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PERSONAL NARRATIVE REPORT

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SENIOR INTERNAL SECURITY OFFICER

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In the late summer of 1942, I arrived in California from New York to work in the Federal Prison on Alcatraz Island. After an interview with the authorities at this institution, I declined the appointment and decided to seek employment in the West. A friend of the family, knowing my background of experience and training, strongly urged me to talk to the WRA people in the Whitcomb Hotel Building in San Francisco. This was the first time I had ever heard of WRA - probably because I was an easterner.

At the Whitcomb Hotel I was directed to a young man who was one of the most efficient interviewer I have ever met. Most interviewers leave you with the impression that they are always thinking about something else - but not this young man. My estimation of the WRA at this initial stage was most favorable since I unconsciously judged the entire agency by the high degree of efficiency of this interviewer - a Mr. Hunter.

Subsequently, I found myself reporting for duty as Assistant Chief of Internal Security at a large relocation center situated in the middle of the desert. The administrative offices were make-shift affairs set up in warehouses. There were no housing facilities nor mess halls for the personnel. As a result, daily commuting from distances as far as fifty miles away was necessary. This meant that all Caucasians were absent from the center at night, Saturday afternoons, and Sundays.

Regarding the WRA as being engaged in one of the greatest sociological experiments of all time and possessing the ardent enthusiasm of a pioneer, I volunteered to remain at the center in an unfinished barracks with windows not yet installed nor was the water connected. It was a pleasantly strange sensation to realize that after the normal working hours I was the only Caucasian among some 15,000 Japanese about whom I knew absolutely nothing. I was almost outnumbered!



Consequently, for the next few months, I found myself being awakened at all hours of the night to take care of such things as showing the driver of a refrigerator truck where to dispose of his cargo of perishables or a power transformer bursting into flames atop a wooden pole causing a dangerous surge of power to circulate throughout the service wires of the homes in an entire area or a gang fight in a certain block ..... Never a dull moment, it seemed.

To state that there was confusion in the center administration in those days would be putting it very mildly. The standard answer to practically any question you might put to staff members was, "I don't know." Blunders were excused away by the stock explanation: "No precedent." This confusion was highly contagious, dangerously spreading among the evacuees and adding considerably to the unrest and frustration of a people still smarting from shock of the evacuation.

As a whole, the center personnel were an extremely well-qualified and capable lot. WRA job standards were most exacting in those days. Unfortunately, as time went on, many of these people quit for reasons best known to themselves. Standards, regulated by the supply and demand conditions, were necessarily lowered and a resultant loss in efficiency - actual or potential - was inevitable.

That this chaotic condition did not escape the attention of Washington was evidenced by the appearance of Mr. E.R. Fryer, an able administrator, whose mission was to untangle this administrative muddle. To save time, he established his living quarters in a room at the center hospital and plunged into the problems of the center with tireless energy and amazing efficiency.

One week-end, shortly after his arrival, the writer was summoned to the Project Director's office. With characteristic frankness, Mr. Fryer explained his mission, stated that he had learned I had been on the project twenty-four hours a day for some time, and felt that I might be well-acquainted with the "growing pains" the center was undergoing. Inviting my criticisms and suggestions, he directed me to talk freely and pull no punches. I would not be human nor honest to state that I did not derive some smug satisfaction to later observe some Administrative Instructions identical to my suggestions emanate from the Washington Office.

After this meeting, I frequently found myself being invited to sit in and take part in policy-making conferences with three or four other employees. While extremely flattering, it naturally did not enhance my popularity with my immediate superior, the Assistant Project Director, and others not invited to attend these sessions. I was to pay dearly at a later date for being classified as one of "Fryer's fair-haired boys".



The center administration suddenly began to click. However, at this point the inevitable internal politics began to rear its ugly head. The personnel seemed to be divided into Fryer and Anti-Fryer factions, but was held in check until Mr. Fryer severed his affiliations with WRA. With this advent, the antipathy that had been smoldering beneath the surface now broke loose with unrestrained fury. The Fryer faction was in the "doghouse".

