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REVIEW OF ANTI-JAPANESE INCIDENTS AND LOCAL SENTIMENT

IN FRESNO AND TULARE COUNTIES

CALIFORNIA

Prepared By
George D. Dean, Senior Information Specialist, War Relocation Authority,
San Francisco, Calif., April 30, 1942.

Note:

The following remarks were the incidental outgrowth of conversations held by the writer in connection with other official duties in Fresno and Tulare Counties, and do not purport to be a comprehensive survey of opinions and sentiment in that area.

G. D. D.

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Senior Information Specialist.

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Sources: Fresno Bee and Visalia Times-Delta.

1. Some Notes on conditions in Fresno and Tulare Counties;

A. In connection with official duties, I spent two days and a part of a third (April 28-30, 1942) in Fresno and Tulare Counties and while there encountered considerable hostility towards the Japanese and some conditions which officials regarded as presenting elements of potential danger.

This was particularly true in two areas. One of these lies in northwestern Tulare County and southeastern Fresno County, embracing a district extending roughly from Del Rey, Fresno County, southward to Kingsburg and eastward to Orosi, Tulare County. The other is in the vicinity of California Hot Springs, in southeastern Tulare County.

Practically all of the difficulty, as I diagnosed it after talking with officials, citizens and newspapermen, seems to have grown out of voluntary evacuations. Both of these sections are in Military Area No. 2. There appears to be little or no objection to the assembly centers at Fresno and Tulare

Prior to the outbreak of the war, the Del Rey-Orosi area had a Japanese population of between 1,800 and 2,000. A large proportion of the permanent Japanese residents own their own farms or lease them. Some have been there as long as twenty and thirty years. Generally speaking, they are trusted and reasonably well liked by the white residents.

Following the establishment of the military areas by the War Department, several hundred more Japanese have moved into the district. Officials estimate the number all the way from 1,500 to 3,000. It is probable that, considering the permanent Japanese residents, the Japanese

population in this district now totals 3,500 or 4,000. Most of the voluntary evacuees settling there seemingly came from Southern California.

They have settled wherever housing facilities have been available -- in the towns and on farms. In some instances Japanese farm operators have permitted evacuees to settle on their land. On one farm near Del Rey approximately 100 Japanese -- possibly more -- are camped.

Resentment on the part of the white residents in the area is openly expressed. Their general complaint is there were enough Japanese there before and they object to the area being made "a dumping ground for the Japs from Los Angeles and San Francisco." The attitude has numerous ramifications.

For example, the Tulare County Board of Supervisors several times took action refusing emergency welfare aid to the Japanese evacuees, and Supervisor J. G. Brown of Terra Bella was quoted in The Fresno Bee on April 14, 1942, as saying:

"We prefer that the government remove all Japanese from the county. If they love the Japanese enough to send social security workers here to care for them, they may find that the workers would get some of the same treatment as the Japanese."

Several incidents have occurred in the Del Rey-Orosi area, two of them of a rather serious nature. Some others have been narrowly averted. County officials are frankly apprehensive that others may occur in the future under certain circumstances.

B. On the night of April 13, 1942, in Del Rey, five Japanese, voluntary evacuees from Southern California, overpowered Constable John Swan, knocked him unconscious and stole his gun and handcuffs. Following this, a

a crowd of white residents from the surrounding area, at least two of them armed with shotguns, threatened direct action against the Japanese in the town and in the camp where about 100 Japanese have settled three miles from the town.

Constable Swan, assisted by Deputy Sheriff Hubert Nevin, succeeded in dispersing the crowd by persuading them that vigilante action would be exceedingly unwise. The next night, the windows of three stores in the Japanese quarters were smashed. These included the San Vicovich Building which had been leased by the operators of the San Francisco newspaper, Nishi Bei, and two buildings owned by I. Sakai. Windows of a third building were broken on the succeeding night.

The story told by Constable Swan is as follows:

He was standing in front of the Del Rey Fish Market on Railroad Avenue talking with a Mexican, Florentino Roma, when he observed the Japanese driving in a reckless manner. He stopped them and sought to question the driver of the car, Masa Nakamura, aged 18. Swan said the Japanese gave evasive answers and when he asked him where he lived, replied: "There's no curfew law here." There was some further conversation and Swan started to put handcuffs on Nakamura.

