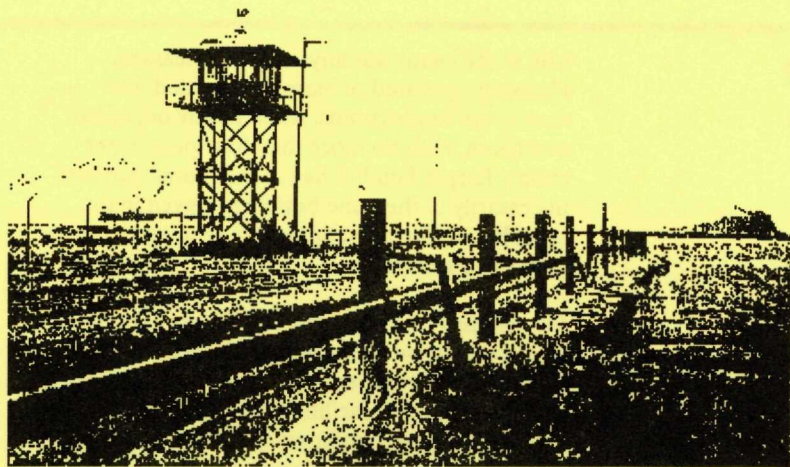




## Tule Lake Internment



### Location

The Tule Lake Internment Camp is located in the town of Newell, 6 miles (9.7 km) south of the town of Tulelake, on State Road 139 adjacent to the Newell Elementary School. Part of the site is the original prison facility, which is surrounded by a chain-link fence behind a stone monument at the roadside. Stone foundations, original fencing, and modified buildings are still scattered through the town—more infrastructure remains here than at any other World War II internment camp of its kind. Although the area is open to the public, many buildings are now private residences. Please visit the site respectfully and do not collect any objects.

### Background to Conflict

On December 7, 1941, the Imperial Government of Japan bombed Pearl Harbor. Japanese leaders hoped to force the U.S. to give up its interests in Southeast Asia and to abandon the Pacific to Japan. The attack only helped to unify our divided country. Pacifists withdrew their counseling efforts against the war in Europe and the United States committed itself to full scale war both in Europe and in the Pacific.

Military attention quickly focused on the Japanese-Americans, as it seemed to some that the attack had been a conspiracy on the part of the Japanese community in America. A full-scale invasion of the West Coast was certainly forthcoming. On February 19, 1942, President Roosevelt issued Executive Order Number 9066, which directed the Secretary of War to prescribe military areas of such extent that suspected enemy aliens might be isolated.

General John L. DeWitt, Commander of the Western Defense Command, implemented the order by declaring the coasts of Washington, Oregon, and California to be military zones. Suspected enemy aliens (many of whom had already been arrested by the FBI) were ordered to be removed. Soon it was decided to remove the entire population of Japanese resident aliens and Japanese-Americans.

Japanese families were reluctant to abandon their property and move to the interior of the United States on their own. The few who did soon returned, reporting white hostility to their settlement attempts. Soon, however, resettlement was no longer voluntary.

### Evacuation

Temporary facilities were provided in horse stalls at racetracks and in livestock exhibit buildings at fairgrounds until permanent relocation camps could be provided. The Tule Lake Basin was selected as one of ten permanent sites. On April 7, 1942, removal orders for the entire population were given.

All persons of Japanese ancestry were required to register at city halls, churches, and schools. They were allowed to take with them only possessions that could be carried (two pieces of luggage per person, not to exceed 75 pounds each). They were seldom given more than a few days' notice before evacuation.

Very few were fortunate enough to find Caucasian friends and neighbors who were willing to look after their belongings, homes, and land. Most lost everything.

General DeWitt's testimony before the House Naval Affairs Subcommittee reflected the general feelings of the Nation:

*"A Jap's a Jap. They are a dangerous element, whether loyal or not. There is no way to determine their loyalty...it makes no difference whether he is an American; theoretically he is still a Japanese and you can't change him...by giving him a piece of paper."*

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## Internment

By the summer of 1942, 110,000 people—two-thirds of whom were American citizens—had been imprisoned *without* accusation of guilt, *without* trial, and *without* legal counsel. Those who were not citizens were not allowed by law to *become* citizens.

