

World War II Enemy Alien Control Program Overview

Brief Overview of the World War II Enemy Alien Control Program

Immediately after the bombing of Pearl Harbor, President Roosevelt issued Presidential Proclamations 2525, 2526, and 2527 to authorize the United States to detain allegedly potentially dangerous enemy aliens. The FBI and other law enforcement agencies arrested thousands of suspected enemy aliens, mostly individuals of German, Italian, or Japanese ancestry, living throughout the United States.

The Department of Justice oversaw the processing of the cases and the internment program. Although many were released or paroled after hearings before a local alien enemy hearing board, for many the adversarial hearings resulted in internment that, in a few cases, lasted beyond the end of World War II. Of those interned, there was evidence that some had pro-Axis sympathies. Many others were interned based on weak evidence or unsubstantiated accusations of which they were never told or had little power to refute. Often families, including naturalized or American-born spouses and children, of those interned voluntarily joined them in internment.

Furthermore, on the basis of hemispheric security, the United States offered to intern allegedly dangerous enemy aliens living in Latin American countries and even recommended which enemy aliens should be interned. Over fifteen Latin American countries accepted the offer and eventually deported a total of over 6,600 individuals of Japanese, German, and Italian ancestry, along with some of their families, to the U.S. for internment. Few, if any, of those deported received any sort of a hearing so many did not know the specific reasons for their deportation. Often these individuals were deported based on hearsay or for other political reasons.

By the end of the war, over 31,000 suspected enemy aliens and their families, including a few Jewish refugees from Nazi Germany, had been interned at Immigration and Naturalization Services (INS) internment camps and military facilities throughout the United States. Some of these internment locations included Sharp Park Detention Station, California; Kooskia Internment Camp, Idaho; Fort Missoula Internment Camp, Montana; Fort Stanton Internment Camp and Santa Fe Internment Camp in New Mexico; Ellis Island Detention Station, New York; Fort Lincoln Internment Camp, North Dakota; Fort Forrest, Tennessee; and Crystal City Internment Camp, Kenedy Detention Station, and Seagoville Detention Station in Texas.

Not all remained in internment for the entire war. The Department of Justice reviewed individual internee cases and granted parole to some of the internees. Several thousand internees chose to or were forced to repatriate to the country of their nationality, Italy, Germany or Japan. Some pursued legal means to fight for due process, avoid repatriation, and be released. With the end of the war, the government continued to repatriate some of the internees, but also began releasing those no longer deemed as dangerous. It took several years to dismantle the internment program. By 1948, the Department of Justice closed the last internment camp and released the remaining few internees.

Along with detainment and internment, the U.S. also implemented the Individual Exclusion Program under the authority of Executive Order 9066 to exclude individuals of German, Italian and Japanese ancestry, including American citizens, from designated military zones. While the War Department considered thousands for exclusion, it only issued exclusion orders for several hundred individuals. Many enemy aliens living in military zones and elsewhere in America were subject to curfews and other restrictions on their conduct.

Records in NARA's custody related to World War II enemy alien control programs are located in several different record groups, including:

- Special War Problems Division records and Central Decimal File records in the General Records of the Department of State, Record Group 59
- Alien Enemy Control Unit records and case files in the Records of the Department of Justice, Record Group 60
- Alien Enemy Internment Camps records and case files in the Records of the Immigration and Naturalization Service, Record Group 85
- Records of the War Relocation Authority, Record Group 210
- Records of the Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians in the Records of Temporary Committees, Commissions, and Boards, Record Group 220
- Records of U.S. Army Operational, Tactical, and Support Organizations (World War II and Thereafter), Record Group 338
- Alien Enemy Information Bureau records in the Records of the Office of the Provost Marshall General, Record Group 389

In addition, the FBI makes some records related World War II alien enemy custodial detention available through their electronic reading room.

Search the National Archives Catalog for Descriptions of Related Records at National Archives

- Enemy Aliens

The U.S. National Archives and Records Administration

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