

MICHI WEGLYNTC AUDIO

MICHI WEGLYN INTERVIEW 2/20/98 (Side 2)

- 2:23:05 Of course Frank Chin was very perceptive in tying it to something that he picked up as a, as a loyalty pledge among the Seattle group. I think it was Frank Sakamoto...
(it was Jimmy Sakamoto)
- 2:23:37 Jimmy Sakamoto who wanted to make sure that his Seattle group would not, group's loyalty would not be impugned. And he selected a day or two in which all the members of the JACL were to come to the office and pledge their loyalty to the United States. Unqualified loyalty. **And the wording I must say is remarkably similar to the loyalty question that was ultimately used in twenty seven and twenty eight.** So I haven't studied it carefully but I remember that did impress me.
(some people speculated John Hall...)
- 2:24:33 Oh John Hall. I've spoken to John Hall. Because I suspected that even the Hawaiian Japanese were given this questionnaire. John Hall is pretty old. He's still, well he may be dead now but at the I called him he was still practicing in Boston and he said that I cannot recall for sure, but I do believe that the questionnaire was not used in Hawaii. He said I cannot swear to it.
(someone speculated that Carl Bendetson(sp?) wrote the two questions.)
- 2:25:18 No. No I don't think so. Well I mean I don't know.
(I want to go back to the impact in camp on the nisei of getting the loyalty questionnaire. what was the effect on families. inside families. you write about this so well in the book.)
- 2:25:38 Oh my goodness. It varied from family to family. It all must have depended on how old you were. **If you were the oldest son your loyalty belonged first to the family. You must take care of your mother and father. Get them reestablished once again. After all their totally impoverished now. How their going to get started on the outside so that his mother and father would say, you aren't going to volunteer are you? Abandon us?** So that's an instance where it had nothing to do with loyalty or disloyalty. He had an obligation first to his family. Then there were those who wanted to get the hell out of camp and they figured, ok, I'll take a chance at being shot at. Maybe the \$10,000, I think it was \$10,000 insurance, might help, I mean if I don't come back, at least it will help my parents get started. So some of them ended up like mercenaries. They said we'll get our freedom one way but maybe you know get shot at and never come back. But it'll be worth it. My parents could use the \$10,000. But it was, it was gut wrenching because there were at that time families with many children. They had large families then. They were like four sons five sons. That wasn't unusual. Some, some would feel that their brothers were traders. There was terrible conflict
- 2:27:09 within a family. I started to tell a story in **Gila where the mothers were urged by eighteen or so leaders witin Gila to threaten to commit suicide. And so all the mothers got together and they announced the fact that if our sons dare to volunteer that they would commit suicide.** So I think 70% did not volunteer.
- 2:27:51

- 2:28:32 So the army, the pentagon heard about it and they sent the FBI in. They picked up the issei who were agitating and encouraging the mothers to say that they're gonna commit suicide. And once these men, the issei, and there were about a dozen and a half nisei involved too. They were picked up and summarily put in jail somewhere. Sent to Bismark or...That brings me to another concept of mine,
- 2:29:21 I do believe that the provost marshal general's office which was part of the war department, was most eager to get as much Japanese Americans to renounce their citizenship so that we would have a good reason to get rid of them. Send them back to China, China, Japan. Just the way we were able, we succeeded so well in sending the Chinese back to China. And we should do the same with the
- 2:29:57 Japanese. And the justification they had was that once they renounce, we have every reason, we have the right to deport them. And it is my gut feeling and I think that other researchers would eventually learn that also was the ultimate goal of the military. To make as many disloyals as possible so that we would not only be able to justify the establishment of all these multi-million, multi-billion dollar camps, but that we would then be able to get rid of a whole lot of unwanted Japs.

(you spoke about the effort to get volunteers from the camps. how successful was the effort to get volunteers, nisei volunteers for the army?)

