



Tule Lake Segregation Center



Tule Lake Segregation Center, 1946

War and Injustice

After Japan’s attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, the lives of 110,000 men, women, and children of Japanese ancestry living on the West Coast drastically changed. Their constitutional rights were violated when they were imprisoned in ten incarceration centers/camps* run by the War Relocation Authority. Many were forced to give up their homes, farms, businesses, and personal property, in addition to their freedom.

**These camps were officially called “War Relocation Centers,” a more accurate description is incarceration camps. During World War II (WWII), the media and many Americans referred to them as the “Jap camps,” which is considered to be an offensive racist description. President Roosevelt and other government officials on occasion referred to them as “concentration” camps. Most Americans now know of them as “internment” camps, although that is an incorrect usage of that legal term, since 2/3 were US Citizens at the time of their unjust incarceration.*

Executive Order 9066

On February 19, 1942, President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066 authorizing the Secretary of War “to prescribe military areas in such places and of such extent as he or the appropriate Military Commander may determine, from which any or all person may be excluded ... The Secretary of War is hereby authorized to provide for residents of any such area who are excluded there from, such transportation, food, shelter, and other accommodations as may be necessary...”

Temporary Incarceration Camps “Assembly Centers”

Following the Executive Order, American citizens and resident aliens of Japanese ancestry living on the

west costs of Washington, Oregon, Arizona and anywhere in California were ordered to evacuate their homes and businesses and report to 17 temporary “Assembly Centers” located at fairgrounds, racetracks, and other makeshift facilities. At these centers, which essentially served as temporary detention facilities, a family usually lived in a single horse stall for up to 100 days with straw filled bags for beds. The horse stalls were hastily cleaned out before being used as living quarters, and the stench of manure and urine remained. Shortages of food and other materials and deplorable sanitation conditions were common at many of the centers. From these centers, the incarcerated Japanese and Japanese Americans were then sent to one of ten war relocation centers.

Ten War Incarceration Centers/Camps

The incarceration centers were located in inland areas away from population centers, frequently on land already owned by the federal government with good transportation linkages. They were designed to be self-contained communities, complete with hospitals, post offices, schools, warehouses, offices, factories, residential areas and farm areas. Of the ten camps constructed, two each were located in

California, Arizona, and Arkansas, and one each was located in Wyoming, Idaho, Colorado and Utah. The layout of the camps varied, but certain elements were consistent, including a perimeter defined by guard towers and barbed wire fences. Main roads in the centers were occasionally paved, but most side streets were unpaved and as a result alternated between being muddy quagmires or dry and dusty depending on the weather.

Tule Lake War Relocation Center

The Tule Lake War Relocation Center was designed as a series of blocks. The first 40 blocks each had fourteen residential barracks, a mess hall, a recreation building, a men’s latrine, two women’s latrines, an ironing room and a laundry room.

Each residential barrack was divided into four to six family rooms, ranging in size from 16 feet by 20 feet, to 24 feet by 20 feet, and sided only with tarpaper. The relentless winds of the Tule Lake Basin drove dirt and dust through the walls.

Each family occupied one room, which was furnished with a single light bulb, a coal stove, and up to eight army cots. Meals were served in

community mess halls, which disrupted traditional family life and the strong influences of parents over their children. Latrines were set up military style with no dividers between toilets or shower stalls.

Camp Life

Though conditions were harsh, incarcerated Japanese and Japanese Americans tried to keep life in the camps as normal as possible. Harvest festivals, dances, and baseball were common recreation activities. Recreation buildings were converted into stores, canteens, a beauty parlor, a barber shop, judo halls, Buddhist temples, a Catholic church, and three other churches.

Loyalty and Segregation

***Issei** – the first generation of immigrants from Japan, most of who came to the U.S. between 1885 and 1924. Issei were not allowed to become U.S. citizens until 1952.

****Nisei** – second generation Japanese Americans, U.S. citizens by birth, born to Japanese immigrants (Issei).

*****Nikkei** – the combination of both Nisei (U.S. born citizens) and Issei (legal residents) that were residing in the U.S. during WWII.

In an effort to recruit Japanese American men for the military and reintegrate incarcerated Japanese Americans back into society, a loyalty questionnaire was distributed to all in the camps in February 1943. The questionnaire included two poorly worded questions intended to determine if they were loyal or disloyal to the United States (U.S.) government.

Question 27 asked: *“Are you willing to serve in the armed forces of the United States on combat duty, wherever ordered?”* For women, it asked *“If the opportunity presents itself and you are found qualified, would you be willing to volunteer for the Army Nurse Corps or the WAAC?”*

Question 28 asked: *“Will you swear unqualified allegiance to the United States of America and faithfully defend the United States from any or all attacks by foreign or domestic forces, and forswear any form of allegiance or obedience to the Japanese emperor, or any other foreign government, power or organization?”*

The loyalty questions seemed innocent enough, but for foreign-born Japanese, who until 1952 were not allowed by law to become citizens of the U.S., they were being asked to give up their citizenship to Japan and become nationless people, having no legal ties to

any country. For their Nisei** children, the question became a decision between country and family. Many Nisei felt pressure from their parents to answer with their families, even if it meant expatriating and moving to a country they had never seen. Others simply answered no as a form of civil protest. Others saw the questions as trick questions designed to force their deportation or to continue their unjust incarceration.

