

MANZANAR . . . RELOCATION CENTER

By Robert L. Brown

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Manzanar is most startling to those who approach it late at night. After driving from Los Angeles for three hours across the silent wastes of the great Mojave desert, with only an occasional car passing, and only one small town of less than a thousand population to break the solitude of the stars, the traveler rounds a small hill and is confronted suddenly with the lights of a city of 10,000 persons, sweeping upward over a mile square toward the silhouetted wall of the Sierra Crest, 14,000 feet high.

"So that's Manzanar!" he exclaims. "Wonder what's going on there? How do you suppose they're taking it?"

For Manzanar in Owens Valley is one of the War Relocation Centers where 120,000 evacuees of Japanese descent are housed for the duration. Under the lights here, pretty well at peace with the world, 10,000 of them are sound asleep on Army type cots in Army-type barracks, their stomachs full of good substantial food supplied through the Army quartermaster and cooked by their own cooks in 36 standard Army kitchens, served mess-hall style.

A few men are still awake: those on the night crew to watch the water system, night janitors, firemen, and the internal police--all Japanese Americans--and there may be a few card or 'goh' games still going on in muffled tones. Some younger men are still earnestly or heatedly debating the latest rumor or their present predicament. But these are a mere handful. There has never been an enforced curfew within the boundaries of Manzanar. Its people, like people all over the world, are normal. When it comes time to go to bed, they're tired; they go to sleep.

And if, by chance, the Army sentry in one of the four searchlight towers becomes playful and swings his searchlight down on a house so that it shines in a window and awakens one of the sleepers, he gets angry! "I wish those damn' sentries would keep their lights out of my window. You'd think we were in a concentration camp!"

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To get the over-all picture of the tremendous task of building and staffing Manzanar and all the other War Relocation Centers for evacuees from West Coast areas designated by military authority, imagine, if you will, any town of 10,000

in America--in Vermont, Michigan, Alabama, Washington. Then try to imagine someone handing you an order to go out and build a duplicate town with an executive crew of 30 people and a construction crew of 400, the whole thing to be done in 90 days including water system, sewer system, and buildings. To top that, the instructions read that 7 days after work is started, the first 1,000 inhabitants will move in.

Thus was Manzanar started.

Eighty-three volunteers arrived first. They came in three busloads. Included in the group were stenographers, a woman doctor and a nurse, a male doctor, and 60 kitchen workers.

The doctors immediately set up an emergency hospital. Kitchen crews piled into cases of food stacked in the middle of the first block, which then consisted of four buildings without windows or doors. They arrived at 3 o'clock in the afternoon. By 6, everybody had been fed, camp style, sitting on packing boxes and eating on paper plates--but fed. By 9, beds were ready, and Manzanar camp life had begun.

At 10 o'clock, somebody thought there should be a "house count" to see if everybody was present. The count turned up one missing. A second and more careful count was taken. Still one missing! Everyone became concerned, and Japanese as well as Caucasians turned out to hunt the missing person.

He was found in about fifteen minutes. A caterpillar ditch digger had cut a line ditch for the sewer pipe, and an excavation about 6 feet deep and 15 inches wide. At night and without lights, a cook, a little hefty about the waist as some cooks get, had walked into the ditch and was wedged tightly in the bottom.

This has been Manzanar's only case of a "missing person".

Two days after the coming of the first 83 "pioneers", approximately 1,000 "volunteers" arrived. Some came by automobile in a 140-car caravan led by Army jeeps; others by special train. Within those two days California's fastest-growing city increased from 4 buildings to nearly 80.

At Manzanar, many of these "volunteers" could get work for the first time for which they had been trained. In the cities a Japanese American boy who had been graduated from a university with an engineer's ticket often found it next to impossible to get a job in a Caucasian firm as an engineer. Prejudice kept the doors of opportunity closed;

many gave up the fight and took on "apple polishing" jobs in the fruit-stand markets.

But in Manzanar there was immediate and urgent need for highly trained personnel of all kinds. A city of 10,000 has countless tradesmen and supply houses to keep the wheels of living moving. Work normally done by these people had to be organized and directed by the management. There had to be police and fire protection; maintenance of sewage disposal and water supply; distribution of food; garbage disposal; ground maintenance; a communication system; a transportation system; a public health service and a hospital. Cities of 10,000 have a city council, and should, if they do not, have a planning commission; they have churches and schools and newspapers; places of entertainment and stores. Furthermore, all these things grow gradually as the normal city of 10,000 grows.

But at Manzanar they had to be created immediately, almost overnight, by a management at first consisting of 12 men, later expanding to not more than 40 Caucasians.

So the Japanese Americans found plenty of opportunity for work. The first arrivals, especially, looked upon themselves as pioneers. Manzanar had earlier been a pioneer community in the '60s, when Middle-Western farmers, after the overland trek to California, had settled on the rich land of George's Creek and planted apple trees there--hence "MANZANAR", from the Spanish "apple orchard". But the City of Los Angeles, in its search for water, bought out all the farmers of Manzanar early in this century and by 1933 had turned the land back to sagebrush, with only the hardiest of the original apple trees surviving. The first arrivals were quick to learn this background of the land they were to call home, and rapidly accepted the pioneer challenge.

