

**THE FIRST  
ROHWER  
REUNION**



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# THE FIRST ROHWER REUNION

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**JULY 20 & 21, 1990  
STOUFFER CONCOURSE HOTEL  
LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA**

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ALICE KALIYA  
SHIRLEY NAGAOKA  
COOLIDGE OZAKI  
CINDY & CHARLES FONG WONG





## Foreword

In conjunction with the First Rohwer Reunion held on July 20 and 21, 1990, in Los Angeles, California, this booklet was prepared and published not only to commemorate the event, but also to provide a historical background and information about the Rohwer, Arkansas, concentration camp in which more than 8,500 Japanese and Japanese Americans were interned during World War II.

It is important to note that writing only about the Rohwer concentration camp leaves a large void of how and why the enforced Evacuation from the West Coast and the internment of 120,000 Japanese and Japanese Americans by the United States government happened. We have, therefore, written an overview of the history of the Issei and Japanese Americans beginning with the early days of immigration from Japan.

The scope of Japanese immigration history covers more than one hundred years and in this short booklet, it is only possible to skim the surface of the events and movements of the people. For those interested in a more definitive history, there have been published a number of books, many of which are still available, about the Issei, Japanese Americans, and also the Evacuation.

Photographs published in this booklet are from the National Archives, courtesy of Stone Ishimaru and Alan Yoshimi, the Pacific Citizen, and from many former Rohwer internees who have graciously lent us their personal photographs for this booklet and the photo exhibit. And a special thanks to Harry Honda of the Pacific Citizen and Robert Hasuike of Manhattan Beach for their help in providing some of the research material required to write and produce this booklet.

Kango Kunitsugu  
Editor  
June, 1990

## The First Rohwer Reunion

The First Rohwer Reunion, to be held on July 20 and 21, 1990, in Los Angeles, California, is a historical event of great dimension. There was a reunion of former Rohwer High School students held in Stockton, California, a few years ago, but the First Rohwer Reunion, as the reunion has been named, is the first reunion ever for all former internees of the camp. In fact, we probably are the last of the ten concentration camps to hold such an event.

It will be the largest get-together of the people from the camp since the Rohwer camp was in operation. In attendance will be many Issei who are now in their 80s and 90s, and there will be Nisei who are now in their 50s and 60s. And then also coming to the event will be some who were toddlers in the camp and can barely remember it.

The fact that this reunion, held 44 years after the camp was closed, also lends a sad note to the event. Most of the Issei have passed away during the period, and we all wish that this reunion could have been held years earlier since we know that for years the Issei had looked forward to attending such a function. And so in a belated way, we dedicate this reunion to the Issei, who bore the brunt of the Evacuation and the internment.

The announcement of Presidential Executive Order No. 9066 by President Franklin D. Roosevelt in early 1942, which triggered the Evacuation and forced more than 120,000 people to be interned in concentration camps, happened more than 48 years ago. However distant the memories of the events may be to all of us today, it will never be forgotten by any of us.

It is a deep scar which runs across the face of the nation, and often called the "Great American Tragedy," it should also never be forgotten by the American people. The events which led to the Evacuation and internment are now part of history, but they are a grim reminder to everyone in the nation that intolerance and prejudice are the seeds which grow until they force aside reason and understanding. The victim in the end is justice and liberty.

And so during the First Rohwer Reunion, there will be joy and happiness as we greet friends with whom we experienced the Evacuation and internment many years ago. The memories will come rushing back, and though the details may be a little hazy, the friendships made and events experienced in the camp have sustained and strengthened all of us. In a way, we could say that we had survived and therefore, we celebrate with each other the fact that we are able to meet again 44 years later.



**BRIDES FROM JAPAN**—Just landed in San Francisco, these women from Japan looked apprehensive as they waited to meet their Issei husbands. Many were picture brides, and others were here through “arranged” marriages by their parents. With their Issei partners, these women played a major part in the proud history of the Japanese people in the United States.

## Issei Persevered in Spite of Hardships and Discrimination

On May 17, 1868, a British vessel with 149 Japanese aboard landed in Honolulu. The group included six women and two children. Although Hawaii was an independent kingdom at that time, this event was the beginning of the history of the Japanese in the United States.

The Japanese passengers were, however, not immigrants but contract laborers who were basically “shanghaied” from Japan. The government of Japan prohibited emigration of laborers. Hawaii had become a major supplier of sugar to the United States and an extreme shortage of laborers for the sugar plantations had forced the owners to seek cheap labor from foreign nations.

Combing the streets of Yokohama of laborers, the ship’s recruiters signed up the 149 Japanese to three-year contracts. When the Japanese government attempted to stop the recruitment, the ship set sail illegally with its laborers, which was only half of the number they were seeking.

Unfortunately for the plantation owners, this initial group of laborers did not turn out to be good field workers. Most of the Japanese were “city people” from the steamy dark alleys of Yokohama who were jobless and not used to hard physical work. Future recruitment of laborers from Japan, once it became legal, was switched to the farm areas of Okinawa and Kyushu.

In 1884, the United States pressured Japan to allow laborers to emigrate as the agricultural and lumber industries of the Western States were facing labor shortages. The railroads were also having a

tough time. The Chinese laborers, who had completed their contract obligations, were leaving the tough railroad jobs and heading for the cities.

By 1900, there were 24,000 Japanese working on the West Coast and about 10,000 of them were working on railroad section gangs. Most of the rest of the Issei were working for the canneries, lumber mills and farms along the West Coast. Many also worked in the mines in the Rocky Mountain area. Like the Chinese workers before them, the Japanese laborers began to drift to the cities after their contract work had been completed and others began farming on a share-cropping basis.

### THE ANTI-JAPANESE MOVEMENT

With the influx of the Japanese on the West Coast, the anti-Chinese activity of race mongers shifted their attention to the Issei, who had begun to alarm the white farmers and labor unions. The Issei farmers were beginning to outproduce them. Anti-Japanese organizations began sprouting up and down the West Coast, and they were instrumental in forcing the United States to pressure

Japan to sign a so-called “Gentlemen’s Agreement” in 1907 which barred the immigration of laborers from Japan. By 1909, about half of the Japanese were working on farms and three-quarters of the farm workers were in California.

Issei farmers, utilizing farming techniques they learned in Japan, reclaimed land which were considered not usable for agriculture, and began to develop many areas into rich agricultural areas. By 1909, the value of Japanese grown crops were valued at \$6 million and by 1920, it was to increase to \$67 million. The anti-Japanese movement in California, therefore, escalated with farm associations, politicians and the media screaming to “send the Japs back to where they came from.”

In the meantime, Japanese women by the thousands were arriving from Japan to join their husbands or to marry men already here. It was the beginning of the stabilization of Japanese communities in many cities and towns up and down the West Coast. Those living in the cities and rural towns opened small stores and shops to serve the Japanese farmers and the ghetto Japanese communities. Children were born, Japanese language schools were opened to maintain and teach Japanese culture, and although there was still a large population of single men, the growing family structure within most of the Japanese communities began to play a major role in the direction of the growth of the communities even though they were still dominated by the men.

The Issei had brought with them the strong

*By 1900, there were  
24,000 Issei working  
on the West Coast.*



**GANDY CREW**—Many Issei men came to the United States to work on the railroads. The tough and hardy men represented the first glimmer of the Issei's contribution to the development and growth of the West Coast.



**TOUGH AND LONELY WORK**—An Issei couple work on their leased farm in a tough and lonely job. It was the farmers who were the strength of the Japanese communities.

values and ethics of the Meiji and Taisho periods of Japan and, denied acceptance into the white man's world, in addition to being harassed by politicians and newspapers, they retreated to their original values and ethics as a source of protection and inner strength.

Although quite a large number of Japanese were living in cities and towns, the farming families provided the economic strength of the Japanese communities. In fact, if it were not for the farmers, the many Little Tokyos up and down the West Coast would have collapsed. The Japanese were discriminated against in employment, forced to

live in segregated areas and denied public accommodations in many of the cities and towns.

The drumbeat of the anti-Japanese organizations continued, as politicians and newspapers intensified the beat. Mob violence, including arson and forcible expulsion from farming areas, began to occur with increasing frequency. In Arizona, nightriders who had successfully chased away native Indian and Chinese farmers from a rich agricultural area, were met with stiff resistance from the Japanese farmers, who were helped by a contingent of Issei leaders from Los Angeles, and gave up trying to scare the Japanese farmers away after a two-month campaign of intimidation and

terror.

Finally, in 1913 the racists and politicians got together and passed the infamous Alien Land Law, which prevented Asians from owning land in California. Other states quickly followed California's lead and Oregon, Washington, Nevada, Arizona, Idaho, Texas, Nebraska and even Delaware passed similar laws. In 1920, not satisfied with the discriminatory law, California passed a more restrictive Alien Land Law.

The basis for the racist Alien Land Law was a law passed by Congress in 1790 which restricted eligibility for citizenship to aliens "who were free white persons." It was actually passed to prevent Blacks who had been brought in as slaves from becoming citizens. The law was later amended after the end of the Civil War to allow "persons of African nativity and descent" to become citizens. In the meantime, Filipinos, who were considered "brown," and aliens from Japan, China, and other Far East countries, who were considered "yellow" were prevented from becoming citizens.

### **THE ORIENTAL EXCLUSION ACT OF 1924**

The blockbuster was the 1924 Oriental Exclusion Act passed by the United States Congress under pressure from the politicians from the West Coast states. Primarily aimed at the Japanese, the

### *In 1913, politicians and racists got the Alien Land Law passed*

law halted immigration of Asians from Far East nations. It was a national insult to Japan since it was the United States which had originally insisted on Japanese immigration in 1884.

Constantly faced with discriminatory actions and laws, many Issei became disillusioned and returned home to Japan. On the other hand, most Issei still harbored a future in the United States despite the harassments and with patience, pride, and hard work, stubbornly pushed on. The Issei created exemplary Japanese communities in the cities and towns of the West Coast in the '20s and '30s by keeping the members of the communities off public welfare and police blotters by taking care of their own problems.

For example, in Los Angeles where the largest population of Japanese resided, Japanese doctors were not allowed to send their patients to the local hospitals because the doctors were denied membership to the hospitals. The community built and operated its own hospitals.

Additionally a rigid community code of conduct was applied to all families through a network comprised of local Japanese associations, kenjinkais, and other community organizations. The young Nisei chafed under these strict rules, but the Issei were comfortable with it since they had always lived under the same restrictions in Japan. It was also their form of security from the threats of anti-Japanese factions. The Issei figured that by the people keeping out of trouble, trouble would then keep away from them.

But they never counted on war between the United States and Japan.

**ARRESTED ISSEI LEADERS**—Within 48 hours after the war broke out, Issei community leaders were rounded up by the FBI and sent to detention camps as “dangerous enemy aliens.”

## Outbreak of War Raises Rhetoric Against Japanese

December 7, 1941. Japanese planes bombed Pearl Harbor and triggered the expansion of the ongoing war in Europe into a total world war. Until that day, the people of the United States were in a great debate about whether the nation should avoid or enter the war to help England and Russia in their war with Germany. Although the United States was providing the Allies with war equipment and supplies, the war in Europe seemed distant and not too important to most Americans. Pearl Harbor changed that attitude with a vengeance, and its spillover changed the lives of all Issei and Nisei.

The Japanese communities were stunned by the news and a deathly silence prevailed as the impact of the war with Japan was something they were least prepared for. Issei leaders of most communities met, but on the whole were undecided as to any concerted program to counteract the expected expansion of anti-Japanese movement on the West Coast. They feared the worst and the worst happened.

Within 48 hours after the attack on Pearl Harbor, the FBI, with the help of local police departments, swooped into the Japanese communities and arrested hundreds of Issei. Moving swiftly with a blanket “Presidential Warrant,” the government agents picked up the Issei at their homes and took them away. Most of the men in the initial roundup were community leaders who were board members of various community organizations ranging from Japanese associations, business organizations, farmers’ co-ops, martial arts, Buddhist churches and Japanese schools. A second roundup a few months later by the FBI arrested Buddhist ministers and Japanese language teachers. Although no specific charges were filed against these Issei, they were arrested because “the enemy aliens would be dangerous to the public peace and safety of the United States,” according to government officials.

The Issei men were eventually shipped and interned at 26 special camps set up in 16 different interior states. Many of the families did not know where their fathers were sent or even what happened to them for about a year after their arrest.

### NIGHTRIDERS AND MURDERERS

It was a fearful and terrifying period for the people. Bereft of community leaders, the people didn’t know what to do as the war hysteria fanned



by the jingoists swirled around them. Nisei, most of whom were still in their teens, were being beaten by roving gangs of thugs, which forced the Chinese to wear “I am Chinese” buttons for their safety. A few Japanese were murdered, and nightriders shot up homes of Japanese farmers. All during this period, public officials did nothing to stop this outrage and some even encouraged it with their so-called “patriotic” inflammatory statements.

Governor Culbert Olson and Attorney General Earl Warren of California, in addition to Mayor Fletcher Bowron of Los Angeles, all joined the fray to demand that the federal government “do something about these sneaky Japs.”

Congressman Leland Ford of California demanded that “all Japanese, whether citizens or not, be placed in inland concentration camps,” adding that loyal Nisei could “contribute to the safety and welfare of this country” by going to camp voluntarily.

Warren admitted that there were no acts of sabotage of fifth column acts in California, but added that the absence of such activities by the Japanese Americans was confirmation that such actions were planned for the future. And so it went on the West Coast during the first few months after the beginning of the war. The politicians had a field day bad-mouthing the Issei and Nisei.

With the exception of the American Friends Service Committee, a Quaker organization located in Pasadena, no other organization or prominent person spoke up to defend the defenseless Japanese and Japanese Americans. A few individuals who did were quickly dismissed as “Jap lovers.”

### TERMINAL ISLAND EVACUATION

In an ominous precursor, the Western Defense

*The FBI arrested many  
Issei 48 hours after  
attack on Pearl Harbor*

Command under Lt. Gen. John DeWitt on February 17, 1942, gave the Japanese people living on Terminal Island 48 hours to evacuate. Most of the people were fishermen or worked in the canneries, and the military orders took everyone by surprise. The residents didn’t have time to dispose of their large belongings and worse, they had no place to go. Temporary hostels were set up until the families were able to find suitable housing in Los Angeles. Once the people were forced out, it didn’t take long before all the homes were looted.

Then in late February, a curfew was ordered for all Issei and Japanese Americans living along the West Coast. Everyone had to be in their homes at night and no one could travel more than five miles from their home without special permission. The noose was tightening.

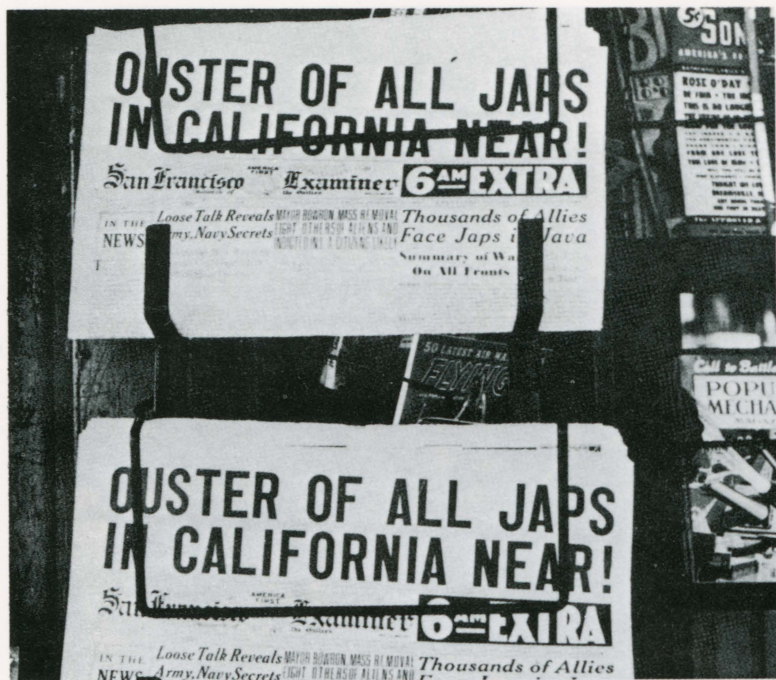
In Washington D.C. others were loudly clamoring to get heard on the issue. Senator Tom Stewart of Tennessee declared that “the Japanese are cowardly and immoral. They are different from Americans in every conceivable way, and no Japanese should have the right to claim American citizenship.”

Not to be outdone, Congressman John Rankin of Mississippi said “this is a race war. I say it is of vital importance that we get rid of every Japanese whether in Hawaii or on the mainland . . . Damn them! Let us get rid of them now!”

To many young Nisei on the West Coast reading such stuff almost daily in the newspapers created a feeling of both anger and helplessness. Listening to the news and commentaries on the radio also added to the confusion. It was all negative, and the immediate future appeared foreboding and scary.

The fact that John Edgar Hoover, the FBI chief, stated to government officials that there was no sabotage committed in Hawaii fell on deaf ears. The ball was rolling, and men in top positions of President Roosevelt’s administration, including Secretary of War Henry Stimson, were urging the President to move on the “problem.”

Unknown to the innocent Issei and Japanese Americans, on February 19, 1942, President Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066, the infamous order to evacuate all Japanese and Japanese Americans from the West Coast.



(Above) HEADLINES—News of the Evacuation hit the streets with big headlines in West Coast newspapers. (Right) Soldiers posted Evacuation notices in areas where Japanese were living to notify them of their forced removal.

## The Evacuation and Internment Caused Untold Losses

When news of the proposed Evacuation hit the Japanese community in Los Angeles, everyone became numb with incredulity. All that flak about getting “rid of the Japs” by politicians, newspapers, and radio had seemed like just a lot of anti-Japanese rhetoric to many of the people, but now it was really happening to the horror of everyone.

The worried Issei of each neighborhood gathered together to discuss the ramifications of the Evacuation order. The news was pretty sketchy, but it was a government announcement and the concern was the Evacuation’s effect on the future of each family and the Japanese community as a whole. In many of the neighborhoods, there were families where the father had been taken away by the FBI after the outbreak of the war and since no one knew where they were taken, the Issei took a bleak and gloomy outlook on the situation.

The Nisei youngsters were also concerned about what was going to happen, but another dimension was added to their thoughts—were they Americans or were they Japanese? They lived in multi-racial neighborhoods along with Blacks, Chinese, Mexicans and Whites all their lives and had thought that they were the same as their friends. They met racial prejudice only when they left their neighborhoods. Few had ever been to Japan and most spoke only the most rudimentary Japanese in order to converse with their Issei parents. They were all confused and in shock.

Some had older brothers already serving in the Army, and the incongruity of the situation puzzled

them. “Is he going to stay in the Army, or will they order him into the camps with the rest of us because he’s a Japanese or a Japanese American or whatever they think he is?” asked a worried Nisei. “The whole thing stinks.”

### FARMERS IN QUANDARY

Meantime, the Issei farmers up and down the coast were also in a quandary. Many had agricultural crops ready for harvest and wondered what to do. Others had planted their crops for the coming season and were concerned about whether they should continue irrigating and weeding to save the new plants. Since the Issei farmers were a major source of agricultural products in California, the government got into the act. The farmers were told to continue taking care of their planted crops and harvest as required. It was a no-win situation for the farmers.

In the meantime, scavengers converged in areas where the Japanese people lived and bought furniture and appliances from the distraught families at ten cents to a dollar. The buyers swooped into the

*Scavengers ‘bought’  
furniture from people  
at 10 cents to a dollar.*

Japanese communities like locusts knowing that the people had to get rid of all household goods in a short period of time and took every advantage of the situation. Bedroom, living room, and kitchen furniture was being hauled away by the truck loads by buyers who showed no mercy in bargaining with the people. It was take it or leave it, and many of the families, incensed with the cold-hearted attitude of the buyers, gave their household goods to their neighbors.

Many families stored their belongings in the local Buddhist churches, but in the end, almost every church was looted during the war. It was a disheartening situation, and since no one really knew what was going to happen to them, many felt that they would never be back, and they handled everything on that basis. They got rid of everything they could and left the rest of the stuff to history. All they knew was that they were being put into concentration camps and that they could only take what they could carry.

Meanwhile, Army personnel on Jeeps began posting Evacuation notices on buildings and utility poles. The posted notices defined zones to be evacuated, usually covering an area with about 250 families, giving the date and the place to assemble from where the people would be transported to temporary assembly camps in buses and trains “escorted” by armed Army soldiers.

Rumors were flying around the various Japanese communities as to the final destination of the

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**THE BEGINNING**—Japanese residents from downtown area of Los Angeles gather at collection area at the old vacant railroad station to wait

for busses to take them to the Santa Anita Assembly Center (1942).

## The Evacuation

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Evacuation, and the most persistent story was that they were all headed to concentration camps located in remote deserts. With that rumor in mind, many families living in the cities began purchasing heavy boots since they were positive that the thin city oxford shoes they wore would not last a month in the desert terrain. There was also a run on lumberjack-type shirts since it was said that nights in the desert got pretty cold. No one really knew during the early days of the Evacuation, but many families were not taking any chances. Families too poor to buy these extra protective wear just had to go with what they had and hope for the best.

