Manzanar Cemetery, Winter 2002.

This booklet was developed by the park rangers at Manzanar National Historic Site in partnership with the individuals profiled and their families.

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Printing was made possible by a grant from the California Civil Liberties Public Education Program.

3/08

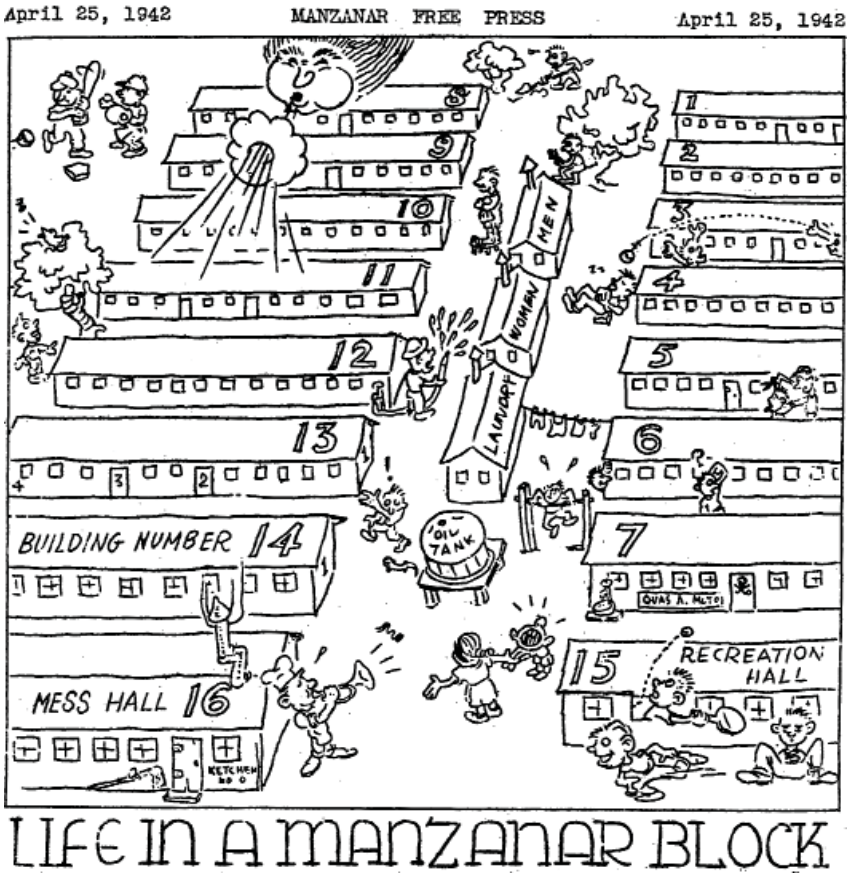
EXPERIENCE YOUR AMERICA

Manzanar

ID Card

In 1942 the United States Government ordered over 110,000 men, women, and children to leave their homes and detained them in remote, military-style camps. Two-thirds of them were born in America. Not one was convicted of espionage or sabotage.

In this booklet, you will read the story of a person who lived this history, in his or her own words.



Wind and Dust

This wind and dust I have to bear
How hard it blows I do not care.
But when the wind begins to blow –
My morale is pretty low.
I know that I can see it through
Because others have to bear it too.
So I will bear it with the rest
And hope the outcome is the best.

-- George Nishimura, age 16 (1943)

MANZANAR Free Press

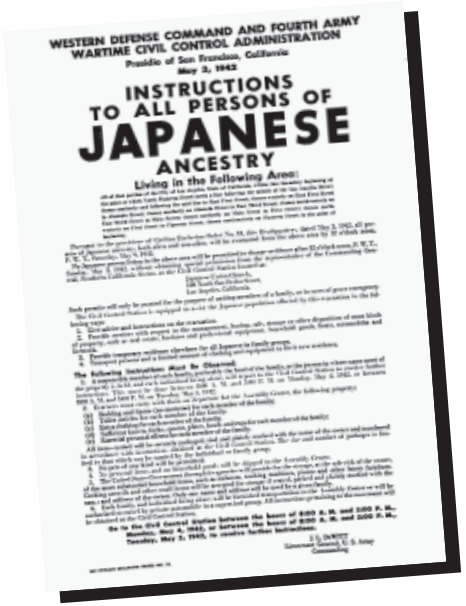
MANZANAR

Location: Inyo County, California, at the eastern base of the Sierra Nevada.
Environmental Conditions: Temperatures can be over 100 degrees in summer and below freezing in winter. Strong winds & dust storms are frequent.
Acreage: 6,000
Opened: March 21, 1942 as a Reception Center and June 1, 1942 as a War Relocation Center.
Closed: November 21, 1945
Max. Population: 10,046 (September 1942)
Demographics: Most internees were from the Los Angeles area, Terminal Island, and the San Fernando Valley. Others came from the San Joaquin Valley and Bainbridge Island.

