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Honouliuli internees remember

By James Gonser

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Local Japanese-Americans and others who were held at the internment camp at Honouliuli Gulch during World War II spent a few hours yesterday remembering the tragic events that led to their years of imprisonment — simply because of who they were.

Karen Nakasone, president of the Japanese American Citizens League's Honolulu chapter, said hearing firsthand from people who were there and preserving the camp itself is the best way to remember injustice.

"No one stood up and spoke out against the Japanese internment during World War II," said Nakasone at the chapter's annual Day of Remembrance at the University of Hawai'i. "I don't want what happened to my ethnic community during World War II to happen to any other minorities. Now, especially that we are in wartime again, there are some major rights violations taking place against Muslims."

Shozo Takahashi, now 91 years old, was a Japanese school teacher and principal from 'Ewa who was picked up by authorities in 1943 and incarcerated at Sand Island and Honouliuli.

Takahashi, an American citizen who was born in Hawai'i, could not be with his wife when their first child was born. Family visits were twice a month.

"My wife carried the baby and rode the bus all the way from Honolulu to visit me," Takahashi said. "As I held my first child, I felt elated that I was now a father, and strongly resolved to continue living for our future."

He was released in 1944.

"Since I had done nothing wrong, I was disappointed that I had been interned based only on my suspected intentions," he said.

Every year, the league commemorates President Franklin D. Roosevelt's Executive Order 9066 issued on Feb. 19, 1942. The order led to 110,000 Japanese-Americans on the West Coast being sent to internment camps.

The wartime incarceration of Japanese in Hawai'i was on a much smaller scale. The declaration of martial law in the territory on Dec. 7, 1941, allowed military authorities to immediately imprison Japanese nationals and their children, even if the youngsters were U.S. citizens.

By the end of the war, an estimated 1,440 people were detained or interned in Hawai'i at one of five locations on O'ahu, the Big Island, Maui and Kaua'i.

The first major camp, which opened in 1942, was on Sand Island. In March 1943, the internees were transferred to the 160-acre camp at Honouliuli Gulch in West O'ahu.

Doris Nye, whose parents were of German ancestry, remembered how her mother and

father were taken from their family home by two gun-toting FBI agents who looked like Eliot Ness.

Nye, who was just 13 and left to care for her younger sister, didn't hear from her parents for months. She thought they were dead.

"It was a terrible thing," Nye said. "No one was ever charged with a crime. Their only crime was having the same ethnicity as the Axis powers."

Jane Kurahara, a volunteer at the Resource Center of the Japanese Cultural Center of Hawai'i, said it is important to tell the story and to document and preserve the Honouliuli camp site, which is in ruins and very difficult to find.

A bill moving through Congress could change that by providing \$38 million to help preserve sites across the country where Japanese-Americans and Japanese nationals were incarcerated. The bill specifically lists Honouliuli as a historical site.

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