

JAPANESE AMERICAN CITIZENS LEAGUE

TESTIMONY OF HENRY TANAKA

To the Commission on Wartime Relocation
and Internment of Civilians

Seattle, Washington
September 9, 1981

Honorable Chairperson and Members of the Commission,

On December 7th, 1941 when I learned that Pearl Harbor had been attacked I was shocked and felt sick to the pit of my stomach. I couldn't understand how the country of my parents could have committed such a dastardly act on the country of my birth.

As a loyal American citizen, I felt that it was my duty to assist my country in any way that I could. So, when a call for special policemen was made I volunteered and was assigned to work in the office. My first day's task was to catalog all the rifles that had been turned in by civilians and to distribute them to the special police who guarded strategic points on the island. At this point the authorities did not seem to feel that I, as a Japanese, would be disloyal.

However, at about the same time, armed police and civilians ransacked the homes of certain Japanese to search for arms and other materials that might be used for sabotage.

After about a month, I was relieved of my job and I went back to my radio and electrical appliance business. Shortly thereafter, my home was raided by the FBI and some of my belongings were confiscated.

"You are under arrest for investigation!" With these shocking words, I was arrested and locked in a cell of the Waimea jail. There were five others in this tiny cell, all sharing a gallon can for a latrine. After a sleepless night on the bare concrete floor, we were transferred next morning to the Wailua County Jail.

We were not allowed to have visitors for two weeks. At the first opportunity my wife brought me clean clothing and I felt like a human being again, instead of an animal.

One day several of us were taken to the County Building for a hearing which was presided over by a Military Intelligence officer and three plantation managers. "Where were you born?" "Have you been to Japan?" "Who will win the war?" "Are you expatriated?" "Did you visit the Japanese training ship, Taisei Maru, when it visited Kauai?" These were some of the questions put to me. It is important to note that during these proceedings and during the entire length of my imprisonment no specific charges were made against me.

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After about 100 days of incarceration, I received a letter from the Office of the Military Governor. It stated that "It is necessary to intern you for the duration of the war for reasons of security of the Western Pacific area." We were then immediately shipped to the Sand Island Detention Center on Oahu.

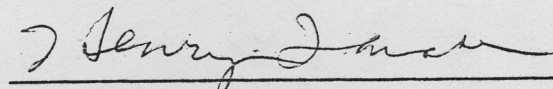
While at the Center, we were assigned different chores. I volunteered to be a tailor's assistant. One day, a Reverend Dozier, a Baptist minister, told us that if we voluntarily evacuated to the mainland we would have our civil rights restored and all confiscated papers, if any, would be returned to us. Those whose families were on welfare were forcibly shipped to the mainland, and a few voluntarily evacuated.

The remaining internees, including myself, were transferred to Camp Honouliuli. One day, at this new camp I volunteered to work with the clean-up group in the guards' compound for which we were paid 10¢ an hour. When one of the guards yelled "Hey, you Japs, stay in line," I quit.

Because confinement was affecting me emotionally, I wrote to the Commanding Officer of the Pacific, Lt. General Robert S. Richardson. At that point I was desperate, having been interned for two years, three months and fourteen days. I demanded they release me or make specific charges against me. If I had shown myself to be disloyal to my country, I would have been willing to remain incarcerated for the duration of the war. Otherwise it was only just that they release me. Two weeks later I was "paroled". When I returned to Kauai, I "released" the US government from future damage claims. However, this was one of the conditions of my "parole". This "release" was signed under duress.

During my parole, my Caucasian benefactress who helped me financially during my high school years became critically ill. I went to her home with a bouquet of flowers but she refused to see me, sending word that she was extremely disappointed in me because I had been disloyal to my country. This was one of the saddest moments of my life. Shortly thereafter, she passed away.

My family and I suffered both monetary and other material losses because of my internment. However, material losses cannot compare with the suffering caused by the trauma of having been tainted with the suspicion of being disloyal to my country. This has left an everlasting scar in my heart.



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