### EVACUATION OF STOCKTON AND LODI

Evacuation notices were posted in Stockton and Lodi, two small farming towns in Northern California about fifteen miles apart, in early May, 1942. Everyone living in both cities and the surrounding areas were ordered to assemble at a specific location in each city. They were to carry

with them bedding and linens (no mattress), toilet articles, clothing, "sufficient knives, forks, spoons, plates, bowls and cups for each members of the family, and essential personal effects."

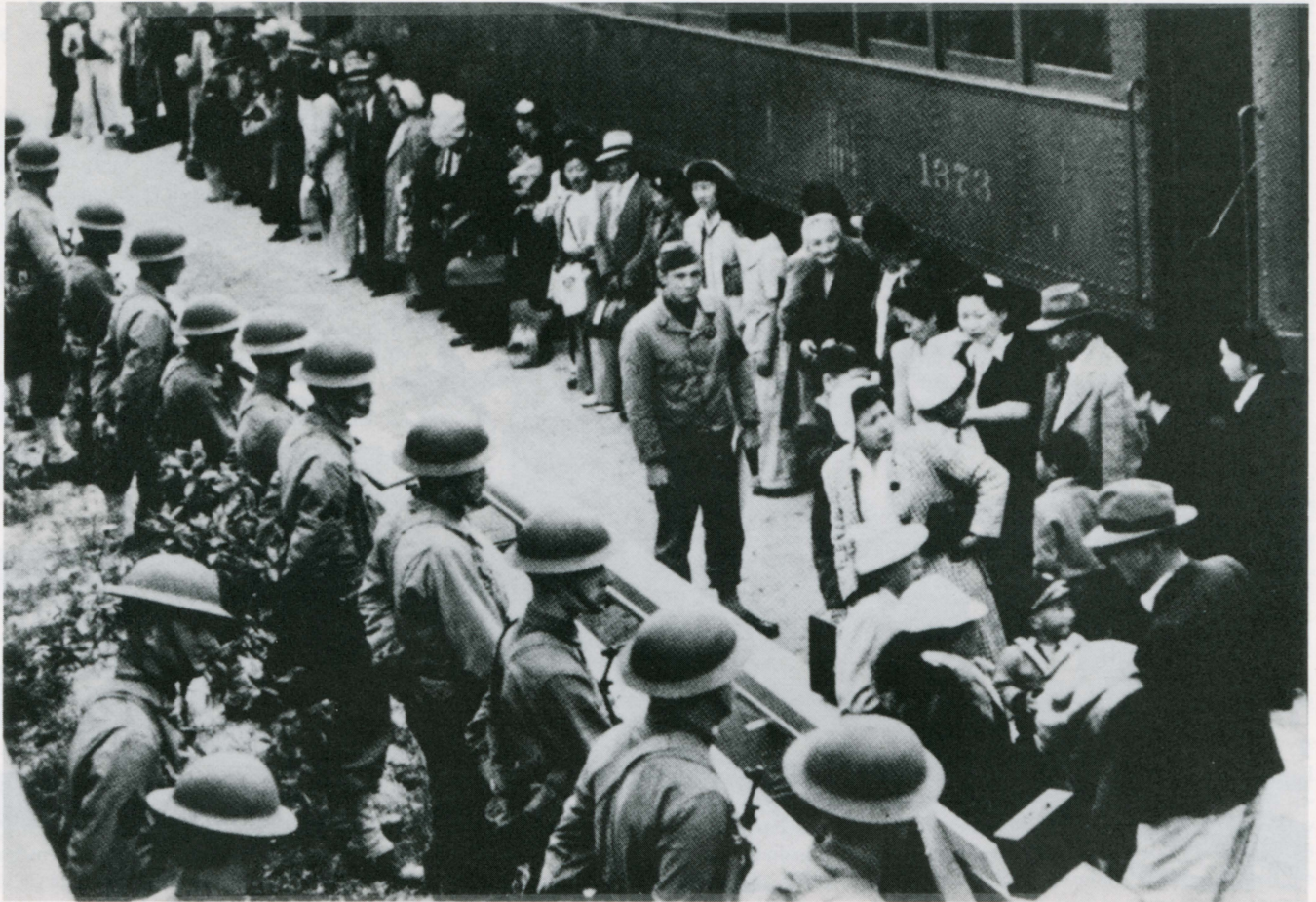
Suitcases were not a normal item in most Japanese households and so there was a rush to purchase cheap fake leather wood-frame suitcases to stuff and carry what they could. A number of families dug out their old straw carrying cases which they had originally used 25 to 40 years before when they first emigrated from Japan. The old cases were stiff and bulky, but clothes and bedding were easy to pack. It was a frantic situation with less than a week's notice and many

valuable personal items had to be left behind.

The Evacuation of the Japanese from both Stockton and Lodi was accomplished in one day with the people transported to the Stockton assembly center. A total of 4,271 persons were herded into the makeshift center, which was a former fair ground.

In the meantime, the story was the same in Los Angeles except that it was on a larger scale. There were about 60,000 Japanese living in Los Angeles County, and there was no way the Army was going to evacuate all those people in one day. And there was no single camp capable of holding that many people. The Evacuation in Los Angeles County took a number of weeks to complete, and the people were sent to different camps including Santa Anita race track (18,719 persons), Pomona fair grounds (5,434), Manzanar (10,046), and Poston (17, 814). Like the Stockton center, Santa Anita and Pomona were temporary assembly centers, whereas Manzanar and Poston were concentration camps for the duration of the war.

*The Evacuation forced people to leave behind many valuable items.*



**END OF THE LINE**—Japanese evacuees end first step of Evacuation as they get off trains and are greeted by armed soldiers at the Santa Anita

Assembly Center. The people were dismayed to see soldiers and guard towers surrounding the camp.

## 18,719 People were Crammed in Santa Anita Assembly Center

The temporary so-called assembly center at Santa Anita already had security fences around the huge race track, but tall military guard towers were constructed around the perimeter of the race track property. Seeing the guard towers with helmeted soldiers with bayonet-mounted rifles for the first time was a shock to the evacuees as they were led to the camp entrance after getting off the trains and buses which had transported them from their towns and cities.

The trains and buses loaded with evacuees continued to roll into Santa Anita during a three-week period. As each group was herded into the camp, they first had to go through an inspection line where every suitcase and package had to be emptied. The inspectors poked and rummaged through the personal effects of everyone looking for "contraband" like kitchen knives and any other items which could possibly be used as a weapon.

Evacuees were being sent to Santa Anita from all over the state. They were from San Jose, Mountain View, Santa Barbara, San Diego, Los Angeles and other areas of Central and Southern California.

"When our family and the rest of us were first sent to Santa Anita, I never forgot my first impres-

sion of the place . . . I never saw so damn many Japanese in my life," said a young Nisei. "In fact, I didn't know that there were so many Japanese around."

The Santa Anita Assembly Center, which was to be the premier thoroughbred race track in the nation, was hastily converted into a concentration camp to house over 18,000 Issei and Japanese Americans. The huge parking lot where thousands of horse players used to park their cars was now a sea of wooden barracks set in geometric order. The one-story buildings each had eight small units as housing units for the Japanese evacuees. The units were basically sleeping quarters with four bare walls and Army sleeping cots. Being temporary, the buildings were put together quickly and in a slipshod manner. Privacy was at a premium as the wooden partitions were never joined properly, and a single hanging light bulb served as lighting for each unit.

On the other hand, the housing units set up for the people in the stable area were worse. There were rows of low buildings in the western section of Santa Anita which used to be the stable area for some of the more famous horses who used to run in

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**SANTA ANITA**—Hundreds of barracks were built on huge parking lot of Santa Anita race track.

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the race track. Each small unit had a double door, the top half which could be opened so that horses could stick their necks out, and the floor was paved with asphalt. The walls were whitewashed, but it was still a horse stable. Four Army cots took most of the space and so very few people spent time in the stable units except for sleeping. It was bad enough to make a person wonder about the personal worth of a human being. It was a humiliating situation.

"I mean it was horrible. It was just a place to sleep, if at all, and if it weren't for the fact that thousands of others were faced with the same situation, I would have screamed to high heaven for the indignity of the damn thing," remembered a Nisei. "How low can you get? It made me feel like I was nothing. Or maybe equal to a horse."

### THE MESS HALLS

People ate in huge buildings which were called mess halls. There were the "Blue," "Red," and "White" mess halls where you were served cafeteria style. You stood in line with thousands of other people to eat, and if you were just a little late, it took at least a half hour before you were lucky to even get into the place. Then you grabbed a plate, moved into a line where they plopped the food into the plate and then went looking for a place to sit among thousands of other people who were eating, or were trying to eat with dignity, on long tables elbow to elbow with other people, who were total strangers. You just ate the slop and left. There was

nothing personal about eating in a huge mess hall. It was like a pig farm where everyone ate because they were feeding you, but the food you ate was something you never remembered . . . you just ate and fled the mess hall. It was a mess, all right.

For a few months there was a camouflage project where about 800 Nisei were "employed" at eight dollars a month to make huge camouflage nets for the Army. But for most people, there was simply nothing to do. Thousands of people were just aimlessly walking around the huge compound looking for friends or anything else of interest.

Fenced in a huge compound with guard towers, there was a totally helpless feeling which prevailed in the camp. For the youngsters, it was just a new experience. They made new friends and life seemed "normal" on the surface, but for the older people it was a demoralizing situation. They had lost everything they had worked for, and the future looked bleak. All they had was what they were able to carry into the camps—some clothes and bedding, toilet articles and a few small personal belongings like family albums.

Outside of the fence, the people watched the automobiles whizzing by on Huntington Drive as if nothing had changed. Many cars slowed down as people drove by the Santa Anita Assembly Center to gawk at the Japanese behind the fence, but the military police on Jeeps quickly appeared to warn the drivers to keep moving. Nevertheless, looking outside from inside the fence, everything seemed normal, and nobody appeared to care that thousands of American citizens were interned in a

concentration camp within the County of Los Angeles.

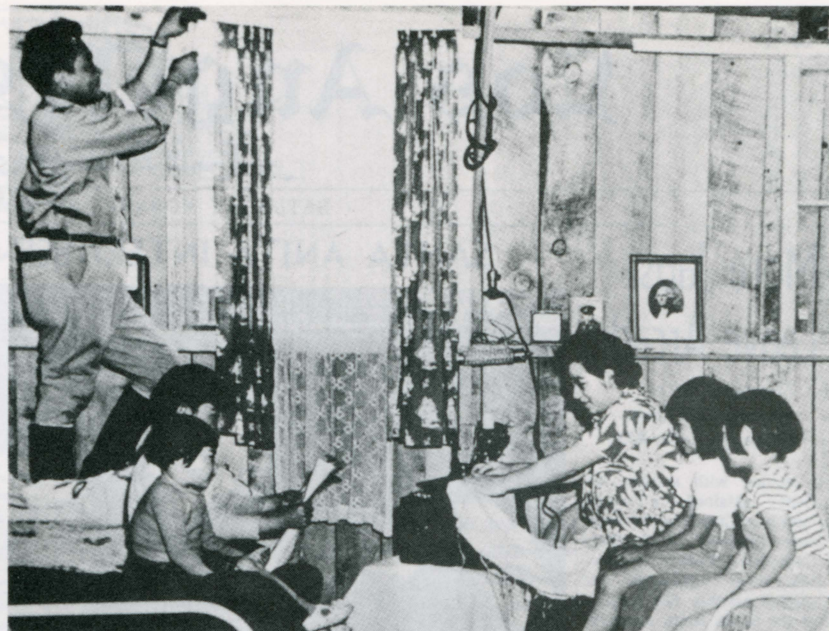
### TIME FOR ASSESSMENT

For the Nisei, it was a time for assessing who they were and where they fit in as Americans. Their original belief of being an American was trampled on by the Evacuation and internment. The outcome of the war was still in doubt during the early days of the internment, but most Nisei felt that eventually the United States would defeat Japan, and since nothing was said about what the government was going to do with the interned Issei and Nisei after the end of the war, there were all kinds of wild and scary rumors floating in the camps.

One rumor which really worried the Nisei was that the government would eventually ship all Japanese, aliens and citizens, to Japan. It seemed farfetched, but so did the Evacuation until it happened. In the world outside of the barbed wire fences, there were politicians and newspapers demanding that all Japanese be sent to Japan, which didn't help the frame of mind of the Nisei, many of whom were already disillusioned. Just the thought of the idea sent chills through most Nisei.

Another crazy rumor had the people being sent permanently to an Indian reservation and being treated as second-class citizens like the Indians, who were really the true native Americans. To many of the people, after what had happened to them since the outbreak of the war, anything was possible.

**FIXING UP**—A family puts up drapes for privacy and to soften the harsh and bare quarters in the Stockton Assembly Center.



## County Fair Grounds Became Stockton Assembly Center

The Japanese people from the San Joaquin Valley, which included the cities of Stockton and Lodi where the largest concentration of the people lived, were herded into the hurriedly-built Stockton Assembly Center during May, 1942. The assembly center was built at the San Joaquin County Fair Grounds, which was located near State Highway 99 in Stockton.

After going through a line where everyone had their hand-carried luggage and suitcases inspected for contraband such as kitchen knives and other items which the inspectors thought could be used as weapons, the people were given a quick health check. Each family was assigned a unit as their living quarter, and they trudged to their new "home."

As they carried their belongings, the rows of barracks with their black tar-papered walls looked ominous to the evacuees. Many of their worst fears were realized when they entered their units for the first time. Their unit was a small single room measuring 20 ft. by 20 ft., which was the largest, and worse, the walls and floor were constructed of rough-hewn lumber. A single light bulb hung from the ceiling.

### SOME WOMEN CRIED

Picking up their Army cots and blankets, a family of five didn't have much room left after the cots were arranged in the small room. Some women, after the initial ordeal of leaving their homes and friends that morning, and ending up that evening surveying the bleak situation in the camp, sat down and cried.

The Stockton camp officials quickly rounded up a crew of cooks and kitchen helpers from among the evacuees and hastily made meals were served in the mess halls that night. The first night at the Stockton Assembly Center was quiet as everyone silently tried to comprehend the rush of events during the past few weeks which finally brought

them there behind barbed wires and guarded soldiers.

The assembly camps were operated under the direction of the Western Defense Command, which was directed by Gen. John DeWitt, who uttered the infamous words, "Once a Jap, always a Jap." The administrative workers in the camps were civilians hired by the government.

After a short sputtering start, the camp slowly became organized. Various jobs for the camp's daily operation were assigned to adult internees. General maintenance workers, typists, sales clerks for the canteens, and recreation organizers were some of the typical jobs. The camp newspaper, "El Joaquin," was published by an all-internee staff headed by Barry Saiki, editor of the mimeographed newsletter.

### UNNERVING EXPERIENCE

Eating in community mess halls with hundreds of strangers was a new and unnerving experience as was visiting the mass shower and toilet facilities. Living in small quarters amid the tightly-spaced barracks, privacy was impossible. As demoralizing as the situation and atmosphere was, a community spirit of working together to improve the deplorable conditions slowly began to emerge among the Issei and adult Nisei.

The Issei led the way with their "shikata-ga-nai" attitude and reasoning that they were all in this

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*Using mass shower and toilet facilities was an unnerving experience.*

together, they organized groups for various cultural activities to keep everybody's spirits up. The Evacuation and internment was now a fact, and they knew that there wasn't anything they could do about it. The Issei, therefore, silently endured the situation and slowly tried to make improvements, no matter how small, of life in the camp.

They put up hand-made drapes at the small windows, not only for privacy, but also to soften the hard and raw interior of their units. Loose lumber and pieces of wood were nowhere to be seen on the grounds of the camp since they were quickly picked up and made into shelves. The small open areas between the barracks were kept free of trash as each family assumed the responsibility of maintaining them.

### A DEADENING ROUTINE

No one knew how long they would be interned in the Stockton camp, although rumors were continually making the rounds that they would be sent here or there, or even shipped to Japan. As life in camp settled into a deadening routine, the many rumors, good or bad, helped perk up conversations and an interest and concern about their next destination.

After five stultifying months in the Stockton camp, and a lot of rumors, on September 10, 1942, the camp newspaper suddenly announced the next step in their internment with the following headline: "DESTINATION—ARKANSAS!!"

Within four days, a train with about 200 internees were on their way to Rohwer. The initial group was an advance crew comprised of two Nisei doctors, a nurse, cook, kitchen workers, electricians, plumbers, carpenters, and other workers essential for opening the camp in Arkansas. In early October, the exodus to Rohwer began as trains with internees left the Stockton Assembly Center on an irregular schedule. The camp was officially closed on October 17, 1942.

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# Los Angeles Times

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SATURDAY MORNING, SEPTEMBER 26, 1942.

CITY NEWS —

## More Japs Leave Arcadia

Transfer of 500 to  
 Arkansas Cuts Camp  
 Population Under 8000

Moving with smooth efficiency attained through months of handling the Japanese problem in Southern California, Federal authorities have segregated and started another 500 inmates of the Santa Anita Assembly Center by train to Rohwer, Ark., where they will remain for the duration of the war.

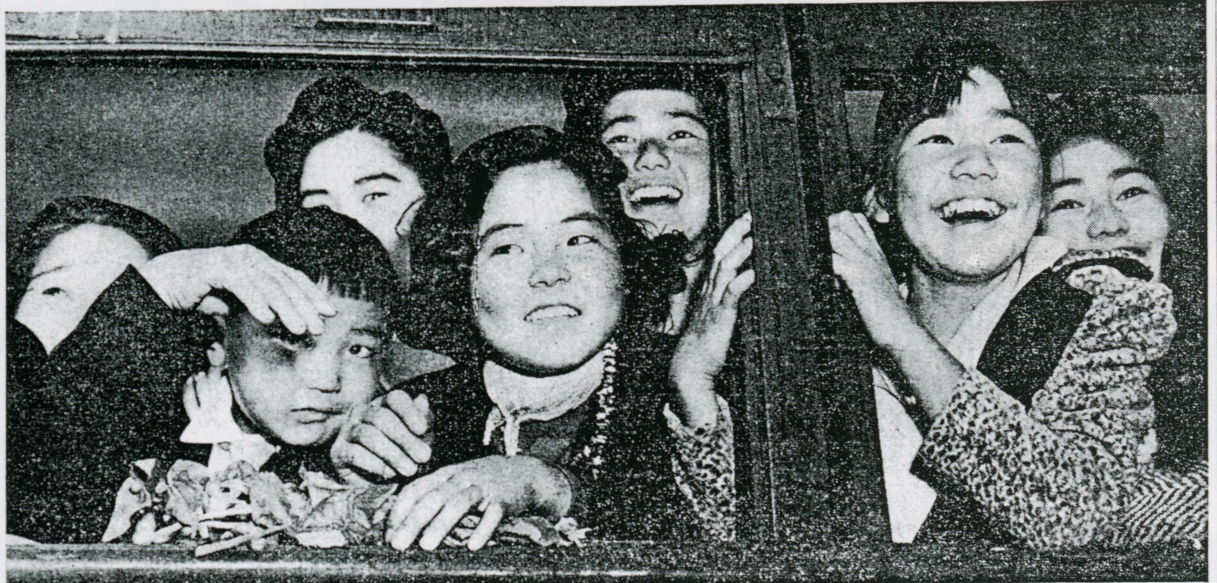
The latest of thrice-weekly departures reduced the Arcadia Center's population to less than 8000—somewhat below 50 per cent of its maximum four months ago.

### NO JAPANESE SPOKEN

Except for the slanted eyes and flat noses of nearly all the evacuees, the departure could easily have been that of an equal number of Americans of Caucasian blood.

Not a word of Japanese was

## SANTA ANITA INTERNEES SENT ON WAY TO ARKANSAS



**NO TEARFUL FAREWELL**—A train ride is a new experience for many American-born Japanese children. These young Orientals are happy as they begin a new adventure. Five hundred were moved out in the last shift to inland centers.

**ON TO ROHWER**—This is the front page of the Los Angeles Times when the first group of internees left the Santa Anita Assembly Center for Rohwer. The newspaper article sounded like they were glad to get rid of

us. Such were the times during World War II when very few of the media, with their racist attitude, recognized that they were helping to create the climate for what is now called the "Great American Tragedy."

## A Long and Weary 3-Day Train Ride to Rohwer Camp

At the huge Santa Anita assembly center, where more than 18,000 Japanese were interned, trainloads of internees were leaving almost every other day to concentration camps during late August and early September, 1942, to such destinations as in Colorado, Wyoming, and Arizona. It was a guessing game as to where anyone was going to end up. Notices were delivered to the families in the barracks and within a week, they were on the train for a long trip to their next camp. Since they were allowed to bring into the camps only what they could carry, which were the bare essentials of items needed to live daily in a concentration camp, it didn't take long for the people to pack their belongings and board the trains.

Unlike Santa Anita, the entire population of the Stockton Assembly Center was headed for the Rohwer concentration camp. The 4,271 persons were transferred over a period from September 14 to October 17, 1942, when the camp was officially closed. It took eight trainloads of internees, about 500 persons per train, to empty out the Stockton camp.

