

The Gila River WRA Relocation Center, Rivers, Pinal County, Arizona.

Physical Setting:

The Gila Relocation Center is located in the general area half-way between the cities of Phoenix and Tucson. It is on Indian land, being placed on the Pima Indian Reservation in Pinal County, Arizona. The land was released by the Indian Service with the understanding that such improvements as were made on it would revert to the Indian Service when the period of evacuation and resettlement was over. The camp area itself was selected in April by the War Relocation Authority. It was chosen because it is very rich agricultural land, capable of producing the Egyptian long-staple cotton, now so vital to the aeronautical industry. The area adjacent to the camp is topographically a typical basin range desert. Wholesale irrigation is necessary before any agricultural plans can be realized. The camp is on a flat plain surrounded by scattered buttes. The land has been cleared of mesquite, tar-bush, juniper, and the characteristic saguaro and cholla cacti for building and farm improvement. The scattered buttes around the camp give the impression of a large bowl which easily retains the heat of the day. The center at present is extremely hot and dusty and a rather unpleasant place to live. The climate is generally extremely hot during the Summer months, the winters being characterized by a crisp coolness and occasional frosts. It does not snow at Gila, although snow does appear on some of the higher buttes during the winter. The Japanese evacuees have complained more over the heat and dust than they have over the other and perhaps worse conditions.

The Gila Center is divided into two camps, one about four miles away from the other. To the east and nearer the two towns of Casa Grande and Coolidge is the smaller Camp I. This was designed to hold 5,000 evacuees. Building has been begun comparatively recently with the result that, when the first evacuees were brought in on July 20, the camps were not completed. At this time, and indeed, for a month thereafter, no provision could be made for adequate housing or the proper

preparation of food. Camp II, four miles to the west, is designed to be the larger camp, capable of holding, when finished, 10,000 people. A plan of Camp II is included with this report.

Population and the Housing Problem:

There has apparently been considerable political pressure in California toward emptying the assembly centers as soon as possible. For this reason the army made the decision that the Gila Center was ready for habitation by the 20th of July. In spite of the plea on the part of the administration that under no circumstances could a large group of people be housed here as yet, Camp I was pronounced finished and, beginning on July 20, evacuees were sent in at the rate of 500 a day four days a week. It will be understood that the barracks for housing were already erected. Gas and electricity had not as yet been turned on with the result that the problem of feeding these first few arrivals was a difficult one. In the first few days meals were prepared over open fires on the outside. Later gas was available part of the time and the buildings designed as mess halls could be used. There was enough water for washing and showers most of the time. Camp II was and is still in the process of construction. Electric, gas, and water mains for Camp II are dependent on those leading in from Casa Grande through Camp I. Whenever construction was going on in Camp II it was necessary to turn off these facilities. Many times during the past days there has been no water all day. No one could wash, take showers, the toilets would not flush, and drinking water has been at a premium. The water situation in Camp II has now been remedied with the result that there is always water in Camp I. The same is not true of the gas and lights. These may be turned off at a moment's notice in order to make a connection in Camp II. In the preparation of a meal it often happened that the cooks would find that the gas no longer flowed. The half-cooked food had to be served in order to prevent waste. The same is true of electricity. This situation has not been remedied as yet although the administration now demands that adequate notice be

given by the contractors before such connections will be made.

When I arrived at Gila there were 6,700 people in Camp I in the space provided for 5,000. (August 13) By August 20 this number had been raised to 7,700 and later to 8,200. Living conditions were intolerable so that some provision had to be made so that some of the people could be moved into Camp II. Now there are 1,000 people living in the second camp in a series of blocks especially provided for temporary habitation. I shall discuss this further in a moment.

