

WORLD WAR II ILLS NEED RECOGNITION

Editorial by Ursula Vogt Potter

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On Dec. 9, 1941, my father, Karl Vogt, was abruptly taken from our family by the F.B.I. and sent to the first in a series of World War II-era internment camps.

For nearly two years, Dad was not told what the "evidence" was against him nor the identity of his accusers. As it turned out, his only crime was his German citizenship. He'd been a legal U.S. resident for 18 years and had applied for citizenship, but the lengthy process of becoming a naturalized American still was under way.

My mother, brother and I---all U.S. citizens--- were left behind on the family farm near Spokane, where we were sometimes subjected to harassment by government officials.

We weren't alone, although it certainly seemed that way at the time. I now know that Dad was joined in these camps by at least 11,000 other German Americans, many of whom were incarcerated for a much longer period, some for as long as three years after the war.

Most of those held in the internment camps lost all of their material possessions. At least 2000 people, including American born children, were deported into war-ravaged Germany to be exchanged for Americans held there.

An additional 4,000 of Dad's fellow internees were German residents of Latin America, who were forcibly brought to the United States and destined to become part of the exchange program. Incredibly, a number of these Latin Americans were Jews who had fled Germany years earlier.

None of these people was ever convicted of a crime against the United States or any Latin American country. Indeed, my research has shown that the vast majority remained loyal to America---even after all that had happened to them during the war.

Because of the passage of the Civil Liberties Act in 1988, many people know about the plight of the Japanese-American community during the war years. However, it has been my experience that a majority of the citizens of this

country knows little or nothing about the internment of Germans, Italians and Latin Americans.

It is also not widely known that in addition to those who were interned and deported, the U.S. government registered at least 300,000 U.S. residents of German descent, branding them as "enemy aliens," often restricting travel and ownership rights, and in some cases, relocating them into "less sensitive" areas.

Last month, The Wartime Treatment Study Act, Senate Bill 1354 and its companion bill in the House, HR 3198, were introduced in Congress.

This legislation would establish two commissions. The first would review the U.S. government's wartime policies regarding ethnic Germans and other Europeans residing in the United States and Latin America and related civil liberties violations.

The other would review the government's refusal to allow Jewish refugees fleeing persecution entry to the United States during World War II.

I am hoping that this legislation passes so that our history books finally will reflect this part of the World War II saga accurately. Those of us who were affected by what happened back then are not asking for reparation of any kind. We are only asking that what happened to my dad and others be acknowledged.

Sen. Ron Wyden, D-Ore., already has signed on to the bill. I would be proud if the other members of the Northwest's congressional delegation, from both sides of the aisle, would also support The Wartime Treatment Study Act.

I would be prouder still if the entire U.S. Senate and House of Representatives would put aside partisan politics, join the lawmakers sponsoring this legislation and do what should have been done years ago.

My dad, who was a loyal American to the end, would be proud, too!