

FIREBREAK GANG

BY

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Excerpt from Robert Spencer's letter of February 15, 1943

"Charlie will describe in some detail the meeting which took place on Friday which was sponsored by Captain Thompson and Mr. Bennett. Much has been made of the Sedition Act, and it was stated publicly that those who hinder volunteer enlistment would find themselves subject to imprisonment under the terms of the Act of 1917. Your own copies of the newspaper will show that the Act has been publicized and held somewhat as a threat over the heads of those Kibei and Issei who were in strong opposition to enlistment. George Yamashiro has been particularly vociferous, as I pointed out before, in his opposition to the measure of volunteer enlistment. I think now, however, that since actual coercion has been used to suppress the recalcitrant groups, the situation is smoothing out a little bit. In fact, the attitudes have changed to some extent, and it seems as though some volunteers will be enlisted. At least there is greater Issei understanding of the problem, and the more out-spoken Kibei have been silenced. Of course, there is still the individual family problem, the fact that this individual or that is prevented from enlisting by his family because of the desire to keep the family unit intact and to prevent neighborhood criticism which will inevitably result if a member of any given family is conceived to be fighting the mother country. These neighborhood criticisms were brought up before in regard to the subject of enlistment in the language school. Where before, however, the community was up in arms, the result of Friday's meeting has been somewhat to mollify community sentiments and to make for less opposition to Army enlistment. It seems that the next feeling will arise against the

enlistees themselves when their names are made public. It is the desire of the Army and the administration to keep these names secret until the day of departure. Friday's meeting was a rather significant one.

Last Monday, you will recall that Block Managers, Block Councilmen, Block Chairmen, and certain club and organization leaders were present. On Friday, in view of the growing community sentiment, a list was prepared of leaders in the community as well as the officials mentioned above. Invitations were sent out to each of them requesting their attendance at the meeting in Butte, Friday night. Trucks provided transportation for those from Canal, and at this meeting the Sedition Act was publicly proclaimed and a much firmer stand was taken by Captain Thompson. It seems that this sort of procedure rather than a sympathetic handling of the problem was more in order.

In my last letter, I believe I mentioned that Charlie and I thought if one-tenth of the quota of 350 were to volunteer, the situation would be about normal. It now begins to appear that more may be expected, perhaps, as some say, 250. I think that 100 to 150 will be the correct number if community sentiments do not change again. If the whole thing is kept out of the papers and they simply publicize the fact that 150-odd volunteered from Gila and, perhaps, an equal number from the other centers, infinite good can be effected to a favorable public opinion. If this does not work and adverse publicity is given, the whole program might as well fold up."

## PREFACE

The mass evacuation and migration of the Japanese were a novel and extraordinary adventure of the American government. The exodus in its scope and its circumstance was unprecedented and was such remarkable and unusual nature as to be recorded on pages of the American political and economical history. It was a compulsory migration against free will, enforced and administered by the governmental agencies. The people, under the extraordinary circumstance and in a new unaccustomed environment, presented an interesting study to many students.

The writer desired to write stories in Japanese, depicting such exodus and life at a relocation camp for his pleasure. The materials used in this report were originally collected and intended for such purposes -- jotted down on little pieces of paper from time to time. Some expressions were kept verbatim in Japanese and filed under the speaker's name. Often the thoughts and the sentiments of the writer were recorded, Therefore, in making this report available for research workers, it was necessary to interview each individual to obtain the statistical information. This report was written by reconstructing the events in chronological order, with which the recorded reactions and the statistical data were correlated.

In translating Japanese expressions, the writer adhered to the technique he used while he was acting as a court interpreter. He attempted to preserve the speaker's intent above all, evaluating the force and strength of the statement -- for example, free translation rather than direct. ✓

To John G. Evans, the writer makes grateful acknowledgment, not only for valuable advice and assistance while he was in charge of the crew, but for his unfailing trust and encouragement.

R. S. N.

Poston, Arizona.  
September, 1942.

# FIREBREAK GANG

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

This is a report of a group of thirty odd men, commonly referred to as "firebreak gang", who were engaged in cleaning and subjugation work of land in Camp I of the Colorado River War Relocation Project at Poston, Arizona. It is a chronicle of the hectic early days, depicting the confused state of affairs prevailing. The subject covers a period of eighty days, beginning on June 27, 1942, and ending on September 14.

