

The Road To Heart Mountain? Rumors, FEMA and the Future

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In 1942, Franklin D. Roosevelt issued Executive Order 9066, sending more than 110,000 people to relocation camps. Most of the internees were U.S. citizens. They were transported from temperate climates to the wind-wracked deserts of California, Arizona and Wyoming. The property they left behind was legally looted by their neighbors. They were shut within barbed-wire enclosures and bare, tar-paper barracks ¾ all for the crime of having Japanese ancestry. To this day, there are Americans who defend this internal deportation, saying, "It was for their own good," or "They weren't like us. They were loyal to their own kind." The camps, they say, were necessary.

The question is ¾ Is it about to happen again? Does the U.S. government have plans to round up some other group of citizens and lock them into bitter internment "for the duration" of some future emergency? The Internet is rife with rumors. The most persistent one says political dissidents will be targeted this time. Skeptics dismiss the tales as so much conspiracy-mongering, and even some conspiracy buffs warn against pursuing the stories. One said to me, "That way lies madness. If you find out there are camps, no one will believe you. And if there are camps, and you come too close..." Some rumors do seem preposterous. In the way of urban legends, people who've "seen the camps being built with their very own eyes" are usually nameless friends of friends. Other reports might have perfectly innocent explanations. An acquaintance shouted breathlessly down the phone that he'd seen, "Barbed wire! High walls! And guard towers!" being built at Ft. Lewis in Washington state.

Well, yes, I thought. *You would see those things being built on a military base, wouldn't you?* But the reports won't go away. Even where they're shaky on specifics, they express an intuitive truth about the federal government's view of ordinary Americans. There's nothing new in that federal opinion. Shortly after the original internment camps closed, J. Edgar Hoover conceived a plan called "Security Portfolio," which would have enabled the President to declare a national emergency, suspend the Constitution, and put thousands of people into prison with no trials and no *habeas corpus* rights. It was the beginning of the Cold War against Americans.

Two years later, Congress approved the Security Act of 1950, which also contained an emergency detention plan. Reportedly, Hoover was furious at the plan's "mildness," and continued with more Draconian schemes of his own. The Security Act remained in force for more than 20 years. G. Gordon Liddy reminisces openly about the days when his job in the FBI included keeping tabs on potential internees. Once every three months, Liddy checked the whereabouts of the political agitators on his list so the government could round them up reliably if need be.

During the unrest of the 1960s the federal government again made contingency plans for possible mass roundups of "militants."

Now, unrest stirs anew, and we see this ¾ a leaked memo from C. Dean Rhody, Director of Resource Management for the Department of the Army, July 27, 1994: Enclosed for your review and comment is the draft Army regulation on civilian inmate labor utilization and establishment of prison camps on Army installations. The draft regulation is the compilation of all policy message [sic], Civilian Inmate Labor Oversight Committee policy decisions, and lessons learned to date. The new regulation will provide the following:

- a. Policy for civilian inmate utilization on installations
- b. Procedures for preparing requests to establish civilian inmate labor programs on installations
- c. Procedures for preparing requests to establish civilian prison camps on installations.

The draft plan once attached to the memo has never surfaced. But Congressman Henry Gonzalez of Texas admitted in an interview, "The truth is, yes, you do have these standby provisions... whereby you could, in the name of stopping terrorism... invoke the military and arrest Americans and put them in detention camps."

An agency of control

Whatever agency builds the camps, the rumor mill knows who will operate them: FEMA, the Federal Emergency Management Agency. FEMA, they say, will become dictator of America in a future "emergency." It will hold absolute power over the infrastructure, productive capacity, and citizenry of the country. Whether FEMA will ever do this is an open question. That it has been *granted the (unconstitutional) authority to do so* is fact. FEMA was established entirely by presidential orders ¾ an unconstitutional process itself. Congress offered no advice, consent ¾ or objection. The agency became official when Jimmy Carter signed Executive Order 12148 in 1979, but the concept behind FEMA flowed from the minds of John F. Kennedy and Richard Milhous Nixon. Kennedy signed a series of orders granting the federal government the power to seize a variety of private or local functions in event of emergency. Nixon consolidated and enlarged these powers in 1969 with EO 11490. Gerald Ford later signed EO 11921 which, in the words of Dr. Henry Kliemann, political scientist at Boston University, "... was understood by FEMA to mean that one day they would be in charge of the country. As these bureaucrats saw it, FEMA's real mission was to wait, prepare, and then take over when some 'situation' seemed serious enough to turn the United States into a police state." Once Carter made FEMA official, Ronald Reagan ¾ far from the lovable bumbler he's pictured in retrospect ¾ gave the agency a distinctly paranoid, military slant by appointing as its head General Louis Guiffrida.