From the Santa Anita camp, the first trainload of internees left for the Arkansas concentration camp on September 25, 1942. Eventually, about 4,200 persons were sent to the Rohwer camp from

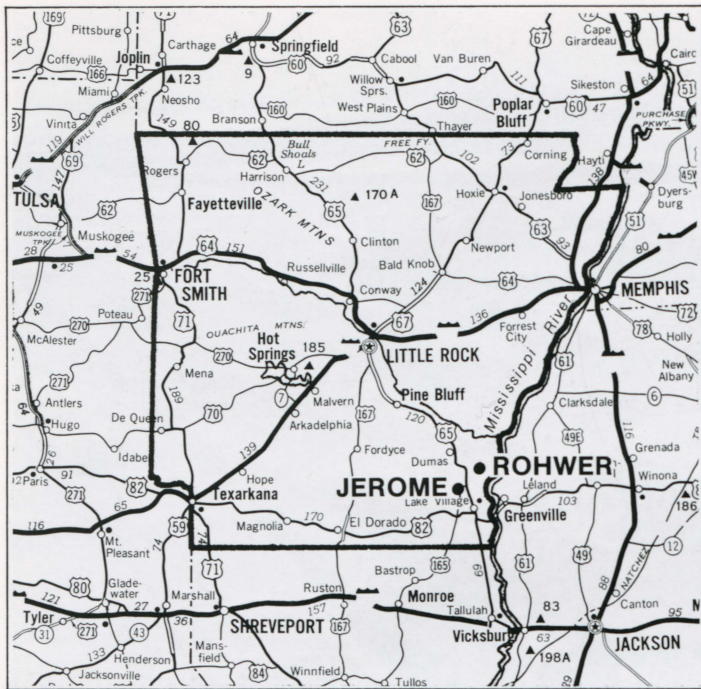
Santa Anita, which was about equal in numbers to the entire population of the Stockton camp.

### FIRST TRAIN RIDE FOR NISEI

For most of the young Nisei, it was their first train ride and also the first time they had ever left the state of California. The Issei, on the other hand, had ridden on trains and buses in both Japan and the United States, and even steamships as they crossed the Pacific Ocean to immigrate to the West Coast. In fact, a lot of the Issei men had worked on the railroads and mines in the Rocky Mountain area and as far east as Nebraska. So it was old hat to the Issei men with the exception now they were riding the rails as "enemy aliens" and being transferred from one concentration camp to another with their families. And it was no "free" ride.

The trains from both camps took the southern route through the states of Arizona, New Mexico, Texas, Louisiana and finally to southern Arkansas, where the Rohwer camp was located. It was a slow and long three-day trip with many stops along the track sidings to allow faster trains to pass by.

There was a war going on, and it was evident that every rolling stock in the country which had wheels was in service because the trains the internees rode were vintage cars with gas lamps and



**ROHWER**—The camp was less than ten miles from Mississippi River, and Jerome, the other concentration camp, was about 25 miles from Rohwer. Rohwer, the farming area didn't really have a town, and the nearby town of McGehee was the closest post office. The area was a swampy delta region.

rigid wooden seats. Air conditioning was unheard of in those days, and the windows had to be kept closed so that the soot from the smoke-belching engines pulling the cars would not enter the cars. With the train crammed with people, it was stifling hot and uncomfortable.

The military police were in the last car of the train, and they would walk through each car from time to time to check things out. Whenever the train stopped, whether at a railroad siding or at a station in a small town, the soldiers would jump out and stand guard on both sides of the train just in case someone would try to escape, which never happened, but they also stood guard to keep the curious townspeople away from the train.

Most of the townspeople did not know that the trains carried Japanese internees since the government tried to keep a lid on information about the train movements in order to avoid trouble from the local populace as the trains rolled by the towns and cities. In fact, shades in every car had to be pulled down anytime the trains stopped in a station. In a way, it was a spooky train ride.

### RESTLESS CHILDREN

There were a lot of kids on the train, and it seemed like most of them were constantly racing from one end of the train to the other end. There was a lot of admonishing, "Now you sit here and be quiet!" type of stern parental orders, but most of the restless children were off and running within five minutes. And in a way, it was a crowded madhouse.

Many of the young people were excited about the train ride because here was a chance to see the country which you only read about in geography books in schools and originally, they sat glued to the windows taking in the scenery as the train chugged eastward. Going through Arizona, New Mexico and Texas, however, the scenery never changed. It was a continuous band of endless

expanse of plains during the first two days of the ride, and it didn't take long for most people to become quickly bored. No mountains, no trees, and no rivers.

The only thing that the people looked forward to was eating. It was the only time the young children sat quietly with their parents as they waited to be fed. The food wasn't much, as sandwiches were served during lunch most of the time, and it appeared that the cheapest and easiest to cook food was for dinner. Rice and shoyu was a no-show.

One of the strangest things about the dining cars were the black waiters in their white coats. The internees sat down at the tables, the waiters brought a plate of food and eating utensils. You ate and then left as the waiters cleared the tables for the next group. It was never made clear as to whether the waiters were Army personnel or employed by the railroad company running the train. Anyway, it was a weird situation since at the assembly centers, everyone had to line up, grab a plate, have food slapped on, find a seat, eat, then take the plates and utensils to the dishwashers. It was surmised that the cars were too narrow for that type of service, and the method utilized was probably efficient and faster even if they had to have waiters.

### GRIDLOCK AT WASHROOMS

Probably the biggest problem riding for three long days on the train was trying to keep and feel

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*Changing clothes was impossible and most wore same clothes during trip*

clean. There was one small washroom in the back of each car with a toilet and a wash basin. About all anyone could do was to brush their teeth and wash their face. There was a gridlock every morning in front of the washroom. With the September heat of the Southwest and unable to wash up, the first thing everyone swore they were going to do when they got to Rohwer was to take a shower.

Changing clothes was almost impossible, and most wore the same clothes during the three-day trip. When it came to sleeping, you just slouched on the hard wooden seats and slept in your clothes. Some took off their shoes and others slept with them on, but it really didn't matter since everyone was in the same uncomfortable situation. The more fastidious internees changed socks every day, and some even managed to change shirts or blouses in the washrooms, but it was a losing proposition since the muggy and stuffy heat in the cars induced perspiration faster than you could change shirts. It was a no-win situation.

Sleeping was also difficult since the people had to sleep where they sat. It was impossible to stretch out, although many slept on the floor and in the narrow aisles hoping that no one would walk through in the dark and step on them. The rigid and upright wooden seats didn't help any, but some have said that the steady clickety-clack of the train wheels soothed them to sleep.

As the train rolled into Louisiana during the third day, the people began to perk up a little since the scenery became more interesting with clusters of trees and some bayous appearing. More invigorating was the rumor that the train would reach the Rohwer concentration camp late that afternoon. The long three-day train ride had sapped the energy and spirit of the people, and in an incongruous way, the passengers seemed happy that the long ordeal was over and that they were finally reaching the end of the line, a concentration camp.

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**BIRD'S EYE VIEW**—Rohwer concentration camp under construction during 1942. The camp began construction in July, 1942 and was completed in January the following year, which was three months after the

internees arrived. Nails and scrap lumber left by contractors were prized items of the people.

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As the train rolled by the small town of McGehee, Arkansas, everyone on the train knew that the long journey through half the length of the United States was almost over. The train had travelled along the bayou area of upper Louisiana and lower Arkansas, and the sights the people saw were as different as any they had seen or expected, although many had read about the South. It was a shock to see through the windows of the train a lot of things they had read or heard about.

The train, moving slowly, had passed by fields of cotton, which was nothing like what the passengers expected. Coming from California with the verdant green fields of vegetables and fruits, the stark cotton fields with its spine-like bare leafless stems with small tufts of cotton on its ends did not appear to be productive fields. The whole scene was a mystery, especially to the Issei, who were more familiar with lush green fields of vegetables.

Another scene, which affected most of the young Nisei, was the wooden shacks in which the black people lived. The weather-beaten homes of the poor blacks, built about a foot above the existing ground on wooden stilts to escape the flooding from the frequent torrential rains of the areas, gave proof to many of the viewers that the South was really what they had read and heard about as far as the lives of the blacks were concerned. It was obvious that the black people in the South were not on equal footing with the rest of the people of the South. To many of the Nisei, it was a cultural awakening of the world around them even if they were headed to a concentration camp. On the other hand, very few of the black people who watched the train full of Japanese people go by knew that the passengers were headed to another version of the white man's prejudice and wrath.

As the train slowly moved past the small town of McGehee in Arkansas, most of the passengers

were at the windows looking for their next home. They knew that the destination was near because the train was slowing down.

It was a clear warm day in September, late in the afternoon. No one really knew what to expect and, coupled with the strange sights of the South they were witness to during the last day of the train ride, there was apprehension and concern that the camp they were headed to may be the worst of their expectations. Things were bad enough as they were.

Except for the fields of cotton on one side of the railroad with large patches of woods with tall trees, the left side of the train was all woods. The trees didn't compare with the redwood trees of California, but it was wooded fairly thick with large bushes interspersed. A gravel highway ran parallel with the railroad track, but with little traffic. There were very few people sighted along the way as the train neared Rohwer. The only positive note among the passengers was that at least the camp was not located in the middle of a desert if what they were seeing from the train was any indication of the type of environment in which the concentration camp would be located. Hope springs eternal and any positive sign, whether to soften the approaching internment in an unknown concentration camp or an improvement over either the Santa Anita or the Stockton assembly centers, was

wished upon as an omen for better treatment and a more comfortable confinement.

**"ROHWER!"**

Voices rose as the train neared the camp and everyone moved to one side of the train to get their first look at Rohwer. As the train slowed down in front of the Rohwer concentration camp, there were a lot of disappointed groans as the rows and rows of tar-papered barracks came into view. A closer inspection of the sight also brought into focus the ubiquitous barbed wire fences and the guard towers. It was not unexpected, but still disappointing and depressing.

"Rohwer!" yelled the soldier as he walked through the cars. "Get ready to leave!"

People began scrambling back to their seats as others went looking for their children. Taking down the battered cheap suitcases from the shelves above their seats, the Issei solemnly sat down on the car seats to wait for the next step in their life. A few calmly picked up some loose papers on the floor and dutifully took it back to the trash box in the rear of the car. They wanted to make sure that the car was in the same condition when they left as when they first boarded it. Although they did not consider themselves as guests, it was a trained habit and part of their culture to make sure that you did not show disrespect to your friends or strangers by leaving behind a dirty room or place.

As the steel wheels of the train whined to a stop on the rails, the soldiers jumped off the train from each car and stood by the entrance to the cars. They helped the elderly off the high steps as other internees lowered their baggage for them. Everyone slowly walked down the slope of the tracks with their suitcases and packages to the level ground covered with weeds. Most just looked at the sprawling camp in front of them.

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*Restless children would  
race the length of the  
train over and over again.*



**VIEW FROM RAILROAD TRACKS**—Bleak rows of tightly grouped barracks was the scene of the Rohwer camp from the adjacent railroad tracks and highway. The camp held 8,475 internees when it first opened.

Internees added makeshift shades above windows to shield small living quarters from hot summer sun.

## Rohwer Camp was Built in Delta Area of Arkansas

Trucks came down in front of each car, and the people and their belongings were loaded in the back and taken to the entrance of the camp where there were more military police standing guard. After a quick check by the soldiers, the truck continued into the administrative area of the camp where everyone had to get off and register. They were given tags with their family name and the unit number of their next home in the camp.

It was hot and dusty, but most were eager to go to their next "home," take a shower and rest in privacy after the long three-day train ride across half the nation in cramped old passenger cars which were put out to pasture many years before because of age, but brought back into service during the war for emergencies such as transporting internees.

There was no welcoming committee, and no one expected any. Trainloads of internees were coming in almost every day, and most of the people already there were busy putting their small units in the wooden barracks in shape. Steel army cots, mattresses and army blankets were distributed to each family, and that was it.

The trucks took them to their block, and the people were left to look for their living unit after unloading their belongings and the cots. There were 12 tar-papered barracks to a block, with six units to a barrack. Six barracks were lined up on each side of the block, and in the center were the mess hall and the restroom-shower-wash building. Each block was designed to house about 250 persons. A dirt road and a drainage ditch surrounded each block.

As the internees first walked up the wooden steps into their unit, they were faced with a stark, minimal room. The floor and walls were wooden planks, a lone bar to hang clothes and a pot-bellied stove, which was fired with cut logs to warm up the room during the winter. And that was it.

### SOME UNITS WERE SHARED

The units were simply a place to sleep. Some large families were fitted into two adjacent rooms, whereas some families with only three or four members who were assigned to the larger units at the end of the barracks had to share the units with a stranger. (Editor's note: The Kunitsugu family had a father and three sons, and so shared their unit with a Mr. Katsuki, an Issei bachelor who worked as a cook at the block mess hall.) Bachelors were usually assigned three to four in a room, and most mothers warned their daughters not to ever visit the bachelor units. And so it went as the people tried to make the best of a bad situation.

As everyone tried to settle down, the first few weeks went by with most people trying to find out where their friends were "living" in the camp. Whereas the Issei, most of whom were in their 40s and 50s, were doing their best to make life more comfortable in the small bare living quarters, the younger Nisei were all over the camp looking for their friends and trading "addresses."

Already "experienced" in living in concentration camps called "assembly centers," the internees went about their daily life in a docile and quiet way. Conversation in the living quarters was kept

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**AND WHEN IT RAINS . . . Built in the delta area, the back portion of the camp was often flooded whenever an Arkansas downpour occurred.**

**Wooden plank sidewalks sometimes were also under water, which made walking outdoors a hazardous and damp trip.**

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 at a low murmur since the walls between each unit were not exactly sound proof, to say the least. Privacy was at a premium. Most people met and conversed with their friends outside of living units since there were no chairs or tables. Young romantic couples found it impossible to be alone in the camp. Most settled for long walks around the camp holding hands.

**“WHAT CAMP WERE YOU IN?”**

Because of the Evacuation and internment of more than 120,000 Issei and Japanese Americans, the most common greeting after two Nisei strangers would meet was, “What camp were you in?” And if from the same camp, “What block were you in?” It was for purposes of identification and also to acknowledge without elaboration that they had both been through the same experience. It was a common bond to which only the Issei and Nisei could relate, and it was a strong emotional tie. And so very few people ever forgot the “address” of their unit in the concentration camps.

The “address” was simplified to the block number, barracks number and the unit letter, as in “11-3-F.” The mailing post office was McGehee, since it was the closest town with a post office. The “town” of Rohwer, outside of the concentration camp, consisted of only a few homes and cotton farms. And with an instant population of 8,475 persons, the Rohwer concentration camp became the sixth largest city in the state of Arkansas.

Located in the southeast corner of Arkansas

near Mississippi River and near the border of Louisiana, the Rohwer camp was built in the marshy delta area of the Mississippi River’s flood plain. The land was owned by Farm Security Administration of the government with plans to help the low income farm families, but because it required a lot of work to clear and drain the area, developers had abandoned it. The WRA purchased the land to build the Rohwer concentration camp in 1942.

In an article written by Russell Bearden in the Dumas Clarion, Arkansas, newspaper on September 20, 1989, it quotes an observer who noted of the wooded areas, “water moccasins, copperheads, and rattlesnakes are found there together with usual swarms of mosquitos which infest the swamplands . . . and throughout the operation of the camp, the Japanese had to live with the ever present mud and swarming mosquitoes.”

The camp was laid out and built in a square grid on about 500 acres in a series of blocks. Each block was separated by a drainage ditch and a narrow dirt road. Arkansas State Highway 1 and the Missouri Pacific Railway tracks ran a few hundred feet from the entrance of the camp.

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*Barracks units were just a place to sleep to most of the people.*

When the first internees arrived in September 1942, the camp was still under construction. With the exception of the renovation of the barracks into school classrooms and the construction of the auditorium-gymnasium, which were built later, the camp was essentially completed in February, 1943, when the hospital building became operational. Workers from the ranks of the internees completed most of the work after that.

The southwest portion of the camp, which had tall trees growing between the rows of barracks and which was the back end of the camp, was also the low area of Rohwer. Consequently, after a torrential rain, the area would be flooded above the wooden plank walks built between the barracks. Entrances to the restrooms and the mess halls in some of the blocks had to be sandbagged to prevent the buildings from being flooded.

In addition to the trees, the people planted bushes and plants, found in abundance in the surrounding woods, to soften the dreadful and repetitious sight of the tar-papered barracks lined up in military-like formation. Perhaps because of the trees and the green foliage, some people have said that the Rohwer camp was the “most beautiful” of all the camps. A “beautiful” concentration camp is incongruous, but the internees tried to improve the harsh environment of Rohwer.

**WEATHER**

The internees of the Rohwer camp were from Southern and Central California, where the weather is usually a pretty consistent element—hot,



(Above) TREES—Blocks along back end of camp were built in wooded area. Block 7 at left with Block 8 in background. (Left) BRRR!—Two-foot long icicles hanging from barrack eaves attest to the freezing winters of Arkansas.

warm, or cool, with a minimum of rain and zero snow. On rare occasions, the temperature has dipped below freezing. Tornadoes and typhoons were unheard of, and the humidity was generally low. And so with the exception of earthquakes, most of the people had lived in a comfortable weather zone all their lives. Then they were sent to Arkansas.

One of the best descriptions of the weather conditions in Arkansas was written by Eiichi Kamiya, a former Rohwer internee who revisited the camp in 1979 and wrote an article of his trip for the *Pacific Citizen*. Kamiya wrote as follows:

“To the uninitiated, Rohwer is about 40 miles north of the Louisiana border and about seven miles from both the Mississippi and Arkansas Rivers.

“We used to say that it was far enough south to catch Gulf Coast hurricanes, far enough north to catch Midwestern tornadoes, close enough to the rivers to be inundated by Mississippi Valley floods, and lush enough to be the haven for every creepy, crawly creature and pesky insect in the world. It seemed to rain all spring, be stifling all summer, have those sand flinging winds in autumn, and have the audacity to snow in winter.”

You get the idea. Everything was served up in spades, and the first year was a major shock to the internees as they tried to cope with the weather conditions which ranged from hot to cold and wet to freezing. After a cold wet night, the people would wake up in the morning to find foot-long icicles dangling from the eaves of the barrack roofs.

The soil of the area turned to dust in the summer and into a gooey sticky muddy mess during the winter. The wooden plank walks were necessary as it was difficult to walk on the stuff after the usual rain. They also kept the mothers sane as they kept most of the kids from walking into their quarters with mud-caked shoes.

The tar paper which covered the outside of the barracks did their little bit to withhold the chilly winds from entering into the units through the cracks of the wood boards, but it failed as an insulation. The cold easily sneaked through the thin tar paper.

The iron pot-bellied stoves in each unit were fired up with cut logs to warm the cold rooms during the first two years. By the third year, there were enough coal being shipped to Rohwer so that it replaced the smoky logs. Most internees had never used coal before and had to be taught how to start burning the stuff. Some thought all you had to do was throw a lighted match at a pile and the coal would start burning. Growing up in the cities and towns of California obviously did not prepare them to handle such mundane things.

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*Three teenagers were caught by police after sneaking out of camp.*

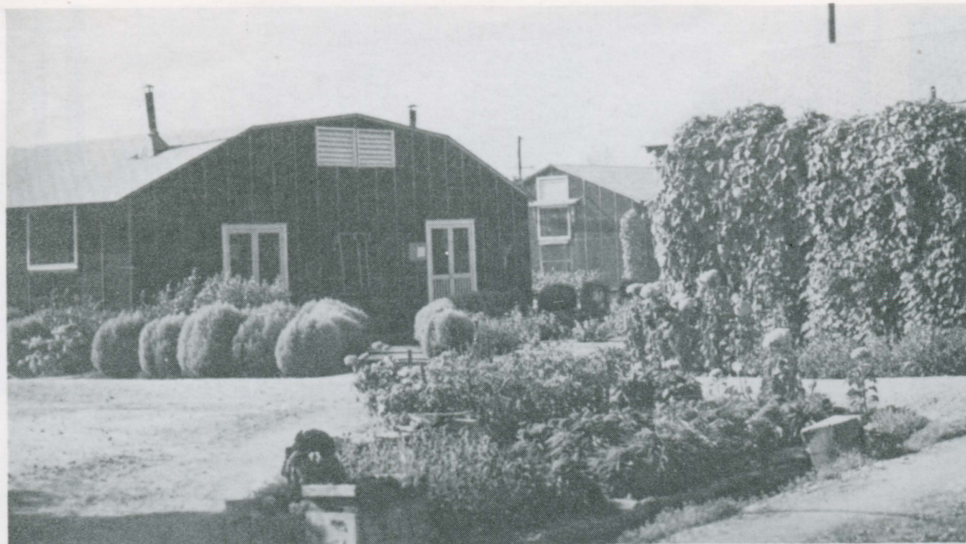
A fence surrounded the camp on all four sides with guard towers at the corners and also midway on each side. The military police had their quarters near the main entrance of the camp. The men of the military police were a friendly group, and they even had a softball team which played with the camp teams from time to time at the athletic field, and the games always drew a large crowd.

The back end of the camp was a popular “door” for Issei looking for cypress knees, or *kobu* to add to their collections. With hand saws and axes, the Issei would walk out of the camp and into the woods with the military police’s “blessings.”

Going out into the woods in the back of the camp may have appeared an easy way to escape if anyone wanted to, but the woods became denser as you walked deeper into the forest. A lot of small creeks crisscrossed the area, and they were the favorite swimming bayous for the poisonous water moccasins and the fierce gatorfishes, which had sharp teeth. Any thought of leaving the camp quickly vanished when schools of water moccasins swam by.

