

AL HIDA

Hida and his family were sent to an internment camp outside of Sacramento and then transferred to one in Colorado. In August 1944 his father moved to Milwaukee and the family followed.

How long were you in an internment camp?

Well let's see, it's roughly two years, two months and twenty days.

How did you feel when FDR announced the internment?

I was shocked. I was in the seventh grade at the time of the beginning of World War Two and on that particular occasion, we were in seventh grade studying about the constitution, U.S. history, the law, you know that type of thing and how the constitution was supposed to guarantee us due process. Therefore, I thought in the wildest dreams people like Grandpa, Grandpa was an alien. He was born in Japan and plus the fact that he was not a citizen but one of the things that perhaps you may not be aware of is that Asians were not allowed to be citizens at that time. They could not become naturalized. I think that you know that today your relatives came from say Germany, to live in Milwaukee or in Wisconsin. After about five years they can become naturalized citizens but people from Asia were not allowed to become naturalized and that was true well...there were some exceptions. In 1952, the Walter McCarren act allowed them to become citizens. If they applied. So as I said I was quite shocked that citizens were being picked up and so I kept on saying that I don't believe this is happening. But as the old saying goes, they had the Army there and all the weapons and so forth and we did not have much choice.

Where did you live and what did your parents do before you were relocated?

We lived in Sacramento, California and I lived in a single-family residence in the inside of the city area. At that time, my father was a Ford Automobile salesman and he sold Ford cars, new cars, used cars, and so on. As far as this concerns, we sold cars and lived in the city.

What kind of transportation did you take to get to the camps?

Ok, a friend of my dad's picked us up at our house with what we could carry. We were allowed to go to the camp with what we could carry, in otherwards, what are two suitcases roughly. And there were some people who took more than that but we were told we could only take what we could carry. So we went through the Sacramento Auditorium, which is in the city of Sacramento, at about seventeenth and Jay Street and we got to that location with our stuff and then we got on buses and large military trucks. In the military, when I was in service, they were what we called a six by sixes, which meant they had six wheels and six wheel drive. Some of us rode those to the camp, which was outside of Sacramento and to what they called an assembly center. In our case, it was called a Walargo. That's where we went to.

It was a barbed wire enclosure with guard towers, etc. Well that kind of gets you an idea how we got to the first camp. We were in three different camps.

What three camps were you in?

Well, from May 15, 1942 until about the 20 of June, we were in this camp called Walargo, which was just outside of Sacramento. Roughly, the twentieth of June they put us on a train, one of the old trains. They had Army soldiers that accompanied us on this train and they were scattered throughout the train. In this particular case, they went to northern California near a city called Newell. Near there is an old reclaimed lake, which was a sandy area, a lot of sea shells in the sand, etc. and a little grass growing. There's a lot of land especially out west that is owned by the US government, it's reclamation land and usually land that nobody wants. It's very difficult to grow things and frequently these are very dusty areas. That was the first camp. Then we were separated in 1943 and this was approximately about June 9. We went on another train but the big difference was that in the California train ride they had to ride with the shades down and this was a very difficult trip. It took several hours. We went from Sacramento to northern California. The second trip was different because we were able to open the blinds. We went from northern California to southeastern Colorado. We stayed there from June of 43 until August of 1944 and which in time in August of '44 my father had left to go east to come to Wisconsin. We left in August of 1944 and came to Milwaukee with our train ticket money lined up. So that gives you where I was.

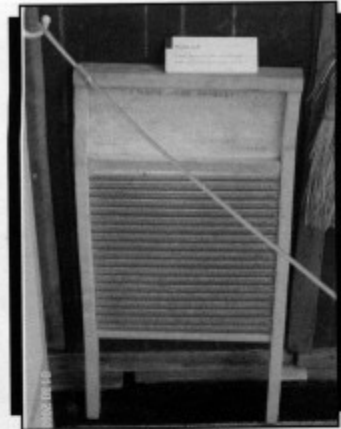
In what ways were you discriminated before the camps and in the camps?