For all of these reasons as well as the poor administration of the questionnaire, 42% of the Tule Lake population refused to answer or answered no to questions 27 and/or 28. Others answered with qualifications such as “Yes, if you free my family.” Either a no or a qualified yes caused them to be labeled “disloyal” by the U.S. government.

Since Tule Lake had the largest percentage of those classified as “disloyal”, it would be converted into Segregation Center for all “disloyals” from all ten centers. Those at Tule Lake who had answered yes to the questions were asked if they wanted to move to the other nine camps to make room for the incoming “disloyals,” but of the 8,500 who stayed at Tule Lake some 4,000 were labeled “loyal.” This mix of people labeled “loyal” and “disloyal” would later lead to internal conflicts and prejudice within the center.

Tule Lake Segregation Center



In 1943, the Tule Lake War Relocation Center was converted into a high security Segregation Center to house those labeled “disloyal.” The population at Tule Lake rose from 15,276 to 18,789 within just a few months. Though additional barracks were built and the camp was expanded, the camp housed almost 4,000 over its intended capacity. This high concentration of incarcerated created discontent, which grew as security increased and additional soldiers were assigned to Tule Lake. Soon a lighted seven foot high chain link fence topped with barbed wire was added, Army tanks arrived on site, and the number of guard towers around the center was increased from six to 28. The farm areas were also surrounded by a warning fence, a security fence, and 16 new guard towers.

As a segregation center, Tule Lake was a mix of “loyals” with no intention of leaving the U.S., pro-Japan Japanese and Japanese Americans who wished to repatriate or expatriate as soon as possible, and many

whose feelings fell somewhere between these extremes. Internal friction between groups as well as with the U.S. Army resulted in harassment, beatings, riots, mass demonstrations, military intervention and occupation.

Martial Law and Imprisonment

As discontent grew within the segregation center, the Army took control of the camp in late 1943, declaring martial law on November 13, which lasted until January 15, 1944.

In 1944, the stockade area was established. The stockade consisted of a 250 foot by 350 foot area enclosed by fences and guard towers. Within the stockade were four barracks, a mess hall, a latrine, and Army tents that were used as unheated punishment quarters for some stockade prisoners. To the north of the stockade stood the six-cell concrete jail designed to imprison up to 24 men. At its peak, over 100 men were incarcerated there.

Renunciation

***Internment-** refers to a legal process in declared wars, in this case applied to the nationals of a country with which the U.S. was at war. Approximately 8,000 Japanese nationals were formally interned by the U.S. Department of Justice during WWII, beginning as early as the night of December 7/8, 1941. Although commonly referred to as “internment” what the 120,000 Japanese Americans incarcerated in the 10 War Relocation Centers experienced is not accurately defined as internment, as the majority were U.S. citizens.

In July 1944, President Roosevelt signed Public Law 405, which allowed U.S. citizens to renounce their citizenship in times of war. By December, only 600 incarcerated Japanese Americans had applied for renunciation, but that number would soon grow as many at Tule Lake felt this law was directed at them and saw it as their only option. Within the camp, groups were organized to prepare young men, many of whom were born in the U.S., for a future life in Japan. The Hokuku Dan was established for men 16 to 35 years old, while the Hoshi Dan was for men over 36 years old. Japanese language, history, religion, geography, ethics and songs were taught to those that had never lived in or even visited Japan.

As government misinformation and rumors spread around the camp that those at Tule Lake would not be welcomed back into U.S. society, that they would not find jobs, and that young men would be shipped off to war and families would be separated, the number of those who applied for repatriation grew. Justice Department officials blamed the pro-Japan groups for rumors and fears, and hoped the arrest and removal of

key Hoshi Dan and Hokuku Dan leaders would reduce tensions. On December 27, 1944, 70 leaders were arrested and transferred to the Department of Justice Santa Fe Internment Camp.* Soon after, the administration banned all pro-Japanese activities. This reversal led 6,000 U.S. citizens to apply for repatriation. Only a small minority of the renunciants truly wanted to resettle in Japan; many more renounced out of fear caused by the rumors, confusion, and mismanagement of the camp.

By the end of 1945, the other nine centers had closed and the Tule Lake “loyals” had relocated on their own, with the WRA providing minimum assistance. In October 1945, Tule Lake was transferred from the WRA to the Department of Justice with the goal of repatriating all renunciants to Japan by November 15th. Lawsuits were filed to delay the deportations, and the Department of Justice agreed to hold hearings for anyone who wanted to rescind their renunciation. Over 3,000 asked for a hearing. As a result, only 406 were on the list for deportation. The Tule Lake Segregation Center officially closed on March 18, 1946.

It was determined by the Commision on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians, established by Congress in 1980, that “Executive Order 9066 was not justified by military necessity, and the decisions that followed from it – exclusion, detention, the ending of detention and the ending of exclusion - were not founded upon military considerations. The broad historical causes that shaped these decisions were race, prejudice, war hysteria and the failure of political leadership.”