It is a typical group of men who were engaged in the outdoor labor of unskilled variety in this project. <sup>2</sup> It is my presumption that the characteristics found in the "firebreak gang" were either similar or identical with those of other outdoor labor groups such as the poultry crew, the fish culture crew, the farm gang, etc.

I acted as the foreman of this group of men, supervising and directing them on the field, having full responsibility for maintaining order and harmony among them and keeping in contact with the administrative branches or the Engineering Department for coordination.

I took a part in its organization and was responsible for its disbandment. It is noteworthy that there was neither friction nor quarrel among them. There was neither antagonistic feeling nor open defiance against the foreman, except at its inception. They were willing to cooperate with each other and to be obedient to the leader. There was neither a trace of sentiment nor an occasion to resort to such a concerted collective action as a strike, even at the time when labor disputes were frequent and grievances of the dissatisfied workers were widely discussed and gossiped in the camp. <sup>3</sup> They were, indeed, well satisfied and contented in what they were doing as days went on. <sup>4</sup> The Caucasians who had supervised or who had knowledge of what we were doing were also well satisfied

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and expressed their commendation and appreciation.<sup>191</sup> It is my belief that we had one happy family, having complete harmony and trust among us. I am afraid, therefore, that this report might give the reader an impression of being a "success story." However, I decided to exercise no restraint and to report as I saw, as I heard, and as I felt.

## CHAPTER II

### MYSELF

At the outset, I believe it is helpful for the reader to understand this report if I presented a brief sketch of my life. I am a male of 38 years of age, born in Tokio, Japan. I married a Nisei girl and have two daughters of ten and eight years old respectively. While in Japan, I entered an elementary school at six and graduated at twelve. At the age of seventeen I completed my education in an intermediate school (chugaku-ko) of American Episcopalian endowment in Tokio. I grew up in a large group of boys of similar age, as I have lived in school dormitories since ten.

At the age of seventeen, I came to the United States to join my parents and entered a high school in San Francisco. At twenty-one I enrolled in Stanford University and five years later I graduated from the School of Engineering. During the summer vacations and one year of leave of absence, I worked on, and later managed, a fruit orchard, about 300 acres in size, in Sacramento Valley, California. There I gained valuable experiences in associating with and handling 30 - 150 resident and migratory farm laborers -- Japanese, Portugese, Spaniards, Filipinos, etc.

After graduation I came to Los Angeles and operated an insurance brokerage firm until 1934. Concurrently, I served in law courts as an interpreter on call, until the civil service status was strictly required. Since then I owned and operated a small retail produce market in the southwestern suburban section of Los Angeles, where Japanese truck gardeners were heavily concentrated. People often wondered why I a college engineering graduate, was in such a "low-down business." To them I used to say, "I learned just the art of 'bull session' at the expense of hard earned \$5,000." Beyond that I had no desire to elaborate.

My friends tell me that I have the appearance of a Nisei and act like one, yet my thoughts and reactions are typically those of intelligent Isseis. ✓

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## CHAPTER III

### THE WORK

The work, attended and accomplished by the "firebreak gang" during June 27 - September 14, 1942, is separated into two categories:

1. To segregate and clean piles of scrap lumber in various areas in Camp 1, which were remnants of the materials used by a construction company in building barracks for living and other accessory purposes. In other words, segregation and cleaning mean:
  - a. To separate usable lumber from scraps and trash.
  - b. To haul away usable lumber.
  - c. To burn the remaining scraps and trash.

These lumber piles were located in the following areas: 7

- a. The Firebreak and Recreational Area between Block 36 and Block 45 on one side and Block 37 and Block 44 on the other -- about 5 acres of ground covered densely with the remnants. At some places the heaps were as high as 4 feet from the ground.
- b. The Firebreak area east of Block 53 and Block 60 -- about 3 acres.
- c. The area immediately west of Block 22 -- about 1 acre.
- d. The Firebreak area between Block 38 and Block 39 -- 3 acres of medium density, about 2 feet deep.
- e. The warehouse area west of "E" Street -- about 3 acres of medium density.
- f. Other small areas.

