

EVACUATION CHAOS – 1942

by Jitaro. C. Tanaka

1. VICTIM OF WORLD WAR II

Victims of the dramatic event of the bombing of Pearl Harbour on Dec. 7, 1941, by the antagonistic policy of Japan, the 23,000 persons of Japanese origin whose homes and residences were confined within British Columbia were finally deprived and assumed the status of evacuees. About 75% of them were Canadian citizens, and many were Canadian born. The entire undertaking was done in the interests of National Security under the War Measures Act. To understand this situation, it is essential to know the background of the Japanese in British Columbia. (A History Book, which is compiled by J. C. Tanaka, may be helpful in this respect.)

The three score and five years we lived in successive bliss in B.C. before 1941, not without some prejudice against us by half, hopelessly nurtured our misunderstanding between the two races and made the Japanese residents an isolated community. We were not prepared to meet the emergency evacuation. The evacuation that followed was provided by Mr. Tanaka, who kept extensive records. For one thing, there was no prearranged plan for moving Japanese Canadians when the Japanese attacked the U.S. The evacuation was done in haste and confusion. The Japanese Canadians were moved to the interior of B.C. and other provinces (since 1908) to labour; however, this time it was under compulsion. The evacuation plan was badly managed and executed; it involved the family separation, with men to be held in camps and the women and children to move by themselves.

2. ESTABLISHMENT OF B.C. SECURITY COMMISSION

The B.C. Security Commission was established on March 4, 1942, under No. 1665 at the Government House in Ottawa. The chairman appointed was Austin Taylor, assisted by Colonel Mead (R.C.A.F.) and Commander Shirras (B.C. Provincial Police).

Duties of Commission:

- (1) It shall be the duty of the Commission to plan, supervise and direct the evacuation from the protected area of British Columbia of all persons of the Japanese race.
- (2) For the purpose of performing the duties aforesaid, the Commission shall have power to make all arrangements relative to the removal of persons, the mode of transport, and all matters relative to the evacuation.
- (3) The Commission shall provide for the housing, feeding, care and protection of such persons insofar as the same may be necessary.
- (4) A plan or plans for evacuation and placement of evacuees shall be submitted to the Minister and shall be put into operation by the Commission when approved by the Minister.

Powers of Commission:

- (1) The Commission shall have power to require by order any person of the Japanese

race to remove himself from the protected area of British Columbia and to remain in such area or to go to and remain in such place or places as may be directed by the Commission.

(2) The Commission may make any rules respecting the conduct, activities and discipline of any persons evacuated under the provisions of the said Regulations.

This Commission was taken over by the Department of Labour on February 5, 1943.

3. ATTITUDE AND ACTIONS OF CANADIAN PEOPLE AND GOVERNMENT

The public atmosphere of anger and hatred permeated the early days of the War. Only those who have gone through the experience know our loneliness and sadness. For the young people reading this, the following headlines might illustrate the stark reality of those days' darkness.

Dec. 7, 1941: After the bombing of Pearl Harbour by Japan, Canada declared War against Japan and rounded up forty Japanese Nationals into the Immigration Building at Vancouver, B.C.

Dec. 7, 1941: Immobilization of the fishing fleet owned by Canadian-born and Naturalized Japanese.

Dec. 8, 1941: Canada ordered all Japanese Language Schools to be closed, and three Japanese Newspapers ceased publication.

All Japanese Nationals over 16 years of age, and Naturalized Japanese over 16 years old whose naturalization came after 1922, are ordered to report at R.C.M.P. (Deadline Feb. 7, 1942)

Dec. 9, 1941: Vancouver City alderman Mr. H.D. Wilson began campaigning against the Japanese in British Columbia.

Dec. 25, 1941: The fall of Hong Kong and strong discrimination against Japanese people started to rise.

Jan. 5, 1942: WILSON TALKS RIOTS. Alderman H.D. Wilson told Committee members that if nothing is done, there will be riots.

Jan. 7, 1942: University of British Columbia dismissed Canadian-born Japanese students from further military training.

