

My name is Jim H. Akutsu. I am 61 years old and born and raised in Seattle, Wash. I wish to thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to reiterate some of the experience I had during the second world war.

My appearance before this commission seems like picking up on unfinished business which I got involved some 40 years ago. I am very happy to sit before you to continue the discussion of the traumatic experience I had to endure which ultimately ended in my being sentenced to 3 years and 3 months in the maximum security at the Federal penitentiary for stealing government documents and as a draft-resistor. I will try to address only the physical condition, psychological harassment, deprivation of human rights and dignity that happened to me and my family during our stay in camp.

PRICE OF LIBERTY AND FREEDOM IS A CONSTANT VIGIL AND THAT VIGIL IS DEMOCRACY.

I was at the Seattle Civic Ice Arena when the announcement came over the P. A. system that the war was declared. The following events are the most unforgettable and outstanding; 1) the FBI interrogation and father being taken away for no just cause, 2) the humiliating weekly trips to the Immigration station to see father for a few minutes and trying to find out where he might be sent, 3) father's place of business quarantined - closed and sealed when the war broke out and how we got ripped-off by the wholesalers taking back uncrated boxes of shoe findings at a tremendous discount, 4) having to lose all of what my father regained after the great depression, the roving caravans of "carpetbaggers" and opportunists who forced their way into our home without any regards to our feelings and making ridiculous offers on the household items and taking terrible verbal abuse if I did not agree, 6) losing our home and rental properties because for poor counselling and not being able to be present at the time of the sale, 7) leaving our home with what we could carry to the embarking area and looking back for the last time. We lost everything because of the evacuation.

Before getting too far into our discussion I want to show you the WILL I made on the 26th of December 1941. I fulfilled my obligation as an American citizen responding to the call for duty, took my physical and waited for induction. I was never called for duty but shipped out of Seattle classified IV-C, an "enemy alien" despite being born and raised in United States. Previously, I tried getting into the National Guard as well as the ROTC at the U. of W. where I was a student attending the school of engineering. In both cases I was rejected.

Classified as an IV-C, "enemy alien" I entered the Puyallup center and after getting over the initial emotional shock of being in the camp I noticed many old, sick, crippled, blind who could not endure the ordeal of standing out in the cold and rain for their meals so they were not eating regularly. Over the

objection of the Camp Steward I made a proposal to the chief cook to start a "tray-service" with 5 - 6 girls carrying hot food to them in time.

Several months later I left Puyallup for an unknown final destination in a vintage passenger coach with blinds drawn and armed soldiers. I was appalled at my first sight of the desolate camp. The first thought that came to my mind was CONCENTRATION CAMP. As I entered the camp over the guarded bridge a sinister feeling overcame me, ---CONCENTRATION CAMP.

Our living quarter was a small single wall subicle approximately 9' x 12', small window and for furnishings 3 cots and a pot-belly stove. No chair or table and a primitive outside "John". Strange, all the doors to the outside had the doorlatch on the outside which meant only one thing, "LOCK-IN". Or was this the "protective custody"? It was at best a very primitive standard of existence, a miserable place to be.

For months we endured poor food and harsh living conditions. It was my understanding that WE WERE TO GET THE SAME KIND OF FOOD AS SERVED IN THE ARMY MESS-HALL, SAME TYPE OF LIVING QUARTERS AS IN A PERMANENT TYPE ARMY BASE AND AN EQUIVALENT CLOTHING TO SUIT THE CLIMATE. I felt that we were being cheated and that someone had to speak out. My complaints were first addressed at the block level but without any response I went to the Administration level.

When the universities in the midwest and Texas opened for enrollment, I applied for a "SCHOOL LEAVE" only to find myself on the "STOP LIST". Again in the fall I tried going out to harvest. For the same I was denied leaving camp.

I kept requesting for better food and improvement of the poor prevailing condition but they did not improve. The steward listened to me but he blamed the poor food and shortage of building, plumbing and electrical material on the break-in of the boxcar at the railroad spur or at the warehouse in camp. It was very hard for me to believe all the poor planning, oversight, shortcoming, excuses, etc. at our cost and the terrible anguish of having to bear it was true. We had all the talented people; carpenters, plumbers, electricians plus lots of cheap laborers who could have very easily completed the unfinished portion of the camp. The wage scale was from \$6.00 to \$16.00 a month. He told me that things will improve because they will be replaced. They were never replaced. We remained hungry, cold, uncomfortable and sick.

With winter approaching the mornings and evenings were getting cold but we were only getting token delivery of coal. Beyond the fence, there was a big scrap pile from building construction but guards were placed there to keep us away. There was no alternative but to burn sagebrush. For this we were punished by not getting any coal delivery.

Prisoners in our own country, we were stripped of all our material possession and given only the bare essentials for

....food, shelter and clothing at the most elementary level. There was nothing else left for me but to let the authority know that I wasn't happy with their insensitive attitude. Yes, I raised "HELL". For my constant reminding to the chief cook, block manager and the Administration I was reported to the Internal Security as a possible agitator and later put on their surveillance list.

The 1942-43 winter was a very rough one. To make things worse the segregation got started with the imposition of the infamous questionnaires by the Army and WRA authority....ARMY or a possible DEPORTATION. The questionnaires went off like a bomb creating much confusion, frustration, anxiety, panic, distrust, disruption in the family, etc. and causing tremendous mental and physical strain throughout the camps. My biggest question was, can the government DEPORTme? Only if I were an enemy alien. I would have to wait for my "day in court".

