

# Sharp Park Internment Camp

by Jim Wagner  
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The Sharp Park Recreational area has seen many changes over the years. We are most familiar with the golf course, archery range, and the former shooting range. What most of us may be unaware of is that in the last century during WWII, Sharp Park was home to hundreds of Italian, German, and Japanese alien detainees and American naturalized citizens of Italian, German, and Japanese decent. Even before the war, this area where the archery range is currently located was in use as a camp for indigents.

As early as the 1930's, an "older boys" camp was established in the area. This camp housed what we today refer to as delinquents. A 1939 U.S. Geological Society map showed a state relief camp in an area called Salt Valley. Here, San Francisco indigents were housed and fed and supplied with basic services.

## Pre-War Years

In the mid 1930's, war was looming in Europe. The United States wasn't immune to the paranoia of war. Chief among the agitators for more information was the director of the FBI, J. Edgar Hoover. In September of 1936, Hoover brought to Roosevelt a plan to register every potential alien of Italian, German, or Japanese decent. Roosevelt reluctantly agreed and signed on to a 5 year secret plan to register the targeted group. Every agency of the U.S. government was ordered to cooperate fully with the registration. Fear of a "5th column" that had been used successfully in Poland, Norway, Belgium, Holland, and France, where German nationals were mobilized within the targeted country to sabotage and undermine a country's security was pervasive at our national level. In September of 1939, the Emergency Detention Program was empowered to detain persons deemed dangerous in case of war. In November of 1939, Hoover issued orders for a compilation of a custodial list. Then in 1940, the Alien Registration Act was passed. Its purpose is self explanatory.

## Sharp Park Internment

Immediately after December 7, 1941, the United States Army and the Immigration and Naturalization Service rounded up the aliens listed on Hoover's secret lists. The fact they were all located and detained as quickly as they were is a testament to Hoover's tenacity and paranoia. The Sharp Park Camp had been pre-selected as a site to house these detainees. One hundred and ninety three of the original occupants were transferred from the Silver Avenue INS detention center, which had quickly filled to capacity due to a fire that destroyed a building at the Angel Island Internment Camp, to Sharp Park. Sharp Park was designated an interment camp and was originally used to house German, Italian, and Japanese while they were waiting to be transported to a more permanent relocation camp inland.

Quonset huts were originally used to house the detainees until more permanent structures could be built. (On an interesting side note, the Quonset hut used by the Sharp Park Co-op nursery was originally used to house people at the internment camp.) Eventually from 450 to 1200 designated enemy aliens would be housed at Sharp Park with a peak at one time of up to 2500. It's interesting to note that the center also housed some Mexican and Canadian nationals deemed dangerous by the government. A small number of Chinese nationals were house as well at the camp.

Yamato Ichihashi, a Stanford University professor was housed at Sharp Park for 6 weeks. In his writings, edited by Gordon Chang, a Stanford law professor, titled "Morning Glory, Evening Shadows: Yamato Ichihashi and his Internment Writing, 1942-1945 (1975):

"It (Sharp Park) is situated not far from Salada Beach in a beautiful valley which is surrounded by hills covered with green trees and shrubs; on the western side between low hills the Pacific Ocean is visible. The ground is limited by tall iron net-fences and small in area; barracks 20' x 120' are well built and painted outside and inside and are regularly arranged; there are 10 of these for inmates, each accommodating about 40, divided into 5 rooms for 8 people each; if double decked (beds) 80 can be put in".

To get a feel of the size of Sharp Park in comparison to other camps we can look at the manifest from a supply ship. The Japanese Government would send relief supplies to these camps and the amount received was dependent on the number of detainees. I have not been able to locate accurate numbers for Sharp Park, however, with a simple comparison we can get an idea. In December of 1943, the Exchange Ship, M.S. Gripsholm delivered the following goods for distribution to Sharp Park:

- 1 crate of tea
- 4 crate of soya
- 1 crate of beans

Angel Island Internment camp received the same allotment. On the other hand, Manzanar located east of the Sierras received:

- 54 crates of tea
- 425 crates of soya
- 17 crates of bean

Manzanar at the time housed 10,271 enemy aliens at the time. These shipments were made by the Japanese government for Japanese Nationals. Italians, Germans, and Japanese Americans were not allotted for which makes estimates of the Sharp Park population that much harder. On a side note, the M.S. Gripsholm was very active during the war not only delivering food stuff for the detainees but also in prisoner exchanges between warring countries transporting the POW's home. In 1943 Italy surrendered and the majority of interned Italian detainees were released. They had spent almost 2 years locked up in either Internment Camps or at Relocation Camps. Sharp Park was one of 4 dozen internment camps built to hold German detainees. Over 25,000 Germans were held at one point.

## Sharp Park Today

Tucked back in the eastern portion of the canyon, Sharp Park is unrecognizable as an Internment Camp. Gone are the Quonset huts, as are the barracks. In its location today is an active and vibrant Archery Range and Club. Long time club members are aware of the history of the site and can point out areas of archeological interest. Concrete steps to a now non existent building are clearly visible from the road. Other areas include the site of the old water cistern filled with dirt to prevent accidents. An old garbage pit is tucked away in the bushes and members talk of old bottles and other artifacts popping up on the site. I believe that this is an important historical site that should be studied and better memorialized. Plans for any use of this site must take into account not only the Archery Club, but the historical value of the area. In connection with the Archery Club, a well co-ordinate attempt should be done to identify, chronicle, and map this site. Sharp Park Internment site is a piece of history that is dying out with the passing of the last of the WWII generation. When asked if he remembered the internment camps at Sharp Park, Pacifica icon Nick Gust said "oh, you mean the concentration camps!" Future generations need to be aware that in our own backyard history was playing out.

## Note:

I want to give Professor Lewis Kawahara credit for his work on the Sharp Park Internment Camp. I was fortunate enough to find out about his work while doing a search of California Education Grants and came across his request to do a photo essay of Sharp Park. His supporting essay work was extremely helpful and the ground work he has put in place will be the foundation that future historians can build on to further bring this important piece of history out in the open.

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## Interviews:

Kathleen Manning  
Pacifica Historical Society

Nick Gust  
Pacifica Founding Father/Icon

Matt Farley  
Board of Directors  
San Francisco Archery Club