(The areas are listed in the chronological order.)

2. To prepare land preliminary to the leveling by heavy equipments. 8
  - a. To assemble and gather into small piles trunks, branches and brushes of mesquites and cottonwood trees, which were previously knocked down or dragged out by heavy duty tractors.

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b. To dig and cut the residual stumps with shovels and axes.

c. To burn the piles.

The tools and equipment used were as follows:

1. Fordson tractors attached with small Ferguson trailers, which were of stake body type of 2-ton capacity. They were also used in transporting the workers to and from the work. Later, the tractors, detached of the trailers, were chained with heavy cables and were employed in dragging stumps.
2. Axes, shovels, rakes, pitch-forks, etc.

CHAPTER IV

THE CHAOTIC BEGINNING

The request of cleaning the lumber piles was first made by the Engineering Department to John G. Evans.<sup>2</sup> It was necessary to remove them so that a lateral system for farm irrigation and for dust control could be constructed. It was originally suggested to employ at least 250 Japanese residents in Camp 1 and clean up the Firebreak and Recreational Area (marked as a and b), where the canal was to run lengthwise, in three or four days. It was suggested and was stressed by Mr. Barbour that this was very important preparatory work which must be undertaken quickly and accomplished in the shortest possible time, as "rigs" were ready to come into the field. The Associate Engineer thought that the recruiting of 250 workers should not be difficult and that with all these men the work would be accomplished in no time, if enough trucks and trailer-tractors were pooled from various departments. But as the thing turned out later, Barbour was over-optimistic and was wishful-thinking, and his desire and expectation were shattered.

According to Evans, the following steps were taken to recruit workers:

1. In their meeting Evans instructed all the Block Managers to get all the idle men out.
2. Block Managers contacted the men without employment and persuaded them. They pointed out as persuasive arguments, I was told, several points such as:
  - a. The whole community would be benefitted by it.
  - b. Sooner we have the canal, quicker we will have water for our vegetable gardens and for dust control.
  - c. If water was brought into Block, it would have cooling effect and we would not be suffering from heat.
  - d. They would be compensated for their public-spirited service.
3. Tomo Ito, Evans' assistant, with whom I was acquainted in my college

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days, asked me to "help the country"; and inasmuch as I was unemployed, I should come out and supervise the men.

On the morning of June 27, I reported to the area immediately east of Block 44 -- area (a). The entire place was in a turmoil -- one big mess. One hundred men, almost entirely of elderly Isseis, were excitedly picking up lumber off the ground and were energetically throwing it on trucks and trailers scattered all over. Loaded tractors were speeding down dusty, dirty roads with droning hums, kicking up smoke high into the air. Tractors were rushing back to the field unloaded, as if they were in a great hurry to get somewhere. Some men were raking up trash into small heaps with great enthusiasm. There was commotion and confusion all over the field. In this atmosphere I was told by F. Evans' other assistant, who had been directing the operations, to take charge of the men and to keep them constantly busy. He said, "Don't let them ease up. Keep 'em busy."

So I kept them busy all the time, keeping the vehicles scattered here, there, and all over, in order to keep all the men busy all the time. Whenever a car was not available to load, I made them clean up the trash into small piles with rakes. The work was progressing fast for about two hours. Then about 10 a.m., I began to hear grumbings and complaints here and there in Japanese. One man said, "How do they expect us to work without any drinking water around."

A few shouted, "Who do they think we are? Hell, we're no slaves. We don't have to work, if we don't want to."

Some in another part were talking aloud, "It's too hot. No use working! We're getting only six cents an hour anyway."

I breathed ominous, ugly air. Some men were leaving the field already for home. I thought that something must be done immediately and quickly, otherwise all of them would quit the work and would go home. Yet the only idea that came to my mind at the moment was to talk to these men. I moved swiftly among them. I said in polite Japanese, "I am sorry. I didn't realize how difficult it is for you to work in this heat. If you would suggest to me what changes can be made,

I am more than willing to listen. I am not here to 'slave drive' you. On the contrary, I am here to serve for you."

