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TANFORAN ASSEMBLY CENTER  
Temporary Home for 5,000 Japanese-American Evacuees  
from San Francisco, Calif.

In February 1942 President Roosevelt issued Executive Order #9066 which enabled the military to exclude all Japanese-Americans from California, Oregon and Washington. Concentration camps were planned in the remote areas of Idaho, Wyoming, Utah, Arizona, Arkansas and California to receive the evacuees. The implementation of the order was started in March and evacuation started in April.

Since the construction of the permanent camps were just underway, the evacuees were temporarily placed in race tracks, county fair grounds and live stock exhibition halls hastily converted into detention camps with barbed wire fences, search lights and guard towers. Tanforan Race Track was one of these, located in San Bruno about ten miles south of San Francisco. It was home for 5,000 San Franciscans for about 6 months until the permanent camp in the desert area of Utah was completed.

Since there was so little time between the issuance of the order and the actual evacuation, Japanese-Americans suffered economic losses in disposing of their possessions. The real and personal properties not sold (usually at prices far below market value) were stored or left in charge of agents. Many storage places were later looted and properties held in trust just faded away. The losses amounted to hundreds of millions of dollars based on 1942 prices.

San Francisco was divided into evacuation districts and notices of the departure dates were posted in prominent places. On the appointed day, the evacuees reported to the district depot with bed rolls and hand baggage. No other possessions were allowed. Cameras, radios and weapons (including kitchen knives) were previously confiscated. Transportation to Tanforan was by means of Army commandeered buses.



Notes on the Sketches.

1. Horse Stalls used as apartments

It was composed of a front and rear compartment - some with no door between. Exterior doors were rough wood planks and the windows were mostly fixed in place. There were no windows in the rear compartments. Floor was either existing asphalt or new wood planks over earth. Partitions between apartments stopped at the top horizontal plate and the space above was open. The least sound traveled from one end of the building to the other. There were neither plumbing nor heating and one single light bulb on a pull chain per compartment. Reminder of the former occupants was quite strong.

2. The buildings with stairs were mess halls and the two small buildings on the right were toilets. Other buildings shown were barrack apartments built to supplement the horse stalls. They were flimsily constructed with tar paper on the outside walls held in place by battens. Roof was thin roll roofing. The single wood plank floor on the inside shrank leaving gaps of  $\frac{1}{2}$ " or more through which the wind whistled. As in the horse stalls, the partition between apartment units were partial. Here again, no plumbing, no heating and a single light bulb on pull chain. Size of a typical apartment was 16 x 20 ft. with an average occupancy of 6. Privacy within the apartment was achieved by stringing up blankets etc. The camp was divided into blocks of barracks housing about 300. Each block had its own mess hall, toilets and showers. One laundry building served two blocks.

3. The grandstand dominated the entire complex. It was the center of activities and housed the camp administration, visitors hall, canteen, scrip book office and one huge bachelors dormitory.



4. View from the top seats of the grandstand looking north on El Camino Real at that time the main highway between San Francisco and San Jose. Some barracks appear on the right.
5. View from lower seats of the grandstand looking north. The race track is on the right and the South San Francisco hills are in the background.
6. From the box seats of the grandstand looking down on people waiting in line to get their scrip book.
7. From the box seats of the grandstand looking down on people waiting in line to get into the canteen. Scrip coupons were exchanged there for sundries. There was only one canteen and choices of items were limited.
8. The guard tower.
9. Barracks were still being built when the evacuees started to stream in.
10. There were many skilled landscape gardeners. They converted a dried up pond in the infield into a beauty spot complete with Japanese garden, bridges, trees, walks, etc.
11. and 12. The hospital group. Facilities and equipment were inadequate and supplies meager. It was staffed by evacuee doctors, dentists and nurses. The care and dedication were first rate.
13. through
16. Horse stall area.
17. and 18. Horse stall and Barrack apartments.
19. Barrack apartments in the infield.
20. Barrack apartments at race track curve.
21. Barrack apartments.
22. through
24. Views of the grandstand.



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