feel about the war when it was over, when you came home, I mean.
- FM: Well, happy, yeah.
- DP: Happy? I mean, how did the people treat you, I mean, was race an issue? I mean, how did people treat you, like, did anything go bad like, or? (talking over each other)
- FM: When I came back—no. Nobody. Everybody treated, treated, all of us good. Like I say, a lot of them didn't know we were part Japanese.
- DP: Um-hm.
- FM: In fact, they're just barely finding it out now.
- DP: There—because the other guy that I interviewed, he was Mexican American, and he said, when he came back, he was just—had a hard time, no one wanted to give him a job and, he was really—felt that they were real racist against the Mexicans.
- FM: No, I never, I never had any kind of problem like that. Everybody was good. See, I was brought up in East L.A.,⁶⁴ and over there, it's like a family. So, maybe that, that was my, uh, my good deal because everybody was a mixture race over there, you got Italians, Russians, Japanese, Chinese, you name it. And I think through that, they, they never give me a bad time, no.

⁶¹ Fernando Joseph Masuda Sosa.

⁶² Westernmost Alaskan island in the Bering Sea.

⁶³ U.S. Navy ship, survived Pearl Harbor (1941), participated in the Normandy landings (1944).

⁶⁴ The neighborhoods of Boyle Heights, El Sereno, and Lincoln Heights, and the unincorporated community in Los Angeles County known as "East Los Angeles."

- DP: So, the only time you felt any problem with race was when you were kids, going to school?
- FM: Right, well, not me because, like I said, I wasn't, wasn't born yet, but my oldest brother, two brothers, and two sisters, they were the ones that—they used to make fun of them a lot and, and call them names, and there was fights and all that. So, of course, they didn't want to go to school anymore, they'd play hooky or whatever. But then, when my older sister, finally, she said, she's just shout out, "Well what happened?" she said, "Well, well, when I went over there, and I talked to the—because I wanted to know why did they, why did she change my name? To Sosa?" And she told me after, after I got older, well, I was asking her, I said, "Why did you, why did you change my name?" She said, "Because what was happening to us"—her, not me, because, like I said, I was too young to have been going to school at that time, but her and my older brothers and sisters, and she says that, uh, she went up to the principal and told him, "You know, we are having all these problems and all that," and that's when she says, "Is it possible that you could change our name?" and he realized that, all that we were going through, but he, he let us use our Sosa name. If it wasn't for him, because my mother, she didn't even think about doing that, changing, changing our name. It was my older sister.
- DP: Um, did your—so, I know you told me earlier, but I guess I didn't—you were born, not here, but where were you born again?
- FM: Yeah, I was born in, uh, in Los Angeles.
- DP: Oh, in Los Angeles? Okay.
- FM: Yeah, on Alameda and Aliso.⁶⁵
- DP: So, your brothers and sis—uh, did you have any sisters, too? Did you have a big family? Because I know you had four brothers or three brothers.
- FM: Yeah, I had three sisters.
- DP: And three sisters, yeah, nice big family. (inaudible) Did they all stay in the same area, or did they start moving away?
- FM: No, they stayed—well, during the war, we were all in the same area.
- DP: And then, after the war, did they kind of stay together, or?
- FM: Yeah, uh, my uh—when I was in the service, the FB—why, I—later on I found out that they went over there, and they took pictures, and they were gonna put them in camps. But I think, knowing that we were doing okay in the service, my three brothers, they didn't put 'em in a camp. They left them alone. And my brother-in-law—they were in the service, they, they lived in the service. Both of them, they were, they—no matter if you only had an eighth of Japanese, they don't want you in there, they don't wanna put you in there. They didn't trust you or whatever. Yeah. And a lot of, a lot of people have asked me, "Ho-How could you have been in the service, you're part Japanese?" Even, even Japanese friends of mine that I, when I'd go to Little Tokyo,⁶⁶ I mean, you know, I met some friends there, and I told them that, uh, I was there, and they says, "How could you? They weren't taking no Japanese, they don't want the

⁶⁵ As of 2025, the "Alameda and Aliso" area is south of the 101 Freeway in L.A.'s Little Tokyo.

⁶⁶ Ethnically Japanese American district in downtown Los Angeles.

