

I Visit Manzanar

U.S. Citizens Behind Barbed Wire

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⚓ OUR PRESENT war to preserve the democratic values in the American way of life has created many a paradox. Perhaps the most striking is the predicament of the American citizens of Japanese ancestry who have been evacuated from the Pacific Coast area and herded behind barbed wire under military guard in the ten War Relocation Centers located in isolated sections of the country. No charges of disloyalty or subversive activity have been placed against these people. The dangerous aliens have been arrested by the Federal Bureau of Investigation and placed in internment camps administered by the Department of Justice. These people in the War Relocation Centers are there simply because they had Japanese ancestors. Most of them had been born and brought up in this country, and many had been American citizens for two generations. In these isolated Centers, deprived of the accepted freedoms inherent in American citizenship, the evacuees are attempting to organize a democratic community life, live as best they may in a trying situation, provide for the education of their children, and preserve what individual rights are possible under the circumstances.

Last spring, I had the unusual privilege of visiting Manzanar, one of these Relocation Centers. I found the situation so entirely different from what the stories in the newspaper had led me to expect that I should like to share my experience with you and lay before you some of the facts of the case.



◀ MRS. BINGHAM, *Chi*, President of Delta Gamma.

Because the visit was being made at the invitation of the United States War Relocation Authority and because the destination was so inaccessible, our Ration Board allowed us the gasoline to make the trip by automobile. It was an unforgettable experience. We drove all one day through the fertile valleys of California, blanketed with the colorful wild flowers that are so spectacular at that time of year. The next day, we crossed the mountains and found ourselves in a desert valley, with gorgeous snow-capped mountains in the background. Manzanar is a place of beautiful distant vistas but immediate surroundings of treeless, grass-



◀ TRAINING ON THE UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS campus for their parts in the war effort are students in uniform and in civilian clothes, and sailors of a Naval Training School. Representatives, gathered at the base of Lorado Taft's famous "Alma Mater" statuary group, are: Back—R.O.T.C. Cadet Robert Roy, Sullivan; R.O.T.C. Cadet Lt.-Col. Lindell H. VanDyke, Champaign; W.A.T.C. Cadette Rose Ann Stewart, Iota, Peoria; Seaman F. J. Silveria, Lodi, California. Front—Gerson B. Schnierow, Chicago, engineering student; and Marillyn Brooks, Springfield, co-ed.—From Joe Wright, Publicity Director, University of Illinois.



MANZANAR RELOCATION CENTER, MANZANAR, CALIFORNIA. Street scene of barrack homes at this War Relocation Authority center. The windstorm has subsided and the dust has settled.

less spaces, glaring sun, billowing dust, and intense heat. I carried away many pictures that I shall always remember. The cleanliness of the people in spite of the drifting dust, especially the children in their clean-starched dresses; the typical American dress, language and attitudes of the high-school-age group; the Japanese-American war veteran of the last world war; the learned professor from one of our leading American universities conducting a scientific research in synthetic rubber for the Government, using one corner of the laundry as his laboratory and a seventy-five cent mail order meat grinder as his laboratory equipment; the successful dentist, working for \$19 a month, the highest wage in the Relocation Centers, caring for the teeth of the ten thousand evacuees in the Center and using his own equipment in the bargain; the infants in the child welfare center, orphans that had been removed from a

Los Angeles orphanage, because these young Americans also had ancestry which made them potentially dangerous to the safety of the country. I shall always remember the pageant given by the school children. There was not the slightest trace of foreign accent, of course. All had been born in the United States and had been educated in our schools. They acted just like any other American children. Their eyes scanned the audience until they located their parents, and the parents beamed with parental pride, just as we all do on similar occasions. I was amazed at the skill and artistry of the school exhibit. They had done so much with so little. I admired the paper flowers and the crocheted animals that the women had made to sell for the American Red Cross. They proudly told me that they had already exceeded their quota! I saw the beautiful flowering cherry trees, blooming in the midst of a desert, a

