

Angel Island WWII Internment Camp & Prisoner of War Enclosure (1941-1946)

Overview

Prior to the north side of Angel Island being used as a temporary internment camp and military prisoner of war enclosure it was an immigration station (1910-1940) which detained and processed immigrants entering the United States from over 80 countries. The largest group of immigrants detained at the Immigration Station were Chinese due to the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882. In 1940 the Immigration Station closed due to a fire in its administration building. Shortly after, the United States Army (which was already on the east and west sides of the Island via Fort McDowell), moved into the then abandoned site and renamed the area the north garrison of Fort McDowell. A lesser known event leading up to inception of the camp or enclosure on Angel Island is that in 1939, President Franklin D. Roosevelt had requested the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) to prepare, in conjunction with the army and navy intelligence units, a list of 'potentially dangerous' persons to be detained in case of national conflict. This list is known as the 'Custodial Detention List' and was used to arrest specific people just hours after Pearl Harbor had been bombed. In the same year that the immigration station shutdown on Angel Island, the U.S. Nationality Act of 1940 required that resident aliens register annually to keep the government apprised of any address changes.

When Pearl Harbor was bombed (December 7th, 1941) Fort McDowell became part of the San Francisco Port of Embarkation, a massive military entity that was charged with supplying and transporting U.S. troops for overseas duty. That same day, President Roosevelt signed Presidential Proclamations No. 2525, No. 2526, and No. 2527 which stated that all Japanese, German, and Italian "natives, citizens, denizens, or subjects of the hostile nation or government... shall be liable to be apprehended, restrained, secured, and removed as alien enemies." On the day that the United States entered into World War II (December 8th, 1941) part of the north garrison of Fort McDowell was formally converted into a temporary internment camp and prisoner of war enclosure which would be tasked with helping the U.S. government process, incarcerate, and transfer: (1) Immigrants from Japan, Germany, and Italy who were arrested by the FBI in the United States; (2) U.S. citizens with Japanese, German, or Italian heritage arrested by the FBI in the United States; (3) Japanese, German, or Italian military captured abroad.

From December 7th, 1941 through the spring of 1942, the U.S. government would continue to issue orders placing increased restrictions on individuals with Japanese, German, or Italian heritage residing within the United States. For example, in February of 1942, President Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066 empowering the U.S. Army to designate areas from which "any or all persons may be excluded." Within about three months after Pearl Harbor had been bombed many immigrants and U.S. citizens with Japanese, German, or Italian heritage were 'evacuated' by the U.S. government and put into camps.

Today, Angel Island is part of the California State Parks System. The site which preserves the former immigration station (1910-1940), temporary internment camp, and prisoner of war enclosure (1941-1946) helps to tell the history of confinement within the United States due to race and nationality. A major feature of this site is the restored barracks which bear hundreds of inscriptions left by people once detained and incarcerated on Angel Island by the U.S. government.

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Frequently Asked Questions

1) Who operated the temporary internment camp and prisoner of war enclosure on Angel Island?

The camp or enclosure were composed of Headquarters, Headquarters Detachment, and Military Police Escort Guard Company (MPEG Co.). The U.S. Army Special Communication Unit (SCU) 1936 processed military prisoners of war, issued orders, and did the administration work. The 313th MPEG Co. and later the 439 MPEG Co. escorted military prisoners of war inland, guarded the compound, and supervised the military prisoners of war. The Commanding Officer of the camp or enclosure coordinated and administrated all of these functions. Watchdog agencies like the Red Cross would visit this facility to ensure that it met Geneva Conventions Standards.

2) How were people processed at the camp or enclosure during WWII?

Upon arriving to the camp or enclosure arrested immigrants or U.S. Citizens would be put through ten successive stations to be processed. New arrivals were kept segregated from others until processed. During the process one guard would escort two people through the various stations until all stations were completed. In total the process would take about one hour and eighteen minutes. Through these stations they would be searched and their personal affects (including money) would be confiscated for storage. A document called the 'Basic Personnel Record' would be generated if one did not exist prior to arrival. This record would account for an internee's personal information and incarceration by the U.S. government. Being processed on Angel Island included being given an internee serial number (if one had not yet been assigned), getting finger printed, having photograph(s) taken, receiving a physical exam, and being assigned a bed in the camp or prisoner of war barracks. Arrested immigrants and U.S. citizens held on Angel Island could be questioned on site, but their formal hearing was conducted at another location. After being sent to Angel Island, these people would typically be sent to another internment camp after several days or weeks.

