

Reagan 'Rights' a Wrong, Signs Internee Reparation

By PAUL HOUSTON, *Times Staff Writer*

WASHINGTON — Weeping openly under a broiling sun outside the White House on Wednesday, 81-year-old Susumu Emori said quietly: "It brings back the old days."

Moments earlier, at an emotional ceremony attended by Emori, five family members and more than 100 other Japanese-Americans interned during World War II, President Reagan signed legislation providing \$1.25 billion in reparations and a formal apology from the government for the federal order more than 40 years ago that placed the citizens in detention camps.

"We gather here today to right a grave wrong," Reagan said in acknowledging that a mistake was made in the forcible relocation of 120,000 Japanese-Americans on the West Coast after the bombing of Pearl Harbor.

The President cited the hard-

ships endured by Rep. Norman Y. Mineta (D-San Jose), whose family first lived in converted stables at Santa Anita race track and then was housed in a tarpaper barracks at a camp in Heart Mountain, Wyo.

Reagan also paid tribute to the "immense dedication" of the 442nd Regimental Combat Team, a World War II Army unit made up entirely of Japanese-Americans, including now-Sen. Daniel K. Inouye (D-Hawaii), who lost an arm on a battlefield in Italy 44 years ago.

Both Mineta and Inouye stood with other key members of Congress as Reagan signed House Resolution 442, named after the combat unit.

"I felt a big sigh of relief from people in attendance," Emori's son Walter said after the ceremony in an auditorium at the Old Executive Office Building next door to the

Please see INTERNEES, Page 18

August 1988

Reparations

Continued from Page 1

White House.

His sister Helen, one of six Emoris that were relocated from Stockton, Calif., to Rohwer, Ark., in 1942, added: "This is a day when I can see the country again offering what it stands for. At one time, the country acted in a way inconsistent with its principles. Now it is acknowledging that it wants to set things right."

All the Emoris plan to donate their \$20,000 restitution payments to Loma Linda University, which gave them jobs and educated them after their release from the detention camp in 1945.

"We wanted to give all of the money we are receiving as a gift back to the country," said Helen Emori King, dean of the Loma Linda school of nursing. An endowment fund will be established for nursing education, she said.

"As the President pointed out, it's not the money that counts," said Walter Emori, a physician who lives in Medford, Ore., where his parents are retired. Also at the ceremony were his brother David, a businessman in Santa Cruz, and sister Grace, an epidemiologist with the U.S. Public Health Service in Atlanta.

The new statute establishes a trust fund from which tax-free payments of \$20,000 will be provided to the approximately 60,000 Japanese-American internees who are still alive. It will be up to the attorney general to identify the eligible individuals and authorize payments, which are to be made over a 10-year period.

The law also provides \$21.4 million in compensation to about 450 members of the Aleut community who were evacuated from the Aleutian and Pribilof islands in Alaska after a Japanese attack in 1942. Reagan noted that the Aleuts were relocated for their own protection but that property which was lost or damaged has never been replaced.

At one point, Reagan threatened to veto the legislation on grounds that it was unnecessary and too costly. The concerns eased after a Senate-House conference committee expanded the reparation payment period from five to 10 years, and made acceptance of the payment a final settlement of any claim against the government for internment.

"No payment can make up for those lost years," Reagan said in signing the measure, which cleared the House last week by a vote of 257 to 156 and the Senate by voice vote. "So what is important in this bill has less to do with property than with honor, for here, we admit a wrong. Here we reaffirm our commitment as a nation to equal justice under the law."

For some Japanese-Americans, the government's apology and reparations are "better than nothing." (View, Page 1)

LAT August 1988