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Registration in Jerome.

As early as in late November, 1942, there were whispered talks in the camp that JACL. leaders were urging the War Department to reinstate Nisei into the Selective Service. On the night of December 11, 1942, a meeting was called by the JACL. heads in the camp for the report on the first national JACL. meeting held since the outbreak of war at Salt Lake City, Utah. At this meeting someone asked Dr. T. Yatabe to verify the rumors that the JACL. leaders were working on the reinstatement of Nisei into the Selective Service. Dr. Yatabe was said to have denied any such attempt on the part of the JACL. whatsoever.

The first sign of what was later to become one of the most disturbing and heated topics of discussion and argument in all the relocation centers was the announcement in the center paper, "Communique" that all-Nisei combat troop to fight as part of U. S. Army, the statement by the Sec. of War, Henry L. Stimson, of January 28, 1943. I was employed at this time as a foreman on the lumber-jack crew. There were upward of 250 men, mostly young men working. These young men received the news very calmly. Most of the young men said, "well, I don't see how the government expects to recruit us after throwing us into a camp like this." It was possible that discussions of some nature among friends might have taken place, but in general the news was coolly received by the Densonites.

The center paper on February 5, 1943, carried the head-line, "General Registration Opens--Signup Begins Next Week for All Evacuees, 17 Years and Over." The Army team headed by Lt. Eugene Siler arrived in camp Feb. 6, and conducted a center-wide educational program on Feb. 8 and 9. The military registration started on Feb. 9, 1943 from blocks 1, 2 & 3. Each day of registration covered 3 blocks. Nothing was ever said that this registration was compulsory. The Communique of Feb. 9 said on its front page, "Each person in the center, 17 or older, will be expected to register during the day the interviewers are in his block." The center was not at all stirred by the beginning of registration. The general feeling of Jerome residents could best be judged by the following questions:

Q: Will wives, children or other dependents of volunteers be allowed to remain in the center?

Is the formation of a Jap.-American combat team a type of segregation?

Where will we fight?

Can I enlist under an assumed name to protect relatives in Japan?

There is no doubt whatsoever that misunderstanding did arise on questions 27 and 28. Some Nisei feared that answering "yes" to question #27 placed them in danger of immediate induction into active combat. The wording of the question #28 left the registrant with a queer impression--impression that he was suspected of holding previous allegiance with some foreign country and now he was being asked to fore swear it. Some took the view that they had come this far without any complaint simply because they thought they were doing their bits for the country they held dear. But despite all their sacrifices the government was still doubtful of their true loyalty. Since the time of evacuation many persons of Jap. ancestry had become very suspicious of the acts of the U. S. Government however honest and sincere its intentions. First it was a promise and assurance by the Army officer in charge at the Civil Control Station just prior to evacuation that Japanese Americans would be doing a patriotic act by their orderly evacuation into the Assembly Center; and their confinement in such center will be only temporary, as soon as confusion abated they would be permitted to return to their former homes or go inland. Because of the suddenness of evacuation, the persons of Japanese ancestry suffered tremendous financial losses. However, it was not so easy for anybody to get out of the Assembly Center once he was in. The people were told that they had to wait until their transfer to a Relocation Center had been effected before they will be permitted to go "outside." After untold miseries suffered in the Assembly Center, it had been only two or three months in the Relocation Center for most of us when the military registration was conducted. The people when sent to the Relocation Center had been told that they will be confined for the duration and six-months after the war. The center would be known as project. When the evacuees were being transferred to the Relocation Centers, they were given pamphlets outlining the government policy for the evacuees. When Mr. Myer succeeded Mr. Eisenhower, the policy of relocation was placed on the WRA. must list. Everytime the government changed its mind, the evacuees had to suffer. Another thing the Jap. Americans began to fear seriously was the thought of being segregated in the military service. In this respect the Nisei were, strangely enough, sympathized by the outsiders. The editorial in the Arkansas Democrat of Feb. 2 had the following phrase in its last paragraph:

"Whatever results, it is to be hoped that Japanese Americans will not be segregated. Our Army should be truly American, not a thing patched up here and there with groups which emphasize the fact that their parents were foreign born, for such a policy can only increase one of the greatest of all curses--race hatred."