SPECIAL JAPANESE REGISTRATION COMPULSORY. LOCAL TENSION STILL HIGH AS AGITATION STIRS UNREST.

Jan. 16, 1942: Cameras and Radios Banned.

Jan. 19, 1942: Rev. McWilliams declares NISEI LOYAL.

Feb. 5, 1942: The Greater Vancouver Youth Council passed a resolution to remove all Japanese from the Protected areas.

Feb. 15, 1942: THE FALL OF SINGAPORE, and annihilation of the invincible British Pacific Fleet by Kamikazi Squadron.

Feb. 18, 1942: U.S. ALIENS, ALSO NISEI, FACE EVACUATION. The fall of Singapore is being followed by growing repercussions along the Pacific Coast of the United States.

Feb. 19, 1942. ANYTHING POSSIBLE NOW ... PUBLIC FEELING RISES ... EVENTS MOVE FAST.

Feb. 26, 1942. SUNSET-SUNRISE CURFEW ORDER FOR JAPS HERE will affect all 23,000 until

The Japanese were told to sit tight and not to make themselves visible, not to go out on the streets unnecessarily. No gatherings in any public hall to voice our tensions and agonies and to find some better solutions could be held without an R.C.M.P. permit. Each day, the Japanese were being discharged from work everywhere, and business licenses were restricted. No provisions were made for the welfare of the fishermen whose boats were impounded. The livestock building in Hastings Park Clearing Centre was overcrowded and in a deplorable condition.

4. ORGANIZATIONS WERE FORMED: HASTILY.

Liaison

Japanese Wartime Security Liaison Committee (formed around the middle of January 1942)

Japanese Canadian Citizens' Council (formed around the middle of March 1942)

Canadian Citizens of Japanese Origin (Naturalized, formed around the middle of March 1942)

Mixed Mass Evacuation in Family Group (formed around April 10, 1942)

The war crisis penetrated so deeply into every phase of community organizations and the Japanese that no pre-war social structure has prevented the confusion and distrust among the Japanese.

JAPANESE WARTIME SECURITY LIAISON COMMITTEE, with Mr. Etsuji Morii as the chairman, was regarded highly by the B. C. Security Commission, and the R.C.M.P. recognized this organization as the official liaison group. However, within the Japanese community, the chairman's personality, character, and credibility were in question. On the other hand, he was rather feared as being an influential man because of his past connection with the R.C.M.P. and respected primarily by the right-wing Issei Group, which consists of many businessmen and well-to-do people. Although the members of the Japanese Wartime Security Committee were mostly Japanese Nationals, the R.C.M.P. claimed that Isseis were well-behaved, disciplined, and law-abiding, while Niseis were a hard, non-cooperative bunch.

Of course, Canadian-born sons and daughters of Japanese had the right to protect themselves against this discriminatory treatment and the injustice of the law and rightly did so. Chairman Morii adjusted the attitude of the Canadian people and the government. By taking upon himself the stance that if four to five hundred Japanese Nationals were to leave for road camps at Rainbow, Lucerne, Jasper and Yellowhead during the deep snow of the Canadian Rockies just off the Provincial boundary voluntarily, the other Japanese can be permitted to remain at their present residences. About thirteen hundred Japanese were removed by Morii and R.C.M.P. order, starting on February 23, 1942. However, the B.C. Security Commission was established on March 4, 1942, under P.C. 1665, and the order required all Japanese to be removed from the Protected Area on the Pacific Coast and from inland areas, regardless of citizenship status. This put an entirely different picture in the mind of Japanese people and resulted in the loss of his credibility in the Japanese community.

Closely affiliated in point of view with that of the NATURALIZED CITIZENS ORGANIZATION was the JAPANESE CANADIAN CITIZENS COUNCIL. This organization was essentially single, Canadian-born Japanese. All Nisei organizations were urged to send three delegates to the organizational meeting, which was held on March 22, 1942, by which time many Japanese organizations had completed a satisfactory plan for unification. In view of the B. C. Security Commission's decision to be lenient but firm, they were given opportunities for representation only with cooperation with the Japanese Wartime Security Committee. In a very short time, sociological and psychological differences developed, and they were in trouble.