I was warned by one of the Internal Security, an old family friend, that I have been put on the Internal Security's surveillance list as a possible agitator. And also, warned by a block resident that a nissei was in the area inquiring into my conduct; as to what my position was on the draft or whether I was holding meetings, etc. I caught the nissei pressuring and interrogating mother. I did not waste any time and physically kicked him out into the snow. I couldn't trust anyone else other than my family.

The news came thru the grapevine that father was going to be sent to the maximum security "PRISONER OF WAR" camp some where outside of Shreveport, La. It was very hard for me to believe this. He had always taught us to be a good American citizen. We got letters from Shreveport that were so censored that it was impossible to understand the letter. Then, news came that father was very ill and that he might die. This was the most trying time for mother. I saw how it was tearing her up physically and mentally. I could not watch what was happening to her but there was little I could do. What price did her health pay as she withstood such pressure? What price, gentlemen?

Working for the Bureau of Reclamation I got all the news of the irregularities and stealing which went on in the camp warehouse and at the railroad spur. One evening I saw hogs being loaded into a truck and driven out into the desert.

In the winter of 1943-44 we got a wire instructing someone in our family to meet father at the gate at noon. It was snowing and very cold. As I hit the main road from our barrack an old man asked me where the Akutsu family lived. Being in a hurry to get to the gate I pointed out the direction to the old man. I waited three hours at the gate in the cold before I returned home. I couldn't believe my eyes. The old man whom I directed earlier in the day was my father. He too hadn't recognized me. I was down to 105 pounds. Although mother felt relieved that father was back it was a shock for her to see him in such an emmaciated condition. She had been under tremendous emotional, mental and physical stress. Shortly thereafter

her health gave way she started to get weaker and weaker and finally succumbed to a total physical break-down. She was under emergency care for many days hovering between life and death. Her eyes were like jellow and she was too weak to talk. From that day on to the day that the FBI picked me up, I did not miss a day going to the hospital after work to visit her and to help the least unfortunate patients.

As she laid in the hospital howering between life and death all of my pent-up feeling exploded. I was mad...furious. I was pushed to my break-point. I went to the Administration to tell them that I have had it with the whole affair. That I was writing Wash., D. C. and to the newspapers to expose all the irregular things going on at camp at our cost. I was really mad. I must have said a lot things and I didn' care.

Shortly thereafter when I got back to my barrack I found an envelope slipped under the door. It was a copy of a letter sent to my draft board by a WRA official asking the board to tamper with my induction notice. Supposedly the selective service was used for induction on a lottery basis and not used as an instrument to violate an individual's rights. In my case it was used as such an instrument. I wrote to General Hershey in Wash., D.C. but I got no response. I found out later that I was charged with stealing government document.

I was not surprised when I got my induction notice but I was disgusted with the WRA authority for stooping so low and the board who carried out the instruction to tamper with my induction notice. I was to have reported for induction on d21 May 1944 at the camp hospital. Date of mailing was 10 June 1944. When I got the notice it was late June or early July.

I was prepared for the worst, to be DEPORTED or go to prison. I was warned by a person who had been detained many months in county jail, that "I might get 'my day in court', but in the end it might cost me my life. Penitentiary is a rough place." I chose to have my "day in court.

I had already fulfilled my obligation as an American citizen in December 1941. As of the date on the induction notice I was still IV-C an "enemy alien". I had been stripped of all of my personal and real property, coerced and forced to accept the status of an enemy alien and put into a concentration camp. I was an enemy alien. The opening statement at my trial, my day court, was "that I was an enemy alien waiting to be deported therefore I do not have to report for induction and that my induction notice had been tampered....". I addressed the judge/jury pleading my case along the same testimonials you have been listening for the past month. I know my position was out of ordinary but in all reality I was an enemy alien, but, not by my own choice. This was a TEST on the government's action against the Japanese/American. In either case, ENEMY ALIEN or CITIZEN, the BURDEN OF PROOF rested upon the government themselves to judge honestly and reply to themselves. As an enemy alien I signed up for Crystal City, Texas to be repatriated

but did not sign any document renouncing American citizenship. As long as I was concerned I did not have it, therefore, I had no American citizenship to renounce. On different occasions whether in camp, county jail or in the Federal penitentiary I was called upon to renounce the American citizenship, which I never signed. And if I had signed, the government would have had every right to deport me. There were many cases of deportation of Japanese/American who signed away their citizenship under duress and restraint.

As I have reiterated my case before you gentlemen, due to the forced evacuation I and my family lost all of our real and personal property. We endured many years of mental anguish, stress and humiliation, the constant harassment of surveillance. I was denied the opportunity granted other internees to leave camp to continue my education or seek employment because of the stop order. We suffered cold, hunger, sickness, misery and broken family. Father was sent without just cause to a maximum security prisoner of war camp and I spent over 2 years in maximum security in a federal prison and lost mother. All this was because of insensitive WRA administrator and uncaring governmental agencies. Gentlemen, for the mental and physical deprivation our family had to endure, mere apology is not acceptable.

There is a lesson for all to be learned here if our suffering is to have any meaning. The lesson is that we live in a country which is supposed to be governed by laws and procedures. Under this system, if a wrong has been committed, the one who has been wronged has the right to seek redress.

Our internment in concentration camps was the result of laws not being followed, and of rights being denied. To deny us again of what is rightfully due us would be to again deny us of our rights.

Therefore, I request full monetary redress to all individuals who have been interned in the camps during World War II.

Thank you.

5 SEPT. 1981
John H. Ruten