

MICHI WEGLYNTCAUDIO**MICHI WEGLYN INTERVIEW 2/20/98 (Side 1)***(Michi tell me about registration.)*

1:04:18 Registration. That is a generic term we used to explain that forced act on the part of the government which made young men... Well, actually the adults who were seventeen years and older declare their loyalty, their unqualified loyalty to the United States.

(What was the lead clearance questionnaire?)

1:04:59 Lead clearance questionnaire... Well, here we had an insistence of the WRA wanting to use this army drive to get volunteers for, to enlist in the army. And the WRA decided, well, we'd like to be able to expedite the release of those who we feel are loyal so that they could help in the war effort. In industry or on the farms, on the railroads etc. And that is the reason the WRA questionnaire was entitled lead clearance, which gave, at that particular point in history considering that the army was there to try to get volunteers, the fact that the WRA was getting people to sign all these answers to a very long questionnaire. And the heading implied that the intention in part was to get the internees to leave camp, was very intimidating. Because they had just gotten settled in camp. For instance, at 1:05:50 Manzanar they had that terrible riot. It was far too soon after that riot for instance. And the same thing happened in Poston where they had a near riot. It lasted a couple of weeks and the army was nearly called in. And so it was timed very 1:07:19 badly because the people misunderstood this heading, lead clearance, as meaning now we are getting ready to have you go out into the community. And they weren't ready. It was a very hostile hostile outside. And they hadn't, no desire being penniless to want....

(can you just describe for me the questionnaire for lead clearance. how many questions were there on the questionnaire?)

1:08:03 I just know that there was twenty seven, twenty eight, maybe it ended at thirty. I cannot guarantee you that.

(there were certainly two key questions. what was question twenty seven?)

1:08:20 **Twenty seven asked whether you are willing to fight for the United States wherever ordered.**

(what was question twenty eight?)

1:08:34 **Twenty eight asked whether you forswear any allegiance to the emperor of Japan and you will swear, and that you do swear unqualified allegiance to the United States.**

(what was the dilemma posed by these two questions to the, to the for the issei?)

1:09:00 Well, to the issei it was **clear cut because they said this is ridiculous. They deny us U.S. citizenship and at the same time they are asking us to renounce our allegiance to the emperor.** That meant that should the war be successfully won by the Japanese, these people would be people without a country because of the fact that they had denounced the emperor at one point. So it was terrifying for them to have to put down in writing that we do forswear allegiance to the emperor. And they had no other citizenship.

(what was the dilemma for the issei on getting this question twenty seven and twenty eight? what was the dilemma for the issei?)

- 1:10:10 For the issei actually it was simpler than for the nisei. It was clear cut because they were confronted with this question, do you forswear allegiance to the Japanese emperor. And swear unqualified allegiance to the U.S. **What a stupid question.** Because they were denied U.S. citizenship and how can they forswear allegiance to the emperor, when that, the possibility of let's say at that point, many issei were rooting for their country and there was a possibility that Japan might win the war and it would be catastrophic if they would sign a paper saying that we forswear allegiance to the Japanese emperor. Their country.
- 1:10:32

(so what was the dilemma that these two questions posed for the nisei?)

- 1:11:17 Well, for the nisei, the two questions posed many many questions. One, well, kibe were very quick to see through that same question which troubled the issei because they said this is tricky. **It's as though, let's say a German American were asked do you forswear allegiance to Hitler and swear unqualified allegiance to the United States? It implied that you indeed had a prior allegiance to Hitler. That puts a person in a ridiculous situation.** And to tell you the truth. Oh, let me first answer your question fully in which you asked how did the two questions bring conflict to the nisei. The nisei were not in any mood at that point, in a concentration camp, to volunteer their services to go and fight their brothers or possibly their cousins in Japan. So they qualified their answers saying that we're very happy to fight but we would prefer to fight in Europe not in Japan. Not wherever they are sent.
- 1:12:10
- 1:12:50

(in the book you also talk about how the questionnaire coming after evacuation, coming after round up of the issei was just insult upon insult. can you elaborate on that?)

(what was the first insult?)

