

Testimony of: Robert Y. Nakao

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On the third day of January, 1942, I was moved from the New Washington Oyster Company which was at South Bend, Washington. *MIDDLE NEMAH* Actually, it was on the ~~Menoneema~~ River, 20 miles from South Bend. We were ordered to get out of there in the shortest possible time, with no explanation or anything. We couldn't find out why the order came through from the commanding officer at Fort Lewis. Prior to that, a few days after the war had started, the army had sent in troops and stationed them around the cannery. They didn't do anything, but just observed everything that we did. I guess it was because we had a station house about 3 miles from shore where a crew of Japanese Niseis lived and they harvested oysters. We had several barges and a tow boat to take equipment and supplies out there. They apparently thought we might be sending short wave signals. There was a submarine scare at the time.

There were about 16 Isseis working at the cannery and several families of Nisei. Part of us were stockholders, it was a semi-cooperative.

They confiscated the money from the bank and we had trouble getting it. The FBI came to check our birth certificates and to see if we had short wave radios or other subversive type things. We went to stay with relatives on a farm in Kent. The army promised to watch the cannery and take care of things, and wouldn't let anybody come there, so we left. When I came back 3 or 4 days later, they had all left, so we had to make arrangements for someone to take over the cannery. Booth Canneries agreed to take over and signed a lease.

ASSEMBLY CENTER

We were put in Pinedale. It was so hot, people fainted in the heat. We lived in army barracks, had to throw water on the floors to keep cool. We lived on rough cement and tar paper barracks.

RELOCATION CENTER

The end of July, we went to Tule Lake, and stayed there for two years. Then we moved out to a farm in Oregon, and lived in an old barrack which was just like the relocation camp--we put up canvas partitions between two families and they had an old coal stove. It gets pretty cold in the winter there. We worked picking potatoes, thinning beets and onions. Not in my line, and we could barely make ends meet.

At the end of the war, we went back to Renton Highlands. We tried to get back into the oyster area, but they didn't want us back. They said they found short wave radios there, but really they just didn't want the "Japs" back. When we did get back to the cannery, everything had disappeared.

SOME OF CANNERY

All the equipment was gone, and the oysters were almost gone. It took us

about four years to get the oyster farm started again. The company did not sue the

government. We had some people investigate for us, but there were no

witnesses. We didn't get anything. Some got a little, but it didn't even pay for the lawyers.

How much did I lose? All the worries and being in camp, and the best part of our money-making area taken away from us. Everything was just beginning.

I'm a Nisei, and I had no other country, even if I speak Japanese. Regardless of what, this is the only country I know and I wouldn't give it up for anything.

When the war broke out you know the feeling--you didn't hate anybody, but you didn't know what to do. The first thing you think of is your family. They were talking about shipping us all out and putting us on an island, like an Indian reservation, especially the Californians. We heard a lot of rumors in camp, like there were Japanese troops in Seattle. And then they had this registration of all the people. They threatened to beat us up and we went to sign up regardless of what we thought. But how can we fight for a country, we have no rights? It affected my life to the extent that I never recovered from it. It set ^{me} be back so far.

Prejudice was so strong when I was young. In 1931 we were getting 15¢ an hour when we could get a job, like janitor or dishwasher. I can remember when I was 5 being threatened by white kids, calling me skinny JAP and that they were going to cut my belly open and cut my ears off. I used to wonder why I wasn't born a white man. So, I've had a hard life, and the evacuation made things a lot harder, just when I was starting to get ahead.

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