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WAR RELOCATION AUTHORITY

CENTRAL UTAH PROJECT

Topaz, Utah

THE U.S.O. AT TOPAZ

by

RUSSELL A. BANKSON

PROJECT REPORTS DIVISION

HISTORICAL SECTION

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Topaz H447
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WAR RELOCATION AUTHORITY

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THE U.S.O. AT TOPAZ

Since the period of volunteering for the Army in March of 1943, the idea of establishing a U.S.O. chapter at Topaz center has been in the minds of the residents and the appointive staff. Various approaches were made to the actual programing of such a chapter but no definite plan was worked out until January of 1944. Previous to this there had been committees from the volunteers and from the Community Activities Section which had outlined the ways in which a chapter could be established, but through lack of determination the details were never consummated.

Topaz proudly pointed to its service flag with over 400 stars upon it after the volunteering period, which took into account some 300 young men who had been in the service prior to Pearl Harbor and another 100 who volunteered.

With the re-institution of selective service in January of this year, new impetus was given to the plan for a U.S.O. unit. Representatives of various groups, including the YMCA, YWCA, the Inter-Faith Council, the Community Council and others, were called upon for advice and assistance. Community Activities Section also interested itself in this.

Finally a regional representative of the U.S.O. visited Topaz in late January and outlined the procedure by which a U.S.O. chapter could most easily be established. The result was that the YWCA assumed responsibility for sponsoring the chapter. So that there would be a desirable meeting place, the

YWCA was assigned Rec. Hall #4 and immediately set about establishing club rooms there where visiting soldiers might be entertained and where young people of Topaz could join with them for periods of relaxation.

Dishes, cooking utensils and a refrigerator were established in the headquarters and there was room enough for dancing. After working diligently on a voluntary basis, a group of YWCA members prepared the place for the U.S.O. dedication of the club rooms was set for the afternoon of Sunday, February 27, 1944. Soldiers and members of their families and other interested persons, including appointive staff members, were invited to attend the dedication, which had the blessing of various center groups.

The program was carefully worked out so that representatives of the families of servicemen were called upon to speak as well as members of the appointive staff. The opening was decidedly successful and the U.S.O. in Topaz got away to a good start. The program is attached.

The quarters were then opened to all visiting soldiers. The U.S.O. committee made arrangements with the gate house to be notified of the entrance of any soldiers and these were given invitation cards which served as a greeting from the U.S.O. to invite them to visit the club rooms and enjoy their facilities.

Among the most active groups assisting the U.S.O. in an unofficial capacity were the Selective Service committee and the Citizens' committee. While the U.S.O. was opened to visiting soldiers where they might read or play the phonograph or listen

to the radio and have a bite to eat, it was proposed that its functions be even more objective.

Its first proposal was that the U.S.O. sponsor a banquet which would honor the first group of young men who successfully passed their pre-induction physical examinations under the selective service. While the U.S.O., as an organization, sponsored this banquet, which was held in Dining Hall #31 on the evening of March 21, it was staged with the cooperation and active assistance of the Community Council, the YWCA, the Selective Service committee of eligible men from the Council, the Citizens' committee composed of military eligible young men from the center, the Community Activities Section and the Mess Management Section.

With such representation as this behind it the affair took on the aspects of an overall center event. There were approximately 250 people seated at the banquet tables to do honor to the 21 young men from Topaz who had taken their preliminary examination at Fort Douglas on March 1 and an additional ten young men who had been out on indefinite leave and after taking their pre-induction physical examinations had returned to the center to await induction into the Army.

The guests included, besides the representatives of the various organizations sponsoring the event, the relatives of the future inductees, their close friends and a good representation from the administration.

The banquet program included a number of talks. Grace was

said by the Rev. Tsukamoto of the Inter-Faith Council, after which an excellent dinner was served. The banquet was presided over by George Shimamoto, vice chairman of the Community Council and after the dinner a number of short speeches were given. One of the outstanding talks was made by Dr. George Ochikubo, chairman of the Community Council, and himself a nisei who has sought a commission in the medical corps. The points which he especially emphasized were these:

1. That he was proud of the fact that no boys from Topaz had offered resistance against selective service.
2. That he was looking forward to standing side by side with these boys who were entering the service.
3. That he believed it was a mistake not to have included as honored guests those who had failed to pass their physical tests and examinations as they had willingly and cheerfully offered their services to their country.
4. That all individuals had their own personal ideas on how things should be done but that they can't be stubborn or arrogant in those ideas but must all obey whatever call was given to them.

Charles F. Ernst, project director, was among the speakers. Summarizing briefly his remarks he said: "All I know about the Army today I get in the letters from my son in the Army and from the volunteers and from the enlisted men from Topaz, serving all over the United States and on the foreign battlefields and especially from former Topaz residents now training at Camp Shelby and Camp Savage. From these letters I have decided three things are normal among our soldiers. First, there is a general tendency on the part of all of them to gripe about most everything, which is the healthy American way. Second, as their training

progresses the men begin to have a deeper interest in, and a greater respect for the Army because of the things they are learning to do together with other men. Also soldiers are taught more about life day by day, and the making each day a success. The men who are most happy are the ones who are wholehearted in their belief that what they are doing is worthwhile in the interest of humanity."

The response was given by Stanley Yano, who represented the boys who are to be inducted. A feature of the program was community singing lead by Jimmy Hirano, chairman of the Block Managers. The entertainment numbers consisted of music by the Savoy Five orchestra, a demonstration of magic by Jimmy Kato and the showing of the colored sound moving picture "Go For Broke", depicting life at Camp Shelby, augmented by colored film showing scenes in and about Topaz.

This most successful evening, which marked the first major activity of the newly established U.S.O. in Topaz, concluded by the guests standing and signing of "Auld Lang Syne" in Japanese and then in English.

From now on with the U.S.O. finally established and accepted by the older people of Topaz, among whom are so many with sons or relatives in the Armed Forces of the United States, it is anticipated that the part which the organization will play in Topaz will be increasingly greater as more and more young men are inducted into the Army.

PROGRAM

- Chairman.....Mrs. Chiyo Kajiwara
1. Song - My Country 'Tis of Thee.....
Audience
2. Prayer.....Rev. S. Shimada
3. Remark.....Mrs. Chiyo Kajiwara
4. Piano Solo..Student from Music School
5. Greeting.....Mr. V. Ichisaka
Rev. ~~S. Shimada~~
T. KASHIMA
6. Response.....Mr. S. Iino
7. Message.....Mr. Roscoe Bell
8. Vocal Solo.....Miss Yo Ikeda
Accompanist....Miss Machiko Nakamura
9. Refreshment.....
10. Japanese Dance...Miss Sumiko Ashizawa

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USO DEDICATION PROGRAM

Rec. #4 - Topaz/ February 27, 1944