It was about this time that a group of about 600 "Kibei" held a meeting in Block 42 Rec. Hall and pledged themselves not to sign for the military registration. No attempt was made, however, to make this group into an organized resistance force. Nothing more was heard of this group after this meeting. The people who did not want to sign usually went into the woods and stayed away from their mess halls where the registrations were conducted. Just before the registration reached our block (31), a group of young men, all jun-Nisei, gathered in the block manager's office to discuss the coming sign-up. Some of them denounced the registration on the ground that they were evacuated from their places of residence and placed behind the barbed-wired enclosure with military sentries, that in their opinion they were being deprived of all civil rights as citizens. If the registration had been conducted for all citizens in and out of the centers for the persons of Japanese ancestry, or better still, for all citizens of this country; then, they would not have felt the discrimination so much. Had they not evacuated because they thought they were doing it for the national defense of the United States? Or had the wrong thing played up to the general public on the outside and the government now felt that the clarification of Nisei loyalty was needed to satisfy the public for the future acceptance? They felt that, above all, their rights as citizens had been completely ignored. Now the government comes out with the statement, ".....it is the inherent right of every faithful citizen, regardless of ancestry, to bear arms in the Nation's battle....." A few of the older men, JACL. leaders, tried to pacify them by offering that if they had volunteered for the Army and distinguished themselves, it would be the surest way to win recognition for loyal Nisei. The contention of these men was that every citizen should do his worth before he can begin to demand for his rights as citizens. Young men countered by insisting that "their rights as citizens be first restored to them before the government makes further demands." They had, in their opinion, suffered enough as it stands.

The project officials at Jerome invited any group to hold a meeting if any difficulties in connection with the registration arose, and offered to send a person qualified to answer the questions. However, in many cases the qualified persons could not answer very clearly of the questions brought forth.

Revision of Question 28 on WRA. Form 126 Revised for aliens was authorized by Myer on February 12. New revision read:

"will you swear to abide by the laws of the United States and to take no action which would in anyway interfere with the war efforts of the United States."

A mimeographed strip of this new revision was stapled onto the original form. This action satisfied many Issei, but some feared that such simple method could easily be altered after they had signed this form. They feared further that had they signed "yes" to this new revision, they might be forced to work in some kind of a war industry. Such action on their part, they concluded, might result in their punishment by the Japanese Government after the war for helping with the war efforts of the enemy nation. They were after all Japanese nationals.

During the whole registration period the activities of the camp continued to function in full swing. Such headings as these were commonly seen in the Communique during this period.

Most Beautiful Girls To Be Featured in Floor Show.
Boy Scouts Receive Awards At First Court of Honor Here.
WRA. Opens Field Offices.
YWCA. Hope to Make Hospitality House 'A Little Bit of Heaven.'

On March 2, Denson Tribune Vol. I No. I (succeeding Communique) announced that registration was compulsory.

"Center wide registration of evacuees 17 and older will be closed tomorrow night. Residents who have not filled out questionnaires were reminded that registration is compulsory. All those who fail to sign up will be reported to Washington, D. C., as having refused to register, Project Director Paul A. Taylor reiterated."

This was the first time that the center residents were officially warned that the registration was compulsory.

Col. Wm. P. Scobey, executive to the assistant secretary of war, addressed a joint gathering of block managers and councilmen and declared in part:

"This is a very critical moment for you, and you must make a clear cut decision under trying conditions. You are either loyal or not loyal.....This is no time for equivocation; the Army does not equivocate."

In referring to questions 27 and 28 in Form 304A, he said qualified answers can be taken in only one way by the War Dept.

"True loyalty and allegiance to the United States must be unqualified..."

All those who had not registered by March 3 were reminded by MR. Taylor through their respective block managers to comply with the registration. Any male citizen failing to do so by Sat., March 6, would be subject to imprisonment up to 90 days.... and the taking away from them certain compensation and privileges or both.