NISEI MASS EVACUATION IN FAMILY GROUP (headed by Fujikura Tanaka, no relative of mine) was formed around April 10, 1942. Those who were married with families were let down by other organizations, and this Group insisted on continuing to negotiate the evacuation in family groups.

COMMISSION DEFINES NEW POLICY: April 10, 1942.

A new policy about the functioning of the Japanese Liaison Committee was announced by the B. C. Security Commission.

NOTICE.

For reasons best known to the Committee itself, it has been decided to abandon recognition of any Japanese Committee. However, any representative group of Japanese recognized by the Commission may form a committee of three or five, and the doors of the Commission will always be open to them.

AUSTIN C. TAYLOR, Chairman

B.C. Security Commission

5. NISEI MASS EVACUATION IN FAMILY GROUP PAMPHLET:

We pleaded with Naturalized Canadians to demand it, but they gave up without much effort. We persuaded J.C.C. Council to do their utmost — they also gave up too soon. They even refused to arrange a final Nisei mass meeting to discuss our common trouble. We talked with the Security Commission, we wrote to them (copy enclosed), and we sent our lawyer. We are still demanding because we believe our request is the most reasonable in view of our enormous sacrifice for our country. With this conviction, we resorted to various methods to secure our last remaining freedom — freedom to live with our families by evacuating en masse in family groups.

PRINCIPAL POINTS in the pamphlets were: We have said YES to all your previous orders, however unreasonable they might have seemed. But we are firm in saying no to your last order, which would break up our families. We are native-born British subjects, taught in school and church about British Fair Play and the Christian faith. Now you are forcing us to accept every essence of Human dignity and right, even in an animalistic world, the family life is respected and declined our application to serve in the Canadian Army. How can you sworn Democratic Nation you profess to be! Strongly stating we must not even for a moment stray from our objective or do anything that may be harmful to our cause, and must not at any time do anything contrary to our Canadian Ideals. Please remember that internment is definitely not our object. Our goal is MASS EVACUATION IN FAMILY GROUP.

This Group has suffered a considerably bad name as Gun-bari-ya and Ya-ke-mono, because irresponsible consular staff did rather bad propaganda, which caused so many voluntary internments in Canada. This is also mentioned in Professor Shimpō's Book.

Fujikawa Tanaka was picked up by the R.C.M.P., and Mr. S. Uchibori filled his post, but he was Ki-ka Nisei and had trouble with English. My brother, Herbert E. Tanaka, helped him in every negotiation. By this time, The Naturalised Group and the Morii Group had departed for self-supporting projects with their families.

The Nisei Mass Evacuation Group now had to convince the B.C. Security Commission that Ottawa would consider a family-group evacuation if the Commission requested it. However, Major Austin Taylor's attitude was the same as before; in fact, he was perturbed that the Mass Evacuation Group had sent a lawyer to Ottawa. There was no way the Group could reach an amicable agreement. Finally, the Mass Evacuation Group decided and asked me to look after their public relations. First, I went to the Daily Province newspaper to place a quarter-page ad; however, I was told that the ad must be cleared by the B.C. Security Commission. Next, I went with Mr. Shinoda to an interview with newspaper reporters at lawyer Paul Murphy's office to explain why the evacuation in Vancouver was so slow, while in Seattle, it had been completed by May 1942.

There were more Japanese in Vancouver than before the outbreak of war because proceedings at Hastings Park Clearing Centre were at a standstill. 3000 people were in the Clearing Centre; 6000 people were still in Vancouver. The group had pleaded with Major Austin Taylor for family evacuation, but he still said no. Mass Evacuation Group sent delegates to protest in Ottawa and were told they would consider it, but it comes from the B.C. Security Commission, and the chairman refused.

