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## Frank Emi, Leader of Heart Mountain Draft Resisters, Dies at 94

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The World War II draft resisters were honored by the Japanese American Bar Association in this April 30, 1993 photo taken at the Japanese American National Museum. From left, Akira "Ike" Matsumoto, Taizo Matsumoto, Sam Horino, Tom Oki, Frank Emi, Toru Ino, Mitsuru "Mits" Koshiyama, and James Kado and Yosh Kuromiya. The men are seated in front of a photo of the 63 resisters from the Heart Mountain Relocation Center on the first day of their trial in federal district court in Cheyenne, Wyo., June 12, 1944. (MARIO G. REYES/Rafu Shimpō)

By MARTHA NAKAGAWA  
*RAFU CONTRIBUTOR*

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Frank Seishi Emi, one of the seven leaders of the Heart Mountain Fair Play Committee (FPC), passed away on Dec. 1. He was 94.

Before World War II changed the course of Emi's life, he had enrolled at Los Angeles City College with plans to become a pharmacist, but left college after his family asked him to help in the family produce business. Emi had big plans to expand the family business into a large supermarket and had just invested \$25,000 to purchase fixtures to display meats when the war broke out.

When the U.S. government issued incarceration orders for West Coast Japanese Americans, Emi had to sell the family business for six cents on the dollar. He and his family were imprisoned at the Pomona Assembly Center before being shipped to the Heart Mountain War Relocation Authority (WRA) camp in Wyoming.

Of the 10 WRA camps, Heart Mountain had the only organized resistance movement that protested the drafting of Japanese American men while they and their families remained imprisoned in U.S. concentration camps. Heart Mountain's uniqueness was largely due to Kiyoshi Okamoto, who started the FPC; and Emi, who advocated crossing the line from mere vocal protest to taking a stand into resistance.



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Frank Seishi Emi

In addition to Okamoto and Emi, the FPC leaders were Isamu Sam Horino, Paul Takeo Nakadate, Minoru Tamesa, Tsutomu Ben Wakaye and Guntaro Kubota.

Emi was never drafted. He was married and had children, and the Army was not drafting men with families at the time. Emi took a stand based purely on principle.

On July 21, 1944, the seven FPC leaders and James Omura, English section editor of the Rocky Shimpō, who had been the only Nikkei editor to publish the FPC press releases, were arrested. They were charged with conspiracy to violate the Selective Service Act and with aiding, abetting and counseling others to resist the draft.

Although Omura was found innocent, the seven FPC leaders were convicted in November 1944. The FPC leaders were sentenced to the Leavenworth Federal Correctional Institute with hardened criminals. To protect themselves in prison, Emi led the Nisei men in a judo demonstration on what was called "Sports Day." The Heart Mountain men picked Toru Ino, one of the smaller Nisei, to go up against a larger white inmate. Ino flipped the other inmate easily, and thereafter, the Nisei were not bothered by the general inmate population.

While they were serving their time at Leavenworth, the 10th Circuit Court of Appeals overturned the convictions of the seven FPC leaders in December 1945.

In addition to the FPC leaders, a total of 85 Heart Mountain men were arrested and found guilty of violating the Selective Service Act. Their cases were never overturned.

Yoshito "Yosh" Kuromiya, one of the 85 Heart Mountain resisters, served his prison time at the McNeil Federal Correctional Institute.

"How can I forget Frank?" said Kuromiya. "He was a major part of my camp experience, especially since the resistance factor dominated so much of my camp experience."

More than four decades later, the paths of Emi and Kuromiya would cross again as they and the late Mitsuru "Mits" Koshiyama teamed up to educate the public on the resistance movement.

Irene Kuromiya, Yosh's wife, is among the handful of resisters' wives who has steadfastly supported their husbands' stand. "We're going to miss Frank," said Irene. "He kept the resistance program afloat, and for that, we're thankful."

"Frank was always supportive of my husband," said Mizue Koshiyama, Mits' widow. "He backed my husband whenever he needed the encouragement."

Harry Yoshikawa, a "voluntary evacuee" resister who ended up in prison with the Amache (Granada) and Topaz (central Utah) resisters, followed the Heart Mountain FPC during the war.