Prisoners of war received at this location would first have their uniforms 'deloused' and their blankets and equipment would be disinfected. They would be given a more thorough medical exam including a blood test and vaccinations. Serious medical care could be given at the Fort McDowell east garrison hospital or at the Letterman General Hospital in San Francisco. Military prisoners of war were usually interrogated at a different site. Many of the military prisoners of war in this enclosure were bound for camps located across the United States and so they weren't held on Angel Island for more than several weeks at a time.

3) Where were the immigrants and U.S. citizens on Angel Island arrested during WWII?

Many were arrested in California, and even in San Francisco. However, some were also sent to Angel Island from Hawaii, Colorado, and Utah. A lesser known history is the internment of Japanese Hawaiians on the mainland. Those who were arrested by the FBI in Hawaii and then sent to San Francisco were established in their field – journalists, clergy of both Christian and Buddhist denominations, businesspersons, others who worked at one time or another for the

Japanese government or on behalf of Japanese immigrants. We estimate that about five hundred and ninety Japanese Hawaiians were sent to Angel Island after being sent to the mainland.

Immigrants or U.S. citizens arrested in San Francisco, CA were brought to a detention center set up by the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) on Silver Avenue. There, they would be interrogated and given an official hearing. If they were found guilty in the hearing they could be sent to Sharp Park (Pacific, CA) where temporary Quonset huts had also been constructed or go directly to Angel Island. Some people were transferred from Sharp Park to Angel Island.

4) *Where were people transferred to and from?*

We know that people were transferred to and from the following camps, although more may have also been utilized:

- Prisoner of War Camp Blanding (FL)
- Unknown name Prisoner of War Enclosure Boston (MA)
- Unknown name Prisoner of War Enclosure Bowling Field Washington D.C.
- U.S. military Interrogation Center Byron Hot Springs (CA)
- Prisoner of War Camp Carson (CA)
- Prisoner of War Camp Chaffee (AK)
- Prisoner of War Camp Clarinda (IW)
- Prisoner of War Camp Concordia (KA)
- Prisoner of War Camp Fort George (MD)
- Prisoner of War Camp Huntsville (TX)
- Prisoner of War Camp Livingston (LA)
- Internment Camp Lordsburg (NM)
- Prisoner of War Camp Mexia (TX)
- Prisoner of War Camp McCain (MS)
- Prisoner of War Camp McCoy (WI)
- Prisoner of War Camp McLean (TX)
- Prisoner of War Camp Pine Grove Furnace (PA)
- Prisoner of War Camp Phillips (KA)
- Prisoner of War Camp Roswell (NM)
- Internment Camp Fort Sam Houston (TX)
- Internment & Prisoner of War Camp Sand Island (HI)
- Immigration and Naturalization Service San Francisco California
- Internment Camp Santa Fe (NM)
- Western Defense Command Seattle (WA)
- Internment Camp Sharp Park (CA)
- Prisoner of War Camp Stringtown (OK)
- Prisoner of War Camp Tonkawa (OK)
- Prisoner of War Camp Trinidad (CO)
- Tucson Arizona Army Base

5) *What did the camp and prisoner of war enclosure consist of and how many people could be held in it at one time?*

Between seven hundred and fifty to eight hundred people could be held in the camp or enclosure at a time. The camp or enclosure was composed of four main areas: (1) the internee or prisoner of war barracks; (2) internee or prisoner of war mess hall; (3) the internee or prisoner of war recreation area; (4) U.S. Army enlisted personnel barracks. All of these buildings were heated with steam heat from the central heating plant (toward the water), and had electric light. The internee or prisoner of war barracks, mess hall, and recreation area were entirely enclosed by woven wire fencing topped with barbed wire that was eight to ten feet tall in most cases. Several guard towers were situated around the site and staffed with armed guards. The north garrison dock was also guarded.

Internee or Prisoner of War Barracks: The main building of this site was the internee or prisoner of war barracks. The lower floor of this building consisted of one large and one small dormitory which had sleeping facilities for three hundred and twelve people. Three small rooms on the first floor were used as an office, supply room, and cell for 'unruly prisoners.' The second floor had a large and small dormitory which provided sleeping quarters for four hundred and eighteen people. Several rooms on this floor were reserved for military prisoner of war officers, the surgeon's office, and the infirmary. The large dormitory was partitioned to separate people when necessary. There were two separate latrines in the rear of the barracks. One latrine contained thirteen toilets and ten washstands and the other contained eleven toilets and seven washstands.

Internee or Prisoner of War Mess Hall: This mess hall provided room for two hundred people to eat at one time. Today, this building still houses kitchen equipment used by the U.S. Army. The entrance to the mess hall which faces the internee or prisoner of war barracks used to have a wooden pathway with sinks for rinsing mess trays.