My pleading had little effect, although no one has left since. I realized that it was too late to retrieve the situation. The damage was done. They felt and resented that I was trying to get the most out of them in the shortest time. I could sense uneasiness and unrest among the men. I knew that they resented my "slave driving." They hated to be "suckers." They were not like the Isseis I had known before the evacuation. The Isseis I had known were all industrious, diligent, obedient and courteous people. These men were not like them. They were suspicious, ill-humored, discourteous, irritable people. I calculated that they were under severe strain and in abnormal state of mind resulting from the evacuation, as they had not fully conceived the meaning of the war and had not adjusted themselves to the new environment. They were skeptical and suspicious of me, of anything and of everything. They were oversensitive, yet they were inconsiderate of my feeling when they grumbled and complained. I knew that they thought of me as a white-man's "stooge." I also suspected that they were not working there entirely from their free will, but instead, some kind of pressure or coercion was exercised upon them. Consequently, I decided to take some immediate corrective measures:

1. I sent some young boys to the near-by kitchens for pails of drinking water.
2. I ordered the men not to rake the trash and rest between loadings.
3. I ordered them to load in much slower tempo. In other words, I tried to salvage whatever I could out of this "wreckage." I called the noon recess and decided to wait for further development.

After the lunch, I reported to the field at 1 p.m. and saw a few

people coming in slowly from all directions, but I did not see one hundred men coming back. When a roll was called a little later, I found that there were only forty-four men present including ten young truck and tractor drivers. I said to myself, "I knew this would happen. I bet those guys -- meaning those who failed to return -- are sore now. I bet they think I am 'apple polishing' white guys. I must be more careful from now on."

I again instructed the men:

1. To pick up lumber in a more comfortable speed.
2. To sit down and rest while the tractors are away.
3. No raking is necessary

As the result grumblings were less and far in between. I ran to this and that part of the field continually in the afternoon, worried and sick over the dissatisfied men, in order to eliminate complaints entirely.

As I called the recess for the day 4:30, a middle aged man, while walking away from me, said sarcastically and defiantly, "You mean to say we can't go home unless you say so"?

I understood the meaning and I was hurt. I was tired, too. I was so tired

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and worried that I did not know whether I wanted to continue on with the job. I was disappointed and disgusted as well. On my way home, I said to myself, "I have two strikes on me, before I even got started. I am having a hell of a time and I don't deserve it."

It was fortunate that the next day was Sunday. The day gave me quiet hours to reflect upon what had taken place. I pondered, "The job is much bigger than I've anticipated. But I can't quit now. I can't fail. If I fail now, I am just rotten and no good."

I kept on in my thought, "These men are sick mentally, because they are in an unusual place under extraordinary circumstances. My past experiences of managing men of an orchard aren't quite enough to cope with the special situation. Something more must be figured. Here is a priceless chance to utilize understanding and knowledge of Isseis. Let's see what I can do."

As a tentative formula in treating the workers, who were almost entirely Isseis, I decided on the following procedures:

1. To show respect and treat them as my superiors. Never to show cockiness or discourtesy. Never to be pedantic. Always to be willing to consult them as if their advices are needed and valued.
2. To increase their faith and trust in Democracy. To help them forget unhappy experiences and unfortunate losses resulted from the evacuation.
3. To increase the spirit of cooperation among themselves and to the community.
4. To equalize by some lawful method on the field the wage differential.

(These men were to receive \$12.00 a month.)

In order to obtain the above objectives, I intended to try out, at first, the following steps;

1. To appoint two assistant foremen who would direct and supervise the operation, so that I might be free to move about among the men.
2. To carry all my conversation in Japanese, strictly in the more polite form. <sup>13</sup>

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3. To disregard the idea of efficiency. To forget about the amount of work to be done in a day. To let them establish their own speed. To make them rest and relax as much as they need.

Thus, on June 30, I started the morning with fresh vigor and new ambition. First, I called on two men at their apartments, who particularly attracted my attention on the first day, and asked them to act as my assistants. One was a Nisei of 22 years of age and the other an Issei of 37. I gave them explicit instructions as to what they were to do and told them what I was intending to do; and we were all set to go. As I look back retrospectively now, the selection was a happy one. They stuck with me to the end and gave me valuable assistance in carrying out all the tedious and routine duties. They were loyal to me throughout placing their faith and confidence in my sincerity and integrity. Indeed, to them much of our success is attributable.