Now, bitterness, anger, and a sense of crowding permeate Japanese society, and they have stopped cooperating with the B.C. Security Commission. That is the reason hardly anybody evacuated over the last five weeks. How can you dump aged women and children into the isolated Slocan Valley without any facilities or building materials and say now you are on your own? If you want a roof over your head before cold weather, you must do it yourself. There are not more than a hundred able-bodied men in the city now, while close to thirteen hundred or more men were in Road Camps, and doing nothing.' To say all this and more, I received anonymity from reports. The next day, the following comment appeared in the Daily Province.

JAP EVACUATION FAILURE SCORED

(June 2, 1942)

A spokesman for the Japanese here today accused the chairman of the B.C. Security Commission of failure to evacuate the Japanese population and of refusing to consider plans which had federal approval.

The spokesman said the federal Department of Labour and the deputy minister for external affairs had reviewed Japanese proposals for mass evacuation in family groups and advised the representatives to ask Austin C. Taylor to request designated settlement areas from the Federal Government.

“So far as we know, Mr. Taylor has refused to even ask the Federal Government to designate areas.”

The spokesman said the Japanese were opposed to the breaking up of families, but the commission seemed determined to separate men from their wives and children.

The commission declined to comment.

This article in the News Herald was essentially the same.

6. MEMBERS OF THE PROTECTING POWER OF JAPANESE.

Jitaro (Charles) Tanaka, a well-known Vancouver furniture manufacturer, and Ippei Nishio, a prominent importer and exporter, were officially appointed to a committee to act on behalf of the Japanese in Canada. Their appointment has been made through the Spanish Consulate General and approved by Ottawa. Prior to this appointment, I met with Consul Ichiro Kawasaki a few times. I bade him and his family Bon Voyage, as a diplomatic exchange was coming soon.

7. FAMILY EVACUATION APPROVED.

On June 25, 1942, Colonel Mead, Assistant Chairman of the B.C. Security Commission, called Mr. Nishio and me by telephone and said he wanted to know whether we knew the leader of the Nisei Mass Evacuation Group. He told me to convey a message to the Mass Evacuation Group. He wanted them to bring a petition stating what they wanted.

On July 1st, at 10 A.M. in the B.C. Security executive office, Mr. S. Uehibori, Herbert Tanaka, and Mr. Hideo Yoshida, with Mr. Nishio and J. Tanaka as observers, met with the full members of the executive of the B.C. Security Commission. Major Taylor and Mr. Shirras were in a very bad mood. Major Taylor told the Mass Evacuation Group, “Under the War Measures Act, the Group can be put away indefinitely without trial. I do not know why I am talking to you now”. He lectured for about fifteen minutes. By that time, the Commission had read the Group petition, and Major Taylor and Mr. Shirras walked out. Detailed plans were left with Colonel Mead.

After the discussion, all the requests were accepted except the Single Men's claim. Out of the blue, Mr. Yoshida asked whether we could trust the Commission, and Col. Mead threw the petition on his desk, pulled a telegram from a drawer and said: “Do you want to read it? This is an insult to an Officer of the Crown”. Quickly, Herbert Tanaka and Mr. Uehibori stepped in and declined to see the telegram, and the incident ended. In the HISTORY OF EVACUATION, we cannot dismiss this distinguished accomplishment.

Everything went very smoothly from July 1st, 1942, on, and the B.C. Security Commission was pleased. On October 30, 1942, the last trainload of Japanese left from Hastings Park Manning Centre to Slocan Valley, mostly aged women and young children, leaving behind 108 sick people and a caretaker. They were hoping that New Denver Japanese Hospital would be finished before winter. My family left with the last evacuees for the Slocan Valley.

NISEI MASS EVACUATION GROUP PAMPHLET: July 1, 1942, afternoon.

“As the wish of the Mass Evacuation Group to have the Japanese moved in family units and reunion of the family to be completed by the winter season was granted by the B.C. Security Commission. From now on, this Mass Evacuation Group will cooperate with the authority.”

