

John Owada

By Grace Lappe, Maisy Long, Hank McSheehy

John Masayuki Owada was born in 1927 in Tacoma, Washington<sup>1</sup>. He was also referred to as Johnny, but his brother Eddie describes that this was a mistake on his birth certificate because his parents had a thick accent and pronounced "John" with an "e" sound at the end<sup>2</sup>. Eddie Toshio Owada was his older brother who was born in 1926 and his younger brother was named Saburo "Sam" Owada who was born in 1928<sup>1</sup>. Their father was named Frank Tnuncnoeuk Owada<sup>1</sup>. He was born in 1888 in the Ibaraki Prefecture, north of Tokyo in Japan. Frank worked as a photographer in World War I in Europe and went to the United States after this<sup>3</sup>. He then decided to stay in America and opened a photography shop in Tacoma. Around the time of the Great Depression, Frank moved to Vashon Island and began farming<sup>3</sup>. The boys' mother was named Kikue and she was born in California in 1908 but grew up in Shikoku, a Japanese island<sup>3</sup>. Their parents were married through a process described by John as a "picture-bride" exchange. When Johnny was around 2 years old, his mother separated from his dad and moved away<sup>3</sup>. Eddie expressed that their separation was due to the fact that Frank was more strict than Kikue, and Frank had also said he was around 10 years younger when they were arranging to be married<sup>3</sup>. On their farm they grew mostly peas and strawberries that they sold in Seattle or Tacoma<sup>3</sup>. John went to three different schools on Vashon- Vashon Island School, Center School, and Burton Grade School<sup>3</sup>. There was no specialized Japanese school during John's childhood<sup>3</sup>. In the Owada household, John explains that they spoke "part-Japanese, part-English"<sup>3</sup>.

On December 7, 1941, Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, was attacked by the Japanese Navy Air Service. John was in 6th or 7th grade. The first effect of Pearl Harbor to the Japanese-American population was a curfew put in place, and John remembers being told to not go more than 5 miles from home<sup>3</sup>. In January or February of 1942, John's father was arrested and taken away by the FBI due to dynamite caps in their home that they had used for removing tree stumps in the farm land<sup>3</sup>. He was taken to the Fort Missoula Internment Camp in Montana, and the 3 boys were left to run the farm, with Eddie in charge<sup>3</sup>. No neighbors helped them out<sup>3</sup>. They had a Japanese-American friend that told them it was no use to work on the farm because they would be evacuated soon enough<sup>3</sup>.

On May 16, 1942, the date set for all Japanese-Americans to be removed and relocated to interment camps, the three brothers along with the rest were escorted by armed guards onto the back of army trucks, then onto a railroad train, and then onto a special ferry that landed them to the Seattle ferry dock. John recalls being amongst 113 Japanese people that were taken off Vashon Island. This was under Civilian Exclusion Order No. 68. As they were forced to march to a train, they encountered many white civilians using slurs and spitting on them. For many this was unusual behavior coming from the secluded island.<sup>1</sup> They ended up arriving at Tule Lake on July 20, 1942 which was located in California.<sup>2</sup>

Here conditions contained of maximum security considering that people held here were considered to have answered incorrectly to certain loyalty questions defining them as a major threat.<sup>3</sup> Tule Lake was surrounded by eight feet tall double fence with barbed wire on the top. Many people within the inside watched how 6 guard towers increased to 28, while 1,000 armed military police with armored vehicles maintained security within and around the camps.<sup>4</sup> Johnny Owada and his brothers were then transferred and arrived to Minidoka in Idaho on September

28, 1943. The civilians that transferred to Minidoka from Tule Lake were seen as loyal, resulting in them being transported when the camp was later defined as for the unloyal ones. Minidoka was filled with the majority of people from the Pacific Northwest including Seattle, Portland, and some from Alaska.<sup>5</sup>

Once John was removed from internment camps and it was the end of internment, he was drafted into the military service during World War II, as well as his younger brother Saburo. This was one of the only ways to show that they were both loyal to America. John returned to Salt Lake City Utah<sup>4</sup> but he still stayed in the Army and served during the Korean War<sup>5</sup>. They both didn't see their mom until fifty years later after she left them. When they met her, they went out to dinner and found out that they had a half-sister since the mom married three times. John wouldn't want to move to Japan since he didn't understand Japanese that well since in the camps they taught English.<sup>6</sup> John Masayuki Owada sadly passed away on November 14, 2007.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Ancestry.com. *U.S., City Directories, 1822-1995* [database on-line]. Lehi, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2011.

