



The AMA History Project Presents: Autobiography of DAVID KATAGIRI

Born April 1, 1925

AMA #8391



Written and Submitted by DK (07/2002); Transcribed and Edited by SS (07/2002), Reformatted by JS (09/2009)

As a native-born U.S. citizen of Japanese ancestry, I was sent to an internment camp located near Tule Lake, California when I was 17 years of age after the attack on Pearl Harbor. Growing up during those days was an exciting time when our heroes were Charles Lindbergh, Wiley Post, Jimmy Dolittle, Roscoe Turner, and Pangborn. Then came Pearl Harbor and our family life was totally disrupted. My brother, Joe, was one of the first to be drafted and was sent to Camp Roberts for basic training.

Then came the government order for us to evacuate the West Coast because any person of Japanese descent was declared to be a threat to national defense. The evacuation instructions were "bring only what you can carry." Should a modeler bring clothes? I brought my Ohlsson 60, balsa and a few tools. Mom carried my overalls. So there I was looking through barbed wire fences at armed Army soldiers, probably my age, who were assigned to guard me as a national threat! And my brother was in the same Army as the G.I. across the fence from me. Crazy!

It wasn't long before I was trying to build a model for my Ohlsson 60. A kind camp administrator brought me 200 feet of Monel fishing wire and a small bottle of clear dope. I promptly scaled up a 25-cent Comet P-40 rubber model to a four-foot span U-Control model. With the help of a woodshop helper, I had a fistful of 1/8-inch square pine strips scrounged from discarded apple crates. I borrowed a yardstick that I stripped down the center to make 1/8 by 1/2-inch spars. Then upon seeing my progress, the camp administrator delivered the last of balsa sheets he found in a local hardware store. Balsa wood had long gone to life rafts by then. Glue? How about toothbrush handles melted in drugstore acetone with a few drops of castor oil? A camp artist gave me several precious sheets of rice paper (similar to bamboo paper), which I used for covering. Since I didn't have enough dope, the tissue got only one coat of dope. The color coat consisted of plain enamel from the paint shop.

Two months later I was standing in the center of a typical army campfire break, nervously holding a hand-carved U-Control handle – my trusty Ohlsson 60 spinning, a hand-carved prop buzzing at full-throttle and my hand shaking in unison. My helper let the P-40 go on its first mission. To this day, I can remember that first successful flight. What a thrill! Fortunately, the model was balanced and the elevator throw was turned way down. That Comet design flew almost hands off. That was my first U-Control flight.

Soon many others came out of those tarpapered barracks to join me. I have a picture that shows our Club Tule in 1943 taken by the helpful camp "sponsor" as cameras were prohibited then. That P-40 taught many novices to fly and started several of us into aviation careers. I stopped logging the flights after 500 and after I entered the Army, it continued to fly for many more missions in Illinois and Wisconsin in the hands of Chuck Hien of Arlington Heights, Illinois, and Fon Du Lac, Wisconsin. I still have that Ohlsson 60 Special S/N 1926! How that engine survived

all the sand we flew off of and SAE 30 lube oil (SAE 70 wasn't available in camp) was an amazing feat and a testimonial for the Ohlsson design.

*(signed) David Katagiri
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