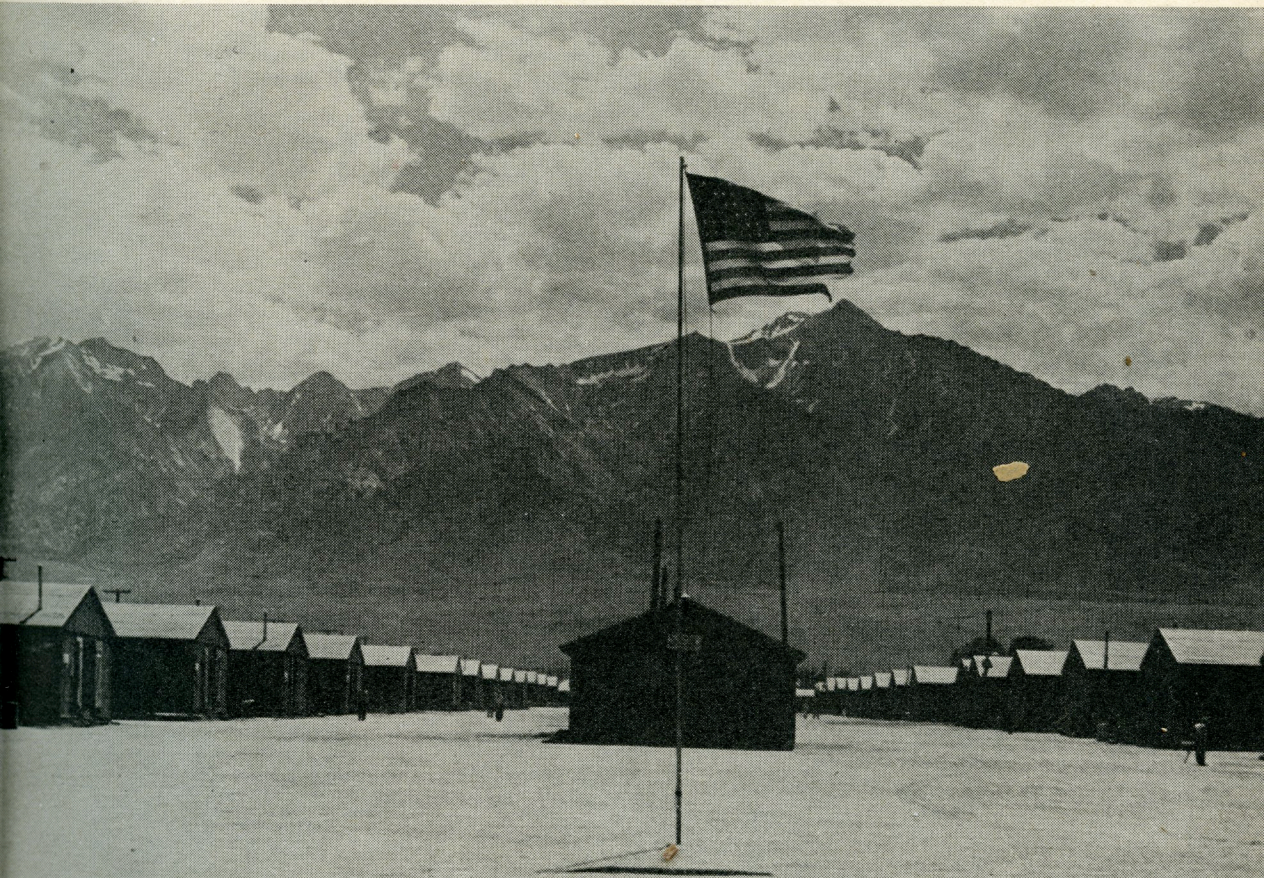
gift from one of the evacuees. I saw service stars in the windows and photographs of sons in uniform. There was a pride and a dignity but a sense of bewilderment that I shall never forget.