Despite financial losses and anguish of minds, humiliation and despair the evacuation had been undertaken without a serious incident or resistance. Why? Simply because the persons of Japanese ancestry thought that they had to be evacuated for national security. All the promises made up to this point had been forgotten by the way side. How long was the government going to continue abusing us? How much chance we would have of being accepted as citizens of this country in the future? Doubts continued to increase within my mind. This was not the principles of Democracy I had been taught in schools. What other country in the world had interned such a large number of its own citizens within the barbed-wire enclosures without proven guilt? Did I not hear Americans say that no one is guilty until proven so? Did such theory not apply to us? What good was a citizen to a country which did not recognize him as such? These conflicting doubts and emotions had been fighting within me, when on the morning of March 6, 1943 I decided to call on Mr. Taylor, the Project Director. I had told my friends that I was going to see Mr. Taylor to clear up many questions which had been bothering me. When I reached the administration building there were about 500 young men gathered there. Most of these men I had never seen before. It soon became apparent that all could not get in to see Mr. Taylor at once. We huddled in front of Mr. Taylor's office and quickly selected five or six, may be 7, men as representatives. Questions were hurriedly gathered from them, and we proceeded into Mr. Taylor's office room. These representatives were, I believe, Rev. Kai, Rev. Tsuha, Mr. Kintoku Ige, Mr. T. Yamate, Mr. Mits Kimura, and myself. I don't know if Mr. Kobayashi was present then or not. In the room of the Project Director was Mr. Whitticker, the Regional Director of the WRA. for the Arkansas area.

From the conference it was revealed that the WRA. was planning to penalize the offenders by imprisonments of up to 90 days for the violation of WRA. regulation. In reply to Mr. Taylor's question, "Why are the boys opposed to registration? Are they interested in returning to Japan? Mr. Ige replied, "I cannot say yes or no--we are not merely a handful of people I can vouch for that. If you will give us the privilege of coming back to you again and make some questions clear." He continued, "It is the opinion of the group here, as well as the people who are waiting outside, the rules and regulations and the whole policies of the U.S. government have been very vague. And we have suffered innumerable instances which are beyond

words which are not suffered by the citizens of other groups at all--the conclusion that the only reason we have been treated such is because we have not been trusted. So if the government cannot trust us, there is no reason why we should be loyal to the country." (Mr. Ige was evacuated from Hawaii after a long period of confinement in Sand Island.) Mr. Ige further stated, "I feel that we have been loyal to America before the war came and we thought the government will be loyal to us. It has not treated us right and I see no reason why I should be an American citizen. We are willing to repatriate at any time we are asked to. At this point Mr. Taylor prepared the following statement.

March 6, 1943

To Whom It May Concern:

I, Paul A. Taylor, assure all persons who signed the statement as follows: "The undersigned persons desire to file for repatriation to Japan and will do so as soon as forms may be provided therefor; also forswear all allegiance to the United States," will not be arrested for refusal to register unless I am specifically directed by the Washington office of the War Relocation Authority. In case Washington directs the arrest of such persons, I will notify each individual at least 24 hours before any arrests are made.

/s/ Paul A. Taylor

Project Director

It must be pointed out here, however, that among those people who stayed outside the building, some probably did not want to sign under any circumstances, while still others who might not have wanted to repatriate to Japan.

In answer to the question, "Is 'no-no' replies to questions 27 and 28 going to be used by the U. S. Government to justify evacuation?" Messrs. Taylor and Whitticker said, "You were evacuated from the Pacific Coast Area because the loyalty of the American-citizens of Japanese ancestry was questionable. What we are going to say in regard to your loyalty as American citizens will depend solely on your action in the future."

That was not what I was told as being the reason for our evacuation from the Coast. Further clarification was requested from Mr. Myer, and we had subsequently received the following teletype from Mr. Myer.

Reurtel containing question "Will requests of evacuees for repatriation be used by government to justify evacuation?", it is my judgment that justification for evacuation already has been made clear to the public. No further justification needed. It will not be used by the War Relocation Authority to justify evacuation. WRA cannot be responsible for statements of any other individual or agencies.

March 8, 1943

/s/ D. S. Myer, WRA, Washington

The following teletype was also received from Mr. Myer.

Do not accept mass petition to foreswear allegiance in lieu of registration. Everyone should be required to register. Anyone wishing to request repatriation or expatriation following the completion of registration will be allowed to do so as soon as opportunity can be provided but no one should be excused from registering. In view of this ruling, definite determination as to disposal of those who refuse to register will be made following the completion of registration. The mass petition is not acceptable because it is necessary that each individual express his own opinion with respect to loyalty. Forms used in the general registration provide that opportunity.