- 2:30:59 Terrible. It was simply devastating to the extent that the provost marshal general's office which was the top police of the military arm, they gloated, they said ho, ho, ho. You know the provost marshal general's office job is to establish concentration camps. And they said, wow, we had good reason to build those camps. You see those Japs can't be trusted. And there was this statement by somebody, I forget now, somebody said yeah but listen their spilling blood
- 2:31:50 over there on the other side. They're good soldiers. And the provost marshal general's office said, well they may be spilling blood, they maybe trying to prove their loyalty, but once they get back, and once they're out of uniform how can we tell the difference. I mean if their in uniform we can assume their loyal but once they're our of uniform, how can we trust them? And that was the attitude within the military. That the average person is not aware of. We feel that we have
- 2:32:35 proven by spilling blood on the battlefield that forever more people will honor that enormous demonstration of loyalty. But within the provost marshal general's office they said, you know we did find an awful lot of disloyals. They did not volunteer. They all, so many of them, qualified their answers or answered no, no. Because of that I think we ought to establish a file for future generations so that when it comes to people in foreign service let's say, no Japanese American should be considered for foreign service until we allow them first to examine their war time record so that was the suspicion throughout.

(i want to go to that demonstration and blood of the men. two more questions about the loyalty oath. what have you found, after this is all over, after the registration is completed, what was discovered about the need for replying to the loyalty oath?)

What was discovered?

(did the issei and nisei have to answer questions twenty seven and twenty eight?)

- 2:34:16 Of course not. Because the war department itself decided on February 23rd that it's not compulsory. It should not be compulsory. Yet, I (??) then, I suppose it's like anything else. The project directors wanted to outdo each other. And it is laughable, but at Tule Lake, project director Best (sp?) he knew very well about the army announcement that it was not compulsory, but he was so angry at this organized resistance which spread from block, well first it started as barracks, barrack number 23, barrack number 24, barrack number 25. Then it became
- 2:35:21 blocks. And the organization was absolutely incredible so that entire barracks would know that if the internal security should come in the middle of the night to pick up supposed ring leaders, that so and so should immediately go to the mess hall and start ringing that bell. And that meant that everybody should jump out of bed and surround that barrack. And of course the two or three internal security guys were so intimidated by just a mob that they simply couldn't get to the ring
- 2:36:13 leaders. Of course the ring leaders changed their beds. They never hid, they didn't stay in their apartment. They had friends who would allow them to sleep in their bed once night. Or another night they would change. So that Tule Lake group had it incredibly organized to the extent that many of them had their bags packed. The leaders all new that sooner or later they'll get caught, they'll get caught. So they had their bags packed. But when they were caught and were sent off in the back of a truck everybody came out to give them a rousing send off and they were proclaimed matyrs.
- 2:37:15 That guy Best, project director Best, had the nerve to make so many disloyals. He would send people to places like Bismark. Bismark is the last stop to Japan. Or Santa Fe. That's a last stop before Japan. He kept sending these trouble makers out till April 6th. And you know that the registration began around Feb. the 11th. So you can imagine the number of people he was able to get rid of.

(at what camp was the registration form first introduced?)

- 2:38:07 I think the registration was first introduced at Tule Lake. And Mr. Best went from mess hall to mess hall to personally announce that. That there's going to be this registration and that each one of you is obliged to go and register. Well, Tule Lake after all, they had quite a number of kibeis there and they had their own mind.
- 2:38:52 And they said there's something fishy about this and they just decided that no, not our mess, not our block. We just will as a block refuse to go. And that spread to the next block you see. And they finally sent in the army with trucks. And they picked up the men. I mean they would go to block 23 and they would grab the men. They would go into the homes and grab those young men and put them on the back of the car and I must say makes me cry everytime I think of it. But their little sisters their brothers would just hang on to their seventeen year old, or eighteen year old, nineteen year old brothers. They couldn't stand seeing these armed troops hauling their brothers away. And they just clung to them. It was tragic. But that of course intensified.
- 2:39:35

(why were those men taken away?)

- 2:40:20 Because they refuse....

(would you describe the nisei, someone picks up the questionnaire, what do they see?)

- 3:00:39 They see too many questions. It's very intrusive.

