

Ordeal of

TOKIO YAMANE



I would like to submit my written testimony to the Commission because I live in Fukuyama City, Hiroshima, Japan, and have been unable to appear personally before the Commission to give my oral testimony.

My name is Tokio Yamane. I was born in Iniole, Hawaii, and prior to World War II lived in Fresno, California, where I was a Senior at Edison Technical High School. I participated in many athletic events, particularly the West Coast Relays in 1940, 1941 and 1942, and established many records. I won the California Inter-High Track and Field Events in 1941, and because of my athletic achievements and my academic standing, I anticipated attending Fresno State College.

However, that was not to be because I was deported to Japan in 1945 and have resided here ever since. The reasons I finally signed the document renouncing my U.S. citizenship and was deported to Japan were as follows:

DEPORTATION

- 1) The U.S. Government incarcerated me as a common criminal at the beginning of World War II simply because, although I was a native-born American citizen, my ancestry was Japanese.
- 2) While at Tule Lake I was forced to undergo a brutal interrogation during the course of which I was so severely beaten by the WRA authorities that I suffered permanent facial disfigurement.
- 3) I had to make a living and take care of and support my widowed mother who was a victim of the A-bomb.

Thus, I should like the Commission to make a matter of record the fact that I did not go to Japan of my own free choice, but the decision was made for me by my own government and, indirectly, by the President of the United States.

First, I was forcibly evacuated to the Fresno Assembly Center, then I was sent to Jerome, Arkansas, then to Tule Lake, and finally to Santa Fe, New Mexico, a Justice Department Camp for enemy aliens, and eventually was deported to Japan in November 1945.

Some of the outstanding events which led me to question the validity of the treatment I received during the four years of incarceration were:

TULE LAKE

- 1) Was it not a violation of the rights granted American citizens by the U.S. Constitution and the Bill of Rights to incarcerate American citizens without due process, particularly when these citizens had not been guilty of any wrongdoing whatever?
- 2) Why were only persons of Japanese ancestry forcibly removed from their homes and incarcerated while citizens of Italian and German extraction were not? Was this not the grossest discrimination against a minority based on ancestry?

3) The Loyalty Questionnaire — Why was this questionnaire not administered prior to the evacuation? To conduct such a survey during the incarceration only shows the determination of the WRA and other government agencies to create dissension among the internees by "divide and conquer" tactics. They succeeded in this end because the questionnaire brought about dissension and disorder within the internee community by dividing members of families and friends, and causing bloodshed and several murders. This tactic also brought about a number of untimely and tragic deaths, and so it should not be ignored or simply dismissed as a wartime tragedy — a forgive and forget matter — because in the 1940's persons of Japanese ancestry were still unsophisticated in matters of politics and they were manipulated by the U.S. Government and its various departments.

4) As the war of nerves continued between the WRA authorities and the unfortunate and helpless detainees at Tule Lake an incident happened in November 1943 which forever changed my life and the lives of several other detainees. It is this incident which I would ask the Commission to thoroughly investigate and make a matter of record as one impact of EQ 9066 on the U.S. citizens involved.

FOOD STEALING

It was on November 4, 1943, as I recall, that the Tule Lake Food Warehouse Disturbances occurred. A Mr. Kobayashi, a Japanese American on security patrol, discovered several WRA Caucasian personnel stealing food from the internee Food Warehouse during the night and loading the food on their own truck which was parked alongside the warehouse. Mr. Kobayashi, who had the authority of a warden, remonstrated with the WRA personnel because they were taking the internee's food without authorization — they were

actually stealing the internee's food. Mr. Kobayashi was attacked by the Caucasian WRA personnel and a scuffle ensued.

As the scuffle was going on, the Organization for the Betterment of Camp Conditions, made up of representatives of the numerous internee blocks, was holding a meeting. As soon as news of this incident was brought to the attention of the organization, the Reverend Kai and Mr. Kuratomi, the heads of the organization, asked Mr. Koji Todorogi and myself, who were attending the meeting to go to the scene and try to restore calm and keep the situation under control by bringing back the internees who had gathered at the scene of the incident.

As Mr. Todorogi and I were heading toward the warehouse area, several Caucasian WRA personnel suddenly appeared out of the darkness and attacked the two of us, without any provocation on our part, with pistols, rifles, and bats, and finally took us to the WRA office.

As the two of us were being interrogated, Mr. Kobayashi, the warden, was brought in by another group of Caucasians. During his interrogation Mr. Kobayashi was hit on the head with such force that the blood gushed out and the baseball bat actually broke in two. I was a witness to this brutal attack and remember it very vividly.