<sup>2</sup> Lynch, Alisa. "Eddie Owada Interview." Densho Digital Archive - Eddie Owada Interview. Densho Digital Archive, July 5, 2008. <https://ddr.densho.org/media/ddr-manz-1/ddr-manz-1-37-transcript-f1a8f58da9.htm>.

<sup>3</sup> Owada, John: narrator, Graves, Tom: interviewer, and Go For Broke National Education Center: publisher, "John Owada oral history interview, part 1 of 4, September 18, 2005," *Japanese American Military History Collective*,

<sup>4</sup> *Tule Lake*. Tule Lake | Densho Encyclopedia. (n.d.). Retrieved March 13, 2022, from [https://encyclopedia.densho.org/Tule\\_Lake/](https://encyclopedia.densho.org/Tule_Lake/)

<sup>5</sup> *Minidoka*. Minidoka | Densho Encyclopedia. (n.d.). Retrieved March 13, 2022, from <https://encyclopedia.densho.org/Minidoka>

<sup>6</sup> Ancestry.com. *U.S., City Directories, 1822-1995* [database on-line]. Lehi, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2011.

<sup>7</sup> "John M. Owada Obituary (2007) Deseret News." Legacy.com.

<sup>8</sup> Owada, John: narrator, Graves, Tom: interviewer, and Go For Broke National Education Center: publisher, "John Owada oral history interview, part 1 of 4, September 18, 2005," *Japanese American Military History Collective*,

<sup>9</sup> Ancestry.com. *U.S., Find a Grave Index, 1600s-Current* [database on-line]. Lehi, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2012.

<sup>10</sup> Lynch, Alisa. "Eddie Owada Interview." Densho Digital Archive - Eddie Owada Interview. Densho Digital Archive, July 5, 2008.

<sup>11</sup> *The Salt Lake Tribune from Salt Lake City, Utah on May 4, 1947 · 18*. Newspapers.com. (1947, May 4)

<sup>12</sup> Ancestry.com. *U.S., Public Records Index, 1950-1993, Volume 1* [database on-line]. Lehi, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2010.

<sup>13</sup> *11 Dec 1949, 15 - the salt lake tribune at newspapers.com*. Newspapers.com. (n.d.).

<sup>14</sup> *Saburo Sam Owada, born 1928 - ancestry®*, born 1928 - Ancestry®.

<sup>15</sup> Pasternack/Appeal-Democrat, N. (2013, November 1). *Japanese Americans return to Tule Lake*. Appeal.

Saburo Owada

By Grace Lappe, Maisy Long, Hank McSheehy

Saburo “Sam” Masayuki Owada was born in Tacoma, Washington in 1928. Eddie Toshio Owada and John Masayuki Owada were his older brothers<sup>1</sup>. Their father was named Frank Tnuncnoeuk Owada<sup>1</sup>. He was born in 1888 in the Ibaraki Prefecture, north of Tokyo in Japan. Frank worked as a photographer in World War I in Europe and went to the United States after this<sup>3</sup>. He then decided to stay in America and opened a photography shop in Tacoma. Around the time of the Great Depression, Frank moved to Vashon Island and began farming<sup>3</sup>. The boys’ mother was named Kikue and she was born in California in 1908 but grew up in Shikoku, a Japanese island<sup>3</sup>. Their parents were married through a process described by John as a “picture-bride” exchange. When Saburo was around 3 years old, his mother separated from his dad and moved away<sup>3</sup>. Eddie expressed that their separation was due to the fact that Frank was more strict than Kikue, and Frank had also said he was around 10 years younger when they were arranging to be married<sup>3</sup>. On their farm they grew mostly peas and strawberries that they sold in Seattle or Tacoma<sup>3</sup>.