(would you describe, at the top there's a seal and at the bottom a description of penalties.)

- 3:00:55 Oh the penalty was ridiculous.

(so what did they see, did they see the seal? we have to hear this from you.)
(that's what it said, in the form you sent me...)
Really. It said that if you do not...
(that failure to fill out this questionnaire...)
Really, well Christopher's mother she said, will not answer, will not answer.
And she was of course....
(Then she was deported.)
Did it really say that? Oh my, failure to... The Tule Lake people did that?
(Yes, that's what they saw...They knew that's what they were risking. They felt)
Wow, I can't believe it.

(michi can you just describe physically what people saw when they looked at the
leave clearance questionnaire?)
3:02:09: Are you talking about leave clearance or the military leave clearance?
(these were the same.)
Actually it was titled differently but...

(can you describe what a nisei would see when he looked at first looked at the
leave clearance questionnaire.)
3:02:27 Well, first of course leave clearance, which nobody in their right mind would
even think of wanting to be cleared for leave. Certainly when they were trying to
organize, reorganize this totally discombobulated life and so that was totally
intimidating. Leave clearance, forget it.. That's not something I want. And then
they saw all these very intrusive questions about what newspapers you read, what
schools you attended, do you have brothers and sisters in the military, do you
have people who are serving in the military in Japan.

(at the bottom of the questionnaire what did they see?)
3:03:23 They said if you, failure to answer these questions would make a fine of \$10,000
or 20 years in jail mandatory. That is, that is totally awesome.

(and was this a genuine were these penitence genuine?)
So it said. So it said.

(but later, did, what did camp directors later find out about whether this
questionnaire was compulsory?)
3:04:09 Well, the war department itself on Feb. 23rd, remember the registration started
around the 11th. On the 23rd they said it is not compulsory. That notice was sent
around to the project directors but the project directors had all been so eager and
gung ho about establishing the best record for their camp. They didn't want to
know about that. And they kept on persecuting these young men who simply
refused to cooperate.

(were the internees ever told that failure to fill the questionnaire out...were the
internees ever told that filling out the questionnaire was compulsory?)
Was compulsory.

(were they ever told, it was not compulsory?)
3:05:11 No, not even Dillon Meyer, it was his job to say hey guys I know you're trying to
get these fellas to volunteer for the army but the war department says it's not
compulsory and it was his responsibility to remind the project directors that they
were pushing it unnecessarily.

(is there any lasting effect from segregation?)

- 3:05:44 Oh it's horrendous. Of course I don't think you can appreciate it unless you were involved as a member of the family. To have ended up let's say in Tule Lake. Tule Lake was ultimately chosen as the segregation center.. The highest security camp for trouble makers. And so there is a stigma attached. The fact that you did spend your war years in Tule Lake. Immediately people associate that with, oh,
- 3:06:29 you're from that trouble making family. So generally they do not talk about this aspect of Tule Lake. Nobody has ever written me a letter saying, oh, your chapter on Tule Lake was absolutely so insightful except Raymond Okamura's wife. I'll never forget. She wrote me a letter saying, I just finished reading "Years of Infamy" and I'm crying. She said finally I understand, why, the reason
- 3:07:22 all those things happened in Tule Lake and ultimately why we had to get up so early in the morning to do those washo washo exercise. I never understood any of it as a young person. And our whole family were so torn apart by that. We never were able to establish ourselves. And as a normal family. And so to have it all clarified in my mind is truly a wonderful thing. And I cherish that letter.

(define for me michi, what is segregation?)

