

BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY: Sukino Tanda, 78, retired Dole Company (Hawaiian Pine Company) field worker

Sukino (Oki) Tanda, Japanese, was born April 3, 1901 in Saiki-gun, Hiroshima, Japan. Being from a farm family, her jobs included weeding and bringing tea to her family in the fields. For this she received her allowance.

In 1923, she arrived in Honolulu aboard the Taiyō-Marū as a picture bride. After staying at the immigration station for three days and later at the Kobayashi Hotel, she married Ryūhei Tanda at Honolulu's Izumo Taisha.

Shortly after arriving in Hawaii in 1923, she began working in the pineapple fields near her Kaukonahua Camp. She left the fields for 16 years to raise a family and returned in 1939. She retired in 1956 at the age of 55.

She lives today in Whitmore and is a member of the Whitmore Senior Citizens. She enjoys working outdoors in her yard.

NOTES FROM RECORDED INTERVIEW

with

Sukino Tanda

February 28, 1979

Whitmore, Oahu

BY: Michiko Kodama

[Note: Mrs. Tanda was interviewed in Japanese by Michiko Kodama. The interview was translated by Michiko Kodama and summarized by Warren Nishimoto.]

Before arriving in Honolulu in 1923, Mrs. Tanda had never seen a pineapple and therefore had no knowledge of pineapple field work. She soon learned that pineapple field work was completely different from her farm work in Japan. During her first two months in Hawaii, she missed her parents and homeland. She got over her homesickness when she found that everyone was friendly to her and that her husband did not drink or gamble.

With expectations of raising enough money in Hawaii to return to Japan, her husband suggested she work as a seamstress, but she was not familiar with the use of a sewing machine. She therefore decided, one month after her arrival, to work in the pineapple fields. At the Hawaiian Pine plantation office, she was required to fill out a form with her name and address, was given a physical examination, received a bango and went to work. It was easy for women to get a job in the fields at that time.

During that first summer of working in the pineapple fields, Mrs. Tanda was placed in a gang of 10 women. All could speak little English. While the men did the picking, carrying, and boxing of the fruit, the women did the weeding. Because hoe-hana was the "easiest" job in the fields, there was not much to learn, and the women were limited to this job. At the beginning of the day, the women were notified by the luna as to which field they were going to weed.

That summer, they worked Monday through Saturday, 10 hours a day, and were paid \$1.10 per day. She accepted the fact that the men were being paid \$1.50 per day. "I didn't think much about it [i.e., the wage differential between men and women] because women are less useful by that much.... Even when men did hoe-hana, the men received the same [higher] pay because they are men and it can't be helped. Women as women just don't have that much value, right? So women [workers] are cheaper. But, nowadays, men and women are the same [i.e., receive the same wage]."

The workday at the Kaukonahua fields began at 6:00 [a.m.] and ended at 4:30 [p.m.] with a half an hour lunch. Workers assembled at the stable at 5:30 [a.m.], boarded a horse-drawn wagon, and were taken out to their assigned field. If a worker arrived late, she would have no transportation

and would be marked absent. Although there were no set breaks, the workers were allowed to relieve themselves in the gulch at any time without checking with the luna, and women, during their period, went into the gulch to change their sanitary napkins. There were no problems since women in those days seldom worked together with the men. The women's gang, the only one at Kaukonahua at the time (1923), consisted of five naichi (i.e., emigrants from the main Japanese Islands) women and five Okinawan women. No problems arose between the women, and although they seldom spoke, they greeted each other each morning before beginning their work.

The women brought along their lunch, hat, and gloves in a large bag. They would also carry an extra pair of gloves and a half-gallon jug of water to drink. The bags were placed onto a horse-drawn wagon which moved alongside the workers. Field clothing in 1923 consisted of hakama, a shirt of kasuri material, gloves, leggings, and denim tabis. Most of Mrs. Tanda's clothing was sewn for her by a friend. In order to walk safely through the pineapple rows, the tabis had to be thick at the soles and were made with many layers. One pair would last her two or three months. The hakama and shirt would last her about six months, with frequent mending in between. No goggles were worn in 1923. It was only when Mrs. Tanda returned to work in the fields in 1939 that she began wearing goggles.

