

Omach - 3-31-43

Draft Registration

Announcement of program first made at Canal on February 8, 1943, 2 p.m. to selected groups who were invited to meeting at Buddhist Church. Block managers, councilmen, heads of departments were included in the group invited. These persons in turn were to relate contents of Captain Thompson's message. Formal message consisted of prepared written announcement of AJ combat unit and President's letter to Sec'y Stimson. Written questions were then called for and answered by Thompson, Bennett and Landward.

Questions dealt with number of things such as provision for support of dependents, opportunity of obtaining rank as commissioned officers, possibility of draft in centers, whether families of volunteers will be given privileges, whether they would be permitted to return to California during or after the war, whether defense jobs are open to Nisei, whether combat unit will be sent to Pacific area, what the intent and effect of questions 27 and 28 were, whether this registration was being required of Japanese Americans on the outside, etc.

Block meetings were called on the same evening or next evening to pass on the information to the block residents. This is where the matter was handled differently in different blocks and resulted in confusion and ill feeling towards the program. In most blocks the information learned at the afternoon meeting was merely passed on to the residents by the block delegates and no discussion was permitted as to what ought to be done as a group. In some blocks, however, the method of presentation was poor or inadequate or was prejudiced with personal reactions, and what was even worse discussion and speeches were made as to the demerits of the program. Personal opinion and sentiment were brought into the meetings.

In Canal Blocks 3, 4, & 5 were the blocks to be registered first commencing Wednesday, February 10, 1943. In Block 3 block meeting was on Monday night and Mr. Yahanda presented the information announced by Captain Thompson to the interested block residents and without further discussion or comments the meeting was adjourned without incident. In Blocks 4 and 5, especially 4, I am informed that considerable discussion followed the announcement. In fact Block 4 had another meeting on Tuesday night and it seems that the residents as a whole had decided that Ques. 27 and 28 should be answered in the negative. It is said that a similar meeting had taken place among the members of the Kibei Young Peoples Association. Many of those in Block 4 and 5 were particularly incensed because many of their family heads had been permanently interned and were bitter because they felt that there was no reason for holding such persons in internment camps when many others thought to be equally or more deeply connected with various suspected organizations were released.

Although the first three blocks were scheduled for registration the first days only about 1/3 of the expected number could be processed because many were in the booth with Sgt. Gillotti arguing for 10 or 15 minutes about why they should answer No. Some were reported to have come out bragging, "I sure told that guy off."

The results of the registration of the 1st 3 blocks were very discouraging, possibly 80 or 90% "noes". Block 4 was said to be about 100% "noes".

In view of the situation Capt. Thompson had to bear down. At Wednesday night's open air meeting at the community stage he again read the 2 formal messages which had already been in Tuesday's local paper in both languages. Rev. Tajima translated. This part alone, which seemed quite unnecessary in view of fact that the people were familiar with the contents took more than an hour. Then the Captain answered some of the more frequently presented questions and answers. This time

he was very blunt in answering that a negative answer to 27 and 28 will mean that the person so answering will be considered as "enemy aliens." This was the first time that this statement was made to the Canal residents.

His attitude plainly indicated deep discouragement at the predominant number of negative answers made in that day's registration. As many Kibei and Nisei had already made up their minds to answer no there were groups here and there shouting and heckling indicated their resentment. The next two days registration continued to be predominantly negative in answers. On Friday night, Feb. 12, 1943, he therefore called a meeting of selected block delegates at Butte and stated that he had come to the center in high hopes and with faith in the attitude and courtesy of the residents but that the last few days activities included not only disrespect of the army and interference with the registration program but also instances have occurred of actual threats and overt acts of disparagement against those in charge of the registration, and that the army will not tolerate such acts any further. He read Sec. 2 of the Espionage Act of 1917 regarding obstruction of recruitment and stated that any further interference will result in the M.P.s taking over the camp. Also 2 days halt in registration was called. Bennett added the point that the entire relocation program of the W.R.A. will fall down and the work of the W.R.A. nullified in event of the necessity of army control of the camp. Also effect of loss of citizenship was stressed.

This message was announced to the block residents by the delegates who attended this meeting. Presentation was limited to passing on this information only, by pre-arranged agreement and therefore discussion was not permitted in most of the blocks. Thereafter, registration was commenced again on Monday and continued without undue hindrance or interference.

The sobering effect of this message was definitely visible. Too

bad that all these pertinent facts and information had not been presented at the beginning. After several weeks training for registration which Landward and the other officials had gone through in Washington, it would seem that they should have anticipated some such antipathy towards the registration and have made a more clear-cut public announcement at the very beginning. Such steps certainly would have gone far towards creating a better atmosphere about the whole thing. Important as the registration is to these Nisei residents a definite and comprehensive presentation from the beginning would have helped considerably.