RALPH LAZO

Family # 21019
Camp: Manzanar, CA

"The first Lazos landed here in 1519 with Cortes. I'm the adventurous type. It runs in the family." Born in a black hospital in Los Angeles, Ralph received his early schooling on an Indian reservation in Arizona when his father was with the Santa Fe Railroad. His mother, who was born in Chihuahua, Mexico, died when he was 5 and his father, who was a house painter and muralist, was often gone leaving Ralph and his older sister on their own. "I was a scrawny kid who took corrective PE". He delivered Liberty magazine, swept floors at school and collected bottles for deposit money. "I was a real hustler."


WESTERN DEFENSE COMMAND AND FOURTH ARMY
WARTIME CIVIL CONTROL ADMINISTRATION
Presidio of San Francisco, California
May 3, 1942

INSTRUCTIONS TO ALL PERSONS OF JAPANESE ANCESTRY
Living in the Following Area:

Ralph was helping a neighbor during the evacuation sale when a buyer remarked to him "I

sure jewed that Jap!" Ralph was stunned. He had grown up in a multi-ethnic neighborhood and had often shared meals in the homes of Japanese American friends.

"It was immoral. It was wrong and I couldn't accept it. These people hadn't done anything that I hadn't done, except to go to Japanese language school. They were Americans, just like I am."

"It was immoral. It was wrong and I couldn't accept it. These people hadn't done anything that I hadn't done, except to go to Japanese language school. They were Americans, just like I am." At school one day, before their departure, a Japanese American friend said to him, "Ralph, what are you going to do without us? Why don't you come along?" He told his father he had decided to go to camp with his Japanese American friends, but he made it sound a little vague and his father thought it was a weekend camp. Later he learned where his son had gone.

"My Dad was a very wise man. He knew I was safe and with friends. You couldn't ask for more protection—barbed wire, searchlights."

"My Dad was a very wise man. He knew I was safe and with friends. You couldn't ask for more protection—barbed wire, searchlights.

"When 140 million Americans turned their backs on us and excluded us into remote, desolate prison camps, the separation was absolute—almost. Ralph Lazo's presence among us said, 'No, not everyone.'"

"When 140 million Americans turned their backs on us and excluded us into remote, desolate prison camps, the separation was absolute—almost. Ralph Lazo's presence among us said, 'No, not everyone.' As a nation, as Japanese Americans, and as his classmates, we need to remember Ralph for his gift of courage and human kindness and embrace him in our hearts with love and gratitude."

Ralph (front center) with friends at Manzanar

In 2004, a movie called "Stand Up For Justice" was made to tell the story of Ralph's courageous decision to join his friends at Manzanar.

Ralph graduated from college and received a Masters degree. He was one of the first people to donate $1000 to the fund for the preparation of a class lawsuit against the United States Government for redress for those who were interned in the war relocation camps. He was called "a Jap, just like his Jap friends" because of his actions. He remarked, "I knew right from wrong. I'm one-eighth Irish. Sometimes it shows."

He was one of the first people to donate $1000 to the fund for the preparation of a class lawsuit...

Ralph became a counselor at Los Angeles Valley College. He died in 1992.

At a memorial service for Ralph, one of his friends from camp days, William Hohri, said of him:

He probably was very happy I was there....I let him know that I was going to school, being well fed."

Bound for Manzanar at the Old Santa Fe Station, March 1942

Ralph was 16. "I went down to the old Santa Fe Station and signed on" (to go to camp). He didn't have to lie about being of Japanese ancestry because "they didn't ask. Being brown has its advantages."

Most of Ralph's friends went to Heart Mountain but he made new friends at Manzanar. "I was very happy being with people I admired and respected. At first a lot of people thought I was Eurasian. They eventually found out but they accepted me."

Initially he lived in a block with the older bachelors. "I spoke no Japanese, they spoke no English. They were my Issei (first generation) parents."

Initially he lived in a block with the older bachelors. "I spoke no Japanese, they spoke no English. They were my Issei (first generation) parents. They took care of me." Later he moved in with a friend whose

Barracks Life at Manzanar, 1942

mother wanted to take care of him. "Ralph Merritt, the camp director, said it was all right with him if I wanted to stay. There were 10,000 of us in one square mile. One was no more or less…."

Ralph had a camp job delivering mail for $12 a month. Later he made $16 a month as a recreation director. He was class president, a so-so student and full of fun.

"One Christmas he announced, 'We are going Christmas caroling'. He gathered us all into the laundry room and tuned us up. There we were in the rain. But everybody just laughed, nobody ever had so much fun in their lives."—Rosie Kakuuchi

Ralph (center, in the dark shirt) dances with his friend Tama after the war

"Most of the Japanese Americans never participated in extracurricular activities at school. He got people motivated for activities."—Bruce Kaji

Ralph played football and helped organize Friday night dances. He only left camp twice. One time he represented Manzanar at a YMCA conference in Colorado. The second time was when he was drafted into the Army in August, 1944.

Ralph was sent to the South Pacific in the Army and was awarded a Bronze star for heroism in combat.