About ten minutes before 8 a.m., two assistants and I reported to the field and waited for the people to arrive. As they began to come, I met them with a smile and "Ohayo gozaimasu". Only a few returned me a greeting friendly. The majority were still antagonistic and sullen. Some ignored me completely. I told myself, "For Christ sake, can't they see that I am trying to be their friend. Can't they see that I am going to do everything possible for their benefit."

The assistants began moving to take charge as the tractors were coming in. I was told that for the day no truck was available and instead seven tractors were assigned. "Good!" I thought, "Now the men can take it easy today."

One Fordson left with three-quarter capacity load. Another followed with a half load. All the drivers were fidgety and did not wait until the trailer was loaded to the capacity. They were anxious to get going and to keep moving. They found great enjoyment and thrill in riding tractors, as if they were newly possessed toys. Two were going down the road with the throttles wide open. They were racing the rough road, bouncing up and down, a part of the load falling

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out, scattering all over. I said to myself, "Bunch of young fools! That's Nisei for you. They are just trying to have a good time. Don't they realize that they are working for money? Why doesn't someone who is in charge of these kids bawl them out? The Fordsons won't last much longer, if they keep on treating them like that."

\* \* \* \* \*

A roll call that morning revealed that there were 32 men and 7 young drivers. The assistants were busy directing the drivers where to park their vehicles. They were also helping in loading. I walked around the field and tried to be friendly with the men. Here and there I initiated conversation. I felt that I was still avoided. I suspected that they still considered me as a "stooge". When they talked to me their tone was not friendly, but peevish and glum.

Soon a tractor came back unloaded. As soon as the driver backed the trailer into a designated place, he ran to me and reported excitedly, "Hey, those guys are plenty sore."

"What guys?" I asked.

"You know, those guys unloading out there. Only two guys out there this morning!" said he.

"Yeah? I didn't know where you fellows were taking the loads. Alright! I will go down there and will find out what the trouble is," I replied.

More trouble! I hopped on the first tractor going out of the field.

This was the first time I learned that the lumber was unloaded west of proposed "L" Street, approximately one quarter of a mile due west of Block 42. <sup>14</sup>  
As I arrived there, I saw two men frantically unloading -- perspiration running down their faces and their shirts dripping wet. Moreover, there were two tractors waiting in line for unloading. When I stopped them and asked, they were too eager to expound their grievances. Those were as follows:

1. There were some 15 men working on the first day. They were from Block 43. They believed it was useless to return to the work, as there was no one to take

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their attendance.

2. The pace of the work was too fast. The tractors were coming in too frequently.

3. There was no drinking water available.

As a reply, I informed these men that:

1. I had no idea that I was to take charge of the unloading crew. I was under the impression that I was responsible only for the loading men. In fact, F told me to do just that. From now on, I would be around regularly to check their attendance. I would see to it that the due credit would be given to the men who worked on the first day. I would see the manager of Block 43 and would ask him to get the men back. Meanwhile, they should pass the word around that we need more men.

2. They should set their own pace or speed of work, ignoring the tractors waiting in line.

3. They would be supplied with drinking water immediately.

Accordingly, on the way back, I arranged for more men and drinking water.

When I returned to the loading field, the Boyle Height Isseis of Block 45 about five in number, were complaining that the weather was "Too hot to suit" them and that they had never "intended to stoop down to this low-down labor."

One of them said, "This is a kind of work for the Mexicans."

About 15 men, all elderly Isseis from a "bachelors' barrack" in Block 37, were talking aloud in a group to themselves, working entirely apart from the others. As soon as I approached them, their conversation ceased. I felt insulted; I felt like revolting. Yet I was curious and wanted to find out what they had been discussing. By some roundabout inquiries, I learned from others, who were in the vicinity, that the topics of their conversation were as follows:

1. They were involuntary evacuees. No one could compel them to work.

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2. They doubted if they would be paid for their service.

