



Tule Lake Dedicates WWII Valor Monument

Record crowd on hand to participate in 17th annual pilgrimage.

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Castle Rock looms over the pilgrims gathered on July 3 for the dedication ceremony which was held in front of the site of the former jail. (Photos by MARIO G. REYES/Rafu Shimpo)



Yoshiko Okamoto offers a prayer at the site where 18,000 Japanese Americans were interned during World War II.



Yasumasa Nagamine

TULE LAKE, Calif.—More than 700 people endured 90 plus degree heat on July 3 to dedicate the Tule Lake Unit of the World War II Valor in the Pacific National Monument.

Of the 700, more than 410 were also participating in the 17th Tule Lake Pilgrimage. This year's pilgrimage, which ran from July 2-5, had the largest turnout with attendees from Arizona, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Hawaii, Illinois, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, New Jersey, New York, Oregon, Texas, Virginia, Washington, Japan and Hong Kong.

“Tule Lake, as a national monument, is a tribute to the efforts of thousands of pilgrimage organizers and participants over the past 17 pilgrimages,” said Roy Ikeda, Tule Lake Preservation Committee chair. “The national monument status ensures now that this story will be preserved.”

Tule Lake started out as one of 10 War Relocation Authority (WRA) camps during World War II, but was converted into a Segregation Center in 1943 to mainly house those who protested their incarceration. The ceremony was held in front of the former jail and stockade. Jimi Yamaichi, who helped construct the jail, jokingly said, “I have a monument behind me. I hate to brag but it's the jail I helped build in 1944. It still stands here so Jon Jarvis (National Park Service regional director, Pacific Coast Region) has to receive it as is.”

Hiroshi Shimizu, Tule Lake Committee chair, said the jail and stockade “became the most contentious point in all of Tule Lake, from segregation until the end, so to be here, to commemorate the dedication, is historic for us.”

Tule Lake sits in Congressmen Wally Herger's and Tom McClintock's districts. Herger sent a statement, which read in part, “The federal government took actions that contradicted the noble tenets upon which this country was founded. This fact is undeniable and indefensible. We must, however, move forward and glean what we can from the errors of the past.”

Tim Holabird, representing McClintock, said the Tule Lake Unit “will help remind all Americans of the ever pressing need to honor the rights in our Constitution.”

Holabird also read a statement from Sen. Dianne Feinstein, which read in part, “Here, at Tule Lake, over 18,000 Americans were imprisoned under terrible conditions, without a hearing or any evidence of disloyalty. It is a tragedy we must never forget.”

The Japanese government was represented by San Francisco's Consul General of Japan Yasumasa Nagamine with wife, Ayako, and Yoshiro Tasaka, the consulate's liaison to the Nikkei community. All three participated in the Tule Lake Pilgrimage and had also attended the Manzanar Pilgrimage in April, making their presence at both a historic first. “It was some time ago that I first heard about Tule Lake,” said Nagamine. “Ever since then, I have spent much time reading and hearing stories from the internment camp days. But studying something in an office in San Francisco doesn't compare to actually seeing and experiencing Tule Lake... Tule Lake is a part of the history of the United States and Japan. The experiences

of the Japanese American community here must be remembered by the people of America and Japan.” Another historic first was having Japanese American Citizens League National Executive Director Floyd Mori attend the pilgrimage.

Although past pilgrimages have included JACL members, relationships between former Tuleans and the JACL have not always been amicable, particularly since there is evidence that JACL’s wartime director Mike Masaoka advocated for segregation as early as June 1942. Mori, who had presided as national JACL president during JACL’s contentious move to apologize to the Nisei draft resisters, was questioned during the pilgrimage over JACL’s wartime activities.

Mori took the questioning in stride and found his first pilgrimage to be an educational one. “This was a great chance to understand Tule Lake,” Mori said. “There were some issues here that people in other camps did not have to deal with to the degree that happened here. I’m dismayed at some of the stories I hear about the treatment of people interned here. It just echoes of what we see today at Guantanamo or Abu Ghraib, that sometimes the military takes justice into their own hands.”

Mori promised JACL’s support of Tule Lake. “We will be working to get some funding to develop studies, and hopefully, in the future, we’ll get some interpretive type facility here,” said Mori. “I think Tule Lake is located such that it can be a great educational resource, particularly with the college in Klamath Falls. There’s a lot of potential, so I think Tule Lake will receive a lot of our attention.”

