

Taken Away

Narrator: George Takei

Welcome to the former Rohwer Japanese American Relocation Center.

I'm George Takei. You may know me as Mr. Sulu from Star Trek. You may not know that I spent a part of my childhood here at Rohwer behind barbed wire.

I remember that terrible day when American soldiers came to our California home to order us out. I was five years old at the time. I remember that they carried bayoneted rifles. I remember the tension. I remember my mother crying. I didn't really understand what was going on, but I will never forget.

We were rounded up and put into concentration camps surrounded by barbed wire and armed guards in towers.

There were no charges, there were no trials, and there was no due process.

My father told me that we were going on a long vacation to a place called Arkansas. That sounded exotic to me. We were put on a train with other Japanese Americans and it was a grueling, long, long trip.

We arrived in Rohwer after three days and two nights on the train—sitting day and night on hard, wooden seats. It was late summer and the sunlight glinted off each barb on the wire—flashing like sharp, deadly gems strung out along the new fence. We passed tall guard towers with armed soldiers staring down at us. Beyond the fence we could see internees who had arrived earlier, lined up and waving forlornly. Beyond them were rows upon rows of black tar-paper-covered barracks all lined up with military precision.

What you see here today is not what we saw when we arrived. The barracks have been demolished or moved, the internees moved away after the war, the guard towers have been taken down, and the barbed wire fences have been removed. But a few remnants from that time are here to remind you of our internment experience at Rohwer. The memorial cemetery is the final resting place of many internees and marks the southern boundary of the camp. The smokestack in the distance was once part of the hospital complex and marks the northern end of the camp.

This is the first stop on the walking tour of the Rohwer Japanese American Relocation Center site. This tour will provide a glimpse into this dark time in our nation's history.

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