It wasn’t too difficult to sneak out of the camp if one wanted to, but there was no place to go without being detected. In 1943, three teenage Nisei decided to try their luck and were picked up by the state police after walking along the highway for about a half day. They were put in jail in Pine Bluff, had their hair shaven off, and returned to Rohwer. That was the first and last time anyone tried to leave camp illegally.

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**FOLIAGE**—Internees planted native plants to improve harsh environment of camp. This is Block 34.



**BARBED WIRE FENCE**—South end of camp with guard tower and fence. Rohwer memorial cemetery is to left of tree.

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On the other hand, there was a large group of internees who were trucked daily, without military guards, to an area a few miles from the camp where they were clearing a plot of land by chopping trees and building an irrigation system to grow food for the camp. And the internee farmers who grew the stuff were also working without any presence of military guards. No one was alarmed or cared that there were Japanese internees working the fields outside of the barbed wire enclosed camp.

Usually a white camp administrator went along as a precautionary measure so that there wouldn't be any trouble between the internees and any curious white people.

**MANHUNT FOR LOST INTERNEE**

In December, 1942, Keiji Yano went mushroom hunting in the woods and got lost as darkness closed in. When Yano failed to return that evening, search parties were organized and fanned out in the woods. With only flashlights to aid them, the var-

ious groups pressed through the thick underbrush and marshy terrain. The fact that it was also drizzling didn't help matters much. The search was called off at 2 a.m. as the darkness made it impossible for the searchers to see beyond ten feet.

The following morning, the search was continued with hundreds of men and youths fanning out in small groups into the woods. Yano was finally found late in the morning by Sanji Teranishi and Yo Iwahashi. The mushroom hunter, aside from the discomfort of being wet and cold, was able to walk back into camp with the search group. An embarrassed Yano apologized for the commo-

*Cotton fields were a mystery to Issei who knew only green farms.*

tion he had caused and said he was giving up mushroom hunting.

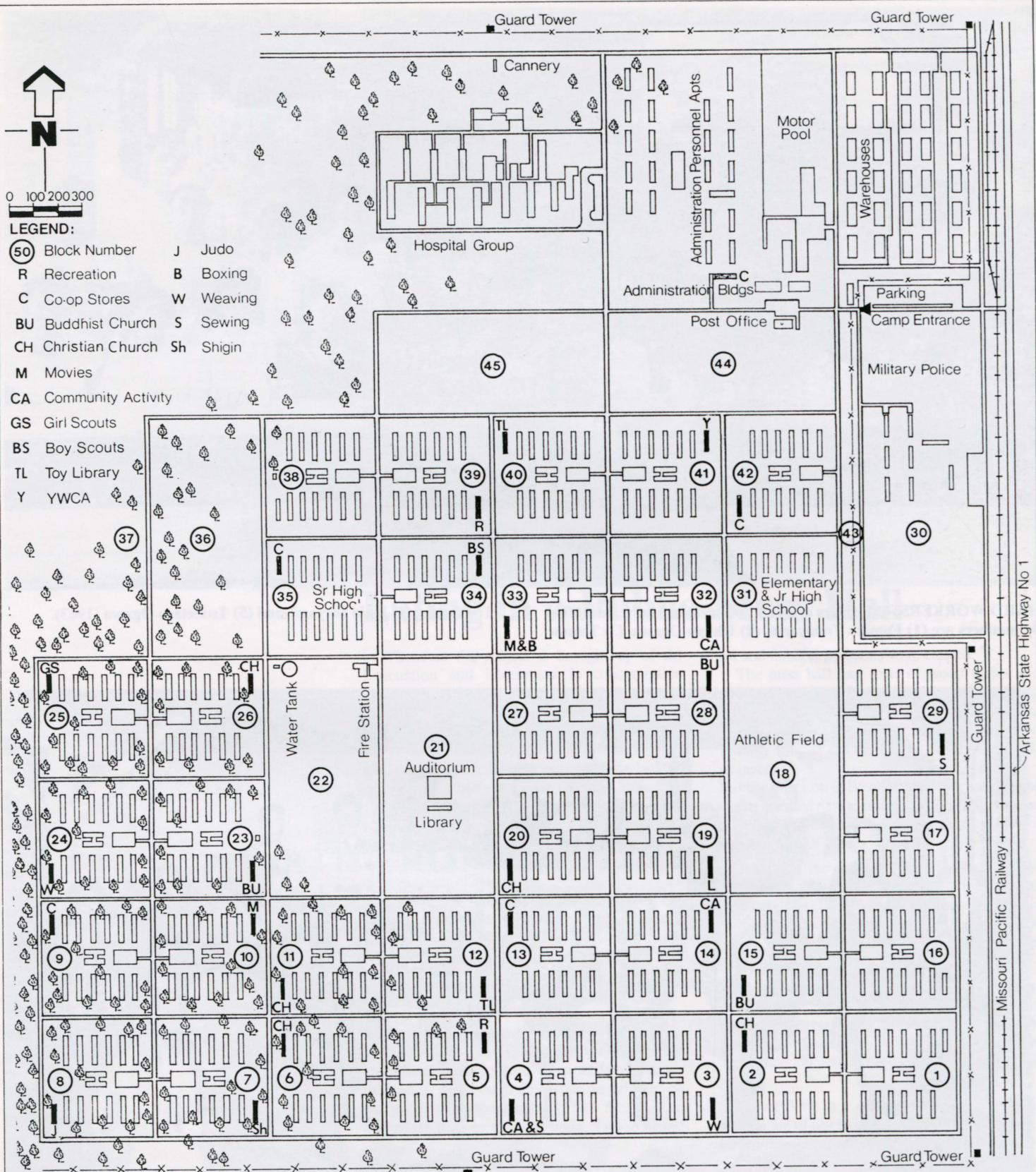
**INTERNEE SURVEYOR SHOT**

There was, however, one incident which eventually led to the requirement that a military policeman accompany a group working outside of the compound. A Nisei surveying crew from the camp's engineering section was about a mile from the camp in the woods surveying the surrounding government property. During a survey, the five-men crew would be stretched out for a few hundred yards as the lead man chops away at the brush to clear the way and others set up points and instruments in the back.

On this day during 1944, Shig Fukuchi, the lead man ran into a man from the back hills who was hunting in the woods for wild turkey. When the hunter saw Fukuchi, he yelled, "Jap!" at Fukuchi, thinking that he was escaping from the camp. Sensing a dangerous situation, Fukuchi took off and ran. The hunter fired his shotgun and hit Fukuchi in the back with a load of shotgun pellets, most of which hit his buttocks.

"It hurt like hell, but I wasn't about to stop. I kept running," said Fukuchi. Hearing the shot, other members of the survey crew came running to help. Seeing the group, the hunter fled. Fukuchi was taken to the camp hospital where the pellets were painfully removed, and he was told that except for the wound, he was okay. About a week later, Fukuchi was released from the camp hospital and returned to his barrack quarters to recuperate.

The camp administration got bent out of shape by the shooting and quickly mounted a public relations campaign in the local newspapers about the internees doing work immediately outside of the camp such as farming and surveying to save the government money. It didn't make Fukuchi feel any better since he had to sleep on his stomach and couldn't sit down for a few weeks.



# ROHWER RELOCATION CENTER

Map of Rohwer camp redrawn from original plans prepared for the U.S. Army. Copy of original plan is from collection of Robert Hasuike of Manhattan Beach, who has been collecting plans of all camps. Additional information listed under "Legend" is from other sources.



**HARD WORKERS**—Members of Block 20's mess hall crew. Identified by numbers are (1) Fumiko Tomiyama, (2) Risayo Ogawa, (3) Takane

Tomiyama, (4) Inaki Iheyami, and (5) Tsunetaro Ogawa (1943).



**GIFTS FROM JAPAN**—Kitchen staff and residents of Block 11 with relief goods sent by government of Japan to all of the concentration

camps. Shoyu, miso, and tea were shipped aboard exchange ship M.S. Gripsholm in December, 1943.



**MASS MESS HALL**—Camp “dining” was crowded and impersonal. Every meal was eaten here and family life deteriorated.

## Eating in a Public Mess Hall

Whenever the subject is brought up of the Evacuation and internment in concentration camps during the war of Japanese Americans and the Issei, most talk or write about the guard towers, barbed wire fences, the tar-papered barracks in which whole families lived in small single units, and the communal bathrooms with its lack of privacy. And then there were the mess halls.

Perhaps, the mess halls were rarely talked about because of the “hey, at least they fed you people” syndrome. Like it could have been worse, huh? Well, let’s take a closer look at the mess caused by the mess halls of the camps.

Each of the 33 “residential” blocks of the Rohwer concentration camp in Arkansas had a large mess hall building. The wood frame structure with concrete slab floor was 40 ft. by 100 ft., large enough for a big kitchen and a “dining” area to feed about 275 persons, the average number of internees per block.

The members of the kitchen crew were internees, and when the mess bell rang, everybody in the block lined up at the entrance, picked up a plate at the counter as they walked in, food being ladled on the plates as they walked by, and then looked around the huge mess hall to find a place to sit and eat.

Sounds neat and simple, but major psychologi-

cal and familial problems were created.

The mess hall had rows of wood tables and attached benches, the type you normally see at outdoor parks. And when you sat down to eat, you ate in front of strangers or others whom you recently met in the camp, but nevertheless, still strangers.

Privacy was non-existent as everyone ate at close quarters seated next to or across from each other on a long common “dining” table in an arena-like atmosphere.

Although the Issei parents tried to have the families eat together, the ambience of the mess hall defeated their efforts. Family conversation, whether to discuss a topic of interest or to even reprimand a son, was impossible. The family get-together at meal time disintegrated.

In the meantime, the young kids wanted to eat with their friends. Eventually, the mess hall took on the look of a segregated hall as the young boys ate together, the young girls did the same, and the Issei were generally left to eat by themselves in small groups.

Eating daily in a vast mess hall, added to the strange life of just living in a concentration camp, put enormous pressure on the Issei parents. Family discipline was difficult to administer in addition to the breakdown of responsibilities of each family member.

How much all of this affected the normally strong filial relationship of a Japanese family as taught and nurtured by Issei parents before the Evacuation is subject to a lot of unknown areas of concern. The one sure thing we do know is that the mess hall situation certainly was not a positive ingredient or contributor to a better family life.

*Family tradition was  
victim of mess  
hall ambience.*



**CHILDREN OF BLOCK 11**—(Front-1 to r) Taye Okada, Hiroshi Ozawa, Takashi Ozawa, Henry Oga, Seitaro Miyano, Koji Utsumi, and Itsubo Oyama. (Second row-1 to r) Kazumi Ishida, Doris Ozawa, Mitsugi Okada, Aiko Utsumi, Marian Ando, Jane Ishii, and Sakae Miyano. (Back row) Takako Takai, Pauline Ishii, and Carolyn Ando. (1943)

## Children of Rohwer

The Rohwer concentration camp was probably just another "town" to the young children of Rohwer. Their fathers went to work every morning to the block mess hall. Their older brothers and sisters had to go to school. They had to attend Sunday school at the Buddhist church located in a small public service hall. More important, there were a lot of friends in the block they could play with every day.

They couldn't wander away too far because of the barbed wire fences, but it really didn't matter to the kids. There were a lot of small open spaces in the block where they could romp around in the Arkansas soil with their friends. And they never had to dress.

They had to be quiet and careful when they ate with their parents in the big mess hall with hundreds of other people of the block. It seemed like the older people were always picking on them when they ate. Giggling was a no-no. The huge white Army cups were difficult to hold with their small hands, and when the cup slipped from their hands and spilled water across the table where another family was eating, they got a look from their father which said, "Wait until we get back to our small one-unit room in the barracks."

Things to play with, such as ready-made toys, were scarce. And since most of their friends also didn't have any toys, they had their fun devising games among the rows of barracks. The small camp store didn't have too much of anything for the kids except clothes, and what kid in camp needed clothes. There was no need to dress up since there was no place to go in the camp anyway.

Rohwer wasn't paradise for the young tots, but it wasn't



**A BIG FOOTBALL**— (1 to r) William Ozawa, Gerald Ozawa, and Elmer Omori, also from Block 11 (1943).

too bad since there was all that mud to play in when it rained, the many little bugs and strange critters they could chase and catch, and best of all, their friends all lived sort of like next door.

What the little kids didn't know, and didn't particularly care was how they had ended up in a place like Rohwer. There wasn't too much yesterday to remember, and tomorrow was another day for Johnny, Takashi, and Paul.



**SERIOUS ATTENTION**—Listening intently are students of Rohwer's first kindergarten class. Students are sitting on low benches due to lack of school equipment during early days of the camp.

## Education Sputtered for a While, But Schools Finally Got Going

One of the casualties of the first year of the Evacuation was education. As the families were forced into "assembly centers" during the early part of 1942, education among the youngsters took a vacation, as they left their schools to go with their families into the camps. Many of the students were in their senior year in high school and never did receive their diplomas, although in recent years, this oversight has been recognized, and some have

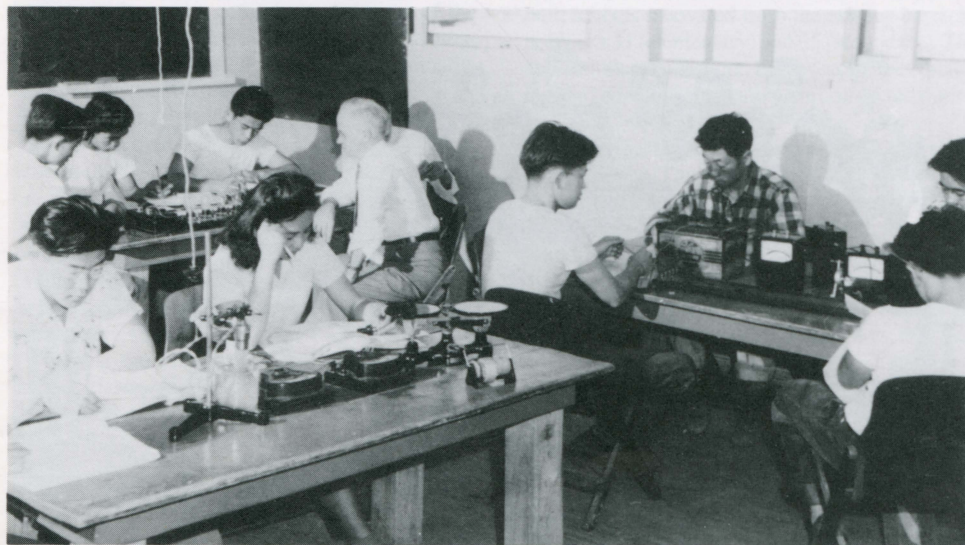
been belatedly receiving their high school diplomas about 45 years after the fact.

The temporary assembly centers, where the people were initially interned, did not have any schools and so during the approximately four to six months' period the people were in these camps, there was an extended summer vacation. This was a period between April to October, 1942, when the last of the assembly centers was closed.

At the so-called "relocation camps," where the internees were transferred from the assembly centers, it took a while for the camp's school system to get geared up. At Rohwer, the elementary and secondary schools officially opened in November, 1942. The initial enrollment was 879 elementary students and 1,138 secondary students.

### ONE LOOK AT ROHWER AND SOME TEACHERS LEFT

The WRA had recruited most of the teachers from Arkansas, and many were criticized for accepting teaching positions in the camp. A number of the recruited teachers took one look at the Rohwer camp and never came back. Others taught at the Rohwer schools for a short period of time and left. Some discovered that they were not covered by federal civil service regulations and left since their tenure at the Rohwer school was considered a temporary teaching position. And then there were those teachers who were intrigued by



**EXPERIMENT**—High school class on physics study electricity.

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SMILE!—Fourth grade class (1943).



SMILE AGAIN!—Sixth grade class (1943).



ONE MORE TIME!—Mr. Cook's  
high school class (1943).



**ROHWER JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL GOVERNMENT CLASS—**  
 (Kneeling l to r) Frank Ige, Kazuto Hirata, John Fukumoto, Matsuo Ida,  
 Jim Kajiwara, Junichi Komuro, Tad Hamano, Yukio Fujiwara, Joe  
 Fujioka, Masaji Jinde, George Hanzawa, Hiroshi Fujimoto, Ray Itaya,  
 Mitsuo Kenmotsu, Kiyoshi Akita, Sam Ikemoto, George Kitagawa,

**Tadashi Hayashi, Tadao Ando, Robert Fukutomi, Yukio Ando. (Stand-**  
**ing) Fumiko Iwamiya, Esther Kawahata, Grace Iriye, Betty Kitagawa,**  
**Yeiko Kawano, Michiko Honda, Fumiko Endo, Jane Hori, Yoshiko**  
**Hachiya, Eva Hirasuna, Alma Baishiki, Nancy Ishikawa, Haruko Arai,**  
**and Janet Hamada. Instructor is Mrs. Ballard.**

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the special circumstances under which their students were forced to live and stayed until the camp schools closed in May, 1945.

During the early stages of the school, there were a few teachers who came from the ranks of the internees. Among them were Toshiko Morita, Hiroshi Uyehara, and Lily Nanimoto. Eventually, most of the teaching positions were filled by Nisei, but attrition took its toll during the latter years of the camp as many relocated to outside jobs. Assistant teachers were all recruited from the camp, and at the school's highest enrollment period, there were 44 Nisei assistant teachers.

Superintendent of the schools was John Trice. William Beasley was principal of the secondary schools, and Merrill Ziegler was principal of the elementary school.

During the first year of the operation of the school, classes were held in makeshift rooms of the barracks. School furniture such as desks and chairs were also lacking, and during the first month of the school, students had to sit on the floor or stand up. Emergency wooden benches were built, and they were temporarily used as desks by the students instead of chairs.

Chairs, desks, textbooks and other school ma-

terials arrived intermittently to the frustration of camp school officials. Often the quality of school supplies and materials received during the early period of the school operation were inferior, and teachers were forced to improvise as they taught.

During 1944, the students moved into the newly built schools renovated from the existing barracks in Blocks 31 (elementary) and 35 (secondary). The auditorium-gymnasium, home economics building, and two assembly halls were completed during 1945.

The elementary schools used the State of Arkansas textbooks. The school met state requirements for graduation from high school and provided courses necessary for entrance to college. The school operated on a year-round schedule. In July, 1943, the first graduation ceremony was held as 152 students from Rohwer High School received their diplomas. Bob Sasaki was the class president.

**ADULT EDUCATION**

One of the successful programs in Rohwer was adult education. With a lot of time on their hands, many Issei took advantage of the courses ranging from English to the arts and crafts. English classes were one of the most popular among the Issei. When the classes were first started in November,

1942, there were 256 adult students, and it jumped to 1,754 by May, 1943.

Arts and crafts classes were also heavily attended. The people learned to paint, carve, knit, sew, and you name it. Most of the classes were taught by expert internees, and the shortage of materials forced the students and teachers to become creative as they scrounged around the camp for substitute materials. Small rugs were made from loose strings and stray cloth. Wooden boxes and the local trees outside of the camp provided the cabinet makers and wood carvers with their needs.

Traditional Japanese arts and crafts also were taught. The strange foliage from the nearby woods provided *ikebana* teachers with a challenge, whereas the lack of *sumi* ink did not deter those attending calligraphy classes.

In essence, the schools and adult education filled in the otherwise vacant periods of time. With a lot of idle time on their hands, many of the internees preferred to attend creative classes taught by fellow internees. Whether they were farmers, merchants, gardeners, or housewives before the Evacuation, the Issei men and women believed in self-improvement, and under even the worst of conditions, they took the opportunity to learn and better themselves as individuals even in a concentration camp.



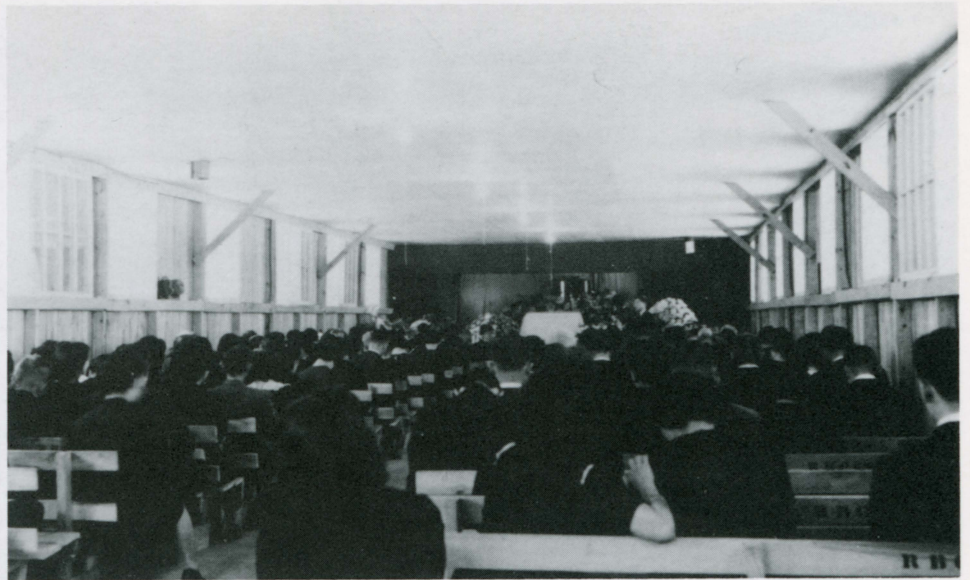
(Above) **ADULT EDUCATION**—The 1943 graduating class of the dressmaking school, which was certified by the Arkansas Trade and Industrial Division of the State Dept. of Education. The instructor was Sadako Yasui (front center with arrow). Adult education programs were very popular with internees.