Two former newspaper men saw immediately a need for a clearing house of information between the administration and the evacuees. They presented a plan to the management and found themselves within the hour in charge of "Internal Information", which grew from an empty barrack and a bulletin board to a staff of 53 information experts in 6 major offices within two months. The work these boys and their staff did in the early stages of development was invaluable to the management. When self-government was organized and block leaders elected to a central council, the information clerks moved into the larger scheme of management as clerks to the block representatives and were able to bring with them intimate knowledge of administrative machinery and policy which insured a smooth functioning of the block leaders' duties from the very inception of the program.

A young architect was given the task of organizing what might be termed the City Planning Commission. With a crew of assistants he began work immediately at an overall landscape plan for the Center, under the general supervision of the Caucasian chief engineer. Today this plan is well on its way to realization.

Other engineers found themselves running the water and sewer system; young business men were put in charge of warehouses and supply. A girl with an excellent record in State Civil Service in personnel work took charge of all personnel records and within a short while had a staff of 20 clerks who compiled records on all people in camp. Newspaper hopefuls, a few with actual experience and others with high school or some college newspaper experience and a great desire to be professional news-hawks, found their way to the staff of the Manzanar Free Press, a mimeographed sheet, and first "newspaper" to be published in any of the relocation or evacuation centers.

But these opportunities for the evacuees were not the Utopia they first seemed; the other side of the story soon became apparent with the arrival of more people. As in any city of 10,000 there were more people qualified for certain jobs than there were jobs. The early volunteers had, of course, settled into the so-called "best jobs". A familiar cry made the rounds, a cry heard in other cities of 10,000 or cities of 2,000 or cities of 2,000,000. . . .

"How did that guy get that job?"

"Where do you get the pull to get on this crew?"

"I've got 10 years' experience and he has only 2 years ---it's a gyp!"

And as in any other community, adjustments were made. By and large, Manzanar residents hold jobs on ability just as, by and large, people in other communities hold jobs on ability. As new work opportunities develop, there is a shifting of personnel. There are advancements on merit, and some workers get dismissed for not doing the job as it should be done.

In all the relocation centers, evacuees are provided with room, board, and hospitalization. In Manzanar families are together in partitioned barracks, four apartments to the building. Single men and women have separate large barracks. The Center is divided into 36 blocks of 15 buildings each. Each block has its own kitchen and mess hall and its own recreation building. Showers, toilets, and laundry rooms are located in separate buildings in the

center of each block. A 250-bed hospital is completely equipped and staffed by Japanese American doctors and nurses. A children's village near it houses nearly 100 orphans. The Center has a community general store where residents may purchase anything from soda pop to pajamas, and will very soon have community barber and beauty shops, shoe repair shops, and other tradesman types of enterprises necessary to life in any city of 10,000.

Those employed on projects or work details within the Center are given a monthly cash advance according to the type of work done. Those who do not work receive no remuneration. Cash advance for workers is divided into three groups: for work rated as unskilled, \$12 a month; skilled, \$16; and professional, \$19. Unskilled work includes general maintenance jobs, beginning typists, carpenter's helpers, or cub reporters; skilled work includes carpenters, truck drivers, stenographers, cooks, electricians; and professional classification covers doctors, registered nurses, editors, engineers, and those who qualify as sub-heads of departments.

Beside the general functions of Center operation, residents are employed on an Army project in the completion of camouflage nets; in farming, with an anticipated 3,000 acres in production at Manzanar by next year; and in an experimental program of growing guayule, the rubber producing plant. With 2,000 children in school this fall, and 4,000 persons now employed--both men and women--and with an additional 2,000 to be added to the payroll when new projects are developed, Manzanar will be utilizing close to 100 per cent of its employable manpower.

General opinion is that the Japanese Americans are primarily agriculturalists. Yet records show only about 40 per cent have a distinctly rural background. Consequently Manzanar, with limited agricultural possibilities at the outset, is being looked on more and more as a potential manufacturing center. Among other things, a clothing manufacturing project to supply work clothes to all evacuees is being established.

Life outside of working hours follows a pattern similar to that in any other American community. The Nisei, second-generation Japanese Americans, continue to live and act and think as do any Caucasian youngsters of like age groups. Especially is this true if they are kept busy.

I am constantly amazed on entering offices where people are at work drafting or filing, to hear strains of the latest Benny Goodman or Artie Shaw swing record hummed or whistled softly as work goes on. Dances, held regularly to the strains of the latest popular records, bring out the "jitter-bugs" as do dances in the "Palaces" and "Winter

Gardens" all over America. On the fourth of July the Center a "Queen Contest" and elected the most popular Miss, who was crowned with as much gaiety as thousands of others throughout the country.