Some justified these actions by claiming that “our boys in Japanese POW camps” were not treated as well as those in American internment camps. They overlooked the distinctions between Prisoners of War and American citizens residing in their homeland. Eventually, at Tule Lake, 18,789 persons of Japanese ancestry were interned behind barbed wire.

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## Camp Life

Life at the camp was anything but pleasant. Housing consisted of barracks, divided into four to six single rooms. Each family occupied one room, with no more than four people per room. Larger families had more rooms, but not necessarily in the same building or even in the same block. Single people were required to share with three others.

Furnishings consisted of a single bare light bulb, army cots, straw mattresses, and a coal-burning stove. Meals were served in mess halls. Laundry, toilet, and shower facilities were provided in centrally located buildings. In military style, there were no dividers between toilets or showers.

Buildings were sided only with tarpaper. The relentless winds of the Tule Lake Basin drove dirt and dust through the walls. Outside, the entire camp was “ankle-deep in dust.”

Local newspapers were filled with racial slurs, and the prevailing attitude of the community was discriminatory. The term “Jap” became a constant reminder to every person of Japanese ancestry that he was a second class citizen, *at best*, in his own country.

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## The Loyalty Oath and Tule Lake Camp

In an attempt to reintegrate the Japanese back into white communities and to encourage military enlistments, a loyalty oath was devised. It consisted of a survey of 40 questions.

Questions 27 and 28 for American-born men asked:

*Are you willing to serve in the armed forces of the United States, in combat duty, wherever ordered?*

*Will you swear unqualified allegiance to the United States and faithfully defend the United States from any and all attack by foreign or domestic forces, and forswear any form of allegiance or obedience to the Japanese emperor, or any foreign government, power or organization?*

Questions 27 and 28 for foreign-born men and all women asked:

*If the opportunity presents itself and you are found qualified, would you be willing to volunteer for the Army Nurse Corps or WACC?*

*Will you swear unqualified allegiance to the United States of America and forswear any form of allegiance or obedience to the Japanese emperor, or any other foreign government, power or organization?*

On the surface, the loyalty oath seemed innocent enough, but foreign-born Japanese, who were not allowed *by law* to become citizens of the United States, were now required to give up their citizenship of Japan also. They would have no legal ties to *any* country. Their children, citizens by birth, then had to decide between country and family.

Repatriating to a country they had never seen was not reasonable, and traditional cultural ties to family were more important than most can imagine today.

Violence broke out in many of the camps during the time the Loyalty Oath was being administered. Those who did apply to return to Japan were moved to the Tule Lake Camp, where they mixed with others who had originally been assigned to Tule Lake and did not wish to move their families again. Tule Lake became the “hard core” camp, and internal friction resulted in harassment, beatings, riots, and military intervention. Mass demonstrations were staged here, and men imprisoned behind barbed wire were further confined to jail cells.

By the end of the war, most Japanese-Americans had returned to “proper” society. Some had distinguished themselves on the battlefields of Italy. Some had worked in defense plants. Some had even come to feel secure in their imprisonment and were reluctant to leave the internment camps.

Tule Lake closed on March 20, 1946. The internee barracks were raffled off to homesteaders and moved to sites all over the basin. Many of them can still be seen, used as barns, farmers’ machine shops, or storage facilities. Some have been remodeled into attractive, modern homes. Some have not had a coat of paint since they were abandoned in 1946.

Executive Order Number 9066 was finally rescinded on February 19, 1976 for the country’s bicentennial.

The administrative area and the military police barracks (the buildings with wooden siding instead of tarpaper) remain today at the town of Newell. Most of these buildings have been maintained and improved, but some stand just as they did on March 20, 1946. The jail still stands as a reminder of the extent of what happened at Tule Lake. May the impact upon the minds of those who see them help ensure that such violations of constitutional rights never occur again.