(Right) **TEAM SPORTS**—Volleyball was part of high school physical education program.



(Right) **OUTDOOR COURT**—High school students played basketball on dirt floors, which made dribbling dangerous.



**CHURCH SERVICE**—A memorial service being held by the Rohwer Buddhist Church in a public service building, many of which were used as churches.

## Churches were Important Part of Internees' Life in Camp

An important facet of life in the Rohwer camp was religion, which played a strong part in stabilizing and maintaining the sanity of the people thrown into concentration camps in far-away Arkansas. In all of the camps, the WRA permitted the Buddhist, Protestant, and Catholic churches to practice. The exception was Shinto, which was considered the national religion of Japan by the authorities, and was banned.

According to statistics from the WRA for all of the ten camps, 55 per cent of the people were Buddhist, 28.9 per cent were Protestants, and 2 per cent were Catholics. About 13 per cent of the people refused to say what they believed in, or did not believe in, and a few others were members of small obscure sects. At Rohwer, it was estimated that 50 per cent of the internees were Buddhist with the Protestants, Catholics, and non-believers ranging near the WRA's national percentages.

Services for all of the churches in Rohwer were held in barracks called public service halls. Each block had a recreation hall, which were used for camp activities such as adult education classrooms, movies, judo and boxing, and meeting rooms for Boy and Girl Scouts. Eight of the buildings were used as churches.

The public service halls were smaller than the residential barracks. Also made of wood frame and tar paper, the buildings were just a big room (20 ft. by 100 ft.) with a concrete slab floor. Long wooden benches served as pews during the early days of the camp and later were replaced with folding chairs.

### THE BUDDHIST CHURCH

A major problem faced by Buddhists not only in Rohwer, but also in the other concentration camps, was the shortage of ministers. During the early days after the outbreak of World War II, the FBI had arrested many of the Buddhist ministers along with other Issei leaders and sent them to special detention camps in Montana, Texas, and New

Mexico. Most of the ministers were released a few years later and were allowed to join their families in the other camps.

At Rohwer, Rev. Enryo Unno and Rev. Seikaku Mizutani worked to get the Buddhist church started during the chaotic early months of the camp. With the aid of former lay leaders, they quickly organized the Rohwer Young Buddhist Association. In 1943, the church held its first Bon-Odori celebration witnessed by thousands of internees.

### THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

Catholic church members numbered less than 100 in Rohwer. Since there were no Issei or Nisei Catholic priests, the Maryknoll Catholic Church sent their priests into the camps to serve its members. The Maryknoll church had a mission in Los Angeles serving the Japanese community for years, and since both the Rohwer and Jerome camps had members from the Maryknoll church, they assigned Father John Swift, who also spoke fluent Japanese, to both camps. Father Swift arrived in March, 1943, seven months after the camp was opened.

Father Swift had a tough schedule, and he went back and forth between the two camps. He would hold Mass at Jerome on Sunday mornings at 8 a.m. and then race over to Rohwer to hold a 10:30 a.m. Mass. During the week, he would stay at Rohwer until Wednesday, then go to Jerome to serve the needs of the Catholics there until after

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*Father John Swift  
served Catholics at  
both Rohwer and Jerome.*

Mass on Sunday morning, when he would return to Rohwer.

### ROHWER FEDERATED CHRISTIAN CHURCH

With members of various denominations of the Christian church in the camp, the members and ministers organized the Rohwer Federated Christian Church in December, 1942. Represented in the federated church were the following denominations: Baptist, Congregational, Disciples of Christ, Episcopal, Free Methodist, Friends, Holiness, Methodist, Presbyterian, and the Salvation Army.

Co-Pastors of the church were Rev. Joseph Fukushima (Congregational), Rev. Sakae Hayakawa (Congregational), Dr. Shokichi Hata (Presbyterian), Adj. Takemaru Hirahara (Salvation Army), Rev. Masatsugu Kakihara (Baptist), Rev. K. Harper Sakaue (Baptist), Rev. Kiyoshi T. Shirashi (Baptist), and Rev. Yoshimatsu Oyama (Free Methodist).

Services in English and Japanese were held separately, and Sunday school was held in six public service halls scattered in the camp. The federated church published two weekly bulletins—one in Japanese and the other in English.

### ROHWER INTER-FAITH MINISTERIAL COUNCIL

In March, 1943, the Rohwer Inter-Faith Ministerial Council was organized to coordinate the mutual concerns of the total camp involving such areas as delinquency among the youth, the welfare of the Issei aged, and other problems.

The first chairman was Rev. Enryo Unno (Buddhist), with Rev. Joseph Fukushima (Congregational) serving as vice-chairman, and Rev. Seikaku Mizutani (Buddhist) as secretary. All ministers and priests in the camp were members of the council.



THE CALL TO SERVICE—Nurses and nurse's aides of Rohwer hospital.

## Medical Clinic Opened in Barracks as Hospital Delayed

Food ranked number one in importance to the internees, and health was a close second. In fact, the first train with evacuees to arrive at Rohwer in September, 1942, was an advance group from the Stockton Assembly Center among who were cooks, kitchen workers, and two doctors (Dr. George Sasaki, Dr. Kenji Oshidori) and a nurse (Chitose Aihara).

As trainloads of internees from the Santa Anita and Stockton Assembly Centers began to arrive from mid-September to October, 1942, the need for a medical clinic became essential. The hospital was still under construction, and a temporary clinic was established in Block 27 by the advance group of Nisei medical staff. The kitchen range and an emergency boiler of the block mess hall was utilized by the clinic staff to meet its medical support requirements.

In November, 1942, the hospital was still under construction, but with a few wards completed, the medical staff moved in to open the hospital even though it still lacked many of the essential medical equipment. During the early days, all surgical cases were sent to hospitals in the towns of Dermott and Dumas. The Rohwer hospital became fully operational in February, 1943, with the delivery of medical and dental equipment.

### NISEI DOCTORS

Many of the books published about the Evacuation and the camps have stated that the camp hospitals were staffed with white doctors, which was not true. The chief medical officer of the Rohwer hospital when it was first opened was Dr. A.T. Torrance, and those who succeeded him were also white. The medical staff, however, was all Japanese Americans.

At the end of 1943, the medical staff was as follows: Hajime Kanagawa (M.D.), Roy S. Morimoto (D.D.S.), Wallace T. Nagata (Ostec), James Nakamura (D.D.S.), Katsujiro Onizuka (D.D.S.), Kenji Oshidori (D.D.S.), George Sasaki (M.D.), Katsuto Takei (Opt.), and Kensuke Uchida (M.D.). They all worked for \$19 a month, which

was top pay for professionals in the camp.

There were 11 nurses with Fumi Gohata (Head Nurse) being the only Japanese American among them. The pharmacists were an all-Nisei staff with Fred Koyama, Mrs. B. Takei, and Paul Matsumoto. There were 33 nurses aides, all recruited from the camp.

### HOSPITAL WAS BUSY PLACE

With a population of the camp at its height with 8,500, which was constantly being reduced due to the relocation program, the hospital still averaged about 1,800 medical and 900 dental cases a month. Put another way, the daily average was 60 medical and 30 dental cases a day, and this excludes those who were hospitalized patients. A pretty heavy load was shouldered by all of the doctors, nurses and other hospital workers.

Even in a compressed concentration camp like Rohwer, most people did not know that the hospital had ambulances. There were two of them, both military ambulances with the familiar red cross sign painted on the sides, and were used primarily to transport patients to and from their units and the hospitals. The ambulances rarely raced through the narrow dirt roads of the camp with the familiar blaring sirens since emergencies were rare.

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*Hospitals averaged 1,800  
medical and 900 dental  
cases a month.*



**ROHWER FARM**—Ready for planting are cultivated rows after internees had cleared and drained the land.



**HARVESTING**—Women workers pick vegetables, which were supplied to mess halls and helped reduce camp food costs.

## Strange Soil Did Not Stump Issei Farmers at Rohwer

One of the most successful enterprises of the Rohwer camp was its agricultural program. As in other concentration camps, there was in Rohwer a large pool of experienced Issei and Nisei farmers, who were utilized to prepare the land near the camp for cultivation and production of vegetables.

With a war going on, there was a nationwide shortage of many items, including food. The WRA, therefore, did not always receive its food allotment quota to feed the internees. The officials turned to the Issei and Nisei farmers for help, and a success story was initiated.

Most of the concentration camps were built in arid desert-like areas with empty plains for miles around the barbed wire enclosure. And the internees made the areas bloom with field of vegetables, which the local people had said would never grow. The interned farmers, mostly from California, had consistently proven them wrong—from Arizona to Wyoming to Arkansas—during their years of internment in the camps.

The land around the Rohwer camp was different from other camps. It was heavily wooded, not level, and of course, marshy. Nevertheless, during 1942, an area of about 600 acres outside of the camp was chosen for the experiment. A team of Nisei "lumberjacks and timber workers" was organized to clear the land. It was a tough and dangerous job as the men chopped down trees, cut

away the large branches, and dug and pulled the huge tree roots from the ground. It took months to clear the land so that it could be cultivated.

In the meantime, others worked on developing a drainage and an irrigation system to draw water from the bayous. Local farmers had never seen crops irrigated by the methods used by the Issei. The veteran Issei farmers were just getting started.

### DRAINAGE SYSTEM BUILT

The group was led by Jensuke Kanegaye and Frank Nishikawa. Advisors to the agricultural operation were Utsuro Hiramoto, Hanji Inoue, Sokichi Ishimaru, Jisaku Kasa, Sakujiro Watanabe and Hoichi Yamaguchi. They studied the strange soil, went deep back in their memories of the farms in Japan, and their farming experience in the delta area near Sacramento, California. They found the Arkansas delta soil fertile, and after the drainage system was developed to dry out the land, the agricultural project was under way.

In the end, the Rohwer farm was growing radish, lettuce, carrot, corn, tomato, eggplant, watermelon, and, of course, daikon. By the end of 1943, the Rohwer internee farmers produced 85 percent of the camp's vegetable needs. In fact, surplus vegetables were shipped to the Arkansas State Veterans Hospital and Camp Robinson, the Army installation in Arkansas.

The local people who lived in the areas where the concentration camps were located were amazed at what the Issei and Nisei farmers were able to grow in land which most had thought would be impossible to produce vegetables. It is said that in some of the areas, local farmers are today growing vegetables initially grown by Japanese farmers during their internment.

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*Rohwer farm raised  
85 per cent of camp's  
vegetable needs.*



**CAMPING AT THE MISSISSIPPI**—In 1943, these Boy Scouts from Rohwer held a five-day camping trip along the banks of the Mississippi River. They were invited by a Boy Scout troop from Arkansas City.

## In Spite of Barbed Wires, Boy and Girl Scout Programs Bloomed

Many internees in the camp were not aware of the fact that every morning at 6:30 a.m. in front of the administration building, the Rohwer Boy Scouts would raise the American flag as a Scout played "To The Colors" on a trumpet. And every evening at 5:00 p.m., the flag would be lowered as "Retreat" was blown.

The Boy and Girl Scout programs in Rohwer were very popular among the young people and provided a positive influence, which is tough to do in a concentration camp. In a period when Issei parents were fretting about camp life being detrimental to the spiritual and moral growth of the youngsters, the Boy and Girl Scout programs were a beacon of hope in an otherwise negative environment.

And this was also true in other concentration camps.

"Once a Scout, always a Scout" had been proven many times, and it was evident as among the personal belongings of the internees carried into camp were the Boy Scout handbook and uniform, which the kids insisted on taking with them.

No one had any idea what to expect when they were evacuated and herded into concentration camps and, consequently, a Boy Scout program in a camp appeared almost preposterous at the time. But the youngsters packed their wide brim hats, neckerchiefs, Scout shirts and pants, shoulder sashes with merit badges, and of course, the long Scout stocking. Even if they had doubts, the young

Scouts believed in the program enough to have hopes that a Scout program would exist even behind barbed wire fences and guard towers.

The catalyst which provided the impetus for a Scout program were the former adult Nisei Boy and Girl Scout leaders, who saw a need for the programs in the camp. One of the leaders of the group was Robert Kishita of Los Angeles, who was active in the Boy Scouts organization for many years. Kishita, with the help of other former Scouts, recruited young boys and girls to join the movement.

Money was scarce in the camp, and so Scout uniforms were not required nor necessary. Just join and become a Scout. In the meantime, official recognition by the local Arkansas Scout District was initially sought with the help of the camp administration staff, along with the Community Activities section staffed by internees.

Boy Scout Troop 19 of Stockton came almost intact and was one of the first troops activated in Rohwer. Other troops were organized and at the end of 1943, there were four Boy Scout Troops, four Cub Packs, three Brownie Troops and six Girl Scout Intermediates in the camp.

In mid-December of 1942, the Boy Scouts travelled to Monticello, where permission had been granted for the Scouts to chop down fir trees for use as Christmas trees in Rohwer.

Not to be outdone, in September, 1943, 125 Girl Scouts from the camp were taken to a cotton

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### *Girl Scouts picked cotton as their wartime service.*

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plantation just outside of Rohwer and as part of a wartime service, helped pick 500 pounds of cotton for Mr. Smith, the owner.

One of the biggest events was a five-day camping trip along the banks of the Mississippi River during August, 1943. Invited by a Boy Scout troop from Arkansas City, 115 Scouts from Rohwer and 90 from the Jerome concentration camp joined the Scouts from Arkansas City, where they pitched tents, went hiking, competed in Scout games and contests, and made new friends.

As in other concentration camps, the Boy and Girl Scout program proved to be one of the most successful undertakings by the people in the camps. With the woods and rivers nearby, the scouting program in Rohwer especially had a good setting. The camp administration officials in 1943 allowed the Scouts to go outside of the camp from time to time for their programs. Until then, overnight camping was held at the athletic field in Rohwer, and other types of outings were restricted within the camp.

Equipment was scarce, but the enthusiasm of the young Scouts carried the program forward along with the strong and sympathetic leadership provided by the adult Scout leaders. And the Issei parents silently approved. They had better hopes for the future of the new generation.



**SMILE, GUYS**—Members of Boy Scout Troop 19 from Stockton show off their colors during camping trip in the woods of Arkansas.



**ROHWER OUTPOST STAFF (1943) Japanese and English Sections: (Front Row l to r) KANGO KUNITSUGU (Sports Editor), SHIZUE TANAKA, TONIE HONDA, IRIS KOBAYASHI, CHIEKO KIKUCHI, VICKY KONMAN (Asst. Editor), SUZIE SAKATA, KAZUYE KORO, EIKO ARAO. (Second Row)-MASAO SHIMADA, GEORGE AKIMOTO (Art Editor), SHOICHI KOMURO (Japanese Section Editor), HENRY OGATA (Production Manager), KINGO TASUGI, BARRY SAIKI (Editor-in-Chief). (Third Row)-HARRY OSHIMA, KAY SUZUKI, YUZO SAKURADA, ART TAKEI, KIK TOYOFUKU. (Top Row)-GENGO MIYAHARA, KANZO OHASHI.**

## Rohwer Outpost Published English and Japanese Editions Bi-Weekly

One of the things which the people of Rohwer camp looked forward to most was the Rohwer Outpost, the camp newspaper. Published every Wednesday and Saturday, the newspaper was the only communication and information source for the 8,500 internees. It was free and was delivered

to each block manager's office, and then it was distributed to each unit.

Its offices, a barrack in Block 42, was a hub-bub of activity as young reporters walked in and out covering stories, filled with the clatter of typewriters as the reporters banged out their articles and a team of typists retyping the news stories onto stencils, and the whirling whine of the mimeograph machines. The atmosphere was what one expected from a newspaper office with one exception—there were no telephones.

The Outpost had English and Japanese sections with an editor-in-chief for each section. Aside from the language, there was also a major difference in preparing the two sections. Whereas the English section had typewriters to mechanically prepare the pages (electric typewriters appeared after the war) onto the mimeograph stencils, the Japanese section had a group of Issei who wrote each character by hand with a sharp-pointed writing instrument, which cut very fine lines into the soft stencil. It took a deft hand and damn good eyesight to do the job.

Printed on legal size papers, the English section usually ran an eight or ten page edition, and the Japanese section produced a six to eight page edition.



Popular Lil Dan'l cartoon drawn by George Akimoto

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE



# Rohwer Outpost

CONTINUED FROM PREVIOUS PAGE

The Outpost generally covered camp events and activities, club meeting notices, vital statistics, athletic event results, editorials and various columns by staff writers, and also official notices from the WRA. There were very few letters to editors. And contrary to what has been written by others during the past few years, there was no WRA censorship of the Outpost.

By far, the most popular item in the Outpost was "Lil Dan'l," the cartoon character drawn by George Akimoto. Wearing a coonskin hat, "Lil Dan'l" cavorted through the pages of the Outpost with mostly an attitude of disdain and irreverence toward tradition and the mundane problems of the

*Japanese edition was  
written by hand  
by Issei calligraphers.*

internees. The drawings were descriptive enough so that words were not needed, and therefore, young kids and Issei both were able to understand and laugh at "Lil Dan'l's" twice-a-week adventures.

During the first few editions, Bean Takeda of Los Angeles and Barry Saiki of Stockton were co-editors. Saiki left the newspaper to teach at the Rohwer High School, but returned in December, 1942, when Takeda left. Saiki directed the Outpost until November, 1943, when he resigned. His successor was Vicky Konman.

From the standpoint of national news pertaining to Japanese Americans, the Pacific Citizen, published by the Japanese American Citizens League in Salt Lake City, was the newspaper to which most internees subscribed and read. The Issei subscribed to the Utah Nippo, published also in Salt Lake City, for their source of national news.



**Vacation!**  
Holiday season vacations for evaseuse workers will be this afternoon and Christmas day, New Year's day and the following Saturday morning. Vacations are with pay. Ray D. Johnston, Project Director

**Saint Nick Will Deliver the Goods Tonight**  
Santa Claus will start on his tour of the Center tonight at 7 o'clock to present over 2500 Christmas gifts to children of 15 years and under, who will be gathered in their mess halls for the block holiday programs, reported George Uyeda, chairman of the Holiday committee.

**ATTENTION! FIRE HAZARDS**  
In order to keep this Christmas a merry one, residents were cautioned by Hays Miller, fire protection officer, to be careful with the Christmas lighting. Candle flames and wiring on the Christmas trees are especially dangerous fire hazards.

**Saint Nick Will Deliver the Goods Tonight**  
The American Friends Service committee with the cooperation of the JAACL carried out the program to give surprise Christmas presents to children in the ten relocation centers. With their headquarters in Philadelphia, Penn., and Washington, D.C., respectively, the two groups made contacts with various organizations and individuals including the United Presbyterians, A.M.E. and the Methodists who sent to Roh- (Continued on page 2)

Highlighting the Center Christmas celebrations will be the outdoor program presented by the Holiday committee at 2:30 p.m. today on the high school athletic field, announced George Uyeda, chairman.

The Rev. Joseph Fukushima will open the program with a prayer. Holiday greetings will be extended by Ray D. Johnston, Project director, and Dr. J. B. Hunter, chief of Community Services.

The entire assembled group will then sing several carols led by Hal Noguuchi. Two special Christmas numbers, "Arise, Shine for Thy Light Is Come" by George J. Elvery and "It Came Upon the Midnight Clear" by Arthur Sullivan, will be sung by the Center chorus directed by Loola Parsley.

"Nativity," the Noel pageant to be acted out by 12 Center dramatists directed by Mrs. Merrill Ziegler, will feature today's outdoor holiday show. Against appropriately simple stage-sets and with soft musical accompaniment, the pageant will depict the birth of Christ through dramatized biblical selections.

Readers will be the Rev. Harper Sakaue and Mrs. Ziegler. Between the scenes the choral group will sing (Continued on page 2)



## Remember?

### CAMP POLICE

Internal security of the camp was provided by an internee police force comprised of about 50 Nisei. Uniformed, but unarmed, they patrolled the camp 24-hours a day.

During the 38 months of operation, the Rohwer police section recorded only 50 "law and order" violations, which averaged about less than one-and-a-half incident per month. It was the lowest rate of all the concentration camps. Most violations were for fighting or creating disturbances.

The soldiers who were responsible for external security were the 334th Military Police Company. Living in barracks at the entrance of the camp, the

soldiers patrolled the perimeter of the camp. There were 65 men in the military police group, and also leading a boring military stint, they organized a softball team, which competed with Nisei camp teams.

Rohwer was a quiet camp with only a few minor incidents, and so by the summer of 1944, the military police detachment was reduced to a single officer and only 13 soldiers.

### GAMBLING

People with a bent or weakness toward gambling, found camp life a natural for the quiet and solitude required to play the game. Somehow or other, the people who enjoyed gambling were successful in bringing with them the various paraphernalia of the sport such as playing cards, mah-

jong sets, hana cards, and the like. Most were just small nickel-and-dime stuff to pass the time and generally the games were played in the bachelor quarters, of which there were one or more in each block.

