



A young Kenzo Torikoshi (left) poses in front of the Fuchu District Office of Stars and Stripes at Fuchu Air Station in 1967. Photo courtesy of Kenzo Torikoshi

Retirement of 'Great Teacher' marks end of era Continued from page 1

an extra about the John F. Kennedy assassination.

"Many others sold Stripes on the street or at offices, but I sold my papers at the mess hall in Fuchu," he said. "I set up a table near the entrance and waited for the servicemen to come in. It was five cents for a regular paper."

In time, he was offered a permanent job as a newsboy there. It was a plum assignment for a kid his age because he not only made money from selling newspapers, he had access to American food as well.

"I was treated well by the mess sergeants, receiving (canned) GI rations, hamburgers, cheese, and food I hadn't seen before, like apple pie," he said.

"Making money wasn't exciting," Torikoshi said about those years, "getting fancy food was exciting."

At age 17 or 18, "I didn't want to go to school anymore. I wanted to stay on base. Things outside were dark, inside was a different world," he said. "I would sleep in the barracks because GIs worked in shifts, so

there was always a bed open. Then I would wake up, go bowling and eat hamburgers. The first 10 years were paradise," he said.

His abilities noticed by Stripes managers, Torikoshi was asked to go to Camp Zama and help out with operations. When the American manager got sick, he recruited and trained a new manager. He did the same for Yokohama, Sasebo Naval Base, Marine Corps Air Station Iwakuni and Yokota Air Base; and later for Guam and other locations in the Asia-Pacific region, eventually earning the nickname of Pacific Stars and Stripes "Dai-Sensei," or Great Teacher.

To this day, all of the operations managers in the region were either trained by him or trained by people he had trained. The organization officially noted his achievements by recently honoring him with the Commander's Award for Civilian Services.

During most of this time, Torikoshi and other Japanese employees worked on a contract basis, and times grew hard when their dollar-based salaries lost purchasing power as the value of the yen increased.

"The new manager couldn't realize how expensive Japan was for the workers," he said, adding that some degree of tension between management and labor arose.

Torikoshi played a prominent role in resolving this issue when, in March 1988, local contract workers were converted to employees under the IHA (Indirect Hire Agreement) between the U.S. and Japan and their salaries were paid in yen by the Japanese government. Eventually, many obtained MLC (Master Labor Contract) status.

Over the years, Torikoshi married and raised two children, both of whom appear to be successful in their chosen fields.

Most of the military bases he worked at – such as Fuchu Air Station, Camp Drake, Johnson Air Base and Tachikawa Air Base – have closed and were returned to civilian use. The world has changed greatly during that time.

His popularity with his fellow Stars and Stripers, both Japanese and American, was clearly shown by the number of retirement lunches, dinners and drinking sessions held in his honor, with his booming voice and husky laugh heard clearly over the sounds of those get-togethers.

Speaking shortly before his retirement, Torikoshi said, "After almost half a century there were many hard things, but overall I've been happy. Now that I am ready to retire, what can I say? How can I complain? Thank you, Stripes. I never thought I could stay this long."