"Frank was my hero," said Yoshikawa. "I read about them in the Denver Post when I was in Denver during the war. I ended up in the county jail with the Amache group but I kept up on what was happening to Frank Emi and the Wyoming group through the papers."

After the war, the FPC was largely forgotten until a younger generation stumbled upon their story. They included Frank Abe, Frank Chin, Dwight Chuman and Lawson Inada.

In 1981, Chuman, as English section editor of *The Rafu Shimpō*, published Chin's article titled "The Last Organized Resistance" in the Holiday Issue. Chin, a playwright, had written the article not knowing if any of the protesters were still alive. To his surprise, he got a call from Emi within two weeks of the article's publication.

After several meetings, Chin said, "Our gradual suspicion over each other gave way to friendship. He was a great man. I think it's terrible that Japanese America didn't recognize Frank Emi and the resisters by expressing their appreciation."

"Frank Emi was a spiritual leader," said Inada, a noted poet. "He was a person of tremendous

courage and spirit.”

Abe produced an award-winning documentary on the FPC, “Conscience and the Constitution.”

“These are the words I have long dreaded having to write: Frank Emi died today,” wrote Abe via email. “We’ve lost a giant.

“I have for my Facebook icon a photograph of the young and athletic Frank Emi in camp, standing squarely with his arms crossed. He defied the government and our own Japanese American leadership by organizing a movement inside an American concentration camp to refuse to report for draft induction in order to protest mass incarceration based solely on race. It was an honor to know him and to be able to document his story on film.

“He was a man 40 years ahead of his time. He was an ordinary young man, but a man of conviction who rose to the occasion when faced with the injustice of the camps. With a wife and two kids he was not even eligible to be drafted out of camp, but he risked his freedom and the welfare of his family to help lead the largest organized resistance inside the camps. It was a classic example of civil disobedience in the American 20th century.”

Emi’s experience has also been documented in another award-winning documentary by Emiko and Chizu Omori, “Rabbit in the Moon.”

During the 1990s, the more Emi, Koshiyama and Kuromiya spoke publicly, the more they faced opposition from Japanese Americans who felt that it had been the duty of Nisei draft-age men to serve in the military, even if unfairly imprisoned, as an effort to prove their loyalty. Emi led the charge to educate the community and the general public.

“Frank was an inspiration,” said Heart Mountain resister Takashi Hoshizaki. “He was going out talking about the resisters when it was still an unpopular topic. He carried the burden.”

Jimi Yamaichi, a Tule Lake resister, admired the fact that despite opposition, Emi never backed down and didn’t stoop to name-calling. “I know people really bombarded him but he never got after them. He very calmly talked about things in a rational way. That’s why people listened.”

Susumu Yenokida, an Amache resister whose two late brothers had also been resisters, said, “I never wanted to talk about my experience. But when I heard Frank speaking out like that, it encouraged me. It encouraged all of us to open up. He’s like the North Star, a guiding light.”

“He was a leader for us guys,” said Noboru Taguma, another Amache resister. “He taught us Nisei how important it is to keep fighting for our rights.”

“I respect Frank for speaking out,” said Ken Yoshida, a Topaz resister. “We needed someone like him who could explain about what we did. There’s something wrong if we don’t fight the government when they’re not treating us right.”

Gene Akutsu, a Minidoka resister, expressed similar sentiments: “I welcomed Frank speaking up for us. I wanted people to understand that the resisters aren’t draft-dodgers. We resisted because the government didn’t do justice by us.”

In 2002, the national Japanese American Citizens League, after years of contentious infighting, issued a public apology to the resisters for not recognizing their wartime stand. Emi was among the featured speakers at the apology ceremony, which was held in San Francisco’s Japantown.

The JACL’s Pacific Southwest District had been the first to issue an apology in 1995. This was largely due to the efforts of Ruth Mizobe, Trisha Murakawa and Paul Tsuneishi, a Military Intelligence Service veteran who had resigned as JACL PSW governor after the National JACL refused to issue an apology in the 1990s.

Floyd Mori, JACL’s current executive director, was elected national president at the same 2000 national convention where the resolution to issue an apology had passed. He had the difficult task of uniting a divided JACL membership and fulfilling the resolution’s mandate of organizing a public apology ceremony.