Organized gambling, ala the notorious Tokyo Club in pre-war Little Tokyo, did not exist since everyone who was working in the camp was earning \$12, \$16 or \$19, which were the standard wages. Big money was absent.

The Issei were more into hana-fuda, an old Japanese gambling game played with flower-decorated cards. Many young Nisei learned the game in camp and took a licking from the Issei who were more familiar with the intricacies of the game.

Then there were the mah-jong and bridge groups, both games being popular among the older Nisei men and women. They looked with contempt at the poker players and, no doubt, the attitude was returned by the gamblers.

**IN ROHWER**—Miyano family lived in Block 11 as they waited for their father's release from a special detention center in New Mexico. (Front-l to r) Mary Sakae, Seitaro, Ruth Tamaki, and Jim Yukihiro. (Back) Mrs. Yukiko Miyano with baby Masao, who was born in the Santa Anita Assembly Camp.



## Issei Leaders Rounded Up Early by FBI

Young Jim Miyano, returning from elementary school, walked into his home and was surprised to find two white men in the living room. His mother, who was pregnant, appeared scared and worried. One of the men was talking to Jim's father, while the other surveyed the room and glanced at Jim when he walked in.

Jim's father, the Reverend Giichi Miyano, was a minister with the Tenrikyo Southern Pacific Church in Los Angeles. He put on his coat and followed the two burly men out the door. What's going on, wondered six-year-old Jim. His father got in a car with the two men, looked at Jim with a grim look, and then the car moved away and they were gone.

It was February, 1942. The men were from the FBI, and they had come to arrest Reverend Miyano. There were no charges. According to the FBI, he was arrested because as an "enemy alien, he would be dangerous to the public peace and safety of the United States."

On this day, the FBI had fanned out all over the West Coast and arrested Buddhist ministers, Japanese language school teachers, and hundreds of other Issei. This was the second phase of arrests. The first phase occurred within two days of December 7, 1941, when the FBI rounded up hundreds of Issei men who were leaders of the Japanese communities in various cities and towns.

The men were leaders and officers of *kenjinkai* (prefectural associations), business and agricultural associations, Japanese chambers of commerce, martial arts groups, cultural arts organizations, and many other groups normally found in most Japanese communities up and down the coast. The FBI's source of finding out who's who in the Japanese communities was based upon scanning the local Japanese newspapers, which usually had extensive coverages of most community organizations and activities.

There were no hearings or charges. The arrests during the second phase were of people who were leaders or teachers of alien religions, schools, and other areas which were purely Japanese in character. It was a sweeping roundup of innocent Issei men.

Thousands of families were suddenly stripped of their fathers, who were not only the heads of families, but also the breadwinners. Most families had children in their teens or younger, and it put untold hardships and pressure on everyone. Many families found it difficult to cope, as teenage sons

were forced to assume heavy family responsibilities.

Reverend Miyano was taken to an overnight stay at a state prison along with hundreds of other Issei men. The next day, they were shipped by bus to a facility in Tujunga Canyon. The Miyano family received information of where their father was being held and visited him the next day. There were many other families visiting, which was held with a fence between the Issei men and their families.

Reverend Miyano maintained a stoic front, but he was worried about his family. His wife, Yukiko, was pregnant and with four small children, the eldest being six-year-old Jim, Reverend Miyano wondered what was going to happen to them. There were also rumors that all of the Japanese were going to be sent away from the West Coast, which would make the situation worse. He didn't know what was going to happen to him and the rest of the Issei men who were also arrested and staying in the compound, which used to be a boys' camp.

With four other ministers, Reverend Miyano was sent by the Tenrikyo Church of Japan to the United States in the 1928 to start their missionary work. He started a mission in San Francisco, and after a few years, was transferred to Los Angeles to continue his missionary work among the growing Japanese population there. The church was established in Boyle Heights, which was a few miles east of Little Tokyo, and where a large number of Japanese were living.

Reflecting on his past, Reverend Miyano also wondered whether all of his many years of missionary work were for naught. A feeling of despair slowly built up within him as he could not help his family, and he also had no control over his future.

Within two weeks, the men were put on trains, but were not told where they were going. With military police in each car, and all of the shades pulled down, those who tried to peek outside were severely reprimanded by the soldiers.

After two long days on the train, the trip ended at Bismarck, North Dakota. The tired and worried Issei were trucked to a camp, which was surrounded with a barbed wire fence and guard towers. Their living quarters were a barrack. It was a long room with about 50 Army cots lined up on both sides.

During their stay at the Bismarck camp, they were interrogated by civilian investigators. Since most of the Issei could barely speak English, the

interrogation went fitfully at best and was later discontinued. In the meantime, the men did not know what was happening outside. Letters were forbidden and so were radios.

The Miyano family, meanwhile, struggled as best they could in Los Angeles. They were not alone since the family of Reverend Susumu Yoshida, also of the Tenrikyo Church and picked up by the FBI, was having a difficult time, too. Their prime concern, however, was about their fathers. No one knew where they were sent to from the Tujunga compound. Repeated requests for information were rebuffed by the FBI.

Amid all of this, evacuation orders were posted, and the Miyano family ended up at the Santa Anita Assembly Center with thousands of other Japanese. While in camp, the mother gave birth to Masao in July. A few months later, they were on their way to Rohwer, Arkansas. And they still had no word about where their father was.

Reverend Miyano, in the meantime, had been transferred to another special detention camp in Lordsburg, New Mexico. With time on their hands, the men studied calligraphy and sang Japanese folk songs. Reverend Miyano learned barbering so that the long hairs of the Issei inmates could be at least trimmed. A mimeographed camp newspaper in Japanese was published. Sleeping 50 to a room required a cooperative effort by everyone with the chores of keeping the barrack clean and maintaining a friendly and peaceful atmosphere.

It was not until the winter of 1942 when the Miyano family found out that their father was in a camp at Lordsburg. The family wrote letters to officials seeking his release. They even sent a family photograph, taken by a Nisei soldier on furlough in Rohwer, of the mother and the five little kids to try to influence the officials.

Finally, in the fall of 1944, after more than two-and-a-half years of separation, Reverend Miyano was released and joined his family in Rohwer. For a period while in the Arkansas camp, he remained bitter over his experience but soon overcame it as he put his efforts into restarting the church in camp.

After the war, the Miyano family returned to Los Angeles, and Reverend Miyano plunged into his missionary work. In 1965, at the age of 69, Reverend Miyano passed away.

**TULE LAKE BOUND**—Internees board special trail for Tule Lake segregation camp from Rohwer.

## The “No-No” Questionnaire

When Wayne Collins, the fiery attorney from San Francisco, wrote that “the episode . . . constituted an infamous chapter in our history,” he was not commenting about the Evacuation and internment of Japanese Americans during World War II, but more specifically about the segregation and deportation of the Issei and Nisei to Japan after the end of the war.

Collins led virtually a one-man war against the United States government from 1944 to 1968 for its methods and administration of the segregation and deportation of the internees.

It all started innocently enough back in the spring of 1943. All internees, male and female, and 17 or older, in all of the concentration camps were ordered to fill out a questionnaire, which was titled “Application For Leave Clearance.”

It became known as the “loyalty questionnaire” among the internees because of infamous questions 27 and 28, which asked:

“Are you willing to serve in the armed forces of the United States on combat duty wherever ordered?” and, “Will you swear unqualified allegiance to the United States of America and faithfully defend the United States from any or all attack by foreign or domestic forces, and forswear any form of allegiance or obedience to the Japanese emperor, to any other foreign government, power or organization?”

### **POLITICIANS WERE SCREAMING**

Confusion and indignation about the two questions spread in all of the camps. Rumors spread all over about what would happen to those who answered “no” to both questions.

Politicians in the nation’s capital were screaming to separate the “loyals” from the “disloyals” so that only the “loyals” would be allowed to leave the concentration camps and resettle.

“You can’t tell one Jap from another and by separating the loyal from the disloyal, we can keep any Jap agent or saboteur in the camps,” said one senator. Ironically, during the war, only two agents for Japan were arrested, and they were both white.

Some Nisei refused to answer the questions or answered “no” because of their incarceration in concentration camps even though they were citizens. Others said why should they renounce any allegiance to the emperor when they never had any

allegiance to the emperor of Japan.

For the Issei, it created a dilemma. They were denied citizenship in the United States, and Japan was the nation where they had citizenship status. By saying “yes,” they would be people without a country.

Rumors were rampant in the camp that those who answered “no” to the two questions would be segregated into another camp, and more threatening was that they would be deported to Japan as “disloyals.”

It was gut-wrenching time for many families. There were Issei who wanted to say “no,” while their sons and daughters wished to say “yes.” Those children under 17 years old had no choice on the matter. And in the tradition of the Japanese family, father was usually the voice of authority.

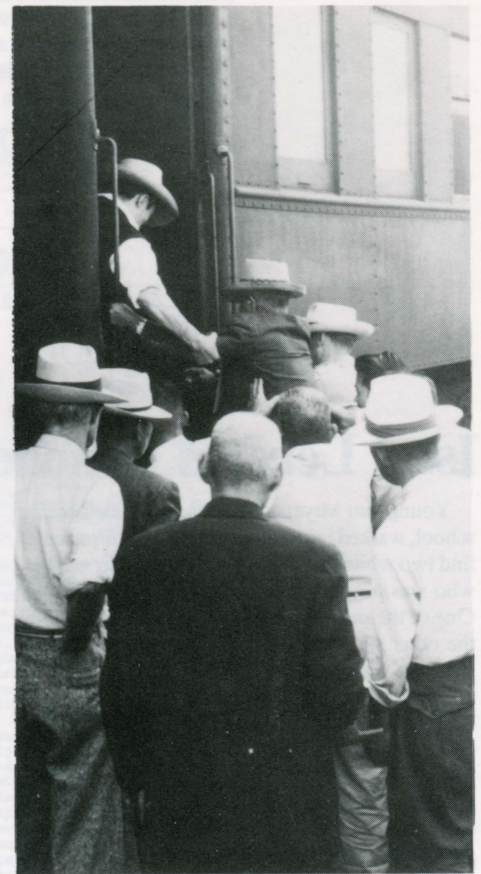
Many Issei had members of their immediate family still in Japan and were torn in their desire to remain in the United States, but they also wanted to rejoin their family.

There were many other intimidating issues which had to be seriously considered. Would the climate of the prevalent anti-Japanese mood in the country improve? Would the internees eventually be allowed to return to the West Coast? With the Evacuation causing them to lose everything, how can they start a new life with nothing? Will they really deport us to Japan? Would they be treated in Japan like they were in the United States . . . like unwanted people?

### **FORCED TO FOLLOW PARENTS**

Fierce family arguments raged between parents and their children. It was a time of turmoil in the camp. Young kids who had never been to Japan, much less knew anything about the country, were being forced to follow their parents to an unknown future. Many Nisei dutifully acceded to their parents’ decision so that the family would not be separated. On the other hand, there were many Issei parents who decided to say “yes” so that they could remain with their children who were determined to say “yes.”

In the end, there were a total of 808 persons, which was about ten percent of the total population of the Rohwer concentration camp, who were destined to be sent to the Tule Lake camp in California, which became the center for the so-called “disloyals.” Among the 808 were many children who had no choice but to accompany



their parents.

On Sept. 15, 1943, the first train left Rohwer with 433 internees aboard for Tule Lake. Less than three weeks later, on Oct. 6, 375 more internees were on their way to Tule Lake.

It was an emotional farewell as thousands of internees lined the railroad siding to say their final goodbyes to their friends, torn apart and separated by a lousy questionnaire prepared by an Administration of racist nature and pressured by a hysterical Congress. It left in its wake the battered and, yes, even destroyed lives of many innocent people.

At the Tule Lake camp, which was filled with gung ho pro-Japanese groups and reluctant “no-no” people, a pressure-cooker atmosphere existed. Under the eyes of a hapless camp administration, a number of strong arm pro-Japanese organizations flourished inside the camp and eventually, many reluctant people signed for repatriation to Japan under pressure from the groups.

The first ship with repatriates landed in Yokohama in February, 1946. Japan was a bleak nation with its cities bombed to a rubble and starvation setting in among the populace. Under these circumstances, the repatriates were not exactly welcomed with open arms, and hundreds of Issei and Nisei were left adrift to fend for themselves.

Eventually many returned to the United States through the efforts of people like Collins, the San Francisco attorney, and others.

The episode, however, left a trail of hundreds of individual and family tragedies. There are many stories of despair and hopelessness, of courage and survival, and yes, it happened more than 45 years ago, and many of the wounds have been healed, but it will never be forgotten. And finally, let it never happen again.

# Seasonal Farm Work and Relocation Program Start Exodus from Rohwer

During 1942 a labor shortage in the sugar beet fields of Montana became a crisis with the governor and senator from the state asking the government for help to save the harvest. President Roosevelt responded by suggesting that the schools release students so that they could help harvest the sugar beets.

Senator James Murray replied that "the President seems to think that you can pick beets out of the ground just like you pick cherries off a tree . . . We have got all these Jap evacuees, but the employment service . . . has failed to get them out on the farms."

The thing started to get heated up, and a constituent wrote to the senator that ". . . you should continue to hammer away at the War Relocation Authority. They should force those Japs to take this work." And so it went.

Well, the call went out to the camps for help as the WRA started to process the work leave program for seasonal farm work. The governors of Montana, Utah, Wyoming and Idaho, where the sugar beet fields needed help, suddenly began to have second thoughts.

They didn't want the Japanese workers unsupervised. In other words, they didn't trust the Japanese workers even though the internees were apparently willing to help save the harvest. Beet topping is one of the toughest field work there is, and the job was usually done by migrant workers.

Governor Nels Smith of Wyoming said, "The only condition under which we will have them is

that at the conclusion of the war they shall be returned to the place from whence they came." Other governors and politicians echoed his words as they sought to placate the anti-Japanese elements in their states. They didn't want the Japanese, but they needed them.

In the end, about 8,000 workers from various concentration camps went to work in the sugar beet fields. The Utah State Labor Commission member S.J. Boyer stated that "We can just as well face the facts. If it had not been for Japanese labor, much of the beet crop of Utah and Idaho . . . would have been plowed up."

Workers from Rohwer had gone to work in the sugar beet fields during 1942 and 1943. Another group of seasonal workers went to Colorado to pick peaches. On a more permanent basis, a large number of families from both the Rohwer and Jerome camps relocated to Seabrook Farms, New Jersey, to work for the frozen food industry. Eventually, about 2,600 people moved out of the camps to work there during 1944 and 1945, and many are still there today.

For many of the workers, the temporary seasonal leave was an opportunity to get away for a while from the stultifying environment of camp life. And although the pay was not much, it was a chance to earn some money since the pay was a lot better than the \$16 and \$12 per month they were getting paid in camp. And finally, it was also a way to test the waters and see how they would be treated by the "outside" world. The newspapers were always reporting anti-Japanese incidents and some of the most strident editorials raging against the Japanese in the United States were not encouraging.

## THE RELOCATION PROGRAM

In late 1942, the relocation of the internees from the camps was initiated, and it was called "indefinite leave." During the early days of the program, an internee had to have all kinds of clearances including an FBI clearance. If the person had ever been to Japan, he or she could not leave. It also wiped out any chance for Issei to relocate until the rule was changed later. More important, to qualify for "indefinite leave," the internee had to have a guaranteed job waiting for him/her on the "outside."

The WRA set up field offices in the cities like Chicago, Cleveland, St. Louis, Cincinnati and other Midwestern cities to line up employment. Once the paper work with all of the clearances and work guarantees were completed, the internee was given \$25 plus \$3 a day for traveling expenses and train fare.

The relocation program started out with a trickle, but by 1944, the trains running from Little Rock to Chicago were carrying hundreds of relo-

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE



SEASONAL WORKERS—Men from Rohwer head for Colorado to pick peaches.

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# Remember?

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## CHIGGERS

By far the worst of the crazy world of bugs and insects in Rohwer were the pesky chiggers. The little teeny bugs hibernated some place during the winters but came on like gangbusters during the summer, much to the discomfort of the people. About the size of a flea, it would eat and bore into the skin, especially on the arms and legs. When you started to feel an itch, it was guaranteed to be a chigger, enjoying itself at your expense.

It was tough to sleep when the chigger was having a ball, and you were scratching a spot until it bled. All types of lotions and other remedies were tried, but the little insect was a tough little bugger. It got really bad when more than one chigger was

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*Chiggers were immune to English or Japanese swear words.*

.....

working on you simultaneously. And they were immune to swear words, English or Japanese.

One unique solution worked most of the time, but it also resulted in many a painful aftermath. Some people put a lighted cigarette as close as possible to the itchy hole hoping that the heat would force the chigger to back out. Sometimes it did and sometimes it did not. But oftentimes, it left a slight burn on the leg or arm. And it could probably be

stated that some folks took up smoking just to combat the pesky insect. Much to the regret of the chiggers, the camp was closed in 1946.

## FUJIMA KANSUMA

Organized entertainment was meager at best, but the people in camp with a lot of leisure time on their hands tried their best at providing some interesting programs. Some of the more successful were the productions of classical Japanese dances and plays, to which the Issei and internees turned out by the hundreds to see and enjoy.

In fact, within a few months after the last internees had been shipped to the camp in Arkansas, a Japanese classical "talent" show was presented at an outdoor stage. It was directed and produced by Fujima Kansuma, the famous Japanese classical dance instructor, and it was the first of many she managed to stage for the benefit of her fellow internees, especially for the appreciative Issei. Fujima Kansuma, a perfectionist, produced programs with such impeccable costumes, precision and staging that the viewers were virtually transported into another world and relieved for a few hours of the deplorable and futile life in a concentration camp.

Since the cost and value of the kimonos and costumes were extraordinarily expensive, most were carried into the camp by the owners as family heirlooms. Many of the other required costumes were made in the camp by materials purchased through mail-order catalogs. And with the good fortune of having Fujima Kansuma in their midst as a fellow internee, the glory of the colorful and traditional Japanese classical dances and Kabuki plays flourished in full regalia for a short period of time behind the barbed wires and guard towers.

## LIQUOR

On the other hand, those with an itch toward spirits found the camp with an air-tight security when it came to liquor. Liquor was out-of-bounds in the camp although those Nisei who had "relocated" to places like Chicago and St. Louis after their initial internment, were able to bring in the favorite bottles for their relatives and friends when they visited the camp.

Friendly military police and administration people also helped to dent the "dry" camp policy by purchasing the hard stuff for some of the internees from the nearby town of McGehee. But these were isolated cases with only a few having access to the smuggled bottles.

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*Sake made with bootleg stills were pretty bad stuff.*

.....

Those Issei who had a penchant for their traditional sake, tried their luck at brewing the stuff with rice in bootleg stills, but unlike the Issei of other camps whom it is understood were successful in their endeavors, the Issei of Rohwer were said to be frustrated, as their best clandestine efforts produced pretty bad stuff which only the most desperate would dare to drink, if at all.

The Rohwer concentration camp proved to be one of the best antidotes for chronic alcoholics. A study has never been made about alcoholics in the camp, but perhaps the ban on liquor may have helped some of them shake the monkey off their backs during their long confinement in Rohwer or other camps.

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# Relocation

CONTINUED FROM PREVIOUS PAGE

cating Nisei every month. Chicago proved to be the most popular destination with Detroit, Cleveland, St. Louis and Cincinnati all running a poor second.

## THE CHICAGO CONNECTION

Probably the most effective guarantee of a job in order to get out of the camp was the referral approach. And one of the top examples is what happened at the H.P. Smith Paper Company in Chicago. The company made wax and cigarette papers with the machines going 24 hours a day.

Seiji "Skunk" Isomoto, who was the leader of the Royal Dukes club in Rohwer, comprised of Nisei from Los Angeles and "headquartered" in Block 11, was among the early group of Nisei who left camp for Chicago. He worked for the paper company, and since there was a labor shortage, he would line up work in the company for his friends back in Rohwer.

Month after month, one or two members of the

camp club would head for Chicago and work with Isomoto at the paper company. Eventually 15 members of the club were working there. The paper company became a "connection" between Rohwer and Chicago, and many others from Rohwer got their first job at the company before going on to other jobs in Chicago. There were Nisei working on the day, swing, and graveyard shifts at the plant west of the notorious town of Cicero, made famous by Al Capone.

The total number of Nisei who have worked at the paper company is not known, but during 1943, 1944, and 1945, the big warehouse-like building must have had at least 25 or more Nisei from Rohwer on their payroll. The pay ranged from 65 cents to 90 cents an hour depending upon the job, which wasn't that good, but it was a start for most

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*Chicago was most popular destination of those relocating.*

Nisei just out of camp.

## JEROME JOINS ROHWER

There were still some people who did not want to relocate for various reasons, and there were some who could not, but the stream of people leaving Rohwer to relocate in the Midwest and the East continued. By the summer of 1944, the camp was about half empty. And the nearby Jerome camp was also in the same depleted condition.

During the early period of the relocation of the internees, seven out of 10 persons leaving the camp were Nisei between the ages of 17 and 35. The camps were, therefore, eventually comprised mostly of Issei and teenage youths. Additionally, the Army was drafting many of the youths as soon as they became 18 years of age and had graduated from high school.

In a major move in the summer of 1944, the WRA transferred all of the remaining internees at Jerome to Rohwer and closed the Jerome camp. At other concentration camps where attrition set in due to the relocation program, many camp activities and programs ceased or had begun to fall apart. Rohwer, however, was at full capacity again, and camp activities were jumping again.



