Japs Accept Evacuation To Arizona Without Resentment

(Robert J. Casey, noted Chicago Daily News Foreign Service war correspondent, in the following dispatch writes of a visit to the Poston, Ariz., resettlement area to which some 20,000 California Japanese have been evacuated.)

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POSTON, Ariz., Oct. 23.—Young Namakura looked at the war-bonds poster beside the sketch of Helen Watanabe, entrant in a beauty contest.

"Your Country Needs Your Help"—"They Gave Their Lives. We Give Only Our Dollars"—"What Sacrifice Have You Made?"

He looked across the endless ranks of hutments and the raw dustiness of fresh-graded earth in streets and yard plots, the long, unearthly vista of desert flatland rising in palsied tiers through the heat waves to the chocolate and mauve ramparts of the Dome Rock Mountains. He seemed to find nothing incongruous in what he saw.

There was no resentment in his voice when he said: "We are going to do everything that is asked of us to win this war."

But one of those who heard him came suddenly to a realization that if anybody should post a reward for personal sacrifice by United States citizens in behalf of the home-front war effort since Pearl Harbor, first prize at the moment would have to go to the inhabitants of this community. Poston, despite all euphemism, is an internment camp. The people who live in it are Japanese or of Japanese derivation, and the majority of them are Americans by all the legal tests.

'A Changing World'

"Yes," said young Namakura, "this is a changing world—otherwise, how do you account for the Cards winning the World Series?"

This in many ways is the most incredible community on earth. If removal under duress from one place and relocation in another under guard is confinement in a concentration camp—then this is a concentration camp—for the tenants of Poston's bright new dormitories came to them just that way.

On the other hand, if government by the consent of the governed constitutes a democracy, then this is a democracy—for these citizens, taxpayers and voters wasted no time arguing about their possible rights, but accepted the Poston arrangement as something logically deriving from the war. Politically, the settlement is the same as any other United States community.

Working with the W. R. A. officials, they have set up a municipal government that might be that of Evanston or Keokuk. After a year's residence, they will be eligible to vote in the affairs of the county in which they now live, and to say their say on the country's course in state and national affairs. Yet economically, Poston is a sort of communism in which nobody owns anything and everybody owns everything and wages are pegged for everybody, from farm laborer to surgeon, and at a very modest scale.

No Guards Visible

This is an internment camp, but there are no barbed wire fences, no watch towers, no visible police force. Five hundred soldiers are on duty as guards, but they are hardly ever seen by the inhabitants. Their job is to watch the highways and check passes of visitors.

It's a Japanese camp where you never hear a word of Japanese, where the descendants of the Samurai and such pitch horseshoes and play baseball and work tirelessly to make the town physically a progressive American community. If you can figure a lot of Americans interned in Tokyo trying to make their living conditions more completely Japanese you may realize the oddity of this.

Poston at the moment has 20,000 inhabitants and is the third largest town in Arizona. It is almost squarely in the middle of the old Colorado River Indian Reservation, 17 miles south of Parker, Ariz., the same distance from a railroad and about 300 miles from the nearest wholesale distribution center. It is one of those strange creations that have been sprouting all over the country since the declaration of war—vast acreages of wooden buildings, spaced in groups for fire control — miles of wide straight streets, door yards without grass—parks without trees—an atmosphere of dust and sun.

Water From Parker Dam

But it's different from its prototype, the Army cantonment, in its physical aspects as well as everything else. For water has been brought down to this particular bit of desert through a 25-mile ditch from the Parker diversion dam. Garden plots are being irrigated. Green things are already growing in parts of the camp where five months ago they chased out the rattlesnakes. And you get the idea that within a year Poston, whatever the deficiencies of its architecture, is going to be something to see.

The selection of the site was governed chiefly by expediency.

The Japanese population of California had to be moved somewhere out of the coastal military zone in a hurry, an astounding job even had there been no problem of relocation attached to it. And having been moved, these people had to be supervised and at the same time have a reasonably normal life—for there was no specific charge against any of them.

None of the states seemed anxious to take over California's racial problem, and the answer, of course, seemed to be to put them on federal land such as, for instance, the sparsely populated Indian reservation along the southern Colorado River. And so, over the protest of the Mojave Indians who, like other Indians, have recently developed fine consciousness, the movement into Arizona's oddest and biggest boom-town was begun.

Move Accepted Calmly

There wasn't much stir about this, the strangest trek in United States history since the gold rush of '49, or the Mormon push-cart pilgrimage. Whole families were uprooted from homes in the lush fields of California's more civilized areas and hauled out into the wilderness without a protest—almost, without a murmur. There seems to have been no fanatical demonstration over their departure. The Indians were too few and too widely scattered to make an audible chorus of protest at the point of their arrival.

You realize as you walk among them here and talk with them and watch them at work, or caring for their children, or playing games in the recreation halls, that they must be keenly aware of the difference between this and the old life. But if there is any bitterness, you see no evidence of it.

"Most of us are young," said young Namakura. "Most of us will live through this war. We knew right off the jump that the time had arrived when we must be Americans or Japanese. Most of us look on this as our opportunity to show that we are really Americans—to prove it so that there'll never be any doubt about it again."