At this point the fight started, with the five Japanese attacking Swan and Roma. Swan was knocked out and when he regained consciousness the Japanese, as well as his gun and handcuffs, had disappeared. Some time later, three of the Japanese appeared in Sanger where they sought out Night Watchman Floyd Bridges. They told Bridges they had been the victims of two holdup men at Del Rey and succeeded in taking the gun from one of them. Bridges took the trio to Del Rey where Swan identified them as his assailants and they were placed in jail.

An old time Japanese resident of the area, Roy Mote, sought out the other two Japanese and turned them over to the constable.

No further trouble of a serious nature has since occurred in Del Rey, although Sheriff George Overholt had two deputies stationed in the town for eight days after the melee and has special patrols in the town each Saturday night.

Swan regards the incident as "one of these things" which might have occurred any time. They could have been Filipinos, or Mexicans or whites. It just so happened, unfortunately, they were Japanese. He questions that the attack by five young Japanese, the eldest of whom is 22, was representative of the Japanese community and was greatly deplored by the older Japanese residents who are anxious to keep peace. These residents fear that if many incidents occur, or serious trouble develops, the area will be declared a military zone and all will be subject to evacuation, the old residents as well as the new arrivals.

C. The other serious incident occurred at Sultana, about twenty miles southeast of Del Rey. At 2.00 a.m. on the morning of March 11, 1942, two white residents of the town, Waldo Ammons and Edward Bernard, 25, made an abortive attempt to burn a two story Japanese owned and operated hotel which at that time was pretty well crowded with evacuees. They poured gasoline on the automobile of S. Ogata, which was parked in a garage adjacent to the hotel building, and set it afire. They then drove away and, thinking they were being pursued, fired three revolver shots into the air. The automobile, valued at \$225, was destroyed but townspeople and the fire department kept the blaze from spreading to the hotel.

Arraigned before Justice of the Peace J. W. Floyd, the men testified they believed they were acting with patriotic motives in attempting to burn the Japanese property. Judge Floyd commented the patriotism had been misapplied, - said the entire town might have been destroyed.

Constable C. V. Martin stated the two men had been drinking. Before Superior Judge Frank Lamberson in Visalia, the men pleaded guilty and asked for probation, which has been granted.

D. Several other incidents of a comparatively minor nature have occurred. Reports of Japanese store windows having been broken in Reedley and Kingsburg have been received by the sheriff's office of Fresno County. In Del Rey, Constable Swan was informed the Japanese driver of an automobile speeding through the town had made an apparently deliberate attempt to run down a woman carrying a baby as she stood at the side of the street. On the other side of the picture, several reports have reached Sheriff Overholt of Fresno County of instances of persons stealing produce from the fields of the Japanese in the restricted area after the 8.00 p.m. curfew.

E. The other area in Tulare County where there seems to exist a pattern for trouble is in the vicinity of California Hot Springs, in the southeastern part of the county, near Pine Flat. California Hot Springs is a resort patronized largely by people residing in Tulare County. It is about on the line between the timber and grazing areas, below which are extensive grain fields. The fire hazard in this region is particularly acute for several months of the year and numerous forest, brush, grass and grain fires occur each summer.

A considerable number of Japanese have rented cabins at California Hot Springs. The number has been variously estimated at from fifty up to 100. The accommodations are fairly expensive and there appears to be no means of gainful occupation in the vicinity. Most or all of the families have come from Southern California and appear to have a good deal of money to spend.

These Japanese are regarded with much suspicion both by the people in the neighborhood -- most of them livestock men -- and county officials, who fear the danger of sabotage. The residents want this area declared a prohibited zone from which the Japanese would be evacuated. On April 20, 1942, the Tulare County Cattlemen's Association held a dinner at which Governor Culbert L. Olson was present. The problem was laid before him by several speakers, and press reports quoted him as saying he would ask Lieut. General John L. DeWitt to declare the region a prohibited zone.

