

CONCENTRATION CAMP—



Style

by MICHAEL EVANS



CONCENTRATION camps are a familiar story in Hitler's Germany. They are part of the sadistic machinery for breaking men's bodies, minds and souls. They are an important part of what we are fighting against.

And so we have brought internment camps to America.

To break men's bodies? To punish men because they are of another race or belief?

Well, let Emon Tatsui tell what we're doing. Emon was a technician in one of the big Hollywood studios. He's in a U.S. internment camp today. And this is what he wrote in one of his letters:

"I like to tell you about this camp. Nice place to live. It's better than Hollywood. Snow on mountains is bright. Every day 80 to 85. No black-out in here. There are liberty, safe and build up new life."

Emon isn't so good with English words. But he gets his idea across. They aren't writing that kind of letter from *Boergermoor*, dreary German concentration camp. Nor from *Dachau*, or from half a hundred others like it.

But the fact remains that internment camps, under a variety of euphemistic names, exist today. Some are camps for the Japanese—for the Issei (the Japanese-born) and Nisei (the American born); some are for the Italians and Germans; and some are for Americans.



What sort of places are they, these American internment camps?

Take Emon's camp, for example. It is called Manzanar, the biggest of the West Coast "reception centers." It is a 6,000-acre tract in the Mojave desert. Last spring it was a dusty, windswept open barrens; today it is a bustling community. There are ball games on trim grass diamonds. And youngsters playing on slides and swings. Some 10,000 persons live at Manzanar and the desert is blooming. Probably not this year—but certainly next year—Manzanar is going to raise all the food it needs.

But crops of cauliflower, lettuce, potatoes, celery and onions are not all that is flourishing in those arid wastes.

DEMOCRACY is blooming, too. Certainly, there are some among those 10,000 who would stab us in the back—if they could. If it were not for them, Manzanar would not exist.

But listen to this, from the *Free Press*, the aptly named mimeograph newspaper of the Owens Valley Reception Center. This comes not from a Caucasian American, safe behind his white face and European features, but from a Japanese-blooded editor:

"You will discover great adventure in our way of life. Here, in the beginning of democracy, is a transplanted pioneer community; equality and fraternity are accepted principles. Special privileges and classes are taboo."

That is the American way.

War has brought internment camps to America, but they have about as much relation to the Nazi model as the Bill of Rights has to the *Horst Wessel* song.

Actually, there are a half dozen kinds of "internment camps" in the United States: reception camps and resettlement areas in the West; alien colonies in the mountain states; detention camps in the Midwest and on the east coast, outdoor camps for aliens deemed to be actively dangerous to the United States. And then, too, there are the camps where



conscientious objectors—Americans who refuse to participate in the war on moral or religious grounds—work at forest and farm jobs.

Life may not be pleasant in some of the American camps. Most of them are located in far-away places. Camp dwellers can not come and go as they wish. The bunks may not be equipped with inner-spring mattresses—but they are clean. The food may not be fancy—but it is plentiful and nourishing. There are no corner movies or drugstores with ice cream sodas—but there are regular entertainments and well-stocked libraries. And if you're ill, the services of the best medical clinic the government can provide are available.

Perhaps you ran a thriving vegetable stand in Los Angeles (as many of the Japanese did). Perhaps you owned a string of hotels in the Pacific Northwest. You won't make as much money at Tanfaron or Santa Anita or the International Livestock Exposition Grounds, near Portland. But a half dozen government agencies, headed by the Federal Reserve Bank, are standing guard to protect the commercial and financial interests of the uprooted aliens.

Best of all, you have the time-honored American right to complain. If you don't like it you can gripe and grouse to your heart's content. And no one will come smashing down on your back with a rubber hose, or maul your face to a pulp under hobnailed boots.

AN ELDERLY Japanese in a West Coast camp put it very well. His name is Tokutaro Slocum and he used to be a sergeant in the U.S. Army. He got the "Slocum" from the American family which brought him up. This is what he says:

"Being here is my part in the war."

Or, as Chiye Mori, who was a newspaper girl in Los Angeles, declares:

"If Japan wins this war *we* have the most to lose. We hope America wins and quickly. This is the way we are demonstrating our loyalty. We

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want to share in the war effort . . . in the gloom of temporary defeats and the joys of ultimate victory."

In "internment camps" on the west coast, the Japanese are voting and holding office. They are learning self-government by writing their own constitutions and putting them into effect. They are holding court over their fellow internees. They are policing their camps and maintaining justice. (At Manzanar, the principal difficulty was with "late card players.")

Somewhat more than 120,000 persons of Japanese extraction have been uprooted from their homes. And close to 75,000 of them are American citizens, with just as many constitutional rights and privileges as you or I. This movement was a purely military measure—but not, in any way, a harsh one.

However, it would be wrong to cite the Japanese camps and colonies as entirely typical.

In New York harbor there is a little plot of land which to millions of Americans and to the forebears of more millions has been the first soil which they could call free soil: Ellis Island, gateway to America.

But today the cluster of red brick buildings on Ellis Island is a prison for aliens. Here are assembled those drawn in by the dragnet of the FBI as operators of secret short-wave sets, printers of subversive pamphlets, would-be-spies and suspected spies. Yet, even here, each suspect has the rights of any man under the Anglo-Saxon law to be considered innocent until proved guilty.

But there is no self-rule at Ellis Island.

Even here discipline, so far as it is reasonably possible, is placed in the hands of the internees themselves. They are invited to take responsibility for operation of the camps—division of chores, maintenance of working hours, punishment of minor rule infractions and many recreational activities.

The big difference between the western camps and the eastern ones is that in the East there has been no wholesale effort to intern all enemy aliens; only those known or strongly suspected of enemy sympathy have been segregated. In the West—because we admittedly could not be certain of the difference between a friendly Japanese and an enemy Jap-

anese—they were all swept up.

Just the same, thousands of Japanese did all they could before internment to work toward an American victory. Many volunteered to go into the labor-barren sugar beet fields of eastern Oregon, southern Idaho and western Colorado and help save that vital crop from the rank growth of weeds. At Manzanar, where they have established their own copy of that truest microcosm of democracy, the New England town meeting, many of them feel they have a stake in the future of our country—and want to see it continue as a democracy.

Perhaps that's why George Nakamura worried so much over the farm he had leased to a Chinese before being evacuated that he finally wrote the War Time Civil Control Administration:

“Please tell Wong to irrigate the celery at least once every five days if it fails to rain, and to harvest the crop as soon as possible.”



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