The Gila Center is located in a rather unattractive part of the desert. An effort has been made however, to make the center as attractive as possible. The barracks are constructed of a plaster beaverboard type of wall mounted on a wooden frame. The rooves are of red fireproof shingle. The center is rather attractive as compared with others. The white houses with their red rooves can be seen from many miles away. Each barrack is 90 feet long and 20 feet wide. It is divided into three apartments, 20' x 30'. The lack of the black tar paper on the outsides of the houses makes them more attractive than those at other centers. The insides of the houses, however, are rather drab. There is unfinished and rough wood with hastily hammered nails sticking out in all directions. the floors were made of green, unseasoned lumber. These have been warped by the heat and dust with the result that the dust is easily blown up into the houses. High winds and dust storms are a daily occurrence. Army cots and spring beds have been provided and homes are made attractive by whatever decorations and furniture the evacuees were able to bring with them. No one feels settled in these quarters. In order to relieve the overloading of the camp, it has been suggested that many will be moved to Camp II. As the situation is now it has been necessary to crowd as many people into an apartment as possible. Usually large families have been kept together but very frequently younger people and young married couples with no children have been moved into one apartment. The barracks have been divided into blocks. An ideal block consists of eight barracks facing each other. The messhall



itself is a barrack placed in the southwest corner. In the northwest corner is supposedly a recreation hall. While the messhalls have been kept free of inhabitants, the recreation halls have had to supply living quarters to some, especially to the unmarried men. Down the center of the ideal block are small buildings. There are four of these. At the south, the blocks run north and south, is an ironing room, the next building is a laundry, the next the women's showers and toilets, and finally, to the north, the men's. It has been necessary to utilize the laundry and ironing rooms for living quarters in Camp I. In the first stages, before the water was connected in some of the latrine and shower rooms, some unmarried men were living in those. This situation is rapidly becoming alleviated now that Camp II is beginning to open up. The fact that the latrines are in the center of the block and between the facing barracks prevents such difficulties as might occur in cases of unattended women. At Gila there has been none of the voyeurism or attempted rape that has been described for the other centers.

I mentioned that an ideal barrack held three apartments, divided into equal sizes. It is hoped that this will be somewhat broken down as the family groups can be settled. By further partitioning, it is possible to make smaller or larger quarters as the need arises. In Camp II the apartment division was changed to allow four rooms per barrack, although the barracks themselves are of the same size according to army specifications. They may be broken down into a number of apartments depending on the needs of the inhabitants.

Each housing barrack has a double roof in order to break somewhat the intense heat of the sun. Many of the well-to-do people have been able to afford air-cooled systems, fans which blow the incoming air through running water. The fact that some have these and others do not has been a source of considerable jealousy. I mentioned that the army provided cots and blankets, tables and chairs. In addition many people have brought in some pieces of furniture such as card tables, tabourettes, collapsible book shelves, and the like. Many houses have

the Buddhist butsudan or the Shinto kamidana. I have not been able to inspect these closely. With so many people living together in one room it will be difficult to do so until the camp is more settled.

Outside of the houses many people have started cactus gardens. The cactus is brought in from the mesa and placed in the rows in the ground or on shelves in tin cans. Some of the people have had really clever arrangements. Some have built little pools surrounded by cactus with the traditional little figures of fishermen, cranes, turtles, and the like which they brought from home. One man has a model of the San Francisco Gate Bridge which he painstakingly constructed out of wood and bits of string. The more devout Shintoists here, however, have gone in for the conventional torii and pagoda. In some cases these have been brought from California but in others they have been constructed on the spot from scrap materials. A police order in the camp demands that the cactus gardens be surrounded by fences. Small children had a habit of falling into the thorny bushes. Some of these fences are quite ornate with little gates and rather intricate carvings. One Shintoist, probably Inari cult, brought a stone phallus which reposes in his garden. Other gardens are also quite religious in nature. Ofuta, the paper charms, are to be seen attached to the cacti plants in some gardens. One house has such a garden while on the outside of the house itself are lengthy inscriptions in Kanji. The same man has a number of torii in his garden over which are painted inscriptions. This matter of gardens is most interesting and will require further investigation.