While the center administration began to function in a more orderly and business-like fashion, new problems were forever popping up. From one extreme to another, it was both amazing and amusing to observe the transformation of persons who a short time before were groping blindly and aimlessly about their tasks, suddenly take on a new self-confidence - to the point of arrogance in some cases. There was a strong tendency for each individual to "feel his oats" and to assume that his division was truly the most important center function, all others being merely incidental to it. This ego-centric tendency caused some to regard themselves and Uncle Sam as one and the same person. Any Japanese who did not see eye to eye with this type of administrator was apt to find himself classified as subversive where, in reality, the worst that could ever honestly be said about him would be that he were anti-administration. Even being anti-administration appeared to amount to a high crime which seemed somehow out of place in an agency that, at the same time, pointed with pride to the democratic principles it professed to adhere to, i.e., evacuee self government, etc. There were times when one was prone to compare the center administration to the Mexican Army wherein everybody is a general, as the saying goes.

Amid the circumstances and conditions roughly sketched in the foregoing, the Chief and myself set about recruiting, training, and organizing an evacuee police force that eventually boasted of some one hundred and sixty members. The usual problems described by other officers in their narratives were encountered. Aside from minor crimes, such as gambling, etc., we were able to devote most of our time to building the department for the first few weeks. The lack of crime at this phase of the project development could be attributed to the fact that the evacuees were busily engaged in getting their homes comfortable and because the affects of incarceration had not yet set in.

It soon became obvious that in order to practice preventative therapy and to keep a finger on the pulse of center activities, it was necessary for Internal Security officers to mingle with the center residents - sit on their doorsteps, attend their social functions, etc. The knowledge as to who was who in the community could only be gleaned by these methods since the evacuees studiously avoided the Internal Security Office for fear of being branded "stool-pigeon". This procedure met with the whole-hearted approval of Mr. Fryer who joined us in our belief that the most practical way to handle anything is first to understand it.



Presently a new project director arrived on the scene bristling with preconceived notions and ideas of how to handle "these damned Japs" and how to run a center. It was, incidentally, his first such experience along these lines. Almost immediately he issued an edict stating, in effect, that he would not tolerate any fraternizing with the evacuees; that all transactions would be consummated with them in your office between the hours of 8:00 A.M. and 5:00 P.M.; and that any violations of this edict would bring on his personal wrath in the form of immediate dismissal or such other punishment that he might decree. Naturally, preventative therapy died a quick death.

Tension in the various centers varies and fluctuates in intensity and scope. Sometimes the causes are readily determined. Other times, there is no apparent tangible reason. On one occasion when the very air was charged with the electricity of tension, I was experiencing considerable difficulty in ascertaining the causes. Finally, I had to break it down into administrative divisions and methodically set out to seek the factors causing this unrest. In the Mess Division, it was learned that food in several blocks was consistently bad and that mother's were complaining about dirt in the children's milk. In the Farm Division, workers were incensed at having been promised a bonus if they could produce crops in excess of a specified amount only to learn that this promise would not be fulfilled. In the Housing Division, the entire population was angry because stoves to heat their homes had been promised on a certain date long since passed. There were many other factors uncovered. Inquiry made of the person alleged to have made such promises resulted in outright denial in some instances and the weak excuse that such promises were made for the sole purpose of "shutting them up" in other instances.

All leading experts on the causes of riots agree that food is the number one factor. With this in mind, I went to the Project Steward, told him of the food conditions in the various blocks and attempted to explain to him the relationship of his department to the general internal security of the center. Whereupon, I was informed in no uncertain terms that I should take care of the Internal Security Division while he would handle the Mess Division without my assistance. Having no alternative, the matter was reported to the Project Director who proceeded to take the steward to task. It goes without saying that the steward never felt kindly toward Internal Security after this experience. Incidents like this were routine experiences for the police department and should partially explain the underlying reasons for the antipathy and resentment harbored by the various departments toward Internal Security. Our powers in matters like this were clipped when our position in the general administrative plan was changed.