- 3:08:19 Segregation was again a plan. Actually I must make a long story short because it started out with a senator who was asked to make an investigation of all the camps. Chandler remember happy Chandler. He did a quick like a two day stint at every camp. He rode around the camp. And he became an authority as to what was going on at every camp just because he happened to make a stop there. He had to make a report. His report was that I think this, the trouble which has erupted in these various camps is a result of the disloyals becoming disenchanted.
- 3:09:24 I think that if we were to separate the bad eggs from the good eggs that everything would settle down. And consequently this loyalty questionnaire was imposed. When the loyalty questionnaire was imposed it was not explained to them right off the bat that the purpose of it was, is that we are planning to separate the loyal from the disloyal. That was never uttered. Only the social scientist were...you know one social scientist was assigned to every camp. And they couldn't understand
- 3:10:15 this crazy questionnaire. They said it doesn't make sense. You cannot ever fathom one's loyalty on the basis of a set of questions. That is an impossible feat. And to crucify these people with these questions in order to...are you going to try to brand these people disloyals on the basis of these stupid questions? And there was in Manzanar a bunch of administrators also who said this is like witchcraft. This is...this questionnaire really needs to be thrown into the trash heap. It is, it just doesn't make sense.
- 3:11:12 And so the Japanese Americans weren't so sophisticated at that point. They took it all so literally and they wanted to cooperate with the government. When the government knew very well that they're aimless. To be able to separate those that they can send back to Japan. And they would love to have as many as possible renounce their citizenship. Which was another thing that happened during the registration drive. Some people said, oh no, we are not going to sign on a piece of paper. I would rather repatriot to Japan where we can take tyranny...

(let me move ahead to the draft. in the book you sight Mike Masaoka lobbying for the nisei right to volunteer. what did Mike Masaoka say?)

I've no idea...his statement, his verbatim statement.

(the nisei protestation of loyalty was so much hogwash we had to have a demonstration in blood. what was the reaction to the average nisei to this line of reasoning?)

- 3:12:36 But of course he got that from the war department. The war department told him, told Mike Masaoka, and he was the consultant to the war department. And the war department said that all this protestation of loyalty is something you cannot trust. It's hogwash and that really the only way they can prove their loyalty is to spill blood. And apparently Mr. Masaoka felt that this was key to securing their future in the United States. That we must be able to demonstrate as a people that we deserved to be treated as first class citizens by proving ourselves. And consequently, sorry but I forgot exactly what you were trying....

(what was the reaction of the average nisei to this line of reasoning that we had to prove our loyalty to America by spilling blood.)

- 3:13:56 No. Of course you have those who were brought up in the Japanese tradition. What I mean to say is that there were those we were inculcated with the Japanese spirit. The yamato damashi spirit which inculcated in one that one's duty to country comes first. Our country right or wrong. And to those people who felt very strongly that this is indeed our country right or wrong (note: someone is whispering over her voice, the standing of the people) they were willing to volunteer and to spill blood.

(what is the standing of the people segregated to Tule Lake in the Japanese American society? are they respected? are they proud of it? do they respect themselves? what is the effect on Japanese American morale?)

- 3:15:35 It's very difficult to find Tule Lakers who really have that much curiosity. I wonder sometimes whether it's that they don't want to speak about it. It is so fascinating to me and I would think it would be to a real Tulean to say, my cousin was in that stockade. And do you know that we had six tanks that guarded that compound of Tule Lake. They held their exercises daily showing their might.
- 3:16:30 Can you imagine a concentration camp in Europe that had six tanks guarding it. It's almost unbelievable. And I would love to run into a Tule Laker who would explain to me how it felt to see tanks right outside the gate. And to think that this was free America. Liberty and justice for all. And to know that you were surrounded not only by this escape proof gate, wired fence that you had the advantage also of huge armament you know personell carriers and all that. Yes, I don't understand the Tuleans. They do not want to look into their past. They don't want to come across their father's names apparently, or their brother's names. I have lots and lots of names and I think to myself, oh my gosh, I hope the son or daughter doesn't look at this. It would be embarrassing. Cause as in every camp you had those who were collaborating with the camp commandant.
- 3:17:15 And there was a lot of that sort of thing in Tule Lake. To the extent that Mr. Nomo who headed up that canteen, he was murdered and to this day that murder is unsolved.
- 3:18:06 But, yes, there has never been a dialogue within the Tulean community as you have among the Fair Play Committee of Heart Mountain, they get together and they share stories and you learn knew things about Tamesa, about Inouye. And you want to know are they still alive? It's fascinating to go deeper and deeper into what really happened and truly you will there's nothing like going to the archives because then you find out, oh, so and so...Block so and so was in cahoots with Best. I mean I can't believe it. But you know that sort of thing is fascinating.