- q:13:32 The first insult of course was to become instantly impoverished. Because you had to give up your home, give up your possessions, give up your long term relationship with friends and neighbors and carry a couple of suitcases and wander into the desert and live under the most extreme conditions. **Of course the army did take care that the Japs would be made to suffer. They chose the worst places, the hell holes that are to be found in this beautiful United States.**
- 1:14:17 Secondly, they were settled. I mean they did their best. They felt that perhaps because of their Japanese upbringing they felt that we must atone for what the Japanese did. The sneak attack. There was so much propaganda that was anti-Japanese. And the Japanese people as a community were made to feel as though they were every bit as guilty for having a Japanese face as the enemy. So that of course those of us who were inculcated with the Japanese way of thinking felt that well, this is the least we can do by showing our patriotism by obeying the government. Perhaps they have a good reason. They had their reason. Military necessity as though the coast were about to be attacked. Well, how do we know. They said only those who had the facts who know exactly what is happening know what is best for us. So, that was another factor.
- 1:15:13

- 1:16:12 Then of course they find out that it wasn't the community that they were promised. They had initially been promised that they were going to be moved inland and they could form their own community and live in a democratic fashion. They were shocked to see that they were surrounded by barbed wires and guard towers. And that point they realized they weren't trusted at all. That they had used very, they had actually lied to them. And it was a matter of their becoming
- 1:17:07 akin to prisoners of war. They were colonized in a sense and they were deprived of all their constitutionally promised freedoms. But many of them took it philosophically and they decided to make the best of it. They tried to make their living conditions more comfortable by building furniture, chairs, tables, beds. Making partitions in barracks (out of what) out of nothing. They tried to
- 1:17:46 scrounge for cut off lumbers. You know left over lumbers (and scraps?) and scraps and egg boxes and whatever. And it was quite extraordinary what people were able to create out of nothing. But, they became aware of the fact that their overseers were really not having their best interest at heart. That the food for instance, the meat, the eggs, the sugar which were supposed to go to the mess halls were being diverted to the black market.
- 1:18:41 There were some of the administrators who were exploiting their position to haul away what was rightfully the evacuees. And they were selling the sugar and meat whatever they could on the black market. And that of course became very apparent when there was a crash. This automobile owned by one of the officials I believe in Manzanar, was in an accident and there it became apparent that his truck was loaded with this material that he was trying to deliver to the black market.
- 1:19:34 And of course people like Harry Uyeno, the Manzanar martyr who worked in the mess hall, was quite aware of what was going on for quite some time. He wasn't able to prove it but, he made a big thing of it. This was beginning to be more than just suspicious. And he organized a union, and he organized a union, and to make a long story short, this union monitored what was coming in. And they noticed that in certain mess halls they especially the ones which were used by
- 1:20:32 some of the big wigs within the Japanese American communities, some of the JACL leaders who were not very popular, had made themselves even more unpopular by making sure that to please their mess halls, were getting the sugar and the eggs and the meat and Harry Uyeno made a big stink and of course the administration which was a part of this overall scheme struck back at Harry
- 1:21:22 Uyeno. Especially when this mob decided to do something about the fact that the administration had picked up Harry on a trumped up charge that he had beaten or killed...somebody had been killed. And of course the administration immediately decided that it must be Harry Uyeno because he's a troublemaker.

(you're saying the administration the WRA, camp directors were corrupt and involved in profiteering, black market profiteering?)

- 1:22:10 Oh yes, some of them, indeed. I don't know, would you like names?
(sure.)

Well, I can name only one or two...

(in this climate, well let's finish the Manzanar. Fred Toyama was beaten up at Manzanar, Harry Uyeno was arrested. How did the community respond to the arrest of Harry Uyeno for the beating of Fred Toyama?)

- 1:22:41 Well, there was a huge meeting, I think Jo Uyehara (?) had a lot to say about the fact that it's not fair that Harry Uyeno should have been taken away to the county jail. And they had a mass meeting. A huge assemblage of Manzanar people just made a big demonstration saying that Harry should be brought back into camp.
- 1:23:21 That he should have a fair trial by his peers. And so Harry was brought into camp, brought back into camp. And he was placed in jail. But the public was not satisfied that he should be left in jail. They wanted him free. And as a result there was one evening this demonstration...to tell you the truth, I cannot remember the facts, you know.

(in this climate, there was a riot at Manzanar, betrayal after betrayal, lied to. why did the government institute this questionnaire for leave clearance?)