Well, actually it all began from the 1800's. The Asians that came to this country, with the Chinese that came to work on the railroad. They came to go mining and so forth. They were not treated very well anywhere. There were restaurants we couldn't go to, there were hotels we couldn't go to, there were certain cities even we could not go to. There were restaurants that would tell us plainly to get the hell out, that type of thing. Or sometimes they would pretend that you weren't even there and they won't serve you. In other cases, you might get some service but very poor service. The newspapers and the radio were never supportive of Asians in California, especially from 1800's through World War Two. It was always a case of you have to worry about where you were going. Churches for instance, there were certain churches that would tell you "maybe you would be happier if you went to a another church and they would name a Japanese church on the other side of town. Other things, you would get on buses and people would sit behind you and remark about your ancestry and how stupid you are and all of those types of things. The other things that they did especially in the West Coast were things like they would pass laws that were directed to you. They had what they called an "alien land law." The alien land law would say that if you were an alien you could not buy a house or land in California. This land could be just a sole resident's or could be many acres so as Japanese Americans became citizens, like my mother was a citizen. Her father was born in Japan so he could not own land but my mother was born in California therefore she could own land. There were a number of different kinds of laws like that. Every property might have what they call an abstract, which is a pile of papers that are the history of your location. You know if you live on 10th street or whatever there is a pile of papers that describes your property and in it sometimes they will have different kinds of restrictions in it. For instance, maybe you can't have a farm, raise cattle in the middle of your city. On the other hand, like in our house that I live in here in Wawatosa, has the restriction that the front of the house has to be at least half brick. Now that's a



June 1944

covenant. Now there are covenants in various cities regardless if whether you are a citizen or not that would not allow you to live in this particular city. They say that no Asians are allowed to live in this city, one in particular is Atwater, California. Other laws that they passed were at times the sick Asian law, which is intermarriage. For instance if I lived in California in 1920, and I decided that I would marry a Caucasian girl and she wanted to marry me, which was against the law in California at that particular time in 1920. That is just two or three of them, but there were many laws like these that were discriminatory, so it was not just people saying bad things or beating us up but they managed to pass a lot of laws that were meant to make us feel uncomfortable. We could not get certain jobs. Even the military, prior to World War 2 had many restrictions of our going into the military. For instance, Filipinos weren't allowed into the regular part of the Navy, but they would use Filipinos to be butlers to the admirals on aboard the ship or something like that. They would use Asians say, minimal tasks, and then of course in World War Two, there were about 30,000 Japanese-Americans in the military during World War Two, and they received more declaration for time served than any other unit in the history of the United States army. So things did change finally. There were about 8,000 of us in the military in the pacific war. Many of them served as interpreters the individual troop units throughout the Pacific. They read documents and translated them for intelligence purposes and they were also at the trials that were held in Tokyo. There were war for crime trials held in Tokyo after World War Two and Japanese-Americans were involved in a lot of interpretation and helping the communities get back on their feet. I could cite many other cases.



Auto Washer

What were your barracks like and what kind of food did you eat? What was it like to live in the camp?
 The barracks were large and constructed by 2 by 4's and 1 by 12's. They were about 100 feet long. They put a wall between about every 20 to 25 feet. So they take a barrack that is 100 feet long and cut it into about 4 or 5 units depending upon who it was for, say a family or whether it was for couple and their children and so forth. These barracks were 1 by 12, on the outside they put black tar paper, then they put strips of wood to hold them down, and then they had rolled roofing on top. There were these assembled buildings, about ten on each side of the block and one large one which became a mess hall, where we ate, one was left vacant as a recreation hall and that recreation hall was empty incidentally until we did something with it. It would have been nice if they had all kinds of electronic toys, but they didn't. For instance, we all chipped in to buy a ping-pong table, so that helped to make it a recreation hall. Then in between these barracks was one building for ironing, we had to iron our clothes in those days, it wasn't pre-pressed materials. Another building was a laundry building. I might mention the laundry building and stationary tubs, the cement like tubs that were side by side, they had hot and cold water and that was it. It was quit a shock to my mother because in 1935, or so, we finally, she got so she didn't have to use the wash board anymore, she used the wash board until 1934 or 35, then she got an electric ringer washer, then here we go into 1942, she goes into this place and say wow that's the laundry room, so she had just two tubs and nothing else. She had to buy soap and so forth and then we finally had to go back and buy a wash board again and she had to do her laundry that way. Women in those days used to do laundry sometimes, Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday, spread out, whereas your mother can probably do the family laundry in one morning, by running it through the washer. Wednesday and Thursday were frequently spent ironing. Another building they had was a women's shower and a lavatory. They were very little, with 4 to 8 toilets that were just side by side with no separation, nothing in front of you and they had troughs, galvanized troughs to wash your hands, and an old fashioned, hot and cold faucet there. The showers were open; with just pipes hanging out of the ceiling, so to speak, you could make them hot



