



Residents of Block 23 (Minidoka Interlude 1943)

About Minidoka

Established in 2001 as the 385th unit of the National Park Service, Minidoka was established to commemorate the hardships and sacrifices of Japanese Americans interned there during World War II. Minidoka Relocation Center or 'Hunt Camp' was a 33,000 acre site with over 600 buildings and a total population of about 13,000 internees. The Center was in operation from August 1942 until October 1945.

Executive Order 9066

Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941 intensified existing US hostilities towards Japanese Americans. As wartime hysteria mounted, President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066 on February 19, 1942. The order gave the Secretary of War the power to exclude any persons from designated areas to secure national defense. Due to public pressure the order was mainly used to exclude persons of Japanese ancestry, both American citizens and legal resident aliens, from coastal areas including portions of Alaska, Washington, Oregon, southern Arizona, and all of California. Following the signing of Executive Order 9066, over 120,000 people living in these 'exclusion zones' were forced to leave their homes, jobs, and businesses and report to designated military holding areas. This constituted the single largest forced relocation in American history.

Living Conditions at Minidoka

The camp consisted of 36 residential blocks. Each block included 12 barracks-style housing units (each divided into 6 one-room apartments), a communal dining hall, a laundry facility with communal showers and toilets, and a recreation hall. The hastily built barracks were little more than wooden frames covered with tarpaper. Temperatures during the winter of 1942 dropped to -21 degrees, and summers were scorching with temperatures reaching 104.

The camp also had its own hospital, fire stations, cemetery, stores, and post office. Minidoka became a nearly self sustaining community raising crops, pigs, and chickens. Internees also provided an indispensable source of labor for southern Idaho's agricultural economy. By the time the center closed, 950 acres of previously inhospitable land had been cleared, cultivated, and set up for irrigation.

A Question of Loyalty

Despite their internment, most Japanese Americans remained intensely loyal to the United States, and demonstrated it by volunteering for military service. They were segregated into all Japanese American combat and intelligence units. Of the ten relocation centers, Minidoka had the highest number of volunteers, about 1,000 internees. The 442nd combat unit fought in France and Italy, and was the most highly decorated unit of its size and length of service in American military history. During WWII, 73 soldiers from Minidoka died while fighting for their country, and two received the Congressional Medal of Honor.

Camp Closing

After Minidoka Relocation Center was closed in 1945, the land was both auctioned off and given to returning veterans through a lottery. Today, most of the former camp remains privately owned farmland. This incarceration of Japanese Americans has been described as one of the worst violations of constitutional rights in American history. More than two-thirds of the internees were American citizens by birth. In 1988, the Civil Liberties Act acknowledged the injustice of the evacuation, relocation, and internment of citizens. The US government issued a formal apology, and restitution was made to individuals interned. The act also provides for an education fund to inform the public about the internment to prevent the recurrence of any similar event.