- 1:24:30 Well as I told you leave clearance was the idea of the WRA. As for the recruitment of volunteers that was the marshall general, the war department's idea. I of course have my own personal theory as to why this questionnaire was instituted. Because I have come across documents which show that the military, U.S. war department was enormously impressed with the stoicism of the Japanese soldier. There is a description of this strafing of an American ship and these Japanese prisoners were cool. They went to the aid of American GI, the sailors, who were wounded who were hysterical, who were terrified of this continuous strafing. And the Japanese soldiers who were prisoners actually, but they took it with no fear, no obvious fear. Awe of the fact that the ship was being strafed continuously and they were more than eager to help the wounded American sailors. And they said this is an incredible demonstration of the
- 1:25:32 Japanese spirit. The yamato damashi upbringing. And they were something about the Japanese that is remarkable. And my own theory is that, **although they turned down Mike Masaoka's initial proposal that the nisei become a suicide unit, with the parents as hostages, I believe that after that first year of war when we were really losing a good part of the Pacific war. To Midway, we were going down hill. And the war department felt that, we ought to take advantage, we**
- 1:26:38 **ought to exploit this remarkable stoicism, this esprit de corp, the yamato damashi spirit of the Japanese, of course they didn't know difference between an**
- 1:27:42 **American, a Japanese American and those our cousins our relatives in Japan. Of course we were brought up pretty much in the same manner. We were instilled with a great deal of stoicism. And we were told how the Japanese soldier would walk for thirty miles with, on a lunch of rice ball with a umeboshi inside. And so**
- 1:28:31 **we were never allowed to complain about the food we were served because our parents would immediately say, think about how the Japanese soldiers are sacrificing themselves, and you have the nerve to complain about food when they can walk thirty miles on just a rice bowl, a ball.**

(given this misconception, the stereotype armed that the government had, what did the government army propose?)

- 1:29:05 The army proposed that we ought, there are a lot of Japanese Americans which comprise good manpower, going to waste in the concentration camps. And we ought to sort out, at least sort out the sheeps from the goats. **We can't trust them all. But we should at least try to get volunteers initially.** We cannot trust them to the extent that we institute selective service, after all they, they'd all been given 4C
- 1:29:57 status, draft status and so which was the equivalent of enemy alien. The Japanese American citizen was considered an alien. And so it was embarrassing to the military that like a few weeks before they instituted the drive for volunteers, they suddenly changed the 4C to 1A. And that created a great deal of dissention and suspicion among the Japanese Americans. **They said my god right after Pearl**
- 1:30:38 **Harbor they fired all the Japanese kibeis who had volunteered or who had already been inducted.** There were five thousand Japanese Americans who were already in the army and many of them had been moved inland and then given wooden guns. And they were given kitchen duty. And the kibeis were fired they weren't to be trusted. And so the whole thing smelled. They saw through it. They said
- 1:31:19 this is not legitimate. This stinks. This really does not make sense. They had sent a team from the war department, actually from the marshall general's office and there was a sergeant who was the head and there were maybe three caucasians. They always had one nisei.
- 1:31:49 And they were sent to Washington to get a crash training on the Japanese mind. They had to study, day after day after day, about why the camp had been established. Why it was necessary that it must be maintained. They wanted them to be able to fully explain to the camp audience, the hard questions that maybe thrown at them. But the end they were told, that you are not to respond with your own theory. If any questions are thrown at you that you don't know anything about.

(we talked about the army recruiting teams, take it from the point of view of the people, the nisei in camp, what was the reaction of the nisei in camp to the army recruiters coming in?)

- 2:10:51 Well, initially you know they saw the notice in the newspaper and they said, more propaganda. But when they saw that the meeting were to be attended, they in some of the camps, like Heart Mountain, there was no attendance. They simply didn't show up. They were having their own meetings. Each camp reacted differently. The Minidoka camp there was a project director by the name of Safford(?) and he had been clever enough to have meetings prior to the
- 2:11:44 appearance of army's team. And he had made sure that the issei leaders of the community would all be told the nature of the visit of the army team. So the issei were able to transmit in an authoritative way, the reason why they were coming for volunteers. And so of course they outshone the other camps. I think there were three hundred who volunteered from that camp as compared to Heart Mountain where thirty seven I think volunteered. So, well for instance Heart
- 2:12:31 Mountain, they had many many meetings. **But these were meetings that were generally called by the young men who were very perplexed.** As a matter of fact, this may be my going off the subject, but, I have come across documents which show that the war department deliberately and knowingly wanted the questionnaires to be complex. **It is my theory now, after having written "Years of**
- 2:13:28 **Infamy," that the ultimate and the key goal in imposing this ridiculous registration of having people declare whether they were loyal or disloyal was to be able to justify the fact that they had spent so much tax dollars on those camps unnecessarily.** These were innocent people. They needed to create a whole lot of disloyals to be able to tell congress that we were justified. **Hey, we ended up with so many thousands of disloyals and we were right to have established those camps.**