3. Their manager told them that this work was to last only a day or two. On the contrary, they had observed and calculated that they could not possibly finish it even in ten days. They resented the idea that they had been tricked into this work by some premeditated scheming. They expressed that if it was for one day or two, they would not mind, but not for ten days.

4. It was too hot to suit them. (It was about 10:30 A.M. The temperature was about 110° F.) <sup>15</sup>

I knew then that I had lost these men -- the city people and the bachelors. I was disappointed that they would not give me a chance. On the other hand, I was contemptuous and scornful of them. I thought that they were unduly susceptible and provocative. I was determined now to go on without them.

Just before the noon, a Nisei driver reported that a sharply pointed scrap pierced through one of the rear traction tires of his Fordson. As I did not know where to report the puncture, I said to him, "Go and find the fellow who gave the key to you."

In the afternoon only 14 men reported to the work. I wondered if I were to lose everyone of them by the next morning. The Issei assistant was worried, too, and said, "Did you notice few men were resting, although you told them to take it easy? You know what's the trouble? They say that they can't sit down and rest while others are working busily nearby. They feel out of place. They don't feel 'right' to sit down just themselves. Why don't you give all of them rest at the same time. Usually the fellows who don't sit down and keep on working are ones who grumble the most."

"All right. I will try anything once," I said to him, "Give them 15 minutes rest every hour on the hour. Take them to a shady place and let them relax."

We tried the new system and we soon found out that the men liked it. <sup>16</sup>

If it was not one thing, it was always something else. One tractor was disabled on account of distributor trouble caused by excessive dust. Another

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tractor was gone due to a punctured rear tire, again from the same cause.

About 4 o'clock Frasier<sup>↓</sup> drove down to the field and inquired of a man as to the whereabouts of his foreman, who, in turn, pointed me out and called me.

"You have to take care of the tractors more carefully. Each puncture costs the government more than \$60; besides, the tire must be sent all the way to Los Angeles for repair," said he excitedly.

I said, "Who are you anyway? And what do you mean by that I must take care of the tractors. I have no authority over the drivers. They are sent by somebody I don't know."

"I am in charge of all the equipment in the camp and those tractors were assigned to you," said he.

"But I've never seen you before. Why didn't you tell me at the beginning. Then I could have told those boys a few things," I retorted.

After a little consultation over the existing condition, Frasier and I agreed on the following points:

1. The driver is to be warned.
2. If the warning is not heeded, he must be discharged.

I warned all the drivers to handle their tractors more carefully. I warned them that reckless driving would not be tolerated and that the speed limit of 10 miles per hour should be strictly observed. I added that if they should disobey the regulations, they would be placed on the blacklist, which would bar them from any position involving driving of vehicles.

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About fifteen minutes later, another Caucasian appeared in a coupe. This time a fat, chubby, red-faced old man. (This was my first meeting with Mr. Barbour.)

"Now, what does he want?" I wondered.

"Well, how many men you got here working?" he asked.

"Nineteen, sir."

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"Nineteen? Why don't you get more men? There are lots of men sitting on their asses all over the camp. Why don't you get 'em? You should have at least a couple of hundred out here," said he optimistically.

"A couple of hundred? Like hell! Just try and get those guys sitting <sup>on</sup> their asses, and see how far you can get with that," I thought.

Instead, I said to him, "I certainly would be glad to have more men, but I am kept busy here and can't get around to that. Will you see if you can get some more men for me?"

"All right. I will see what I can do for you." said Mr. Barbour.

I did not know what happened subsequently, but that was the last time the subject of getting more men was brought up by Barbour. I did not get even a single man through his effort.

That night, I met Evans at the intake station and received his assurance that the work was officially recognized and the men would be paid for their service. As to recruiting more men, I was advised to contact various Block Managers.

On June 30, I found a little encouragement in finding 21 men and five drivers. I could sense that the situation was eased on the field. I could hear laughter now and then for the first time. The men were rested on the hour as the day before, as this procedure was bringing in the result desired.