Now that people are being moved into Camp II the overcrowded condition of Camp I is being somewhat alleviated. Provisions are being made to devote one entire block to schools. These barracks will be turned into rooms for the primary grades and also for the high school. The Fall semester will be expected to start sometime soon.

In the center of Camp I is a canteen where tobacco, soft drinks, newspapers and magazines, and various articles of clothing are sold. No such arrangement is as yet possible for Camp II.

There is as yet no Christian Church. A recreation hall in one block has been cleared however, and yesterday a sign was put up announcing the presence there of the Buddhist Church. I was able to read the Kanji, Hongwanji, the sect to which most of the people here belong. In a messhall Christian services are going to be held. Services have been held once with about 200 in attendance. It is estimated that only 15 per cent of this center are Christian, the rest are Buddhist. The effect of this will be more clearly seen in the discussion of the types of people here. Buddhist services will be held regularly in both camps from now on. I do not know what arrangements have been made as yet for Sunday Schools for either Christian or Buddhist. I know further, except for the gardens which are mentioned above, of no manifestation of Shinto. To be sure, there are the charms, the kamidana, and the gardens but whether there will be any establishment of shrines or formal priests is not known.

Administration:

The director of the camp is Mr. Eastbourne Smith, late of the Soil Conservation Service in Albuquerque. His wife, Dr. Nan Cook Smith is aiding him as assistant administrator in charge of community welfare. Mr. Smith's assistant is Dr. Lew Korn, also from the S.C.S. The camp is under the administration of the War Relocation Authority, aided by the army. The gate of the camp is patrolled by military police. There is no fence around the area however, nor are there the usual outposts of any other kind. It would be virtually impossible for any evacuee to walk to any point where he could escape. The desert is a rather grim warden. The military police reside in a barrack nearby at the gate of the camp. Here also are quarters for the construction workers.

In addition to Mr. Smith and his immediate assistants there are numerous project aides. A Caucasian business staff takes care of the buying and the allotment of provisions. With regard to the social set-up, however, there are a number of young men trained in recreational and administrative tasks whose job entails getting the people housed, keeping them amused, and providing for their



welfare in many ways. The project is just beginning. Hence no proper outlet for social expression can as yet be maintained. The three principal concerns of the administration at the moment are, in addition to food and housing, the maintenance of a proper police system, welfare, and recreation. I shall mention these items briefly.

Food:

It is difficult to get food into the camp. The army is in control of any problems of this kind and the diet selected is one provided by army direction. Contracts regarding food and milk are let by the army only on a 30 day basis. It is therefore most difficult to get a contractor to ensure supplies when he has no promise of a furtherance of his contract. Food cannot be allowed the administration. There is no provision for the staff to either live at the camp or to eat there. Quite fairly, everything must be subordinated to the interests of the Japanese in camp. Because I have not had an opportunity to eat at the camp I have been able to find out little about the diet there. Those whom I have asked say that the food is all right but that they get quite tired of it. There is apparently a fearful monotony in the diet. Occasionally, unpalatable left-overs will be served, and in the early days of a month ago, improperly cooked food as the result of the gas difficulty was rather common. Most of the people apparently can acclimate themselves to an American diet or have already done so. Thus meat and eggs, bread and coffee are generally acceptable. Some of the Issei miss the Japanese delicacies they were used to but in general there seem to be few complaints. One boy objected to the way in which the food was served. He said that he had roast Beef, rice, and applesauce all on the same plate. The gravy ran over into the applesauce and the rice making as he said, "a lousy mess you couldn't eat." I do not know much about the subject of food here. As the camp gets better organized I hope that an investigation will be possible.

