

# Heart Mountain Draft Resisters Honored at DOR

Members of the Fair Play Committee, internees who refused to report for induction during World War II, are given NCRP's Fighting Spirit Award.

By TAKESHI NAKAYAMA  
RAFU ASSOCIATE EDITOR

The Heart Mountain Fair Play Committee, a group of Nikkei internees who resisted the World War II military draft, were honored by the National Coalition for Redress and Reparations (NCRP) during the annual Day of Remembrance held Saturday at the Japanese American National Museum in Little Tokyo.

Surviving members of the Fair Play Committee, comprised of 63 draft eligible young Nisei who defied U.S. government orders and seven leaders of the FPC Steering Committee who counseled them, were awarded the NCRP Fighting Spirit Award.

The Fair Play Committee members on hand to receive a standing ovation from the crowd of 300 included James Kado, Toru Ino, Tom Oki, Teizo Matsumoto, Kei Yoshida, Ray Motonaga, Yoshi Kuromiya, Mits Koshiyama and Frank Emi, who accepted the plaque on behalf of all the FPC members.

The Heart Mountain draft resisters of conscience conducted their non-violent protest, they said, because of the government's actions in violating their civil and human rights by forcibly removing them from their West Coast homes and imprisoning them at the American concentration camp in Wyoming.

For their refusal to report for induction into the U.S. Army in the spring of



Members of the Heart Mountain Fair Play Committee gathered to be honored at the annual Day of Remembrance, held Saturday at the Japanese American National Museum in Little Tokyo.

1944, the 63 FPC members were convicted of evading the draft in the federal court at Cheyenne, Wyoming, and sentenced to three years in federal prison. Half of the group served their sentence at Leavenworth, Kansas, the other half at McNeil Island, Washington. They appealed their conviction but lost at the U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals and Supreme Court.

"We never had any problems with the other inmates," said Kuromiya. "We were in a minimum security camp at McNeil with no walls. Originally, there were 33 of us, later 22 more from Heart Mountain joined us. Where we were

was mostly war-related offenders like conscientious objectors and Jehovah's Witnesses. So there was no danger of physical harm."

The leaders of the Fair Play Committee, the Steering Committee, were tried, convicted and sentenced to federal prison for conspiracy to violate the Selective Service law. Minoru Tamesa, Ben Wakaye and Guntaro Kubota, the only Issei member, were given two years. The remaining four leaders—Kiyoshi Okamoto, Paul Nakadate, Sam Horino and Frank Emi—were sentenced to four years.

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...judge's conspiracy ruling, and the lead-  
...ers of the Fair Play Committee were  
...freed, except for Wakaye and Tamesa,  
...who had been convicted earlier with the  
...first group of 63 Nisei defendants for  
...draft evasion and were serving two sen-  
...tences concurrently.

...In addition, James Omura of Denver,  
...publisher and editor of the *Rocky Shimpo*,  
...the only Nikkei newspaper to print news  
...releases from the Fair Play Committee,  
...was charged with conspiracy and tried  
...along with the draft resisters. But he  
...argued that he had a constitutional right  
...to print news about the FPC under the

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## Draft Resisters

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Fourth Amendment, guaranteeing free-  
...dom of the press, and was acquitted of  
...the charges.

The Fair Play Committee members  
...who resisted the military draft served 26  
...months and were granted a full pardon  
...by President Harry S. Truman on Dec.  
...24, 1947.

Richard Katsuda, president of NCCR-  
...Los Angeles, called the draft resisters  
...“pioneers of the civil rights movement  
...and inspiration for the redress move-  
...ment,” and noted that many young men  
...from various other concentration camps  
...resisted the draft on their own so that  
...there was a total of more than 300 Japa-  
...nese Americans who refused to report for  
...the pre-induction physical examinations.

“We in NCCR wish to recognize the  
...Heart Mountain draft resisters—and all  
...the resisters—for taking a stand for jus-  
...tice against such overwhelming odds,”  
...Katsuda said. “We must cultivate and  
...promote actions that take a stand for  
...justice and hold the government account-  
...able.”

“I think this award is very humbling,  
...in a way, because we didn't really expect  
...any such honors,” stated Frank Emi, a  
...member of the FPC Steering Committee.  
...“We didn't think we really deserve all  
...this, but we're all really appreciative.”

“We did it because we felt very out-  
...raged at the government's very unfair,  
...very unjust actions they kept perpetrat-  
...ing on the Japanese Americans,” related  
...Emi, who added that he would do it over  
...again “in a heartbeat.”

“When they sent us to camp, we didn't  
...have any idea how to resist anything like  
...that, especially when the JACL leaders  
...told the Japanese population to cooper-  
...ate. But once we were put in camp, and  
...on top of that, they put out that infam-  
...ous questionnaire—questions 27 and 28—  
...and then after that instituted the draft  
...in camp as if nothing happened, it was  
...just a continuing abuse of our rights. It  
...looked like there was no end to it, so  
...there was a point at which we felt we  
...had to take a stand to protest all the  
...injustices.”

He noted that different segments of  
...the Japanese American community are  
...beginning to understand the FPC's po-  
...sition.

“The redress movement sparked in-  
...terest,” said Emi, who still teaches judo  
...at 82 years of age. “And no one talked  
...about the resisters before Frank Chin  
...wrote the well-documented article in the  
...*Rafu Shimpo* Holiday Edition in the early  
...‘80s.”

Kuromiya said there is still confusion  
...and misinformation about the various  
...forms of resistance in the camps. “The  
...internment story has focused mainly on  
...the government's massive infringement  
...of civil rights, but little is said about the  
...citizens' response to such obvious vio-  
...lations. Until we have a clearer under-  
...standing of the citizens' role in uphold-  
...ing constitutional guarantees, it could,  
...and possibly would, happen again. And  
...sadly, Japanese Americans will again be  
...ill-prepared to prevent it.

“I hope it'll never be necessary to  
...resist the draft again, but if I had to do  
...it again, I would, absolutely. I don't think  
...there would be any alternative,” declared  
...the retired landscape architect from  
...Alhambra.

Although he didn't experience any  
...ostracism after the war from other Nikkei,  
...Kuromiya said, “Anytime I would men-  
...tion I was a draft resister, right away  
...they would say you were one of those  
...‘no-no boys,’ one of those bad guys,  
...troublemakers. And automatically, they  
...would relate any kind of resistance to  
...being pro-Japan and disloyal.”

Koshiyama, 75, said people who ac-  
...cused the resisters of being pro-Japan  
...are “just trying to hurt people. After 55  
...years, it's hard to believe there's people  
...like that. Besides if the resisters were  
...that pro-Japan, they would've gone to  
...Tule Lake.

“Nobody wants to go to jail. People  
...think ‘You didn't want to go (into the  
...Army), that's why you went to jail.’ But  
...jail is the last place you want to go,” he  
...continued. “I really believed in the courts  
...of America, I really believed we had a  
...good chance of winning.”

Koshiyama, a retired farmer from  
...San Jose, added, “I think the NCCR  
...people realize there's no second-guess-  
...ing your rights as a citizen. You don't do  
...things to please anybody. You gotta  
...fight for your citizenship rights when  
...they're taken away. To me that's the  
...most important thing of being an Ameri-  
...can. That's why we resisted.”