**ROHWER VOLUNTEERS**—Nisei youths answered the call to serve their country by volunteering from concentration camps. Five of the volunteers from Rohwer are shown above with Ray D. Johnston (left), Rohwer director; Sgt. Isamu Adachi (third from right) and Capt. John Holbrook (right), both of the Army recruiting team. The five Nisei volunteers, unfortunately, were not identified. More than 1,500 Nisei volunteered to join the Army from the camps. (Photo: March 10, 1943)

## Nisei Volunteered from Camps to Join U.S. Army to Prove Loyalty

When the war broke out on Dec. 7, 1941, there were 3,500 Nisei soldiers already in the Army. Some were immediately discharged, but most were transferred to less sensitive jobs such as unloading box cars. In an extreme example of the Army's hysterical reaction, when President Franklin D. Roosevelt visited an Army camp during the war, the commandant had all of the Nisei soldiers locked in a building with machine gun squads surrounding the building.

The Navy was worse. With a few exceptions where a few Nisei were able to join the Navy by accident, the Navy refused to accept Japanese Americans in the service. During the war in the Pacific, the Navy would reluctantly ask for Nisei translators from the Army and send them right back when the job was completed. For years, the Navy's acceptance and treatment of minorities was abysmal and shameful. And it was only a few years after World War II ended that the Navy finally began to accept Japanese American recruits.

Prior to the new policy, the Navy accepted Blacks, Filipinos, Chinese, and others of the colored races primarily to serve as stewards, cooks and mess attendants on the ships. The Navy had consistently resisted attempts to drag it into the 20th century.

### ISSEI SAILORS KILLED

Did you know that seven Issei were among the 268 men who were killed when the USS Maine was blown up in Havana harbor on Feb. 15, 1898, which started the Spanish American War? They

were all assigned to the galley per Navy policy. Also during the first World War, a large number of Issei served with the United States Expeditionary Force which fought in Europe and turned the tide of the war in 1918.

When World War II broke out in 1941, the Army stopped drafting Japanese Americans and had them reclassified as 4-F (physically, mentally, or morally unfit), or 4-C (not acceptable because of nationality or ancestry).

In Hawaii, all of the Japanese Americans in the Hawaiian Territorial Guard were discharged. On the other hand, the all-Japanese American 298th and 299th Regiments of the Hawaiian National Guard, became part of the Hawaiian Provisional Guard. A few months later, they would be sent to Camp McCoy, Wisconsin, for further training. When they completed their training, they were redesignated as the 100th Battalion. Thus history was made.

### ROOSEVELT CALLS FOR ALL-NISEI OUTFIT

In February, 1943, President Roosevelt ordered the War Department to organize a military combat team consisting of "loyal" Japanese Americans. He wrote that "the principle on which this country was founded and by which it has always been governed, is that Americanism is a matter of mind and heart; Americanism is not, and never was, a matter of race or ancestry."

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**CAPTURED GERMAN SOLDIERS**—Two members of the 442nd Regimental Combat Team escort a group of captured German soldiers in Italy. The all-Nisei outfit fought their way through the mountains of the

Apennines, breaking the back of the German defense, and which opened the road for the liberation of Rome.

## Nisei Volunteers

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It seemed incongruous to many Japanese Americans that the government was asking young men incarcerated in concentration camps because of their race to be asked to volunteer for military service. To many other Nisei, however, it was an opportunity to remove the cloak of suspicion and prove that they were just as loyal and American as others. And in the process, to get their parents, sisters and brothers out of the camps and return them to the normal life they had led prior to the Evacuation.

President Roosevelt's 1943 announcement to organize an all-Japanese American combat unit came after a simultaneous but two separate and independent movements.

### HAWAIIAN NISEI PETITION TO SERVE

First was from Hawaii, where the Japanese community which comprised more than one-third of the island population, and incensed at the discharge of Japanese American soldiers of the Hawaiian Territorial Guard, petitioned the government to allow them to serve in the Army to prove their loyalty.

In the meantime, the Japanese American Citizens League met in Salt Lake City and petitioned the government to restore Selective Service for the Nisei. The JAACL leaders, led by Mike Masaoka, reasoned that military service by Nisei would not only help blunt the anti-Japanese attitude, but also would probably aid the release and return of the

people back to normal life after the war's end. It proved prophetic.

### NISEI VOLUNTEER FROM CAMPS

More than 10,000 Japanese American youths answered the call to volunteer in Hawaii, and 2,500 were selected from the group to serve in the all-Japanese American unit. More amazing was that 1,500 Nisei also volunteered from the concentration camps where they had been incarcerated with their families. Every camp, including Rohwer and Jerome, had a contingent of young men who volunteered to join the special unit.

All volunteered to serve their nation, but probably the strongest reason for doing it was that they wanted this chance to prove to the country that Japanese Americans were loyal Americans. It was also to stem the anti-Japanese rhetoric by bigoted groups and have their families treated fairly and equally by the general public when their families were allowed to leave camp in the future.

All of the young men who volunteered from Hawaii and the camps were sent to Camp Shelby,

.....

*Nisei soldiers were serving in Pacific before 442nd was organized.*

Mississippi, for training. The group was designated the 442nd Regimental Combat Team.

### THE MIS GROUP

While all of this was going on, a small group of men, led by a young former Nisei attorney from Los Angeles, John Aiso, had already organized a special branch of military intelligence for the Army at the Presidio in San Francisco. The military language school was operating one month before Pearl Harbor.

The Japanese language was a mystery to the Army and the need for military intelligence in the war in the Pacific was a large void in their war effort. In their original effort to organize a military intelligence group, the Army was surprised to discover that the Japanese language was also a mystery to the Nisei. And so the Military Intelligence Language School (MISL) was organized to teach Nisei soldiers the Japanese language and also rudiments of the Japanese military nomenclature.

Before the legendary 100th Infantry Battalion was formed, the MISL had already sent Nisei translators and interpreters during 1942 to Australia, New Caledonia, and Alaska, where Japanese forces had captured the islands of Kiska and Attu. By the end of the war, more than 3,700 Japanese American soldiers had served with the Allied forces in the Pacific and China-Burma-India theaters of the war. Because of the nature of their intelligence work, the general public was not informed of the important contributions made by Nisei soldiers in the Pacific theater during the war.



**SALUTE FROM THE PRESIDENT**—On a rainy day in May, 1946, President Truman awarded the Presidential Distinguished Unit Citation to the 442nd Regimental Combat Team at the White House grounds. It was the seventh time the famed unit had achieved the award.

The 442nd Regimental Combat Team, of which the 100th Battalion became a part, became one of the legendary units in the European theater of war. They fought in Italy and France, and because of their courage and tenacity, they were described as the "finest offensive combat unit" by officers of the Fifth Army in Italy. They were also known as the "Purple Heart Unit" as they charged up the hills and mountains during seven major campaigns and in the process were awarded a total of 9,486 Purple Heart medals, given for death or injury during battle. And when the war ended, 680 young men of the unit had been killed in action.

#### 442nd AT THE WHITE HOUSE

In May, 1946, the 442nd received a special recognition very few military groups have received in the military history of the United States. The entire outfit was shipped back to the United States and marched down Pennsylvania Avenue in Washington, D.C. Then at the White House, before the whirling cameras of movie news photographers and witnessed by correspondents of the nation's largest newspapers, President Harry S. Truman affixed the Presidential Unit Citation to the unit's colors. It was the 442nd's seventh such award.

The outstanding record of the Nisei soldiers was one of the major contributing factors in blunting the anti-Japanese fervor by racists in the country, especially along the West Coast. The story of the 442nd and the MIS helped to create a more positive atmosphere, and as the people left the camps to start their new life, they also went out with a proud attitude. It was reflective of their pride in the contributions to winning the war made by their sons and brothers in the battlefields in Europe and the Pacific.

## Beyond the Call of Duty

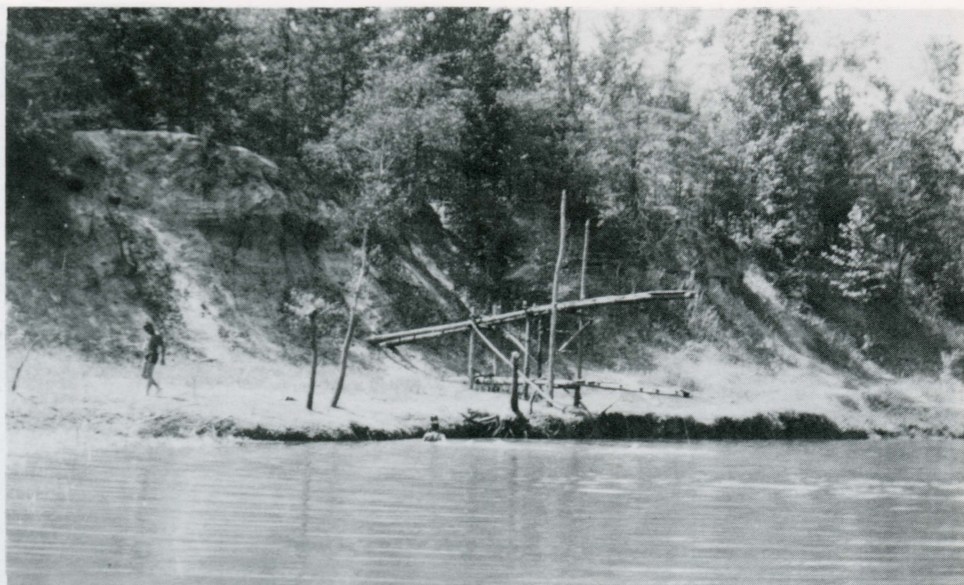
The following young men, who were from the Rohwer concentration camp, or who had relatives in the camp, were killed in action during World War II. Some were already serving in the Army when the war broke out in 1941, others volunteered from the camp, and others were drafted from the camp.

Nevertheless, each Nisei paid the supreme sacrifice while still a youth, and their ultimate service to the nation should never be forgotten. A greater tragedy was that their families were incarcerated in a concentration camp as they were fighting for freedom and justice. It is the ultimate sacrifice which bears the grace of a call larger than duty or honor.

The indignities heaped upon their families and friends, and even to themselves, during the war to prove that Japanese Americans were loyal Americans were the internal force which had each young man to answer the call to serve the nation. All Japanese Americans, and also the nation, owe them a debt which can never be repaid, but which will always be honored.

- |                                  |                                      |
|----------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Sgt. TERUO HOZAKI (Los Angeles)  | T/Sgt. AKIRA OTSUBO (Stockton)       |
| Cpl. TOSHIO HOZAKI (Los Angeles) | Pfc. CALVIN SAITO (Los Angeles)      |
| Sgt. STANLEY ICHIKI (Stockton)   | Pfc. GEORGE SAITO (Los Angeles)      |
| Sgt. WILLIAM IMAMOTO             | Pfc. MASUTO SAKADO (Hawaii)          |
| (Port Orchard, Wash.)            | Cpl. YOSHINORI SAKAI (Sacramento)    |
| Pfc. BOB KAMEOKA (Hanford)       | Sgt. ROY A. SHIMATSU (Torrance)      |
| Pfc. TAKEO KANEICHI (Fresno)     | Sgt. TOGO SUGIYAMA (Manhattan Beach) |
| Cpl. GEORGE KAWANO (Inglewood)   | Pfc. COOPER TAHARA (Florin)          |
| Cpl. ROBERT KISHI (Stockton)     | Sgt. IWAO TAKAHASHI (Whittier)       |
| Pfc. KAY K. MASAOKA (Lodi)       | Pfc. KO TANAKA (Lodi)                |
| Sgt. SEICHI NAKAMOTO (Fresno)    | T/Sgt. TED TANOUYE (Torrance)        |
| Cpl. GEORGE NAKAMURA (Acampo)    | Pfc. MASARU TASHIMA (Fresno)         |
| Pfc. TAKEO NINOMIYA (Bowles)     | Pfc. FRED S. YASUDA (Los Angeles)    |
| Pfc. JOE NISHIMOTO (Fresno)      | Pfc. MINORU YOSHIDA (Stockton)       |
| Pvt. SUSUMU OKURA (Wilmington)   | Pfc. TATSUO YOSHIZAKI (Norwalk)      |
| Pfc. GEORGE OMOKAWA (San Pedro)  |                                      |





**DIVING BOARD**—Two lads from Rohwer discovered this 15-foot high diving board by a river after about a four-mile hike into the nearby woods.

## Playing Tom Sawyer in Rohwer

Two 16-year-old boys, David Kataoka and Arvin Kataoka (not related) from Block 5, were the Tom Sawyers of Rohwer. The barbed wire fence, which secured the Rohwer camp, was no barrier to the youngsters, who were curious and adventurous. It was more like a challenge.

Rohwer, like all of the concentration camps, was planned and built geometrically. Everything, including the rows of barracks and the blocks, was predictable and boring. And youngsters with not much to do and restricted within the confines of the fenced-in camp, were constantly searching for something different, something exciting, and something besides the regimented camp life.

Block 5 was at the south end of the camp and

across the fence was the wooded area with tall trees and wide bushes—unexplored territory. Cutting logs for firewood in the woods just outside of the camp boundaries was a regular project conducted by all of the blocks.

One day, while chopping away at the logs with the Block 5 crew, David and Arvin noticed a narrow path which led deeper into the wooded area. The path didn't look as if it had been used for some time, but both Nisei youths were intrigued by it. They followed the path for a short distance. Where it led they did not know, but the excitement of the unknown got their adrenalin flowing.

The next day, they approached the cook at the

mess hall and asked him if he could prepare two lunches for them. They explained that they would not be back for lunch that day. Armed with two lunches and an axe, the two youngsters took off in their bicycles for the lost trail in the woods.

Since the path had not been used for some time, David and Arvin often had to chop away at overgrown bushes and branches. Once in a while, they ran into old trees which had fallen across the trail, but they kept going as the winding path and where it led became an obsession. It was slow going, but they kept at it for three consecutive days, returning to the camp before dusk each day. They had travelled a hard and tough three miles from camp.

On the final day, the path led them to a river, and as they walked along the shore of the river, the river became wider. At the widest point of the river was the surprise of their life. Made of logs and wood planks was a tall diving board, which was at least 15 feet high.

It was a hot summer day, and with no one around, the two youths yelled at their discovery. They quickly doffed their clothes, climbed the rickety structure and dove into the cool river. Investigating the area later, they also found a swamped flat-bottom boat, which they worked to get it floating again. It was a day to remember for the rest of their lives.

Like all young boys, it didn't take long before they spread the word around to their friends. Not all their friends took the challenge of walking three or four miles outside of the camp to reach the swimming hole, but some did, including three Shimabukuro brothers and Masachika Arai, among others.

No one knows who originally found the swimming hole and built the diving board, but for the few kids of the Rohwer camp who discovered it, it was an opportunity to play Tom Sawyer in the woods and rivers of Arkansas for a few years.



**SWIMMING HOLE**—Young boys from the camp ride a boat they found swamped in the river, while another youth swims along side at their "secret" swimming hole.



**CAMP STYLE FOOTBALL**—Playing on a field with clumps of grass, football was popular during early days of Rohwer in spite of shortage of equipment. Player in white jersey in center is blocking for ballcarrier (Yas

Chono) in dark jersey. This 1943 game was between the GI's and the Blue Devils.

## Lumpy Dirt Fields Fail to Deter Youths from Sports

The first trainload of internees arrived in Rohwer on Sept. 17, 1942, and less than two months later, the first football game was played.

Witnessed by a few thousand people, the all-star team from the Santa Anita Assembly Center defeated an all-star team from the Stockton Assembly Center, 7-0, on a dusty field. Kazumi "Choo-Choo" Tsujimoto, a 145-lb. guard, blocked

George Kagawa's punt and recovered it in the end zone for the only touchdown of the game.

That two football teams can get organized, practice, and play a game within such a short time is reflective of not only the interest in athletics by the internees, but also of the fact that 64 percent of the people (about 5,400) were Nisei or Sansei. Most of the Nisei were in their teens and 20s, whereas the

small number of Sansei in the camp were mostly under ten years of age.

Sports activities were an important part of camp life. There wasn't much to do for the young people within the restricted confines of the camp. The frustration and energy was directed toward an athletic program, which proved very popular. Many of the Issei enjoyed the games as spectators, with baseball drawing large crowds of baseball-savvy oldsters. Although many also attended the football games, the mayhem and rules of the sport puzzled them.

The camp's athletic department was directed by George "Pop" Suzuki, whose staff was responsible for the development and maintenance of the athletic fields in Blocks 18 and 21, and also organizing various sports leagues. Aside from baseball and football, the section developed a program



**ROYAL SPARTAN SOFTBALL TEAM**—(Front row-l to r) Sut Ohara, Joe Mizufuka, Mabo Sugii, Hidemi Sugino, Min Dote. (Second row) Shig Nishio, Nob Morimoto, Seiichi Sugino, Eddie Morimoto, Ray Miyamoto, Roy Sugino. (Back row) Haruo Kumamoto, Sei Shoda, Shiro Morimoto, Tosh Dote, Perry Miyake, and Jiro Nawa.

*Mayhem and rules of football puzzled Issei spectators.*

which included judo, boxing, horseshoes, volleyball, table tennis, weightlifting, and other athletic activities. Most of the athletic programs were organized for both boys and girls.

The athletic fields were just plain dirt and during the winter season, the rainy season made the field a quagmire of mushy surface, which made playing impossible. Since the camp did not have a gymnasium, the basketball games were played outdoors on a smoothed-out dirt surface, which made

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**ROHWER MEMORIAL CEMETERY**—Built outside the camp boundary, the Rohwer Memorial Cemetery had 24 grave markers when the camp was closed late in 1945. The state of Arkansas recently nominated the cemetery to the National Park Service to have it declared a National Historic Landmark. This photograph was taken in 1945.

## Rohwer Cemetery Needs Help

One of the few physical evidences left of the Rohwer concentration camp, which was in full operation during the war years and closed about 25 years ago, is the memorial cemetery. Existing in lonely splendor among a grove of tall trees near the state highway, the cemetery has recently become a focus of efforts to both restore its monuments and also to have it declared a national historic landmark.

The memorial cemetery, built by the internees of the Rohwer camp, has 24 grave markers and three tall monuments, two built by internees and one built in 1982. The cemetery was located outside of the camp boundary since there were no provision made within the camp for a cemetery.

During the past few years, many former Rohwer internees have visited the former camp site, and they have discovered that the cemetery monuments are the only physical structures still intact. In fact, many were surprised to find that the cemetery itself was well maintained. For many years, the Green Thumb clubs of Arkansas and Mississippi have been taking care of the cemetery by hiring caretakers to cut its lawn and keep it in shipshape form.

The state of Arkansas had named the Rohwer Memorial Cemetery as a state historical monument a number of years ago. In 1974, it was listed on the National Register of Historical Places. Early this year, the Arkansas Historic Preservation Program nominated the cemetery to the National Park Service to have it declared a National Historic Landmark. If it is approved late this year, the cemetery will be maintained by the federal government.

In the meantime, there is another effort underway to restore the crumbling monuments. The two original monuments were built in 1945. The monuments were designed and built by two internees,

Kay Horisawa and Kaneo Fujioka. The men were able to use only the material they had available, which was concrete. The two monuments, one which was built in honor and memory of the Rohwer Nisei soldiers who were killed in action during World War II and the other was a memorial to those internees who died in the camp, had withstood the ravages of time for many years.

The deteriorating condition of the monuments were first brought to light about 10 years ago by Sam Yada, who had relocated to Little Rock from Rohwer. He began a one-man campaign to raise funds to replace the memorial to the Nisei soldiers by contacting his former Rohwer friends. His relentless nationwide effort succeeded, and in 1982, a new monument was built using more stable materials. The dedication of the monument was attended by the Governor of Arkansas and other state and national officials.

Since then, others have become interested in the cemetery, and the condition of the two original concrete monuments began to worry them. Some of the hand-made concrete symbols were breaking apart. The settling of the ground and the deterioration of the old concrete was such that George Hasegawa, a retired engineer from St. Louis, who made an inspection of the site last year, stated that "these monuments will fall and probably break into so many pieces."

Concerned over the original cemetery monuments, the Midwest District Council of the Japanese American Citizens League organized the Rohwer Restoration Project in 1989 to save the monuments. Their goal is to raise about \$35,000. George Sakaguchi of St. Louis is the chairman of the project.

Donations can be sent to the following: The Rohwer Restoration Project, c/o Midwest JAACL, P.O. Box 270005, St. Louis, Missouri 63126. All contributions are tax deductible.

## Sports

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dribbling the basketball a constant adventure.

To the cheers of the Issei, a sumo mound was built in one of the blocks, and the first sumo tournament in the history of Arkansas was held in Rohwer. The first sumo champion was Victor Matsui, a strong and agile Nisei from Redondo Beach, who stood 5 ft. 9 inches and weighed 185 pounds.

The Rohwer High School had its own athletic and physical education program for boys and girls. Football, volleyball, and basketball leagues were popular with teams organized by grades. As the camp authorities reduced travel restrictions, there were inter-camp events between Rohwer and Jerome High Schools in football and girls volleyball during 1944.