From Theodore W. Bullock, a ranger for the state Division of Forestry, I was told that feeling against the Japanese in the area was quite strong. He said recently several enrollees at the Civilian Conservation Corps at the Fountain Springs Camp, about fifteen miles distant, had organized a mob to go to California Hot Springs to drive the Japs out. The CCC boys were armed only with clubs. They reportedly had been loaded into a truck but were stopped before they got started. I have no other verification of this incident.

F. District Attorney Walter Haight and Sheriff B. S. Serhman of Tulare County are inclined to view the situation in the California Hot Springs area with considerable apprehension. They point out that the area annually has

many

many fires and with the Japanese in the area this summer, all fires, even those which might be started by lightning, would be blamed on to them.

They believe the Japanese should be moved out of the foothill section by having the region declared a closed zone or by some other action. It is their opinion they can keep the remainder of the county under control provided no more Japanese come in. I might say the assembly center in the city of Tulare does not appear to be a matter of any contention among the residents as the purpose of the center in keeping the Japanese there only so long as they can be moved to reception centers or otherwise relocated, is pretty well understood.

G. In the Dinuba-Orosi area has been formed an organization known as the Bald Eagles. This is an unofficial organization composed of farmers, businessmen and others in the community. The purpose as announced is to see that, in the event of an invasion by land forces or paratroopers, the local Japanese offer no assistance to the enemy. They have no uniforms but all are to have guns. They deny it is a "vigilante" organization. An area has been blocked off into sections and members "assigned" certain Japanese to "take care of" in the event of invasion. Their goal is 1,000 men. A similar organization of about 100 members has been formed in the Terra Bella district, in the general neighborhood of California Hot Springs.

Charles R. Hurst, one of the leaders of the organization, said: "This is in no sense a vigilante organization. We are choosing only men of mature judgment who will keep their heads in any emergency. We will not interfere with the civilian defense work. Many of our members are members of the defense corps and that is their first obligation. But they will step in where the defense corps is not able to cope with the situation."

The good faith of this organization per se is not questioned by the peace authorities, but both District Attorney Haight and Sheriff Sherman acknowledged the potentialities of such an organization under a certain set of circumstances, such as some overt act by the Japanese in the neighborhood, atrocities against our Prisoners of War in the hands of the Japanese, etc. They frankly admit it is a possible trouble source, but are rather inclined to minimize the likelihood of anything occurring.

H. A collateral situation has developed in the county in the refusal of the Board of Supervisors to provide assistance for welfare work among the Japanese in the county. The views of Supervisor Brown were discussed earlier in this report. The resentment has been directed against the Government, it being the belief that the Federal Government is responsible for the large movement of the Japanese into the county. Supervisor R. L. Patterson of Visalia said: "The Japanese are an obligation of the United States Government. We do not want to be any party to a program to treat them better than our own indigents." Assistant District Attorney LeRoy McCormick remarked: "The county has tried again and again to get the army to order all Japanese out of Tulare Founty. They have simply slapped us in the face by the concentration of Japanese here." The latest episode in this is the Board's refusal to grant a request of the State Welfare Department to make five county case workers available to assist in interviewing Japanese being sent to the Assembly Center. Supervisors Brown and C. B. Allumbaugh opposed helping Federal Authorities on the ground they "have shown no consideration for Tulare County by permitting large numbers of Japanese evacuees to settle here."

I. The directors of the Tulare County Farm Bureau adopted a resolution

objecting to making Tulare County "the dumping ground for Japanese that are considered undesirable in other areas of California." The resolution asserted that in many sections there are more Japanese than whites.

J. In general, Sheriff Overholt of Fresno County seems to feel more apprehensive of disturbances than do the authorities of Tulare County, because of the situation in the southern part of his county. He thinks the situation can be considered "bad" and, if anything, it is growing worse.

K. However, I did not find other substantiation of the belief that the situation is deteriorating. Jack Goddard, Valley Editor of the Fresno Bee, who has watched the situation very closely, believes it has improved during the last week or ten days. Whether this is temporary, he could not say. Charles A. Whitmore, Publisher of the Visalia Times-Delta, regards the situation in both counties as "quite critical". He said that he plans to write some editorials in the near future designed to cool-off the sentiment. Both he and C. L. Relander, the City Editor of the paper, think the Bald Eagles bear close watching by the authorities as it would take somewhat less than an invasion to cause them to go into action.