March 6, 1943

D. S. Myer, WRA, Washington

A question was put to Messrs. Taylor and Whitticker asking their answers on, "What about those who have signed 'yes' to questions 27 and 28, are they considered loyal?" They replied by saying, "Each person must be thoroughly clarified before his loyalty is accepted. Those who are still questionable although their answers are 'yes' will still be subject to restrictions imposed upon those who are 'disloyal'".

The proceeding of the meeting was reported to the people in the afternoon of the 6th at block 29 mess-hall. After receiving further information from Washington, the majority of these people had registered by March 10, the extended date of deadline. It would be difficult trying to explain the reason why so many people asked for repatriation at this time. Among other things there were usual follow-the-others feelings, a way out in evading the delicate questions, or people who were honestly convinced that America was not the place for them, etc.

The End.

WAR RELOCATION AUTHORITY
COMMUNITY ANALYSIS SECTION
ARMY REGISTRATION

JEROME

January 30.

Weekly report: In general, announcement well received, but some resentment on segregation. Estimates of volunteers ranged from 100 to 1000, but not over 25% of those eligible expected to enlist. Number would be greater if all branches were open and in mixed units. Feeling that volunteering better than being drafted.

February 5.

Teletype: Dissatisfaction over segregation unanimous at first but indication that more were coming to recognize that public opinion is at stake. Friction already between a boy wanting to volunteer and his parents.

Editorial, Communique: Editorial which appeared in the Arkansas Democrat and which offered hope that nisei would not be segregated reprinted with comment agreeing in full with views expressed.

February 6.

Weekly report: Recruiting team arrived. Strong resentment against segregation indicated, although only few voicing this sentiment, but influencing many who were on the fence. Had more details been available January 28, response would have been greater.

February 13.

Weekly report: Response very poor, with number of volunteers practically nil. Not expected to exceed 10. Various rumors on beatings, but no one injured, no actual threats verified. Staff and military police on alert.

Report submitted by Information Division: A day-by-day sampling of evacuee opinion and attitudes revealing the confusion and turmoil in the minds of both issei and nisei. They feel that once again their security is at stake. Mass registration coming on top of all nisei combat team and the recruiting team being sent from Washington was too much all at one time. The fact that the War Department had covered every point, leaving nothing to question, was upsetting. As the subject became clarified over the period from the announcement to the date of the report, the hysteria was lessening and signs pointed to a more sane attitude.

February 20.

Weekly report: 30 of 33 blocks registered with about 50% of those to be registered actually doing so. Issei block managers have not had as good a turnout as nisei block managers, although all block managers have registered. Expect to be able to register almost everyone within the next week.

Jerome - 2

March 6.

Weekly report: Dr. Yatabe attacked in corridor of hospital about 10:45 a.m. on March 6. Assailant's unknown and all were wearing army overcoats, indicating possibly that they were Hawaiian evacuees. At same time the Rev. Yamazaki was called outside and then attacked. Both victims and families living in hospital with M.F. guard. No arrests until definite evidence on hand.

During same morning delegation including captain of Internal Security had an appointment with project director to ask about registration. They did not want to register and said they would prefer to ask for repatriation.

Registration very slow for last three days of week, and notices sent to delinquents.

February 27.

Weekly report: Few "nos" until blocks occupied by Hawaiians. Most of this group had been interned at Sand Island. Qualified answers may run to 15% or 20% of male citizens.

March 13.

Weekly report: Registration completed. The closely knit organization includes 198 male citizens, 189 female citizens, 216 male aliens, and 178 female aliens - total of 781. All have definitely expressed desire for expatriation or repatriation. Outside of this group 65 male citizens answered "no" to #28, 44 qualified statements beginning with "yes", 15 answered "no" but agreed to abide by U.S. laws, 9 were neutral, 25 said they had been interned on Sand Island and felt it useless to swear allegiance, 7 undecided, 50 miscellaneous qualifications, 47 others qualified, but statements not on hand - 46 of these from Hawaii. Total of 460 male citizens qualifying or answering negatively - about 30% of total number of male citizens in center.