Local support, as witnessed during the Manzanar Historic Site designation process, was critical, and Dave Bradshaw, Modoc County supervisor, credited public meetings in Newell for building local Tule Lake support.

“The two meetings were well attended by the community and also by the Tule Lake Committee,” said Bradshaw. “There were lots of questions answered, lots of give and take. People had a chance to make their comments, and I think these two meetings were the ones when local support started and enabled the board of supervisors to support the proclamation.”

Jennifer Cooney, City of Tulelake mayor, said her family grew up hearing about World War II from a different perspective. “My grandfather was in it, so the children heard it from his side,” said Cooney. “And living in this area, they have seen this site but haven’t known the whole history so we’ve been doing a lot of cramming. They are definitely learning a lot, and I look forward to working with the committee as we move forward.”

Tule Lake is also located in the jurisdictions of both the U.S. Fish and Wildlife and the National Park services.

Ron Cole, Klamath Basin National Wildlife Refuge Complex regional director, said two Tule Lake portions – Castle Rock and the former Civilian Conservation Corp/German prisoner of war site now known as Camp Tulelake – sit on National Wildlife land.

Ren Lohofener, regional director Pacific Southwest Region of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service who oversees all Fish and Wildlife land in Nevada and California, promised to “do the very best job we can to care for this monument.”

Lohofener spoke of more than 400 generations of people who have walked the former Tule Lake site, including Native Americans who were forced into reservations and World War I veterans who farmed and fed the nation.

“It’s more important to remember the bad times than the good,” said Lohofener. “We need to learn from and not repeat past mistakes. Today, we pay respect to the Japanese Americans who spent time here, and we reflect upon those whose job it was to guard the camp, and to those, who in the community, had the camp placed here. This monument is especially important because it will help us remember and appreciate the magnitude and sacrifices made during the course of the war.”

Jon Jarvis, NPS regional director Pacific Coast Region, shared briefly how Tule Lake received national monument designation. Two years ago, Tule Lake received National Historic Landmark designation, a critical step. At that time, the NPS also collaborated with the Bureau of Reclamation and Cal Trans to try to protect the site, but funds were limited.

“But suddenly an opportunity emerged,” said Jarvis. “President Bush, as many presidents do in their last term, was looking for legacy. All so often, they turn to the National Park for sites to preserve under the Antiquities Act, which is a special authority that all presidents have in order to establish by proclamation, sites of national significance.

“I won’t go into the gory details but it was a slog. There were many tense moments as to whether or not it was in or out, what the boundaries were going to look like, concerns about private property rights, concerns about naming, and some people, who just didn’t understand. But the reason it was a success was because of all of you. At those key moments when things started to waiver, the right phone calls were made, the right push was made.”

President Bush signed the proclamation on Dec. 5, which, in addition to Tule Lake, designates five sites in Hawaii and three in Alaska.

Dave Kruse, Lava Beds National Monument superintendent, is the new superintendent of the Tule Lake Unit.

Les Inafuku, Manzanar Historic Site superintendent, described the dedication and the pilgrimage as “fantastic.” He plans to have a Manzanar staff person attend future Tule Lake and Minidoka pilgrimages, although both occur during the busy summer months. He is already in talks with Kruse and Wendy Jaanssen, Minidoka superintendent, about a multi-park funding proposal.

“Coming up with some compelling multi-camp type request will help us become closer, bond the camps closer,” said Inafuku.

Other recognized supporters included: Margaret Bailey, Klamath District Region, Fremont-Winema National Forest; local resident Brodie Bettendorf; Anne Hiller Clark, Shaw Historical Library; Jim Cook, Siskiyou County supervisor; Laurence Crabtree, Doublehead District Region, Modoc National Forest; Robert DeGarmo on behalf of John Bulinski, Cal Trans District 2 director; Craig Dorman, former superintendent, Lava Bed National Monument; Larry Hearn, Klamath Basin Refuge Association president; Lee Juillerat, Herald and News; Todd Kepple, Klamath County Museum director; Laurel Robinson; Stephanie Toothman, Chief Cultural Resource Program NPS Pacific Southwest Region; and the Tulelake Chamber of Commerce.

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