

60TH ANNIVERSARY
OF EVACUATION

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Japanese internment revisited

By Ken McLaughlin

Mercury News

In four days in April, they were all gone.

Every central coast and southern Santa Clara Valley resident who the U.S. government had determined was at least a 16th Japanese had reported to the Watsonville Veterans Memorial Hall and been bused to the Salinas rodeo grounds. There, some of the Pajaro Valley's most prominent residents spent the next couple of months living in horse stalls, choking on the smell.

The first-of-its-kind re-enactment of the forced evacuation of people of Japanese descent was staged Saturday in Watsonville, 60 years to the day after it happened.

The \$35,000 production, watched by about 1,000 people, began with the wail of a vintage police motorcycle. Slowly, dozens of "actors" dressed in period attire and carrying valises, cardboard boxes — even a pet dog — walked down East Beach

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NHAT V. MEYER — MERCURY NEWS

Marcia Hashimoto fixes her makeup before a re-enactment of the Japanese internment on the West Coast in 1942.

"It played the videotape that has been running in my head for years, with flesh and bones."

— REP. MIKE HONDA, D-SAN JOSE



Ken Tanimoto said his whole family was interned. Saturday's re-enactment was a \$35,000 production.

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Street toward the vets hall, where city police, soldiers and MPs with Springfield rifles barked orders at the crowd:

"Move up. Register. Get your tags. Get on the bus."

The dog, belonging to a crying little girl, was snatched away.

The bus belonged to the Pacific Greyhound Lines, built in the '40s. The actors were a handful of actual internees and their children and grandchildren. From the grandstands set up in front of the vets hall, human emotions flowed like stream water from a spring rain.

"It just broke my heart," said Rachel Mayo of Capitola. "I couldn't keep from crying."

The event, called "Liberty Lost... Lessons in Loyalty," was organized by the Watsonville-Santa Cruz chapter of the Japanese American Citizens League as a way to remember history by reliving it, and also perhaps provide some emotional closure.

"It played the videotape that has been running in my head for years, with flesh and bones," said Rep. Mike Honda, D-San Jose, who was interned as a child.

People of Japanese descent had been ordered to report to the vets hall beginning on April 27, 1942. That day, 725 people were bused to the ro-

deo grounds, renamed the Salinas Assembly Center. They were among 1,120 residents of Santa Cruz, Monterey, San Benito and southern Santa Clara counties and 120,000 Japanese and Japanese-Americans interned in harsh camps in desolate areas.

The Watsonville Register-Pajaronian proclaimed on April 30, 1942, that by noon "no person of Japanese ancestry remained in Santa Cruz County for the first time in more than a half a century."

Mas Hashimoto, a retired Watsonville High School history teacher, began planning the re-enactment early last year.

But the backlash against Arab Americans, Muslims and even non-Muslim Sikhs in the days after the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11 gave the event an added poignancy.

Historian Sandy Lydon, author of the book "The Japanese in the Monterey Region," said he was chilled by the parallels.

Lydon was among those who spoke to the audience that gathered at the Mello Center for the Performing Arts after the re-enactment for a dramatic presentation of the lives of internees.

"We need to watch out for each other," Lydon said, noting that 600 Arabs and Americans still remain in indefinite federal custody. "On-



NHAT V. MEYER — MERCURY NEWS PHOTOGRAPHS

During the re-enactment, Katie Arao, left, sits next to an actress who portrays her mother as they are transported to an internment camp.



Robb Mayeda was one of dozens of actors who staged a re-enactment of the internment. Mayeda's father was an internee.

ly that way can we prevent it from every happening again."

After the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941, many Americans were gripped by war hysteria. It was particularly strong along the Pacific coast, where residents feared more Japanese attacks.

Many civic leaders in California, Oregon and Washington demanded that the residents of Japanese ancestry be relocated.

Many argued that it was for their own protection, a voice symbolized by the words of a police officer helping to "tag" Japanese and Japanese-Americans in front of the vets hall Saturday.

"It's for their own good," said the cop, answering questions from an actor playing a reporter from the Watsonville paper. "We don't want to see the same thing happen here that happened to the coloreds in the South."

SEGREGATION TIMELINE

■ **Feb. 19, 1942:** President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066, which resulted in the forcible internment of 120,000 people of Japanese ancestry on the West Coast. More than two-thirds of those interned were U.S. citizens.

■ **February 1943:** The 442nd Regimental Combat Team, a segregated all-Nisei unit, was activated. The unit compiled a sterling war record.

■ **December 1944:** Executive Order 9066 was rescinded by President Roosevelt seven months before Japan's surrender. The last of the camps was closed in March 1946.

■ **August 1988:** President Ronald Reagan signed a law that apologized for the internment and provided payments of \$20,000 to each surviving internee and a \$1.25 billion education fund.

Source: Facts On File, Mercury News research

Seated in the audience at the Mello Center was Rudy Tokiwa, 76, who served in the famed 100th/442nd Regimental Combat Team. Tokiwa was among those who helped rescue members of the Texas battalion in France in November, 1944.

Tokiwa, a retired flower grower and contractor from Sunnyvale, had been sent with his family to Poston, Ariz., a hot, dusty and scorpion-infested camp. His father was a World War I U.S. Army vet.

Tokiwa had lied about his age to join the 442nd, also known as the "Go For Broke" battalion as a way to prove the loyalty to his country.

"We just needed to step forward," Tokiwa said.

When he returned to the Bay Area, he was confronted by a Red Cross worker, who used an ethnic slur.

A Navy man who overheard the conversation, however, chastised the woman.

"He said, 'Don't dump on this man. He was in battle with us.'"

It was that spirit that was honored Saturday.

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