Men of 522

or cold. This is kind of a great shock to a lot of the people who did not participate in school showers and that type of things. I think some of you already have school showers that have separation in them, whereas there was nothing. We had a lady that was in her 70's who used to go take her shower at 2 or 3 in the morning when nobody was there. That allowed her to shower in privacy. The other thing I might mention is that when we went to northern California, it would snow there. As a result, if you had to use the facility at 2 o'clock in the morning, you had to walk outside in your bunny slippers to the lavatory. If there was three inches of snow on the ground, I think you could see where this might not be the best thing for you. So as a result, many of us ended up purchasing a chamber pot. If you wanted a description, you might ask your parents, they've probably heard of it. All it is, is a pot that you do your business in and somebody gets the chore of cleaning it the next day. The other building was a men's lavatory and shower and then there was a building that was more or less the boiler room somebody had to put coal in to

fire up the boilers and the boilers would heat the water for the two showers and mess hall and the laundry. That was basically the block, one other thing I might mention that in the barracks rooms, we had 150 watts bare light bulb in the center and we had four or five cots depending on how many people were there. It was an army cot with a mattress. For awhile we had a straw bag that was shaped like, a mattress and we had to stuff straw inside them. It was kind of interesting is that the beginning of the week you had a mattress that was very high in the center and then by the end of the week later the straw would collapse and with a big dent in and so forth. As far as food was concerned there were military rations, and food was not that plentiful during World War II. Food was military style about the only thing that was different was they added some rice to the diet. They also added some soy sauce to the stuff the cooks could use. But basically it was that it was military style trays, military cups, military stainless ware, and so on. Food was not big, believe me. I also know what military food can be like, and it was worse than what we had when we were in service.

What was a typical day like?

Boring. Basically there wasn't much going on for people like me and I was an eighth grader, but when school started we did have some resemblance of school, but otherwise you had to be creative. We sit and did a lot of walking. This is a necessarily large complex in terms of area so we did a lot of walking and obviously on meals that are at a prescribed time, so we would meet at that time. We would have to eat in our own mess hall, like we were in block 35 so we ate in block 35 mess hall. My father at the first camp was the block manager, which led itself to good and bad, the good part was that he received all the mail for the block and had to distribute it and so forth, so we sometimes helped with that kind of thing. Sometimes we were able to get a hold of a basketball. We did play some ball or basketball, there was not a whole lot going on. Every week or two they might have something like a talent show somewhere and somebody would play piano and somebody would do some singing or dancing and that type of thing and everybody would go in there. Sometimes they would have block games to play softball with each other. We didn't have anything like radios, television, or any of that stuff. Occasionally we'd get an outside newspaper to read, then when school started well obviously we had things to do, we had 3 or 4 classes a day and a very subpar school that was set up for us. We didn't have paper, we didn't have a lot of pencils, books, it was the whole nine yards of stuff, even teachers were short. That kinda gives you an idea what the days were like and operation in camp that occupied my time a little bit. It was not a fun filled period.

What was the hardest part about living in an internment camp?