Internee or Prisoner of War Recreation Area: Behind the internee or prisoner of war barracks was a recreation area. People held in the camp or enclosure were restricted from other parts of the Island, and would be brought out to this area for exercise.

U.S. Army Enlisted Personnel Barracks: The former immigration station hospital (downhill from the internee or prisoner of war barracks) were barracks for U.S. Army enlisted personnel. Typically military that worked at the camp or enclosure used this building as their housing if they weren't high ranking.

6) *How many people were held in the camp or prisoner of war enclosure from 1941-1946?*

This is unknown at this time. We estimate that well over two thousand people were held in the camp or enclosure between those years.

7) *What battles were the military prisoners of war on Angel Island in?*

We know that some of the military prisoners of war were captured in the battle at Iwo Jima, Okinawa, Midway, and even Pearl Harbor. Kazuo Sakamaki, a member of the Japanese military captured at Pearl Harbor, was eventually sent to Angel Island.

8) *Where there Italian Service Units on Angel Island?*

Yes. After Italy surrendered to the allies in 1943, there were Italian Service Units on Angel Island. They did a lot of the grounds keeping and gardening work at Fort McDowell. They were not under constant confinement like other military prisoners of war and were allowed to go into

North Beach in San Francisco for dances and parties. They were also allowed to have visitors on Angel Island.

9) *What was a typical day like in the enclosure for military prisoners of war?*

5:30 AM – Lights on

6:30 AM – Breakfast

7:00 AM – All prisoners except those that are sick or on a detail must be out of the barracks so that it can be inspected.

8:30 AM – The sergeant of the guard will notify the dispensary about how many prisoners cannot leave their bunks due to illness.

9:00 AM – Recreation

11:00 AM – Recall

11:50 AM – Check prisoners

12:00 PM – Lunch

1:30 PM – Recreation

3:00 PM – Recall

3:30 PM – Bathing, shaving, washing of clothes when ordered.

5:00 PM – Dinner

8:15 PM – Retire

8:30 PM – Lights out

10) *What kind of food was given to military prisoners of war in the enclosure?*

Most meals were a mixture of different foods. Military prisoners of war received more ethnic foods in addition to ‘American’ foods. Below is an example of what was served to a Japanese military prisoner of war:

Breakfast: Sausages, rice, browned crust, apples, coffee, milk, sugar.

Lunch: Sukiyaki, cabbage salad, rice, caramel pudding, water.

Dinner: Spaghetti and hash, baked tomatoes, lattice and tomato salad, rice, cakes, cocoa.

the U.S. Army noted that prisoners were allowed as much soy sauce as they wanted

11) *Is there writing from people held in the barracks during WWII?*

Yes, the last layer of paint on the walls has writing in pencil, pen, chalk, or soap in addition to writing that is carved or scratched through the last layer or paint. Much of the writing is in Kanji (Japanese) or German. Writing from people held in the barracks when it was an immigration station is underneath several layers of paint.

12) *How can I locate records on someone that was held on Angel during WWII?*

Many of the records for arrested immigrants and U.S. citizens sent to Angel Island during WWII are now physically held at the National Archives & Records Administration in College Park, Maryland. You can inquire about their holdings through their official website (<http://www.archives.gov/dc-metro/college-park/researcher-info.html>).

Many of the records on military prisoners of war held on Angel Island during WWII were repatriated with those people at the end of the war. To inquire about copies of those records, you should contact the following archives directly (please note that they are in Japan, Germany, and Italy):

The personnel records of World War II German prisoners of war in the United States were returned to Germany. For access to these records, please write to the Deutsche Dienststelle (WASSt), Postfach 51 06 57, D-13400 Berlin, Germany. The web site is <http://dd-wast.javabase.de/>.

Personnel records of Italian prisoners of war have been returned to Italy. For further information please write the Ministero della Difesa-Esercito, Direzione Generale dei Servizi di Commissariato e Amministrativi, Via XX Settembre No. 11, Rome, Italy. The web site is <http://www.difesa.it/Pagine/default.aspx>.

Prisoner of war personnel files for former Japanese prisoners of war were returned to Japan after World War II. For further information we suggest that you contact the Military History Department, National Institute for Defense Studies, 2-2-1 Nakameguro, Meguro-ku, Tokyo 153-8648, Japan. The web site is <http://www.nids.go.jp/english/index.html>.

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Suggested Reading

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Larisa Proulx is a US National Park Service Archives Technician at the Tule Lake Unit World War WII Valor in the Pacific National Monument. In her former position as an Interpretive Specialist for California State Parks, she conducted historic research at various National Archives & Records Administration locations and launched an oral history program focused on Angel Island's World War II confinement history. Larisa graduated from Clark University (Worcester, MA) with a Master's Degree of Public Administration.