I was not able to do anything to help Mr. Kobayashi. There were more than ten Caucasian WRA personnel there, but none of them even tried to give him aid. Not only that, the Caucasian who was responsible for this savage attack even boasted of his act by showing off the broken bat to the other personnel and laughing. From about 9 that evening until daybreak, we were forced to stand with our backs against the office wall with our hands over our heads and we were continuously kicked and abused as we were ordered to confess to being the instigators of the disturbance. We denied these accusations but our protestations of innocence were completely ignored by our tormentors. The beating continued all night long and at daybreak the three of us were turned over to the Military Police and we were thrown into the stockade for confinement.

SAVAGE BEATING

It was during this night of horror that I was so severely beaten about the face that my teeth punctured my lower lip, resulting in permanent facial disfigurement.

As if the camp authorities had been expecting this incident to happen, the Military Police detachment immediately entered the detainee compound with tanks, machine guns, tear gas and started their repressive measures to cow the detainees, and to overwhelm the youth organization which was made up of unarmed and defenseless teenagers. The repressive measures and the martial law instituted by the camp authorities took the following forms:

- 1) The MP tanks and jeeps constantly patrolled the area in a show of force designed to harass and frighten the detainees.
- 2) Unannounced and frequent inspections of the detainees' barracks in search of alleged contraband such as kitchen paring knives, sewing scissors, carpenter's and gardener's tools.
- 3) Firing of tear gas at small groups of unarmed internees assembling at bath houses and bathrooms to get water for washing, or gathering at the coal pile to get coal or kindling for heating, or gathering at the shower area waiting to bathe, or at the laundry area to do their laundry. These repressive measures lasted two or three months and resulted in nightmarish fear, particularly among the very young and the very old detainees.

THE BULLPEN

It might be of interest to the Commission to learn that Tule Lake had a stockade where internees were imprisoned for relatively minor offenses, and within the stockade area was located the "bull pen" in which detainees were confined for more serious offenses. Prisoners in the stockade lived in wooden buildings which, although flimsy, still offered some protection from the severe winters of Tule Lake. However, prisoners in the "bull pen" were housed outdoors in tents without heat and with no protection against the bitter cold. The bunks were placed directly on the cold ground, and the prisoners had only one or two blankets and no extra clothing to ward off the winter chill. And, for the first time in our lives, those of us confined to the "bull pen" experienced a life and death struggle for survival, the unbearable pain from our unattended and infected wounds, and the penetrating December cold of Tule Lake, the godforsaken concentration camp lying near the Oregon border, and I shall never forget that horrible experience.

Mr. Kobayashi, who had been so severely beaten, was never given any medical aid even though he had suffered a brain concussion and his head wound was open and infected. He moaned and complained constantly, but no aid was ever given him. Once, at his request, I placed my finger on his wound and was shocked to see pus ooze out of his wound.

I was too involved with my own problems and after we were finally separated I lost track of Mr. Kobayashi, but I am still concerned about him, and I respectfully request the Commission to make an effort to locate him, if he is still alive, and to solicit his testimony about the food stealing incident and his treatment by the Security Personnel during his confinement in the "bull pen" and afterward.

SUICIDE

The other person taken into custody with me as a result of the warehouse incident was Mr. Koji Todorogi. I believe his father was a Buddhist priest who, as an intellectual, was taken into custody by the FBI at the outbreak of the war and sent to one of the Justice Department camps. Mr. Todorogi was a quiet fellow of small stature, and not the pugnacious type to get involved in demonstrations and disturbances. The last I heard of him is that he committed suicide soon after his return to Japan because he never got over his horrible experiences in the American concentration camps.

At this time we were all 18 to 21 years of age, very young, idealistic and naive. What a tragedy to have the internment experience make such a shambles of our lives!

As the days and months went by, our relatives and the internees made repeated efforts to have us released from the "bull pen," but their efforts were unrewarded and our pleas for justice and a fair trial went unheeded. My relatives even contacted the American Civil Liberties Union and the Spanish Consulate and implored them to investigate the conditions in the stockade and the "bull pen," and the legality of our imprisonment.

The representatives of the ACLU and the Spanish Consulate came to see us in the "bull pen," heard our story, but nothing was ever done by the WRA to hear our side of the story, to improve our miserable living conditions, or to release us. To this day I recall the marvelous taste of the cigarettes given to us by the representatives of the Spanish Consulate. It was really a great kindness these people did for us.

DIES COMMITTEE

Not long afterward, members of the FBI and the Dies Committee came to see us. To this day I remember the remarks one of the FBI agents made to me. He said that he sympathized with us, but since the camp authorities had overreacted to the attempts of the camp youth organization to investigate the food stealing incident, the U.S. Government had to "save face," and it would be unlikely that we would be released from the "bull pen." And we were not released. I was told later by a doctor who treated me that the whole thing had developed into an international incident.

Nevertheless, even after the visits of the ACLU, the Spanish Consular officials and the Dies Committee, we were still naive and trusting enough in American justice and fair play to hope that we might be unconditionally released any day. But as the days and weeks dragged on our hopes faded and we realized that we would be spending another Christmas and New Year in the "bull pen," and since we had no alternative, we decided to go on a hunger strike until we were released or until we died. It was our last desperate effort to be released after about one year of incarceration in the "bull pen."