(the popular belief is that Japanese America itself asked the government to restore the draft to give them the opportunity to sacrifice, prove their sacrifice in blood, to prove their loyalty. did the Japanese Americans want the draft more than they wanted the rest of their civil rights?)

3:19:43 Well, you know very well that that was the genesis of the, one of the genesis of the Manzanar riot. They had a meeting of the camp representatives and the one, and there were a couple of JACL leaders who represented Manzanar. And apparently it meant a great deal to that organization that selective service be instituted. Not voluntary enlistment. I have a document dated March 1942 that
 3:20:38 was right after executive order 9066 was issued that was Feb. 19th and around March the 5th there's a document saying we ought to find out just how many, um, draft age Japanese Americans are in camp. So apparently already the army was thinking in terms of the possibility of using that man power. After all they saw those Japanese...

(michi tell me again, in late '42 there was a meeting of people from...can you tell me who called that meeting and what was the purpose of that meeting?)

3:21:24 I wonder, you see I forget now if it came after the Poston riot.

(no it was before. it was in October.)

Was it in October?

(no it was just before Thanksgiving, the all camp meeting of Salt Lake City.)

Tell me exactly what it was because I...

(it was WRA at Mike Masaoka's and the JACL's behest called an all camp meeting...)

What for.

(to discuss, supposedly to discuss camp problems. so two representatives from each camp went to discuss problems in each camp and WRA would be there and try to work them out and try to get a uniform policy. cause there were all these camp directors trying to do their own thing. and they were trying to...now that camp was, now that people were in camp, now it was going awhile, now was the time to unify the policy. And they discovered, WRA discovered that they were sponsoring the JACL national convention. and that's what it was. so Fred Toyama and the other guy were two JACL guys from Manzanar. and the only thing they asked for, actually they used the word demand, was the selective service. and there was not a word about the restoration of the other civil rights.)

(what did that meeting lead to at Manzanar?)

3:23:38 Well, unfortunately word got out that, I think it was Fred Toyama had very vehemently that the selective service be restored to the Japanese Americans within the camps. And the reaction in Manzanar and other camps were, what! They want to raid a concentration...you know concentration camps for bodies, I mean to be shot at. I mean it didn't make sense to the average young person of 19, 20 and to the parents certainly. After all these were you know these were gently reared young sons on whom they depended on for their future. And to end up in a camp like that, in a god forsaken place, then they want to come raid...

(describe your camp. what was the reaction in Gila. what was your reaction to life in Gila?)

3:25:12 No, cause I told Frank. I was a hard working farm girl and I was liberated and I didn't have to work that hard in camp.

(so you were used to the hard life.)

3:25:30 Yeah, I was a child slave labor. so I had it easy in camp.

(how old were you in camp?)

3:25:40 I was fifteen when I went in.

(michi, how did the word, the JACL Fred Toyama calling for the draft, hit the issei. you begin to talk about that?)

3:26:00 You know that's too hard a question because it's too complex. I have to site one after the other because each family was different.

(how about Mary Tsukamoto's family?)

Oh, come on now.

(what was the reaction in Heart Mountain from what you've seen in the documents. what was the reaction at Heart Mountain?)

3:26:41 I think I told you earlier that they refused to go to these meetings sponsored by the army team. They stood them up. And they held their own private meetings here and there. And they couldn't make heads or tails of this questionnaire. And so eventually when they did meet with them, when they did go to the larger meeting, they asked very hard questions which these army...the teams were in no position

3:27:38 to answer such questions as, can you restore our constitutional rights first? We'll be happy to go. Will you allow our parents to go back to their homes first. In which case we will be very happy to go. We would serve happily if we could be dispersed into various units like other U.S. citizens. We do not want to be treated in an apartheid fashion where we would end up as blacks. You know the Jim Crow (sp?) units.

(it would be a Jap crow unit.)

Jap crow