Housing:

Most of the facts on housing have already been touched on. Blocks, barracks, and apartments are the rule. At present they are most overcrowded but the tension is being somewhat removed with the opening up of Camp II. When new arrivals come in, they leave the train at Casa Grande, some 15 to 18 miles from the camp. They are brought by bus from this town to the camp. Usually their baggage has preceded them and is piled up in a great heap in the center of a firebreak, there being such a firebreak between each block. They get off the bus and are eagerly greeted by such friends and relatives as they might have at Gila. They are then examined by a physician and a nurse. This consists of a mere check-up as to respiratory organs. Those with colds are relegated to a nurse for a quick treatment. Those with other obvious diseases are sent to a hospital or otherwise isolated. The army is supposed to send all cases requiring an ambulance to the proper hospitals and to take care of them on the trip. They have been most careless about this however, denying ambulances where necessary, sending the aged and infirm toride on buses over dirt roads, not considering the fact that a woman is nine months pregnant and subjecting her to the jolting ride of the bus. The army moves call for speed and individual cases are rather neglected. So far Gila has been lucky in that none have suffered too badly as the result of the quick ride. Ambulances have been demanded by Smith in some cases where they were absolutely necessary. The question as to whether the army will pay for these ambulances or whether they are chargeable to the WRA is a hotly debated question at this point. At Parker, one old man died as a result of the hot and jolting bus ride, under similar conditions. The army attempted to place the blame on Mr. Head, director of that project, accusing him of negligence, when, actually, the army is responsible for movement of every evacuee to the very gates of the relocation center. After such a ride, then, the evacuees are registered and their family group separated. They are then assigned to quarters. If the family is small, they are made to move in with someone else. If it is large, it has to be broken up. In these early stages the attempt has been made to keep the families



but at the same time it has been necessary to crowd wherever possible. A single block will ideally hold 200 to 250 people depending on the ages and sizes of families. One block at Camp I now has 399 people in it. The crowded conditions are deplorable. After a family is settled the members go out and attempt to locate their baggage. This is often difficult, so high is the pile. Often baggage will be damaged and the complaints are rather loud to say the least. Mrs. Smith acts as moderator in such cases.

When a family is settled the members usually volunteer for the Work Corps.

This is done through interviews with the already established Division of Employment. Interviewed by Japanese with employment experience, the prospective workers are assigned to jobs which best suit them. At present, every job is conceived to be temporary. Mr. Smith believes that until the camp is full no permanent jobs should be allotted so that everyone may have an equal opportunity to get the job he wants. Most of the work here will be agricultural labor and land clearing and cultivation. I mentioned that the Egyptian long-staple cotton is in demand and land is already being cleared for this. Alfalfa too, will be a staple crop. These two, cotton and alfalfa, will be the chief crops. Irrigation has to be arranged. A difficulty has come up at the moment in regard to farm land. The sewage engineer did not, apparently, make adequate plans. It was hoped that the sewage could be pumped through a septic tank and then drained into a stretch of waste land to the south between Camp I and II. The pump broke. Sewage is pumped directly into a cleared area between the two camps, directly in back of the last barracks at Camp I. The stench at times is blown all over the camp and there is an unpleasant mosquito and fly problem. Dysentery is quite common and there are a good many cases of colds and dust fever. All of this is seemingly attributable to the dehydrating climate. The mass of people here has not as yet had time to adjust to the conditions. The hospital here is a good one but hopelessly small and understaffed. Dr. Sleath is the Caucasian in charge; as yet there are only four Japanese physicians. More are awaited. There is no unwillingness on the part of the Japanese to attend the hospital for any ailment and the line is usually quite long. Dr. Sleath is most overworked what with new evacuees coming

in daily, births, deaths, and the like.

Police System:

A new internal security manager has just been appointed. This man heads a group of "wardens", all Japanese, whose duties are to patrol the camp and to report mischief of any kind. They have had to guard the warehouses which have been broken into several times. Another difficulty is that of moral turpitude. While the administration has no objection to any moral laxity the Japanese themselves might condone, it does wish to prevent the military police and the Caucasian construction workers from molesting the Japanese girls. A patrol is necessary to keep these groups in line and a careful watch must be kept of empty barracks, especially in the unfinished Camp II.