I will not bother the Commission with the details of our hunger strikes, except to say that I eventually passed out and when I came to I found myself in the camp hospital under the warm and solicitous care of a Japanese doctor and nurses. After the fourth day of hospitalization I was unconditionally released and returned to the camp.

DURESS / RENUNCIATION

In February 1945, I was sent to the Santa Fe Internment Camp for enemy aliens. Then, in September of the same year, I and other members of the youth organization were handed a paper to sign. There were no explanations or instructions. We were simply told to sign the paper. This was a document renouncing our U.S. citizenship. I signed it because by now I had become convinced that the United States would not honor its obligation to grant me the rights of a native-born American citizen guaranteed to me by the U.S. Constitution and the Bill of Rights.

On November 30th, 1945, I was transported to Japan with others like myself, leaving from Portland, Oregon on a ship carrying such personalities as the former Japanese Ambassador to Germany, the Honorable Baron Oshima. And to date the thought lingers on in my mind — were we pawns of war to be exchanged for American prisoners?

LIFE IN JAPAN

The lives of many deportees to Japan were made even harsher by the devastation of the country and the post-war conditions of the ravaged country where food and housing were at a premium and the black market flourished. The deportees had lost all their possessions and had no money. The relatives they had hoped would help them were in an even greater economic crisis and were unable to give aid. Thus, the uncertainties of their immediate livelihood as well as their future, the lack of work and the disruption of education for their children were contributing factors to many of their illnesses, mental depression and suicides. Within a few years of their arrival in Japan the lack of proper medical care, lack of work and proper food, took their toll and many of them, young and old, male and female, succumbed to tuberculosis, and others found life intolerable in post-war Japan. Two of my sister's dear friends died as a result of such conditions within a few years of their expatriation from America. One died of tuberculosis at the age of 22 and the other committed suicide at age 23.

Many of the highly educated expatriate Nisei were hired by the Japanese Government for liaison work with the Military Government offices established by the Occupation Forces. However, those Nisei were paid in depreciated yen and many of them slept on the floor in hallways and in elevators at their places of employment, cooking their one meal at night on charcoal braziers, and subsisting on the barest necessities. No rooms or transportation were available to them and they existed in such abominable conditions from 1945 to about 1948.

SECOND CLASS CITIZENS

When these deportees were allowed to work for the American and British forces in 1950, they were hired as Japanese nationals and were paid the prevailing Japanese low wages, in depreciated yen, although their English and bilingual skills were highly sought.

For the American deportees the humiliation of being regarded as second class citizens and being treated with contempt and disdain by American forces personnel was hard to bear, but they endured because there was nothing else they could do.

All these hardships and tragedies were unnecessary, and would not have happened had it not been for the forced removal of these loyal Americans from their West Coast homes and jobs, and had it not been for the crass disregard of their inalienable rights by the U.S. Government, and for the incarceration in concentration camps lasting almost four years.

In my case, of the four years of incarceration in American concentration camps, two years were spent in the stockade and the "bull pen," and in the camp for enemy aliens in Santa Fe. What were the charges against me? What had I been guilty of? Nothing whatsoever, except that — although I was a native born American citizen — I had Japanese ancestors!

Besides the facial disfigurement still visible, resulting from the attack suffered at the hands of the Caucasian camp security personnel, I lost all of my personal belongings I left in Fresno when I was sent to the Fresno Assembly Center, and all my school records, and the records and awards for my athletic achievements which I had with me in my room at Tule Lake when I was taken into custody by the MPs and confined in the "bull pen." These records and athletic awards are very precious to me and I would ask the Commission to try to locate them and have them returned to me.

LOSS OF EDUCATION

The loss of my college education, to which I greatly aspired, but of which I was deprived by the forced evacuation and internment, is still keenly felt by me, particularly since upon my return to Japan I had to devote my efforts and energies to support and take care of my ailing mother who had been a victim of the A-bomb, and I was unable to complete my education at a Japanese university. This lack of a higher education has left me with a sense of inadequacy and has greatly handicapped me in my business career. The setback I suffered because of the incarceration delayed my business career and advancement by as much as 15 years, actually much longer than that suffered by those Nisei who had remained in the concentration camps.

I believe the Commission should recommend some form of reparation, and that amends should be made for this flagrant violation of human rights suffered by so many Americans of Japanese ancestry, and the injustice they had to endure as a result of Executive Order 9066. Many of the internees have never fully recovered financially and emotionally from being forcibly evacuated and incarcerated some forty years ago, and they should be compensated for their losses while they are still alive.

I thank the members of the Commission for the opportunity given me to state the impact of EO 9066 upon my life, and the lives of others who have been close to me.

— Tokio Yamane