- 2:14:30 So in a nut shell this was very very much in the back of the mind of war department officials who realized that after all, **after they started winning the war, after the battle of midway**, and they had a feeling that the Japanese Americans **aren't really that dangerous. But we've got to save face we can't just say let's close the camps up. We made a mistake, we're sorry, you may go home now.**
- 2:15:22 Which would've been the decent thing to do as a **matter of fact**, Dillon Meyer (sp?) had already in 1943 had suggested that and I think McCloy (sp?) thought that well it did make some sense but **of course FDR was not in no mood to admit that such a huge mistake had been made.** And you know McCloy(sp?) and Knox(sp?) and Stimpson(sp?), those people in power, the military simply were not going to capitulate and say we've had a chance to sort out the loyals from the disloyals and now the rest can return to their home community. **And of course that was the genesis. The beginnings of the resisters.** That is my theory now that it was really a stupid questionnaire and don't think that the people in the war department didn't realize that is was very perplexed, perplexing a rather stupid questionnaire in that there is that document in which McCloy(sp?) and Dewitt(sp?) are discussing, and there's a transcript that has been leftover. And they are saying wow, it's really happening. Those people in Gila(?), 60% or was it 70% have refused to declare their allegiance to U.S. and the mothers and fathers are being urged by some of the men, just a group of men, I think there were like seventeen, no more than twenty three who....

- 2:18:06 Dewitt says that there's the disenchanting types and then there's the superloyals. Those are the ones you can't trust the most. You remember **that document.** He says those are the ones the ones who wrap themselves in the American flag. Those are the ones you can't trust the most.

(let's talk about the loyalty oath. questions twenty seven and twenty eight. how fair was it for the government to ask the nisei about their loyalty? how fair was that? was it unfair?)

- 2:19:01 Utterly unfair. How would you like to be asked are you loyal or disloyal? I mean have you ever thought about it? McCarthy. That was the beginning of McCarthyism. He got to a point where he said we can't trust the teachers, the professors in the United States. We must get a loyalty oath from each and every one of them. It's a stupid stupid way because there is no way you can determine loyalty or disloyalty unless you go and bomb a bridge. That means you're disloyal. But if you think oh god, I'd like to bomb that bridge I mean my worst enemy. Oh maybe Clinton is about to go over that bridge you know, it be awfully good if some guy plant a bomb just before he goes over that bridge. The fact that he thinks about it does not make him disloyal. And there is no way for one to determine such a thing as loyalty or disloyalty cause it depends what culture you are from.
- 2:19:36
- 2:20:28 Within the Japanese culture as in many Asian cultures loyalty usually begins within the family. The family. You owe your loyalty to your parents. And if you're the eldest son you know your loyalty lies.

(can you tell me again, make the distinction for me between thought and deed. thinking something disloyal or committing a disloyal act. can you determined loyalty or disloyalty based on a questionnaire?)

2:28:08 No. There's no way you can determine loyalty or disloyalty based on a questionnaire because it depends on who has written out that questionnaire. How the questions are slanted. And as I have told you previously, that questionnaire wanted to know exactly what relatives do you have in Japan and what are their positions. I mean are they in with the military and what position do they hold.

2:22:00 And it very much depended on whether you was being asked whether you're loyal or disloyal as to whether you had possibly an uncle who was an admiral in the Japanese navy. That meant oh, here we got someone terribly important. We've got to use him for trading purposes.

(so the questionnaire actually asked...

2:22:36 Every one of them.

(actually asked, do you have members of your family in the Japanese military.)

2:22:44 Uh huh, oh yes. I found that out from Sho Onodera. I said why was your mother taken? Usually it's the father who is taken. He said oh my mother's brother is an admiral.

(michi who do you think wrote questions twenty seven and twenty eight?)

2:23:05 Well, of course Frank Chin was very perceptive.