The evacuation of one hundred and ten thousand people of Japanese descent was ordered as a measure of military necessity soon after the attack on Pearl Harbor, when the fears of a possible invasion made it advisable to remove from strategic areas any persons who might harbor foreign agents or give aid, or information to the enemy. There is a large Japanese-American population on the Pacific Coast. Because of the restrictions on immigration, practically all of the younger ones are American citizens, having been born in this country. Many of the older ones, born in Japan and ineligible for citizenship, have lived here so long that they know no other life. Approximately seventy thousand are American citizens. Only a few hundred of

them have ever been outside of the United States.

The order of evacuation at first contemplated a voluntary removal to other parts of the country, outside of the prohibited area. However, it was difficult on short notice, to uproot families, dispose of business, home and personal belongings, and leave friends and familiar scenes, to seek a new life in a strange part of the country. Moreover, because of strong anti-Japanese sentiment after the attack on Pearl Harbor, these people of Japanese ancestry were not welcomed in new communities. Public feeling ran high, and it soon became evident that the evacuees could find neither livelihood, happiness, nor safety unless the Government assumed the responsibility for removing them from the prohibited areas, of caring for them temporarily until other arrangements could be made, and then of relocating them in other parts of the country.

MANZANAR RELOCATION CENTER, MANZANAR, CALIFORNIA. *Street scene looking east toward the Inyo Mountains at this War Relocation Authority center.*



Accordingly in March, 1942, these people were removed from their homes by order of the Government and were placed in temporary assembly centers. Some of the large race tracks in California were used for this purpose. Here they lived in discomfort and congestion pending the construction of barracks on the sites selected for the Centers.

This mass movement was probably one of the largest and most orderly mass movements of modern times. The evacuees left home and property without protest. It was not necessary to resort to forcible ejection. Their leaders wisely counseled the people that their greatest war-time service to their country was to comply with the orders of the Government, and that the proof of their loyalty to the United States would lie in their willingness to make the sacrifice in good spirit. They realized, too, that it was a measure for their own protection against the outbursts of racial hatred. They hastily closed up home and business and disposed of their possessions,

taking with them only what they could carry to the assembly centers.

The evacuees now are housed in the Relocation Centers in barracks of frame construction with tar paper roofs. Each barrack is partitioned off into family apartments, 20 by 25 feet. Six to eight people are supposed to occupy one family apartment. Old people, adolescents, children, married couples, and single members of the family must live together with little or no privacy in one family room. There is no running water in the barracks, no bath, or toilet, no cooking facilities. Each block of twelve or fourteen houses, accommodating between two hundred and fifty and three hundred people is supplied with a bath and laundry building and a mess hall, where meals are prepared and served cafeteria style. The food is nourishing but plain. The Relocation Authority has set a maximum cost of forty-five cents a day per person for food, but the actual cost ranges from thirty-four to forty-two cents per per-

RELOCATION CENTER. Kindergarten class. The teacher is Shigeo Tabuchi.





RELOCATION CENTER. Home visiting day at the center grade school.

son a day. All the rationing restrictions are strictly followed. Two meatless days a week are observed. All the evacuees, whether millionaire (and there are several at Manzanar, we were told) or laborer receive the same accommodations and the same fare from the Authority.

The exterior boundaries of the Centers are guarded by detachments of military police. The maintenance of law and order within the Center is the responsibility of the project director and his non-Japanese staff. The basic policy of the War Relocation Authority has been to provide the fullest possible autonomy for the evacuees in the conduct of their community affairs.

Representatives are elected from each block and form a community council, which serves as an intermediary between the Official staff of the Authority and the community. The principal functions of the council are:

(a) to enact regulations in the interest of community welfare and security and prescribe penalties (but not *fines*) for their violation; (b) to present resolutions to the Project Director; (c) to solicit, receive, and administer funds and property for community purposes; and (d) to license and require reasonable license fees from evacuee-operated enterprises. A judicial commission tries evacuees who are arrested for violation of community statutes and hands down decisions which become final after review by the Project Director. The arbitration commission hears disputes between residents and recommends a method of settlement to the Project Director.

The block manager is an evacuee administration officer, appointed by the Project Director, to serve as his personal liaison officer.