On May 16, 1942, the date set for all Japanese-Americans to be removed and relocated to interment camps, the three brothers along with the rest were escorted by armed guards onto the back of army trucks, then onto a railroad train, and then onto a special ferry that landed them to the Seattle ferry dock. Saburo’s brother John recalls being amongst 113 Japanese people that were taken off Vashon Island. This was under Civilian Exclusion Order No. 68. As they were forced to march to a train, they encountered many white civilians using slurs and spitting on them. For many this was unusual behavior coming from the secluded island.<sup>1</sup> They ended up arriving at Tule Lake in July, 20 1942 that was located in California.<sup>2</sup>

Here conditions contained of maximum security considering that people held here were considered to have answered incorrectly to certain loyalty questions defining them as a major threat.<sup>3</sup> Tule Lake was surrounded by eight feet tall double fence with barbed wire on the top. Many people within the inside watched how 6 guard towers increased to 28, while 1,000 armed military police with armored vehicles maintained security within and around the camps.<sup>4</sup> The Owada’s were then transferred and arrived to Minidoka in Idaho on September 28, 1943. The civilians that transferred to Minidoka from Tule Lake were seen as loyal, resulting in them being transported when the camp was later defined as for the unloyal ones. Minidoka was filled with the majority of people from the Pacific Northwest including Seattle, Portland, and some from Alaska.<sup>5</sup>

He followed his two older brothers around while taken to the internment camps and while staying in the internment camps. They did many things together to ensure that they were safe. They lived in block 59<sup>8</sup> and they still had an education and went to school. He also attended barbell tournaments <sup>9</sup>. In the camps, letters that were being sent had to be looked through to make sure they weren’t sending any secret messages. His dad taught him Japanese and he didn’t have power since he was so young. You only had more power if you were over 18 which meant you were of higher class <sup>8</sup>.

After serving time in the U.S. Army, Saburo moved to Denver CO<sup>10</sup> and worked at “Hanks Service Station,” where he once got robbed<sup>11</sup>, and then worked for his friend Jim Tanimoto on his gridley farm. Saburo then married Miyoko Miyaoka in 1949 but they divorced in 1959. Later on in his life, he had a child named Brian Yoshio Owada who was born in Denver, Colorado on 22 July, 1963<sup>12</sup>, and later traveled to Tokyo to attend Tokyo Christian University. He

returned back to Tule Lake in 2013 to remember his time in the internment camps<sup>13</sup> when he was only twelve years old. It is unknown where he is today and of whether he is still alive.

<sup>1</sup> Ancestry.com. *U.S., City Directories, 1822-1995* [database on-line]. Lehi, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2011.

<sup>2</sup> Lynch, Alisa. "Eddie Owada Interview." Densho Digital Archive - Eddie Owada Interview. Densho Digital Archive, July 5, 2008. <https://ddr.densho.org/media/ddr-manz-1/ddr-manz-1-37-transcript-f1a8f58da9.htm>.

<sup>3</sup> Owada, John: narrator, Graves, Tom: interviewer, and Go For Broke National Education Center: publisher, "John Owada oral history interview, part 1 of 4, September 18, 2005," *Japanese American Military History Collective*,

<sup>4</sup> *Tule Lake*. Tule Lake | Densho Encyclopedia. (n.d.). Retrieved March 13, 2022, from [https://encyclopedia.densho.org/Tule\\_Lake/](https://encyclopedia.densho.org/Tule_Lake/)

<sup>5</sup> *Minidoka*. Minidoka | Densho Encyclopedia. (n.d.). Retrieved March 13, 2022, from <https://encyclopedia.densho.org/Minidoka>

<sup>6</sup> Ancestry.com. *U.S., City Directories, 1822-1995* [database on-line]. Lehi, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2011.

<sup>7</sup> "John M. Owada Obituary (2007) Deseret News." Legacy.com.

<sup>8</sup> Owada, John: narrator, Graves, Tom: interviewer, and Go For Broke National Education Center: publisher, "John Owada oral history interview, part 1 of 4, September 18, 2005," *Japanese American Military History Collective*,

<sup>9</sup> Ancestry.com. *U.S., Find a Grave Index, 1600s-Current* [database on-line]. Lehi, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2012.

<sup>10</sup> Lynch, Alisa. "Eddie Owada Interview." Densho Digital Archive - Eddie Owada Interview. Densho Digital Archive, July 5, 2008.

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<sup>13</sup> *11 Dec 1949, 15 - the salt lake tribune at newspapers.com*. Newspapers.com. (n.d.).

<sup>14</sup> *Saburo Sam Owada, born 1928 - ancestry®*. , born 1928 - Ancestry®.

<sup>15</sup> Pasternack/Appeal-Democrat, N. (2013, November 1). *Japanese Americans return to Tule Lake*. Appeal.