Among other qualifications, Guiffrida had written a paper advocating the declaration of martial law in response to black militancy. His plan could have sent millions of blacks to relocation camps. He also wrote: Martial rule comes into existence upon a determination (not a declaration) by the senior military commander that civil government must be replaced because it is no longer functioning, anyway.

Defining "emergency"

Nevertheless, in the public and media mind, FEMA is simply a helpful ¾ though sometimes slow-moving ¾ service organization. It shows up after earthquakes and floods to rescue stranded puppies. It parcels out money so communities can rebuild. Maybe. But FEMA isn't, and never has been, an agency to aid average Americans. FEMA's chief ¾ but largely secret ¾ mission has always been "Continuity of Government." Its job is to make sure that federal control continues at all costs. This has led to construction of dozens of secret underground bunkers, capable of sustaining life for the select few allowed into them. It has led to FEMA budgets in which millions are allocated to disaster relief while billions go to unspecified "other purposes." And that's not to mention the unknown sums in black-budget appropriations the agency receives via the Defense Department. For many years, FEMA denied the existence of its primary bunker, Mount Weather in West Virginia. Even after admitting it was there, they would never disclose its purpose ¾ even to their ostensible bosses in Congress. At 1975 hearings, retired Air Force General Leslie W.

Bray, director of FEMA's predecessor, the Federal Preparedness Agency, stonewalled a U.S. Senate subcommittee, insisting, "I am not at liberty to describe precisely what is the role and the mission and the capability that we have at Mount Weather, or at any other precise location."

However, it's an open secret that an entire parallel ¾ and unelected ¾ government is headquartered at Mount Weather, ready to take over the country in an emergency. Disturbing as this may be to some, most Americans would probably take comfort in the belief that government ¾ any government ¾ would continue in an emergency. But what is an "emergency"? According to Carter's order, it is "...any accidental, natural, man-caused, or wartime emergency or threat thereof, which causes or may cause substantial injury or harm to the population or substantial damage to or loss of property." In other words, an emergency is anything the president *or the director of FEMA* declares it to be. Because to the professionally paranoid, anything ¾ even civil disagreement ¾ can be a threat. It's worth noting that, in the same 1975 hearings at which the Senate failed to learn the purpose of Mount Weather, Senators did learn that: ...the facility held dossiers on at least 100,000 Americans. [Senator] John Tunney later alleged that the Mount Weather computers can obtain millions of pieces of additional information on the personal lives of American citizens simply by tapping the data stored at any of the other ninety-six Federal Relocation Centers.

The subcommittee concluded that Mount Weather's databases "operate with few, if any, safeguards or guidelines." And that was during the ancient history of computer power! ;Bill Clinton has "modernized" FEMA and elevated it to a cabinet-level department. Under his crony-appointee James Lee Witt, FEMA has increasingly insinuated itself into the doings of local governments, pushing them to pass zoning ordinances and even conducting a SWAT-style raid on a county office when agency officials suspected misuse of flood control funds. These are odd roles for a federal emergency management agency.

But what about those camps?

Clinton also signed Executive Order 12919, which authorizes *any* FEMA department head "...to employ persons of outstanding experience and ability without compensation" in event of emergency. And where might these FEMA-commanded slaves, and other political internees, work and live? According to Roland C. Eyears: [FEMA] operates widely dispersed, newly constructed detention facilities which might be mistaken for hospitals. How curious that such activity has become common at closed military bases. Many include rail spurs in a time when there are no legitimate commodities with the bulk and weight which would justify rail hauling.