“Frank Emi was an important part of the World War II Japanese American experience,” said Mori. “He had a clear understanding of the role that justice should have played during that difficult time, particularly in the lives of those whose chosen path was to resist the injustice of the incarceration of Japanese Americans. Frank was a gentle person with a strong passion for what he felt was just and fair. He helped myself and many in the JACL to understand and appreciate the personal turmoil that

resistance had brought to their lives. He was a hero for justice and he will leave a lasting legacy of commitment to principle.”

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During the redress movement, Emi worked with Nikkei for Civil Rights & Redress (NCRR). Jim Matsuoka, on behalf of NCRR, said that the organization “mourns the passing of a great American hero, Frank Emi. We know through his courageous actions and those of his fellow resisters at Heart Mountain what the meaning of the words ‘believers in the Constitution’ really meant.

“Frank Emi was first and foremost a patriot, and he made better Americans out of all who knew him. Thanks to Frank, many of us who are Japanese Americans are proud to claim our heritage. In an era of rejection and hostility, he was fearless and courageous and undeterred in standing up to do what he felt was right.

Unafraid of the consequences, he risked prison and ostracism for his passionate beliefs in the constitutional rights of each citizen as fundamental tenets which could not and should

not be abrogated. Frank lived to see the day that those who scorned him came to realize the heroic nature of this man and his true stature as an American.

“Frank Emi was a longtime and leading member of the Nikkei for Civil Rights & Redress and was dedicated to the campaign for redress. He joined the lobbying delegation to Washington, D.C. in 1987 and emceed many redress programs. Frank remained a strong advocate for civil rights throughout his life and to a person we will say that we were privileged to know him. He will be greatly missed by his family and friends, the Nikkei community and all who take pride in valuing our freedoms as American citizens.”

Aiko Yoshinaga Herzig, who helped some of the resisters obtain their wartime files through the Freedom of Information Act, was saddened to lose two friends, William Hohri and Frank Emi, within weeks.

“Frank was a giant,” she said. “He was a giant of a man because he was a humble man whose courage to become one of the leaders of the resistance movement inspired others to look beyond mere patriotic words and to support the righteous protest movement against the drafting of the boys out of camp ... He inspired not by shouting or banging on the tables, but he did it in a very quiet yet effective way. He was not only a good leader but a man of integrity. This is such a loss for the community.”

Dr. Art Hansen, professor emeritus of history/Asian American studies at California State University, Fullerton, has interviewed and invited Emi to his classes over the years, and likened Emi’s situation to a famous football game: “In 1944, Army’s great football team, led by halfback Glenn Davis and fullback Felix ‘Doc’ Blanchard (dubbed the ‘Touchdown Twins’), compiled its first unbeaten season since 1916. While Army remained undefeated the next two seasons, Davis (‘Mr. Outside’) and Blanchard (‘Mr. Inside’) were each awarded the Heisman Trophy and together graced the cover of Time and Life magazines.

“That same year witnessed the exploits of another formidable ‘team,’ the Fair Play Committee at the Heart Mountain concentration camp in Wyoming. Its ‘Mr. Outside’ was James Omura, the militant English-language editor of the Denver-based Rocky Shimpō newspaper, and its ‘Mr. Inside’ was Frank Emi, the disciplined, principled, wise, and charismatic leader of the FPC.

“They faced much fiercer opposition than the footballers arrayed against Davis and Blanchard — the U.S. government, mainstream America, and the majority of the Nikkei community (spearheaded by the JACL national leadership). Both were tried in a federal court for conspiracy to evade the draft and counsel others to do likewise, but only Emi was convicted and imprisoned, before a court overturned his conviction.

“Both devoted their ‘retirement’ to securing redress and redemption for their racial-ethnic



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Emi addresses the Japanese American Citizens League in San Francisco in 2002 after the civil rights group issued an apology to the resisters. (MARIO G. REYES/Rafu Shimpō)

community, which was achieved in 1988, and for the restoration of their personal and collective dignity as courageous resisters of conscience on behalf of the U.S. Constitution. Hopefully, someday Hollywood will capitalize on their story to make a companion film to the 1947 one about Davis and Blanchard, 'The Spirit of West Point,' and title it 'The Spirit of Heart Mountain.' If so, the producers will be taxed to find an actor sufficiently handsome and noble to portray Frank Emi, unquestionably an authentic American hero."