Welfare:

Mrs. Smith is in charge of community welfare. This is a most difficult job to handle inasmuch as it concerns the ceaseless bickering over quarters, gripes about food, about schools, lack of milk for children, adjustments in employment, etc. All passes to leave the center for personal or family reasons must be arranged by this department. I am going to leave Mrs. Smith's work for some time until I can examine it more fully. It is this department which has appointed and has to deal with the block managers. Each block has had appointed for it a temporary manager who serves as a spokesman for his block and airs the gripes of his block. It is his duty to keep the block in order. This is a position which is paid at the rate of a skilled worker, now \$12.00 per month, altho it may soon be that the prevailing wage may be the same for everyone: unskilled, skilled, and professional and technical. No agreement has as yet been reached as to a wage scale. The welfare department also manages elections. The block manager is elected wherever possible and it has been the attempt of the welfare council to create by election a camp council. In one case, the Smiths asked that several names be submitted for official positions on the camp council, which, incidentally

does not as yet function. An Issei spokesman came to Mrs. Smith with one name. When she asked him where the rest of the names were, he stated that the people had already voted, not in secret ballot which is the WRA rule, but by a raising of hands in the Japanese way. Mrs. Smith asked that the man go back again and arrange to submit the names of several nominees. The election problems will prove quite interesting. Another function of welfare is that of managing death and burial rites. Cremation, in accordance with Hongwanji Buddhism is the general rule because most of the people conform to this sect. It is agreed that the family may accompany the body to Phoenix for the services and to take a picture of the corpse. After cremation, the ashes will take their place with the family relics in the camp. No disposition of Christian bodies has as yet been arranged and the administration is holding its breath waiting to see what will happen in such a case.

#### Recreation:

There is as yet little time for recreation. The immediate problems of housing and food have somewhat superseded the need for recreation. Individual go-shogi, go-mono, hana, and other games do of course take place but there is no organized schedule. A go-shogi league was begun by some Issei and has functioned to some extent but this has not been universal in the camp among all the go players. There has been some gambling and there are said to be professional gamblers from Los Angeles who are doing their best to fleece the unwary. The administration has been on the look-out for these individuals. Gambling for small stakes is permitted. It is hoped to bring up various go tournaments, the same for contract bridge and chess. Bridge is very popular among the Nisei. There have been three dances. These were held in messhalls much to the objection of the cooks there. The cooks said that if further dances were held they would strike so that dances have been stopped for the time being. The cooks are mainly Issei. When the first dance was announced the Issei came in a body to Mrs. Smith and asked her to stop it. Dancing is considered very definitely immoral by most of the Issei who are



very strong at Gila. These Issei were told that if they wished to stop the dances they would also have to stop their go-shogi. This let the dances continue for a while but the cooks and kitchen staff, apparently under the instructions of the opposing Issei group, threatened a strike if the dances were allowed to continue. There will be more dancing when there is room in the recreation halls. A soft ball league is now being organized and gymnastic equipment is to be put up.

The recreation department is also in charge of church services. At the pressure of the Christian group in the camp, a minister was brought from nearby Sacaton to conduct the joint Christian services. This will be continued for some time, every minister in the district having an opportunity to preach. No pianos are as yet in camp for the church hymnal offerings. Two have been ordered from San Francisco. The recreation department is attempting to build up a library of Japanese as well as English books. No ruling is in effect here against the Japanese language. Contributions of books from the outside are welcomed.