Unfortunately, Eyears offers no proof of his assertion. But the rumors don't die. There is this, from the Internet: At a dinner following a gun show... [in 1994], a friend introduced me to a trucker... The trucker said that for several years, he'd been making deliveries to a military base in Montana. According to him, the base was one of those that was supposed to have just been closed. Yet, he said, he'd made several deliveries there in just the previous few months. The only difference, he said, was that prior to the "closing" he'd drive on to the base, be directed to a warehouse a few miles away, and would unload at a loading dock. Now, he said, he was being met at the gate and not allowed to drive onto the base. Yes, it's another "friend of a friend" story. However, it's no rumor that Congress has on several occasions proposed to convert closed military bases into prison camps. C. Dean Rhody's memo lends credence to the idea that camps are under construction now. Have FEMA and its partners in the Defense Department simply *done it* using some of those black-budget billions? FEMA bureaucrats may be tempted by the prospect of unlimited power. The standing army, which the founders of the country so passionately warned us against, is casting about for something to do. By profession, both groups have a mindset that envisions danger everywhere. Propaganda keeps Americans in fear of "terrorism." Anyone who speaks out against government abuse is branded an "extremist," a "hate-monger," even a potential terrorist. The demonization is eerily evocative of what the Jews and Japanese-Americans endured long ago. It could happen. But the skeptic still asks, "Where's the proof?"

The road to Heart Mountain

In December 1997, another Internet memo landed on my desk. It listed two dozen allegedly "verified" sites where FEMA labor camps were being built — right now. One camp, the memo said, was at "Hart [*sic*] Mountain, northern Wyoming, renovated WWII Japanese-American special internment detention facility..." We were going to be in that area on a business trip...

So there we were on that January day, my Significant Other and I, our truck bumping over wind-sculpted ice as we followed a local's instructions to "look for the old smokestack on the bluff." We leave Highway Alt. 14 and plow uphill on County Road 19. We rise onto the bluff where the camp was built. And the wind continues to howl across ¾ nothing. A fallow beet field. A realm of snow. To the right, far away, sit four crumbling buildings, all that remain of a city-sized prison. Other structures were sold and hauled away years ago. To the left, a small forest of plaques lies under heaps of white. We get out and brush snow off the plaques. We find years of testimony to guilt and regret. We find honor for the young men who fought for the country that despised them. We find words of useless repentance etched in stone after stone.

Later, we plod through six inches of untracked snow, across the sagebrush plain, to the derelict buildings. According to a map on one of the plaques, these are part of an old administration complex. They're rotting, but curiously untouched by vandals. Doors still swing easily and windows hold fragments of glass. The interior walls, though crumbling, are still institutional green. Next to a disused chimney, a hinged box holds a 50-year-old supply of kindling. And Charles looks up and finds, caught under a light fixture, a scrap of wallpaper as bright in this dry climate as it must have been in 1942. Green leaves and red roses. But there's nothing here to renovate. And the only new buildings are far away ¾ prosperous farms profiting from land the internees made fertile. There's certainly no plank-and-barbed-wire concentration camp waiting to receive another group of demonized Americans. No U.N. troops standing guard. No FEMA bureaucrats waiting to implant biochips in incoming prisoners. There's nothing human at Heart Mountain. The ghosts themselves have blown away. Yet, as we turn to begin the long, bleak drive back to Montana, I can't help but remember that the federal government housed them all in barns ¾ all those tens of thousands of Americans ¾ as it waited for the camps to be hammered together. Troops rounded them up and took them to fairgrounds before the camps were ready. All it requires to turn a fairground into a prison is a few cots, while they wait for something more permanent. All it took to provide the wartime permanence of Heart Mountain was two months of construction.

And we, of course, have something America didn't have in World War II — dozens of demilitarized military bases scattered all around the country — barracks, barbed wire, checkpoints and all. Waiting. I feel silly having pursued a chimera down the Wyoming winds. But at the same time, I don't feel safe. Or free. The camps may no longer stand on the cold deserts of Wyoming or the shimmering deserts of Arizona. But they're there. In the executive orders. In the plans. In the memos. In the minds of those with a will to control. It's a will that has swelled through

50 additional years of unchecked power. A will that will burn children and shoot mothers and say the innocents were to blame for their own destruction. A will that engineers the survival of government while treating free people as resources or enemies. Next time, I fear, wind and loss won't be our worst punishments.

For more information on FEMA:

FEMA: The Secret Government, by Harry V. Martin <http://www.sonic.net/sentinel/gvcon6.html>

And for the official, sanitized view, FEMA's own web site: <http://www.fema.gov>