When I went to the unloading ground, there were eight men present, an increase of three. They were busily building a shanty hut under a big mesquite tree, utilizing scrap lumber and torn roofing paper. They told me that they divided themselves into three units; and each unit was to take turn in unloading. They were to rest between the unloading operations under the shade. (The hut was enlarged from time to time, and at the end it was large enough to house forty people.) I was amused to observe the method, which I had tried with the loading crew and failed, was more acceptable here.

I thought this was a good opening to talk to these men. I commended them for

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their idea and added, "We don't need to work any more than we are physically able. We don't need to exhaust ourselves. The white men in this project are not our enemies. On the contrary, they are trying everything possible for our benefit. They want to see that we are willing to cooperate with them."

This was one of my favorite themes and was repeated to them often in the ensuing days.

Late in the afternoon, when the men were resting in a shady place, Frasier was coming down the road. They noticed him and began to get up. I said to them, "Never mind the white man. Just keep on resting. I am the one responsible for you people."

When I walked up to him, Frasier asked me, "Say, how come those men are sitting down?"

"Well, they are fagged out. They need rest," I replied.

"Yes, but it doesn't look so good. Looks as if they are on a 'sit-down' strike. Why don't you rest them a few at a time?" said the overseer.

"All right," I answered reluctantly.

And to myself I said, "Hell with looks! Suppose it looks like a sit-down strike. So what?"

This was one of the orders I intentionally disobeyed. I was convinced by this time that it was better to rest the loading crew as a body. Moreover, I wanted to sit with them and talk to them all at one time.

Then Frasier brought up the subject of tractors. He told me that:

1. Two young Niseis of another crew were racing with their tractors and collided with each other. The extent of damage was one smashed radiator, one bent axle and two torn front tires.
2. As soon as my drivers got out of my sight, they were driving too fast and recklessly.
3. The Engineering Department was seriously considering taking all tractors

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away from the Japanese, as evidences of careless and negligent handling were mounting and avoidable and unnecessary damages were piling up.

4. That some immediate steps should be taken in addition to warnings.

We agreed that the best solution would be to hire a foreman to take charge of the tractors and drivers. I told him that I knew just the man.

That evening, I sought out a Nisei of 22 years of age, who had considerable experience in operating such equipment on his farm and had knowledge of the mechanism. I knew him as a serious minded young man, to whom such responsibilities could be entrusted. After a lengthy discussion on the state of affairs, we decided to take the following steps as remedies:

1. To assign a tractor to each driver and to let him be responsible for the same machine every day.

2. To order every driver to take the same route between the two points.

3. The tractor foreman would ride with different drivers constantly and would check the movements of others.

4. We should discharge the boys of ages 15-17 and should substitute with older men. This meant that we must discharge 3 boys.

The young foreman reported to me the next morning and began to put the above steps into practice. Thanks to his ceaseless efforts, we were free from accidents and damages since then, except for three minor repairs.

About two days later, when I met in the Administration Building Mr. Rupkey, Chief Engineer, he threatened vehemently that the department had decided upon taking all equipment away from Japanese and substituting with Caucasian workers. Knowing the alarming condition then existed, I did not think he was bluffing. I thought he meant what he said. I explained to him the measures I had taken and advised him that we should be given a chance to prove that we could cope with it. I recommended to him that the similar steps should be taken with other crews. I told him that we were in the weeding-out process. It was impossible then to distinguish

capable drivers from incapable ones until one actually had seen them in operation. I promised him that we would soon see calmer settled days after this transitional period. Mr. Rupkey was impressed and said that he would wait and see.

Since that day the condition improved gradually. The alarming situation was corrected and all the tractors, including heavy-duty types, are operated by Japanese at present.

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On July 4, the Firebreak and Recreational Area (area marked as 'a' on the map) was finally raked up and cleaned. Now it was the question of burning the trash. But it was too dangerous for a small group of men to undertake.

1. Huge quantities of highly inflammable dry trash were scattered all over the area; in some parts densely heaped up, in another part too close (20 feet) to the combustible barracks fabricated with tar paper.

2. Gale and whiff wind, which were of daily occurrence, complicated the question of burning.

I thought, "If we only had the assistance from the boys of the Recreation Department and the firemen. Why not? This area belongs to the Recreation Department, anyway. They have about 150 boys, who aren't doing anything. Firemen? Sure! All they do is play baseball."