

Crystal City Internment Camp History

The cooks showed the greatest cooperation for the difficult task. The hours were long and the dining room with a capacity of sixty.

Operation, with development at some later date, was a necessity from the standpoint of providing food for the opening hospital, as well as, to the new employees arriving periodically to undertake the duties required by the ever increasing camp population.

Four roughly made tables, with a seating capacity of six each, dishes gathered from odds and ends in the warehouses, and a one-oven stove is symbolic of the early Officer-Hospital Mess Kitchen and Dining Room.

Most of the divisions having been placed in working order, the kitchen personnel was scarcely better equipped with skill, for the eight Japanese cooks were by trade, truck farmers, grocermen, and florists or nursery operators, to whom kitchen work was both new and very complicated by the American way of preparation. These men were to be trained and supervised by a Steward, employed to plan the meals, order food, equip the facility.

Office equipment had been ordered, but, shipment was slow. A round dining table, an apple box, pen, and pencil served as desk, file case, and typewriter, respectively.

On July 1, 1943, the first meals were served. This, in itself, was uneventful, the morning's preparation was chatter, not understandable, for it was in Japanese ran riot. It developed that cooking was the least desired occupation, after once being tried, even a full day was too much. They wanted to stop work immediately.

After a morning of conference, it was agreed that cooking would go on, the mistrust and skepticism were obvious.

By September a routine was established which proved quite satisfactory. The increasing hospital census and new civilian employees, especially teachers, and the opening of a second dining room for internee orderlies and nurses aides brought about the need for a larger force of cooks.

With this addition, two shifts were formed, each shift taking turns working on the morning and evening schedule by the week. Some of the men began to show skill in management, some developed as followers, thus a chief dining room cook and a chief hospital cook were selected for each group, along with cook's helpers, dish washers, dining room attendants, and clean-up men.

Cook's uniforms consisting of white shirts, white trousers, caps, and aprons brought about pride to the extent that a group picture was requested by the men themselves.

New Years Day 1944 was declared a cook's holiday, in keeping with the Japanese tradition. The dining rooms were closed, the hospital mess was served with the assistance of German orderlies and nurses aides.

allowed to follow their national food habits.