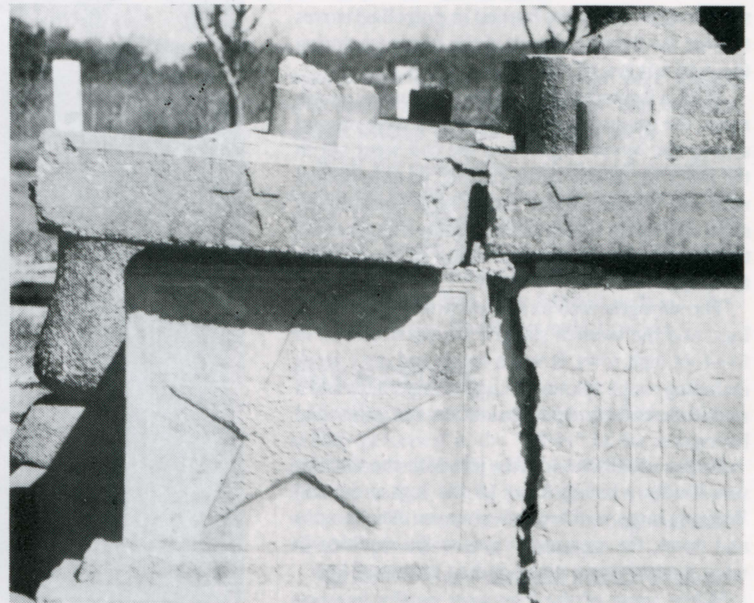
The playing fields were just plain dirt, field standards and equipment were built from scratch with available material, and the athletic equipment was average or hand-me-downs, but they never affected the young people's interest and enthusiasm for athletics in the camp.



**THE CEMETERY TODAY**—Monument at left is a memorial to Nisei soldiers from Rohwer who were killed in action while serving in the U.S. Army, and at right is the monument dedicated to those internees who died in the camp. Both were built by internees 45 years ago and are now in bad shape. The monument in center honors Nisei soldiers who served during World War II. It was built in 1982 through the effort of Sam Yada, a former Rohwer internee who lives in Little Rock.



**MONUMENT BUILDERS**—Kaneo Fujioka (left) and Kay Horisawa (right) engineered and constructed this concrete monument in 1945.



**FALLING APART**—The base of concrete monument has broken apart. As deterioration continues, a national campaign has been initiated to restore the two original monuments.



**THE GANG'S ALL HERE**—The people of Block 7 during early 1945. With relocation in full swing and young adults leaving camp, Rohwer's

population consisted mostly of Issei and children. Note service flag with each star representing a Nisei from the block serving in the Army.

## Block Log Cutting

A bi-weekly ritual at the Rohwer internment camp during the winter was the log-cutting projects in all blocks. The logs were cut and split into short lengths and were burned in potbellied stoves to heat the living quarters of the internees during the cold winters of Arkansas.

With a limited supply of the log-cutting equipment, the gas-powered circular saws were rotated among the blocks, and when the call went out to the block for its day of log-cutting, all able-bodied men and women turned out to help. Community spirit was never higher in camp than when it came time for the block to cut its share of the logs for firewood.

The strongest men and boys carried and cut the logs, and the women stacked the cut firewood in five-foot high rows. It was a tough and dirty work including rough splinters, snagged fingernails and a multitude of cuts and bruises on the arms and hands.

It was usually an all-day job with the circular saw loudly whining away as the logs were cut. Wearing large neckerchiefs to cover their mouths and noses, the men took turns at the machine in what seemed like a never-ending stream of logs.

While some of the logs were cut by internee lumberjacks from the nearby woods, most of the logs were delivered to the Rohwer camp by outside contractors since it took a lot of logs to keep more than 8,500 people warm.

It was not until late 1944 when the camp switched over to coal. Until then, coal was used only for the hospital's large furnace, heating water for each block's wash and bath rooms, and for the big ranges in the mess halls to prepare food.

When darkness set in and the last log was cut, there was always a good feeling, not just because the tough job was finished, but also because everyone in the block had pitched in for the benefit of the block.



**LOG CUTTING**— Every block had a log-cutting day and every able-bodied adult pitched in to help saw, carry and stack the logs. The cut wood was fired in pot-bellied stoves to keep the living quarters warm during winter.



CALIFORNIA HERE WE COME—First trainload of internees leave Rohwer to return to California in July, 1945.

## War Ends and Internees Faced Anti-Japanese Mood of Public

The war in Europe ended in June, 1945, and Japan surrendered in August of the same year. The West Coast was no longer declared off limits to Japanese, and the heroic war record of the Japanese American soldiers in both the European and Pacific theaters of World War II helped to blunt much, but not all of the anti-Japanese climate in the country. There were many groups on the West Coast, now that they had gotten rid of the Japanese on the pretext of war security, who began campaigning that they didn't want the Japanese people to return.

Many people, especially the Issei, after being incarcerated for more than four years, were fearful of leaving the security of the camps. Although most still wanted to return to California, the anti-Japanese rhetoric from the state added to their reluctance.

Anti-Japanese organizations sprouted like weeds in California as they campaigned against the return of the Japanese. Pamphlets such as "The Japs Must Not Come Back" were circulated. All of the war-time hate propaganda returned with a vengeance. There were proposals to ship all Issei to Japan and putting all Nisei on an island in the Pacific. Some even asked that the Japanese be kept in the concentration camps "until they die of old age."

The district attorney of the state of California, Fred Houser, campaigned against the return of the Japanese to the state. The Board of Trustees of the Los Angeles Bar Association, the so-called protector of individual rights, passed a resolution against the return. Everybody was getting in on the act

against a defenseless people who were forcibly evacuated and incarcerated in concentration camps without any charge against them.

With the continuous rantings and ravings by organized bigots, very few Issei voluntarily relocated to the West Coast when the area was "opened" for the Japanese during the early stages of the relocation program. Those who did return during the early days were families with both Issei and Nisei adults. But it was only a trickle.

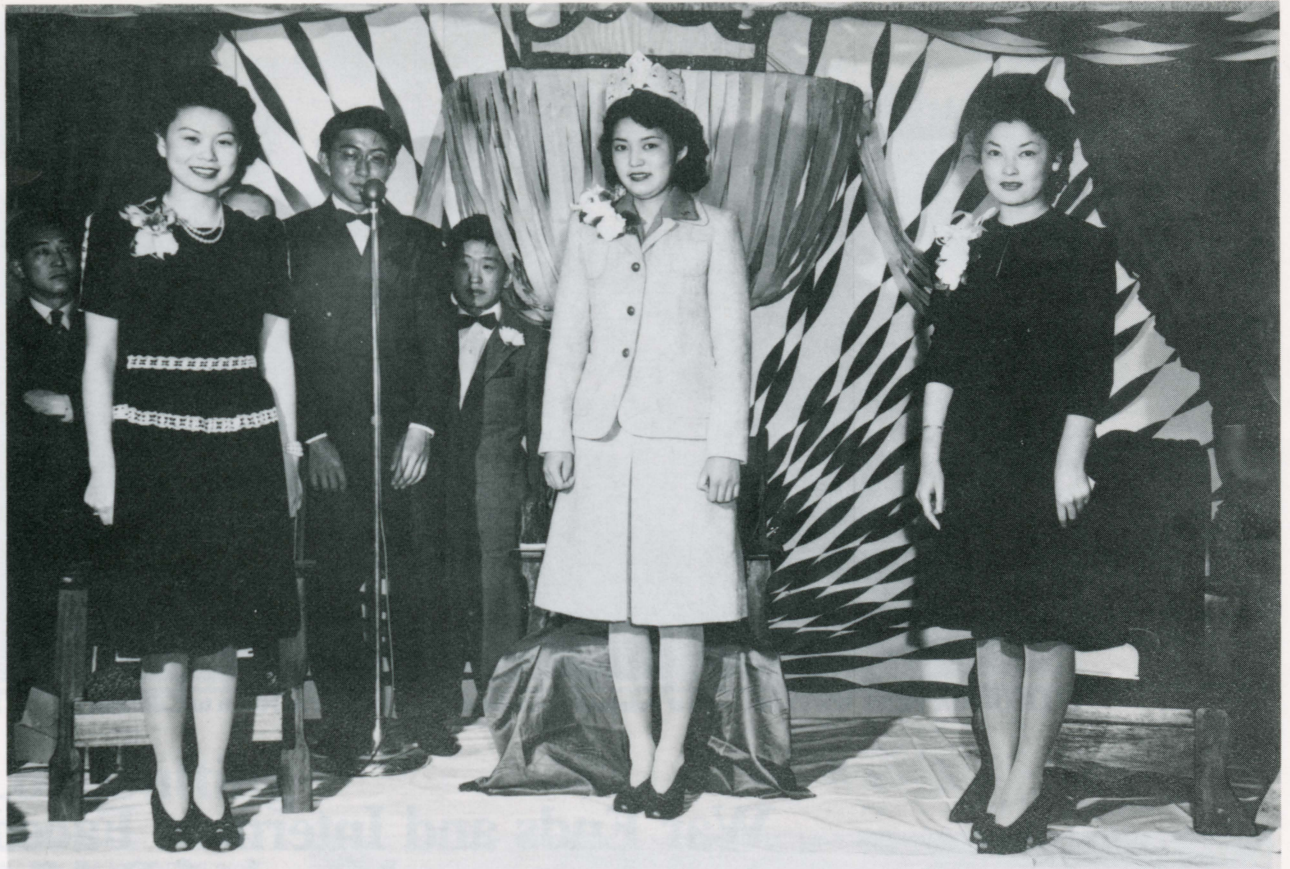
### THE RETURN

As reluctant as some of the people were to leave, as they perceived it, the "safety" of the camp, the push became a shove when the WRA announced that the camps would be closed in 1945. There were still a little less than half of the original total of 120,000 persons still in the camps.

Aghast at the anti-Japanese attitude of the people on the West Coast, a small number of white Army veterans, who had fought alongside the 442nd Regimental Combat Team in Europe, volunteered to speak at various meetings in California to inform the people of the valor and courage of the Nisei soldiers. With the intent of trying to defuse a dangerous racial climate, the Department of War approved the program.

The white veterans went into the various cities and small towns to speak before veteran organizations, Lions Clubs, Optimists Clubs and chamber of commerce groups. The effort helped, but it really didn't turn things around. In one case, a veteran who spoke about the contributions of the all-Nisei

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**CORONATION BALL**—A month-long camp queen contest was topped with a coronation ball held in February, 1943. Crowned queen of the camp was Shigeko Nakano (center) with runners-up Kimi Yamada (left) and Rosie Matsumoto (right). Emcee was Icy Hasama, with “Choo-Choo” Tsujimoto (behind Hasama) coordinating the event. More than 650 people attended the large-

est social event held in Rohwer, which was sponsored by the Royal Dukes club. One of the most active clubs in Rohwer, the Royal Dukes were comprised of Nisei from Los Angeles.

Funds raised by the group through its queen contest and coronation ball went toward the establishment of a children toy library in the camp.

## War Ends

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Army outfit and asked for tolerance and understanding before a group in Bakersfield, was jumped on and beaten up after he left the hall. And so it went.

Given a choice, the vast majority opted to return to the West Coast, and the trains which originally took them into the concentration camps went into reverse and shipped the people back to the West Coast. As bad as the anti-Japanese climate was on the West Coast, safety in numbers was a strong factor, and so the people returned together in groups to their former cities and towns.

In many cases, the former internees were met by welcoming committees formed by former neighbors and the local churches. The Japanese were helped with their resettlement problems, and temporary hostels were set up until housing was found for the families.

There were also violence and other acts which met other returnees. There were bombings, night-rider shootings at farmhouses, and other terrorism

committed against the Japanese. And many merchants had “We don’t serve Japs” signs on their windows.

### GEN. STILLWELL

Mary Masuda and her family had returned to Santa Ana from a concentration camp and were threatened by local bullies to get out of town. Her brother, Sgt. Kazuo Masuda, had been killed in Italy when he deliberately sacrificed his own life so that the men of his patrol could return safely. Sergeant Masuda was awarded the Distinguished

Service Cross.

The presentation of the nation’s second highest military award was made to Mary a few weeks after she was threatened. The ceremony was held in front of the Masuda home with Gen. “Vinegar Joe” Stillwell, one of the outstanding generals of the Pacific War, doing the honors.

Stillwell, knowing of the circumstances, said, “The Nisei bought an awful big chunk of America with their blood. You’re damn right those Nisei boys have a place in the American heart, now and forever. We cannot allow a single injury to be done to them without defeating the purpose for which we fought.”

After that strong statement from a very outspoken and tough general, the Masuda family was never bothered again. The event and the general’s remarks were reported in the Southern California newspapers, and it helped not only to defuse a dangerous racial situation, but his words encouraged a lot of other people to come forth and openly support and help the Japanese returnees.

.....

*‘The Nisei bought an awful big chunk of America with their blood.’*

—Gen. ‘Vinegar Joe’ Stillwell

## Evacuation Not Justified Says Congress Commission

If anyone has any doubt about the fact that the Evacuation and the internment of Japanese aliens and Japanese Americans during World War II was not justified and was racially motivated, the issue was clarified in 1983.

In 1980 Congress created the Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians, which was approved by President Jimmy Carter. During the following two years, the national commission held hearings and examined more than 10,000 documents relating to the incarceration of the Japanese people in the United States.

In 1983, the Commission issued a report to Congress and found that military necessity did not exist in fact to justify the evacuation and exclusion of ethnic Japanese from the West Coast.

It also determined that the Evacuation and exclusion was the result of "racial prejudice, war hysteria, and a failure of political leadership."

The Commission also recommended that "Congress establish a fund which will provide personal redress," and it was this report which initiated the right of redress for all those interned who were still alive and set the one-time per capita compensatory payment of \$20,000.

President Gerald R. Ford, in a presidential proclamation, stated that, "We now know what we should have known then—not only was the Evacuation wrong, but Japanese Americans were and are loyal Americans . . . I call upon the American people to affirm with me this American Promise—that we have learned from the tragedy of that long-ago experience and forever to treasure liberty and justice for each individual American, and resolve that this kind of action shall never again be repeated."

## Five Decades Later, Evacuation and Internment are Still Remembered

It has been almost five decades since the Evacuation and the internment in 1942. In a person's lifetime, that is a long time, but to most of us, it does not seem like it was that long ago. The scenes of the concentration camp and events which occurred are still vivid in our memories. It is difficult to forget, and we should not forget.

The reconstruction of our lives was not easy as we returned to find our rightful place in the nation. The lessons we learned from our Issei parents—patience, perseverance, and dignity—stood us well as we struggled to survive and succeed. Not everyone made it, but nevertheless, most could say that our lives today are, for the most part, better than what we had originally envisioned when many of us left camp with an unknown future and empty pockets.

When the camps closed, most of the Issei were already in their 50s, and many were in their 60s. They had lost everything during the Evacuation and at their late age, starting life again from scratch was very difficult. But they went back to farming and gardening and somehow overcame the obstacles and managed to survive.

For the Nisei, who were just coming of age, the story had better results. In spite of still recurring anti-Asian discrimination and acts, most have

worked their way to join the world of middle America. Sons and daughters, and yes, even grandchildren, now are part of the household, and all of the Sansei and Yonsei face a brighter future than our Issei parents and we did.

The Evacuation also was responsible for Japanese Americans now living in almost every state of the Union. Although the West Coast is still home to most of us, Japanese Americans with Southern drawls and Boston accents are no longer unique. And with miscegenation laws eliminated from most states, about 50 percent of the Japanese Americans now marry non-Japanese.

### WE'RE GETTING THERE

The corporate world still has large pockets of resistance against promoting Japanese American executives, but things have improved in many other fields. The teaching profession has been a successful area of employment as well as engineering and the various sciences. There are also many successful businesses owned or managed by Japanese Americans. Things could always be better, but more important, we appear to be getting there.

Probably the biggest impact of change is the election of Japanese Americans to the Senate and

Congress. Paving the way were the elections of Senators Daniel Inouye and the late Spark Matsunaga and Congresswoman Patsy Mink from Hawaii. In California, the general public has since elected Norman Mineta and Robert Matsui to Congress, and both have been continuously re-elected. Now it is no longer big news when a Japanese American gets elected as mayor or as a city councilperson.

The strange thing is that who in their right mind would have ever thought that a Japanese American would ever be elected by the general public to the Senate and Congress 40 years ago when the situation was the darkest for all of us. The impetus for the election of Japanese Americans on the mainland United States was provided by the Civil Rights movement of the 60s and the election of Blacks into public offices throughout the nation.

The approval by Congress of the Redress Act of 1989 to compensate persons of Japanese ancestry for their incarceration is also symbolic of the progress of race relations in the nation. There is obviously a lot of room for more improvement, but slowly but surely as we all stand up for the rights of others and ourselves, we as a nation will become a better country.

Yes, we have come a long ways.



# All the Camps

## THE ASSEMBLY CENTERS

The 15 temporary camps, called assembly centers, were hurriedly built to round up and intern the people as quickly as possible. Built under the direction of the Western Defense Command, the Army found it expedient to use existing race tracks, stock yards, and fair grounds for most of the assembly centers. The camps were opened during April and May, 1942, and closed July to October, 1942, when the internees were transferred to more permanent camps, called "relocation camps," by government officials.

Not listed above are the Manzanar and Poston camps, both which were originally opened as assembly centers and later changed to permanent camps.

1. Fresno, Calif. (5,120 persons)
2. Marysville, Calif. (2,451 persons)
3. Mayer, Arizona (245 persons)
4. Merced, Calif. (4,508 persons)
5. Pinedale, Calif. (4,792 persons)
6. Pomona, Calif. (5,434 persons)
7. Portland, Ore. (3,676 persons)
8. Puyallup, Wash. (7,390 persons)
9. Sacramento, Calif. (4,739 persons)
10. Salinas, Calif. (3,586 persons)
11. Santa Anita Racetrack, Calif. (18,719 persons)
12. Stockton, Calif. (4,271 persons)
13. Tanforan Race Track, Calif. (7,816 persons)
14. Tulare, Calif. (4,978 persons)
15. Turlock, Calif. (3,661 persons)

## THE "RELOCATION" CAMPS

These were the ten major concentration camps built by the government to intern Japanese aliens and citizens expelled from the West Coast during World War II. The last center was closed in October, 1946.

1. Amache, Colorado (7,318 persons)
2. Gila River, Arizona (13,348 persons)
3. Heart Mountain, Wyoming (10,767 persons)
4. Jerome, Arkansas (8,497 persons)
5. Manzanar, California (10,046 persons)
6. Minidoka, Idaho (9,397 persons)
7. Rohwer, Arkansas (8,475 persons)
8. Tule Lake, California (18,789 persons)
9. Topaz, Utah (8,130 persons)
10. Poston, Arizona (17,814 persons)

## SPECIAL DETENTION CAMPS

The following camps were detention centers where many Issei and some Nisei community leaders were incarcerated, most of whom were arrested by the FBI and local police the day after Dec. 7, 1941, and also during February, 1942. Most were leaders of various community organizations, Buddhist ministers, Japanese school teachers, businessmen, and others whom the government in its ignorance of the Japanese community, considered "dangerous to the war effort."

There were other similar special camps spread around the country, but most held a few hundred Japanese for a short while. The internees were eventually transferred to other larger special detention camps like Crystal City, Missoula, and Santa Fe.

1. Bismarck, No. Dakota
2. Crystal City, Texas
3. Fort Livingston, Louisiana
4. Fort Sill, Oklahoma
5. Kenedy, Texas
6. Kooskia, Idaho
7. Lordsburg, New Mexico
8. McCoy, Wisconsin
9. Missoula, Montana
10. Santa Fe, New Mexico
11. Seagoville, Texas
12. Stringtown, Oklahoma



**PSI EPSILON**—A girl's club from Block 29, its members were Lillian Matsumoto, Mary Nawa, Mary Fujishima, Marie Kimoto, Lillian Nakashima, Dorothy Sugita, Rosie Matsumoto, Kikuye Toyota, Tsutako Kobayashi, Iris Matsumoto and Jikko Kimoto.



**LUANAS**—(Back row-l to r) Maisie Horikiri, Michi Tanaka, Margaret Kikuchi, Ruby Hamasaka, Jane Shitera, Christy Ozawa, Mildred Ikezoe. (Front) Mary Ihara, Ann Tsuji, Lilyan Hananouchi, Betty Horikiri.



**LUMBERJACKS** — Tough-looking lumberjack crew from Block 16. (Front-1 to r) Shiraga, Matsuzawa, Uno. (Standing) Baba, Uno, Sakai, Uno, unidentified, unidentified, and Kakehashi. (Back)-unidentified.

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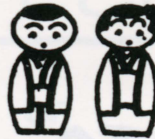
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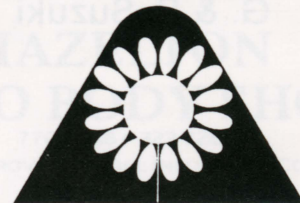
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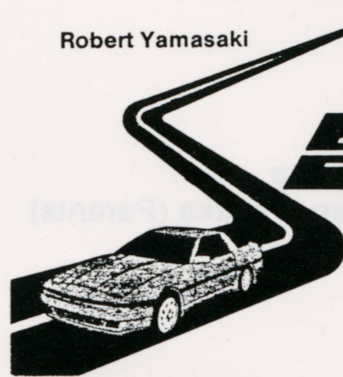
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