The response both as to registration and as to the number of volunteers for the combat team as between the "white zone" residents from the Sanger-Parlier area and the Turlock group appears particularly marked. The feeling as to registration was intense when the Turlock group was being processed but the registration of the white zone group went off much more smoothly and without indications of resentment. The number of volunteers from the latter group alone is said to equal or surpass the volunteers from the rest of the two camps combined. The fact that there are more property owners among them, indicating that there are proportionately more persons who had intended to settle in this country permanently, may be a partial explanation in addition to animosity which might have been caused during the assembly center period at Turlock, Tulare or Santa Anita.

The principal objections apparently harbored by most of those who have in some form voiced their antagonism to registration seems to point to this--that the compulsory evacuation and internment of citizens was tantamount to an abridgment of citizenship rights and the threat of possible loss of citizenship did not mean much because it was disregarded anyway. In this sense the attitude is that there is no differentiation between Issei and Nisei and for the army to expect the Nisei to serve the country was too much. Of course it appears to me that this attitude does not give proper weight to the W.R.A. program of relocating and re-estab-

the evacuees nor to the apparently sincere desire on the part of the government to preserve citizenship rights, even in a limited form, for the Japanese born in this country. Most of those with whom I have discussed the matter did not realize that by answering "no" to 27 and 28, they would face the possibility not only of loss of citizenship but also of imprisonment or internment in a prison camp, freezing of assets and loss of property holding by escheat proceedings. Their understanding of the term "enemy aliens" was that their status would be similar to Issei and not the the status of those interned at Lordsburg, Camp Livingston, etc. Many who learned of this distinction became frightened and went back to change their answers. Others who had little to lose by reason of their funds and property being negligible or were in their wife's name, etc. stood pat with the intention of going to Japan after the war as they felt that they had no future here in this country.

The objections to volunteering for duty with the AJ combat team seem to be crystallized in the principal theme that this segregation of one racial group was discriminatory and that when sent to the front they would ~~be~~ probably be ordered in a pinch to the most dangerous area or in case of necessity of retreat to hold a certain line to permit other combat units to escape to safety while they were being pounded to death. The newspaper articles written by Jimmie Omura from time to time in the Rocky Nippon on this subject have apparently had considerable effect in formulating the opposition to the AJ combat team. The statement issued by Secretary of War Stimson that the unit was decided upon as the best procedure not only for the army but also for the Japanese as a whole because it would permit the combat team by appropriate display of loyalty and bravery to mitigate and stifle current suspicions against the Japanese are to a considerable extent taken with a grain of salt in view of the segregation and discrimination connected with evacuation. Also many have expressed doubt as to the publicity value, for the improvement of relationships with

Caucasians as a whole, of such a combat team to the extent indicated by Captain Thompson. They feel that the analogy made by him to Irish-American or German-American units which have distinguished themselves in the past to the eventual benefit of those racial groups is out of place as such groups are Caucasians and are generally considered assimilable anyway. They ask about the Negro combat units that have fought and died for this country in the past. They have not received widespread ovation or appreciation and Negroes are subjected to bitterly unfair discrimination. Many Japanese feel that they cannot expect to fare any better regardless of the blood and sacrifice that the AJ unit might ^{make} be made for this country.

On the other hand there appears widespread support for the view that if the Nisei are permitted to volunteer and join various mixed units the personal friendships and contacts they make with their Caucasian buddies will go far more towards cementing better relationships. The feeling of equality will be a buoyant factor to their pride and morale and the contacts that may be thus made would be very important. Many have voiced their willingness to volunteer into such a mixed group but felt that a segregated unit would be distasteful, and they prefer to take their chances of getting into such mixed units through the draft.

It appears that most Nisei are concerned about the draft and the many problems and ramifications incident to it. Many, perhaps a majority, are resigned to it and expect to serve when called. Captain Thompson at first intimated that it was only a question of time as to when the draft would affect the camps Nisei but stated that there was nothing officially announced about the matter and that this was only his personal opinion. Later at an open meeting at Mess Hall 4 Project Attorney Terry made a statement that in his opinion there would be no draft in these camps if the results of the registration were not favorable. He indicated that in his personal opinion if 90 or 95% of the citizens in all the centers answered "yes" to 27 and 28 this would be considered as meeting the

standards of loyalty that would justify the policy of extending the draft to these centers but if there was a substantial number of "noes", he doubted very much whether the selective service officials would extend the draft in the face of certain public opinion against such step. Thus the uncertainty of the situation prevails in every one's mind and this may be a reason why the number of volunteers is comparatively small. No official statement has been made about the matter and probably would not be forthcoming pending the results of the registration and the findings of the Chandler committee which is making investigations of relocation center residents.

A policy of segregation of those considered disloyal from those considered loyal will probably be recommended by the Chandler committee and it is likely that the draft will be extended to the latter group. The practical difficulties incident to such segregation are considerable. The anomalous situation is present that sisters, wives and Issei parents of a large number of Nisei answering "no" to 27 and 28 have indicated loyalty to the U. S., apparently because the draft would probably not affect them anyway. Whether such families should be considered as one group for purposes of segregation will be a problem that must be considered. In event of internment of disloyal individuals in military camps, under present policies of permitting family reunions for internees, it would be optional for other family members to join them. The latter solution to the question of segregation appears to me to be the one more likely to be adopted.