And let none say the Nisei have no sense of humor. The Center was divided into districts almost immediately by incoming people. It has its Beverly Hills, its Hollywood, its Westwood, and I suppose its "South of the Slot", though this hasn't as yet appeared in print. Apartments have all manner of fancy names: "Sierra Manor" is quite common; "Jerks jernt" is perhaps the most modern and bizarre. There is the "Town House", "Ambassador", and the "Beverly-Wilshire", named with fine irony after three of the best hostleries in Los Angeles. The whole camp chuckled at a item appearing in the Free Press asking the women to stop using the laundry tubs for baths--use the showers instead--as "it is hard on the tubs".

For recreation, the top sport is baseball. Driving around the Center in the evening, one gets the impression that everybody is playing baseball. Actually there are over 150 teams and some 20 leagues. Two full pages of each issue of the Free Press are devoted to baseball scores and briefs of the best games. Feeling that the paper was getting overbalanced in this direction, I suggested to the editor that the staff play down a little on sports and try to get more news of a general nature. A howl went up immediately. The baseball scores were the best and most highly valued news items in the paper!

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Through all the standard pattern of life at Manzanar, however, runs the river of doubt--the fear of the future. By far the great majority of the residents are simple folk who are unable to comprehend the full significance of the evacuation. They were moved because it was war and the Army said to move. They know that if they had not moved there would have been trouble between themselves and their Caucasian neighbors. They feel safe and protected, and for this protection the vast majority are openly grateful.

"But after the war--what happens?" is the question in every adult mind.

Mothers are worried about their daughters' ability to keep house and make a home for prospective husbands "after we leave here", as daughters now are enjoying a freedom from housekeeping, cooking, and dishwashing that is usually only a wishful dream of young brides.

Fathers shake their heads and say that the lack of competition, the government-created jobs, will cause their boys to become soft and lazy and ill fit them for the hard work that must come "when this is over".

Where to live and what to do afterward is a constant topic.

"We must scatter, spread ourselves thin over the country," cautions one elderly leader. "We have lived too long in Little Tokyos all over the country. Our Caucasian neighbors do not know us. We trade among ourselves, have our own friends, and live apart from the country we are now frantically trying to cling to. No one knows us."

"We have the poorest public relations program of any group in America, with the possible exception of the Jews," says ~~the possible exception of the Jews~~ another young Nisei, graduate of a Pacific Coast university. "It may be too late to do much about it, but after the war we should organize a bang-up press and public relations program to let the rest of America really know what we are like."

Another put it this way: "You know what the trouble here is? Here at Manzanar we have security without a future. One of the best traits of our people has been that we have always supported ourselves--have always made our own way. Now the government pays our way, and we have security in having our food and lodging furnished. If the war were to end tomorrow, what would we have? Maybe what we need is less security of the kind we're getting and more chance for a future, which we're not getting--yet."

There lies one of the dangers of the program, of course. The danger of paternalism. Call it what you will, it cannot be denied that the very protection afforded the 120,000 evacuees in a time of war, in the manner in which it is being accomplished today, will isolate these people from the realities of everyday existence. And to compete in everyman's world of the future will be difficult if one has not lived through the stress and strain of the times--been conditioned to living, for example, in 1948 by having lived through the years from 1942 to 1948.

A sick man who has been in bed for a year has to learn to walk all over again. To accomplish this he has helping hands--his nurse, his family, his friends.

What the war will do to the thinking of the American public, to condition its help or non-help when 120,000 Japanese Americans try to walk again, is the big question mark of the program.

Perhaps the answer lies in keeping the patient on his feet--to let him walk enough each day never to forget how. This is an important part of the federal government's program in working toward self-sufficing and self-governing communities for evacuees, where there is useful work to do--work in the development of natural resources which will keep

skills in good trim and provide opportunity for the young to develop useful arts and crafts.

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The West Coast evacuation program was first in the hands of the Wartime Civil Control Administration of the Army's Western Defense Command, which established 18 temporary Assembly Centers for citizens and non-citizens of Japanese descent. From these the evacuees are moved to Relocation Centers, permanent for the duration, under the civilian control of the War Relocation Authority, headed by Dillon Myer. (Milton Eisenhower, who first headed it, is now with the Office of War Information.)

The Relocation Centers include Manzanar at Manzanar, California, with an approved capacity of 10,000; Colorado River at Poston, Arizona, 20,000; Tule Lake at Newell, California, 16,000; Gila at Sacaton, Arizona, 15,000; Minidoka at Eden, Idaho, 10,000; Heart Mountain at Lodi, Wyoming, 10,000; Rohwer at Rohwer, Arkansas, 10,000; Jerome at Jerome, Arkansas, 10,000; Central Utah at Delta, Utah, 10,000; and Granada at Granada, Colorado, 8,000.

Movement of evacuees to four of these Relocation Centers is nearly complete as we go to press, and two more are expected to open in mid-August.