Sojin Kim, formerly with the Japanese American National Museum, helped bring some of Emi's artifacts to JANM. "Frank Emi always struck me as cool," wrote Kim via email. "Not just because of what he did and how he lived his life, but also because of how he carried himself. He had a powerful presence, dignified and strong. And then there are those cool photographs of him wearing a leather jacket in Heart Mountain."

"At JANM, we all appreciated Frank's willingness to work with us, helping us to better understand the Heart Mountain Fair Play Committee, and participating in public programs and oral history interviews. Among the things that Frank donated to the museum's permanent collection is a chest of drawers, a tall dresser, that he made in 1943 for his family's barracks. It is a beautiful piece, crafted with skill and care. It's so poignant when you realize that at the same time that he was committing his efforts to standing up for his community and for some very big principles, he was also attending to the everyday needs and comfort of his young family."

Eric Muller, the Dan K. Moore Distinguished Professor in Jurisprudence and Ethics at University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, wrote about the resisters' court cases, "Free to Die for Their Country." "Frank Emi was a man whose courage was matched only by the clarity of his moral vision," he said. "While many Nisei felt the injustice of the government's wartime imprisonment of the Nikkei, few were willing to name it as clearly and openly as Frank did."

"He paid the price of his resistance in a federal penitentiary during the war, and in subtler ways within the Japanese American community for years afterwards. Yet he never wavered from stating and defending his patriotic position. Frank proved throughout his life that a calm, reasoned voice of protest is in the best American tradition, and that justice comes to those who work for it. We have lost Frank, but Fred Korematsu and Rosa Parks have some good new company today."

"He was a good man," Emi's wife, Itsuko, said in Japanese.

The couple met at a Maryknoll ballroom dance class. At that time, Itsuko, a Japanese national, had been thinking about returning to Japan, and this was to be her last day of dance class when Frank waltzed into her life. "Perhaps it was fated," she said, laughing when asked whether it was love at first sight. This was a second marriage for both of them.

Over the years, she noted, a number of people visited their home to interview her husband, but because she did not speak English very well, she did not get involved with her husband's activities.

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Before becoming known as a resister, the Los Angeles-born Emi was recognized for his judo prowess. He started out as a student at the Hollywood Judo Dojo in 1937, and eventually became the dojo's head instructor. He reached the 8<sup>th</sup> dan and continued to go to the dojo until a month before his passing. In 2007, the Southern California Judo Association, the largest judo organization in the U.S., presented Emi with the Nanka Hall of Fame award.

Gary Freeman, Robert Iwasaki and Masanori Hase have been taking over Emi's responsibilities at the dojo.

Freeman, who has known Emi for the past 50 years, said, "He was a good leader and teacher. Everyone looked up to him, and he was well respected by all the students. He could be strict but it would be for the benefit of the student."

Iwasaki, who has known Emi for 30 years, started out as one of his students. "He was a person who was strong in his ideals and convictions," said Iwasaki. "I fully supported what he did during the war, even though I was in the military for a number of years. It was fully justified. And thinking about the pressures he experienced, I appreciate it even more."

Hase, who has known Emi since 1998, was also one of his students. "I got to know Emi Sensei when he was older, so he didn't wrestle too much with the younger guys," said Hase. "He was hands-off. He'd observe and give us pointers but he wanted you to figure things out for yourself. He wasn't a person that fed you information. You had to work it out for yourself."

In addition to his wife, Emi is survived by daughters Kathy and Eileen; several grandchildren; a sister, Kaoru; and stepdaughter, Rie. He was preceded in death by his son Grant, who was born at Heart Mountain and fulfilled Emi's dream of becoming a pharmacist; his first wife, Amy; older sister Hisako; and brother Art.

Funeral service will be held on Friday, Dec. 10, at 10 a.m. at the Nichiren Temple, 2801 4th St. in Boyle Heights, (323) 262-7886.

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