In the original administrative plan, the Internal Security Division commanded the enviable position of being answerable to one person only - the Project Director. This was as it should be. In addition to the law and order functions of a routine nature, it was the investigating body for the Project Director who was too busy to undertake these investigations himself. It was charged with bringing such matters as described



in the preceding paragraph, to his personal attention.

When Internal Security was changed from the status of division to that of a section under Community Management, its effectiveness was considerably weakened. Instead of reporting directly to the Project Director, it now became necessary to make several copies of reports and route them through channels. There have been times when such reports never reached the destination intended. Copies made for Central Files resulted in the reports being read by several people including evacuees. It was not infrequent for the questionable political groups to possess more information about our activities than we knew about theirs. What, pray tell, was the Internal Security supposed to do in the event it discovered some ranking official to be the cause of trouble? If a report were made, it would be routed through his office and it was a cardinal sin to even attempt to deviate from the hard and fast rule of channels by by-passing him.

Some police departments now found themselves under the thumb of an individual who, perhaps, had a long suppressed desire to be an amateur detective and who could not resist the urge to meddle with competent policemen in crucial moments. While the same man would not dream of telling a surgeon how to perform a delicate operation upon an individual, he would unhesitatingly and aggressively stick his untrained nose into a delicate situation involving thousands of persons.

While much more could be added to the above subject, it is perhaps sufficient to conclude the discussion with an opinion of the writer: that most, if not all, of the rebellions that took place in the various centers would never have reached the proportions they did with an efficient Internal Security unhampered by "red tape" and with real authority in proportion to its responsibilities.

Rebellions, strikes, and uprisings occurred with such frequency in the various centers that the WRA decided to create an Isolation Center as a place to segregate the actively subversive and seriously anti-social elements from the normal center populations. It was an emergency measure enacted to cope with a situation unforeseen in the original administrative planning. The writer received a change of station and was charged with administering the Internal Security Division, perhaps the most important division in this particular type of center. This assignment proved to be the most interesting of all my experiences with WRA and my fondest memories of the agency are associated with the Isolation Center. The teamwork of the limited number of very capable personnel made an otherwise tough task enjoyable. Unlimited backing and latitude was extended to the writer by the Project Director. Even when we would argue a point - and we had some good ones - it was a healthy condition motivated by the intense desire on the part of both to do the best job possible.



Because of the sudden birth of the Isolation Center, there were no Administrative Instructions to guide us. We were told, "It's your baby. We'll back you to the limit, but it's your baby." We moved slowly at first, cautiously sizing up the situation. Our equipment was very limited. Our personnel consisted of a Project Director, a fiscal man who came periodically on detail from another center, two maintenance foremen, and the undersigned. Later, this condition was alleviated by the addition of very competent employees. Sixteen hours a day, seven days a week was routine for all. When we came too sorely pressed for equipment or supplies, the "boss" would suddenly announce that he was going to another center to beg or borrow whatever we needed at the moment. Shouting over his shoulder, "Take over until I come back"- and add with a grin - "and good luck." Rarely, if ever, did he come back empty-handed. There was never any lost motion - we couldn't afford that luxury.

On one such occasion, I enjoyed the unique position of passing a law - by the powers vested in me as Acting Project Director, -directing the arrest of twenty-one evacuees, presiding as judge in their individual trials, sentencing eight leaders to three months in jail and placing the others on probation. Besides being in charge of the jail, I was probation and parole officer. It has been said that the law mentioned in the foregoing was a deliberate design to goad the leaders into doing something for which they could be arrested. While I do not choose to enter into a discussion on this point at this time, I do recall having rescinded the same law within six hours after it was passed. Where else but WRA could one gain such extraordinary experience? Smiles seen for the first time on the faces of many of the evacuees were immediately in evidence following the removal of this pressure group. I have always felt that this was the turning point from the uncertain to the positive control over this group of recalcitrants.