8. COMMISSION TO TAKE OVER THE NEW CANADIAN NEWSPAPER.

On April 2, 1942, Commissioner Col. Mead wrote to an official, saying that paid notices were being put in the *New Canadian*, and “It is the intention of the Commission to take over the New Canadian for publishing official notices and giving copies free to all Japanese.” (B.C. Security File.) The contents of the *New Canadian* until the end of the war were approved by a censor before each issue went to press. (File #31)

On July 4, 1942, the Commission Newspaper (The New Canadian), in the English Section, which had been unsympathetic to the Mass Evacuation Group because of its conflict policy, was surprised by the turn of events. The paper mentions the change in their attitude from non-cooperation to cooperation and, in their editorial, remarks that family evacuation may have been granted anyway, as it was the government's intention, and gives the impression of bad boys suddenly going off. They do not know that the Mass Evacuation Group promptly met with Ottawa and the B.C. Security Commission, convinced that the separation of families is doomed to failure, and that adapting evacuation to family groups, as in the United States policy, will be successful.

American brothers of Japanese Descent were always guaranteed by their government, regardless of financial status, housing, food, care, and protection. Whereas in Canada, the Commission shall provide for the housing, feeding, care and protection of such persons in so far as the same may be necessary. That is the reason it cost the Canadian Government only \$13,359,392 from 1941 to 1947, or 0.001% of its annual budget, to care for its detainees. The cost was announced at Parliament by Prime Minister Mackenzie King. Care for Canadian detainees was 40% less per person than it cost to provide for the American detainees.

9. CONCLUSION

Naturalized Canadian Group, J.C.C. Council and Mass Evacuation Group, sometimes or other, took active participation in evacuating family groups. Evacuation in Family Group was finally recognized by the B.C. Security Commission, and the errors in their initial policy of separating families were acknowledged. As a result of their failures, the Security Commission did not invite their newspaper staff to this most important event in the history of Evacuation; therefore, they do not know the whole story.

In the dark forest all around in hazy, misty autumn, surrounded by Slocan Lake, the new home of Canadian Style detention for the next three to six years, where many Mikels and Sanels were born and grew up. Who but us can know the bitter confusion, the disillusionment, and the sadness? Time is a great mender and healer; we forget so soon.

This wholesale evacuation was forced upon us by some greedy and power-hungry politicians, calling native-born sons and daughters enemy aliens. The always silent and quiet Japanese nature, trusting the multi-cultural and multi-racial community to do all the talking, perpetually remain modest, unattached

spectators. History always repeats itself, so they say. How can we be sure that our blood relations across the Pacific may have, for its own survival, launched a different kind of aggressive policy and strategy?

Have we not learned from our own sad history? They did not give us a chance before. Now, the opportunity has been here for over two decades and five years. Do you expect to be served on a silver platter, like scared retarded problem children? Perhaps you listened too long to timid men. Now your time is here for you to participate politically and sociologically, if not, will forever lost.

(Signed by Jitaro Charles Tanaka)

Notes by Takashi Ohki

Jitaro (“Charlie”) Tanaka was born on November 27, 1905, in Shiga Prefecture, Japan, and arrived in Vancouver in 1911 at age five, joining his father, who had immigrated earlier. He grew up in Vancouver and became a community leader, businessman, and wartime chronicler.

He became one of the key intermediaries between Japanese Canadians and Canadian authorities during the Second World War when the Spanish Consulate appointed Jitaro Tanaka (along with Ippio Nishi) to act on behalf of Japanese nationals in Canada. He served as translator, advisor, and liaison, travelling to relocation towns and road camps across British Columbia. His work placed him at the centre of the administration of Japanese Canadian displacement.

One of his most important contributions was the creation—together with his wife Sumiko—of a 177-page, near-daily chronicle covering Dec. 7, 1941, to Oct. 16, 1944. This chronicle is now a major primary source for historians of Japanese Canadian internment.

The Tanaka family was interned at Lemon Creek in November 1942. In 1943, they moved to Montreal, where Jitaro resumed furniture manufacturing and later served as president of the local Japanese Canadian Citizens Association. He retired at age 64 and eventually moved to Mississauga, where he died in 1990.