Boredom. The other thing was that we were in the camp with many people that probably we weren't used to being with socially. They were not necessarily people that you might normally do things with. The other thing about the camp is that we were all suspended in time. I'm talking about school and so forth. Many young people were trying to go to college and no colleges were available therefore they were delayed anywhere from 1 to 4 years in terms of getting a career started or if they were in a career they had a period where they couldn't develop their career so it was wasted time. Plus it gave people time to think about how they didn't adjust. That was always an area that created problems.

When you did return home, were you able to go back to your original home, or did you try to?

When my father came to Milwaukee in 1944, we could not go back to California, Washington, or Oregon. The 300-mile zone from the Pacific Ocean was prohibited as far as allowing us to go back. We went to high school here in Milwaukee and my father found a job and we lived in Milwaukee since then. 1948, they told us that if we wanted to go back to the West Coast, that the army would pay our way and ship our stuff, and so forth. At that time, my mother decided that we would sell the house in California and stay a Wisconsin resident. That's for things like college time and military time and other things for a Wisconsin resident. The irony of the whole thing is that at the first time our daughter in Sacramento is a bridge designer for Caltrans, which is the California State department of highways and bridges. She is now a senior bridge engineer and she has 3 degrees in the area of structural engineering and works for the state of California. Her house is near where my grandfather used to have his chicken farm. He used to raise chickens and raise vegetables in the area, which has now become a residential area and my daughter has her house there. Her office is near the hospital that I was born at. So it's kind of interesting that she has been in Japan, she's been in Oregon, New Jersey, Germany, she attended school in Princeton and also went to school in Lafayette, Indiana. So it's been interesting that we stayed here and then right now there's some thought that we will not stay in Wisconsin. We will go back to California.

Do you feel any kind of anger toward the US now?

Well, I wouldn't say anger because of that particular incident. One of the things that I studied in psychology, that if you're in anger for long periods of time, it's very hard on your mental health and so quite frankly, I put it aside and haven't really thought about it, the fact that it goes to justice, however we did finally in 1988, we did get a bill through Congress after 3 or 4 tries through Congress; we were able to get a bill that caused the government to give us a statement of apology as well as some financial confrontation. But it only applied to those that were living in 1988, but it didn't compensate for people like grandfather and my other people in the family that passed away before 1988.

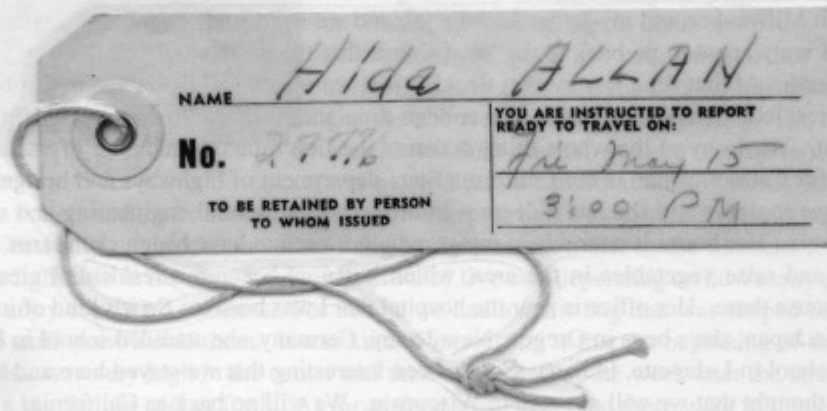
Is there anything else that you would like say?

Well, first of all, I would like to say that I have been appreciative of the fact that you are pursuing this topic and secondly, I am certainly glad that it is going beyond.



Below is documentation of the Incarceration of Allan Hida by the US Government.

On May 15, 1942, this white tag was shown to enter the bus to:
 Wartime Civilian Control Authority Camp: Walerga in
 Sacramento, CA. for approximately one month.
 Tulalake Relocation Center, Newell, CA one year
 Amache Relocation Center, Granada, CO about a year



This green card authorized the below named individual to leave Amache Relocation Center in Granada, CO on August 20, 1944. Between the two dates were days of incarceration.