#### Social Groups within the Camp:

Up until August 20 the only Assembly Center represented within the Gila Center was that of Turlock. There were about 4,500 from this center while the remainder came from the so-called "White Zone" (Military Area No. 2) and had not been interned in an assembly center. The white zone group is fully backwoods and rural. The Turlock people are also rural farming people. The result is that here there is a definite group of Issei, Kibei, and Nisei who have been permitted to live in rural areas without much chance of assimilating American ways. It is for this reason as typically Japanese a group as may be found in this country. The number of people educated in universities and even high schools is small when compared with the high grade of education found at Tanforan, for example. A surprising result is that the people at Gila so far constitute a very "Japanesy" group. I mentioned that they were about 85 per cent Hongwanji Buddhist. Nearly all of them speak the Japanese language and one may ask even a small child to translate or interpret. There are a great many Issei here from the rural areas and many of these do not speak English. They are quite a powerful group and, with the aid of the many Kibei here, they are getting the upper hand politically. The example of the vetoing

of dancing is a good one and does reflect their power. The Nisei are in the main younger than in other centers. The many Kibei, I think, are explained by the fact that these people, living in rural areas, have retained the Japanese way of thinking. They have accordingly sent their children to Japan for an education rather than to universities or high schools in the United States. In pre-evacuation days, the Kenjinkai was very strong. The type of organization that this represents has lost out in the Gila camp. There is a definite feeling for Assembly Center rather than for prefectural association. The Turlock people have worked out a tight political system as against the people from the white zone. The latter had no chance to resolve themselves into any kind of organization. The Turlock people had already elected their leaders before they left the assembly center. The white zone people feel slighted and are rather resentful against the Turlock people. The white zone and Turlock people are in the main farmers and rural people. At Turlock however, there were a number of the Los Angeles group. These are thought by all to be rowdyish and are most unpopular to all. Some of the Los Angeles boys (Nisei) have begun a gang. Frequent fights have broken out and there have been several cases of beatings for no apparent reason. These are in the main, those squabbles which break out among teen-age boys. There is little resentment against the Caucasian staff. Once, as I passed by a single men's barrack, two older men waited until I had passed, then said "keto, baka" and spat. The younger boys have little to do and it is believed that they are the ones who have tampered with the warehouses.

However, the situation here is peculiar in its very nipponized atmosphere. A loyalty to the white zone, to the Turlock center, or to Los Angeles is marked. Political favors are given out by those in authority only to friends from the same center or locality. This is cut across by the usual division of Issei, Kibei, and Nisei. The Nisei are rather younger, as I stated, and do not have as much say-so as they would like. They are at outs with the Issei-Kibei group. The Nisei and Kibei cannot get along at all. The latter are regarded as anti-American and as stuck-up Japanese. They, in turn, regard the Nisei as rather boorish and impolite.

These, up until August 20 were the social classes in the camp. On August 20 however, there was a large group from the Tulare center which came in and was assigned to Camp II. Like the Turlock people, these were already organized and had their leaders appointed. A rather ugly situation has arisen from the Tulare group. Immediately they began to demand the pick of the houses through their leaders. They insisted on having the same arrangement followed as to housing that they were accustomed to in Tulare. When it was told them that people from Camp I were to be moved over to relieve the congestion there they objected strenuously. They believed that they should be allowed to be settled first and then the people from Camp I could come over and take what was left. They forgot that the first choice went to the Camp I group inasmuch as it had been here and subjected to crowded conditions for some weeks. They were finally beaten down and agreed to a temporary arrangement in housing until the differences between Camps I and II could be settled. But it is obvious that they are not satisfied and they have lapsed into a sullen, uncooperative silence. The administration expects considerable trouble from the Camp II or Tulare group. They too have attempted to snatch all the best jobs and houses for themselves. Again there is manifested that peculiar feeling of assembly center solidarity. It is obvious that these people were not in the greater part acquainted before evacuation, that they are adherents of different religious faiths, and that they differ in Kenjinkai and occupational status. Yet they are firmly banded together as coming from a particular assembly center. This is a matter which will require further investigation. I shall be glad when Yusa and Kikuchi get here to give me a hand on problems of this kind.

The foregoing has been a quick resume of my notes on a number of subjects. I shall be glad for suggestions and criticisms regarding these subjects.