Although she became pregnant during that first year of field work in 1923, Mrs. Tanda continued working until a week before her child's birth. She thought that it would be "wasteful" to stay home. She experienced no problems while working except for an occasional bout of morning sickness. Her children were all delivered at home by a midwife.

Because she was busy raising her children, Mrs. Tanda did not work between 1924 and 1939. She enjoyed the work and would have continued if she didn't have children.

In 1939, when her children were older, she returned to field work in order to help her husband financially. Because her husband was an employee for Hawaiian Pine, it was easy for her to get work at Kaukonahua. She began as a full time worker, working 10 hours a day, Monday through Saturday. Women at this time still received less pay than the men.

By 1939, jobs for women in the fields increased. In addition to hoe-hana which was the only job women did in 1923, Mrs. Tanda stripped and cleaned slips and carried out pineapple in a canvas bag slung over her shoulder. Because she didn't want to fall behind, she carried as many as 10 fruits in her bag. She also carried out a few in her arms. Harvesting the ratoon crop was particularly difficult for her because it was easy to slip and fall while carrying out fruit in the bag. When that happened, she would have to empty out all the fruit from her bag in order to get up again. The women were expected to learn their job by observing and doing because there was no one to teach them. They did, however, help the slow workers whenever possible. Knives for crown removal were provided by the company, and the women sewed canvas sheaths for these knives.

Unlike in 1923 when her field gang consisted entirely of Japanese and Okinawan women, Mrs. Tanda's gang in 1939 consisted of four to five Filipinos and four to five Japanese. It was still the only women's gang at Kaukonahua and was still comprised of 10 women.

Clothing worn in 1939 changed somewhat from that worn in 1923. No longer allowed to wear tabis in the fields, workers wore leather workshoes, switching to rubber boots whenever it rained. Goggles were worn to reduce the chance of eye injury from the sharp pineapple leaves and were issued free by the company. In addition to the denim gloves which the women sewed themselves, leather gloves were also used in 1939. Sold by the company, leather gloves were more durable and provided more protection than denim gloves.

Working conditions in the fields changed with the coming of World War II. The length of the workday was reduced from 10 to 8 hours. The women were allowed to return home at 2:30 p.m. so they could cook and perform other household duties before the blackout went into effect. Schoolchildren worked only half the day. Mrs. Tanda and the rest of the women constantly worried about air raids and were ordered by their luna to lie down between the rows of pineapple whenever the sirens sounded. They also were concerned about the Filipino workers and their attitudes toward Japanese during the war. The Japanese women stayed close to each other and would not let any Filipinos work within the rows assigned to the Japanese women.

Following World War II, working conditions were altered with the utilization of the mechanical field fruit harvester in 1947. Because carrying pineapple in bags gave her a backache, Mrs. Tanda was happy to see the machine come in. However, working with the machine became difficult when there were plenty of fruit to pick. In order to keep up with the machine, the women would help each other out.

The income she received from her pineapple work was an important part of the family budget. Following the war, she began sending sugar and other things to Japan because of the shortage there. Her children also had to go to work in order to help with finances. With her income, she has been able to visit her mother in Japan four times. She also has made trips to the Mainland and to the outer Islands.

Her main dislike about pineapple work was working in the rain, because she could hardly move in all her wet clothes. They were not allowed to go home until they received permission from the luna. However, all this was forgotten when payday arrived.

**WOMEN WORKERS
in Hawaii's
Pineapple Industry**

Volume I

ETHNIC STUDIES ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

**Ethnic Studies Program
University of Hawaii, Manoa**

June 1979