In the first few months of the Isolation Center's existence, the evacuees were a most difficult group with which to deal. All felt persecuted, some had a martyr complex. They refused to believe anything we told them. An active anti-work campaign was in full swing. They hated all white men in general with particular emphasis upon WRA personnel. They flatly stated that they were prisoners of war and demanded their rights as such under the Geneva Convention. They were even in conflict among themselves. They split up into groups, the main division being between the more educated element who were called "sissies" and the muscle boys who were regarded as barbaric and uncouth. The latter group, being the more aggressive, set about to "take over" the control of the camp. They eagerly sought out new arrivals in a campaign to gain converts and swell their ranks. With the passing of time, they grew more and more bold until their threats reached a point where some of the evacuees felt it necessary to barricade themselves in their sleeping quarters for fear of being murdered in their sleep. It was at this phase that the law was passed and the leaders sent to jail as described in the foregoing.



It should, perhaps, be pointed out here that we possessed little, if any, information regarding background, type of personality, or other pertinent data relating to these evacuees. Procedure had not yet been developed to the point where docket and allied papers accompanied the arrival of each new resident. Consequently, we had to rely on such things as observation and speculation as to the make-up of the individuals in our charge. It is quite a trick when the persons you are attempting to classify refuse to talk or act normally in your presence.

Eventually, we were able to sell the idea to Washington that a rehabilitation program should be put into effect. If you've ever tried to sell an idea to Washington, you'll better understand what I mean. The residents were assembled and the program we designed was outlined to them. They were informed that Case Histories were to be compiled on each of them and that release from the Isolation Center was now possible. They were given to understand that everything they did - good or bad - was to be recorded and evaluated. It was conveyed to them that they had to stand on their own two feet and stop leaning on each other or blindly following a leader since they would be released only when we were convinced that they could and would be law-abiding citizens wherever they went. It was made clear that "big shots" would not be tolerated in the center and that all were to be treated on an equal level. They were frankly told that attitude and general behavior would be the deciding factors in earning a recommendation for release. They were flatly told that, while we couldn't force them to work, refusal to work would be regarded as an uncooperative attitude which fact would hardly be conducive to a speedy release. We enjoyed a 100% employment program from that day on.

Teaching them the benefits and advantages of democracy was one of our functions. A rather difficult task when one considers their attitude toward the entire evacuation program. It was further complicated by the manner in which they had been arrested and sent to us from the various centers - no warrant of arrest, no trial, no opportunity to defend themselves, no right for counsel or to subpoena witnesses in their own behalf, no right of appeal, etc., etc.

Another headache was the tendency on the part of some centers to drop their administrative problems in our lap.

Among other things the Isolation Center provided us with an unusual insight into the problems and administrations of the various relocation centers. From this vantage point, the writer arrived at the opinion that the idea of trying to operate these centers along the lines of a model community is too visionary, idealistic, and impractical. When any people are confined or incarcerated within a certain area, compelled to eat outside their homes in community mess halls, whose wages, jobs, and other normal pursuits and activities are regulated by a governing power not of their own choosing, there is no community. It is, instead, an institution for which there is centuries of established



precedent and research for reference. Examination and analysis of the Rules and Regulations governing the Crystal City Project under the Department of Justice will reveal that they are almost identical to the rules prescribed for the operation of any modern penal institution. The comparative trouble-free administration of Japanese persons at Crystal City is offered in support of my opinion.

Eventually our problems in the Isolation Center were ironed out. Our "baby" grew up and purred along with easy efficiency until the camp was closed in December of 1943.

Coincidental with the closing of the center, the writer was inducted into the Army. Slightly over two years have elapsed since then and once again I find myself in the employ of WRA. However, I am to be terminated in a few days by reason of the liquidation of the agency. My thoughts seem to be divided between what I will do next and reminiscing about my experiences with WRA.

I have met and worked with some of the finest people in the world while employed with this agency. I have also met and worked with others whom I do not hold in such high esteem. I know I have gained considerable and widely varied experience with WRA that I would probably never have obtained elsewhere. I am truly grateful for this. What value this experience will be to me later on remains to be seen. If nothing more, I should be able to impress the hell out of my grandchildren in years to come - don't you agree?

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