- Japanese, all—they'd use as Japanese was interpreters," and, um, I forgot what, uh, they'd call it. And then with the only regimental ca—(tape stops)
- FM: (tape begins)—your, in your life, have, have you ever heard anybody say that they didn't know that the Japanese weren't in the service, or?
- DP: Uh, no, I'd never heard, uh, that, but then, again, I really don't expand my—I mean the people I talk to about this kind of stuff are in school. When I come, like, I don't really talk to my mom and my friends about this stuff, so—and the people in school, they know the same things I know. They are getting taught the same things. But, yeah, there's a lot of, uh, um, educational stuff that gets left out through grade school and high school. Yeah.
- FM: Right, yeah, I think so. And they want the world to get, uh—be happy, there's gonna have to have—all this story told about everyone. Black, white, yellow, whatever they are, so they'll know that they are just as Americans as anybody else.
- DP: Um-hm. Yep. That's what America definitely is, I mean, everybody came here and kind of.
- FM: And we are for-fortunate to have this mixed race! Because, look at the, the Indians and the Navajos that went in, that broke the—
- DP: Codebreakers.⁶⁷
- FM: —yeah. (chuckles) That was something. Yeah, if it wasn't for them, well, a lot of this stuff wouldn't have been told but I, yeah, a lot of people don't know that, and I'm surprised that they don't know anything about it.
- DP: Well, I appreciate you doing the interview with me, Mr. Masuda. (tape stops)
- DP: (tape begins) Side two was accidentally disconnected, and it didn't get recorded, so, we're just going to go back and do a couple of questions, because Mr. Masuda is a real nice guy. Um, what were your scariest moments of the war?
- FM: My scariest mo-moment was, when I, we, uh, got lost, and we overshot the frontlines. I was in the service company, and, uh, the sergeant told us to get, get up on the hill there, to make sure that the Japs didn't know we were already there, because they were gonna make a U-turn and start back (coughs)—

[00:50:00]

- FM: —to the frontlines. And while, excuse me, Bully Beef and I went up on a hill, and we were watching the Japs chasing the Filipinos, tryin' to kill 'em. And then they start shelling us, and as the shells start coming in, I was watching all the patterns that was coming out to-toward us. And as it got closer, I finally told Bully Beef, "Let's get out of here!" So, I jumped out back, and there was a big old water hole there, and I fell in that waterhole. And he says, "They're up on the hill, they're looking," and I tell him, "Bully Beef, get your ass out of here!" And then, I said, "The next shell is going to be there!" And he said, "Wait a minute!" he kept on yelling at me, "Wait a minute!" but then, I yelled at him again, and I said, "Hey, you better get out of—that, that last—the next one is right there where you're at," and as he jumped out of it, the shell

⁶⁷ Native Americans in the U.S. armed forces using their languages to transmit secret messages.

landed right where he was, and he fell in his hole, but at that time, the sergeant came to try to get us out, now that they made their U-turn. And as he came out, he just looked at that hole, and he looked up there where we were, where the shell fell in, and he took off running, and we couldn't even tell him, "Stop!" or anything. Our teeth were cha, uh, chattering, like we were cold. We just couldn't say anything. We couldn't holler or yell or anything. And then we were there for two minutes, I think, and then all of the sudden we got up, and we started running, and we couldn't yell or say, "Stop!" or anything, because we couldn't talk, our teeth were just chattering like that, and we jumped into the truck, and when we got back to the camp, the sergeant says, "Well, where were you guys? I thought you guys got blown up?" We told him that we couldn't even talk, we were so scared, and when we started, our mouth was just chattering, and that's about it. He said that, "Well, we thought you guys were (chuckles) were dead!"

DP: It was the other story, though, when you were passed out you were—that—you were being bombed all the way around you.

FM: Oh yeah, oh yeah. We were in a foxhole, and they started shelling, this was at night, and I remember hear-hearing somebody yell, and, uh, I think it was a sergeant or somebody, and he says to his guys to stay put or something. And then, what happens is, as he got up, and he started running, a shell musta hit him. And then, the shells starts falling close to where I was. Finally, I start getting dirt all over me, and I took out my rosary, and I started praying. I put my helmet on, and I remember just praying, and I think I cried a little too at that time, and, and then, all of the sudden, I just passed out, and the next minute that I knew was that, when I opened my eyes, there were two little Filipino boys saying, "Tubâ, tubâ?"⁶⁸ That means, uh, some kind of wine, coconut wine, that they had. And, uh, I got up, and the sergeant came running and says, "Why didn't you guys, why didn't you answer me, when I kept on yelling at you. How, uh, Sosa, how're you doing?" I couldn't talk. I just was too scared, and I just passed out, and that was about it. But those kids with the tubâ, they, (laughs) they, you know, some kind of a wine, some kind of a wine, a coconut wine, yeah.

DP: I wanna thank you, again. I kind of messed up. It was all my fault that I didn't do the last half of the tape right, so—but we are gonna call it a wrap, huh?

FM: Is that it?

DP: Yeah, that's it, that's kind of hard to go—(audio stops).

[00:54:06]

END OF INTERVIEW

⁶⁸ Alcoholic Filipino beverage, made from the saps of palm trees.