

This excerpt is from *Waging Peace: The Main Line's War Resisters of the 1940s Have No Regrets*

J.F. Pirro July 8, 2011



Of the 35 million men who registered for the draft in the 1940s, 12,000 were war resisters, and more than half of those served prison terms—instead of their country—during the “Good War.” Many had connections to this area, and the few who are alive today harbor no regrets.

One-time war resister Toshiyuki Fukushima at home in Swarthmore. (Photo by Jared Castaldi)

Growing up in this country, Toshiyuki Fukushima was convinced that a Japanese-American boy was expected to thrive at either judo or fencing. But, from the get-go, Fukushima didn’t enjoy hand-to-hand combat. Bigger and taller than most kids his age, he quit after the first year. Years later, his experience with Quakers reaffirmed his pacifism.

This was prior to World War II, when the Japanese weren’t considered peace-loving types. Soon enough, they’d be the outright aggressors. Fukushima was drafted before the war. Then, after the bombing of Pearl Harbor and the installation of Japanese-American internment camps, he was suddenly classified 4C—undesirable. “We didn’t ask for it or petition for it,” says Fukushima.

Now 89 and living in Swarthmore, Fukushima recalls only a few other Japanese-Americans during his time in Civilian Public Service, an alternative to combat during the war. He remembers the public’s abrupt and drastic change of heart toward Japanese-Americans, the dire circumstances surrounding it, and the questionnaire issued to solicit help from Fukushima and others in his predicament. Two of its questions have stayed with him all these years. One: Will you serve in the military of the United States? The other: Do you forswear allegiance to the emperor of Japan?

World War II was called the “Good War” because of its objectives: halting Hitler’s tyrannical, fascist regime, and retaliation for the surprise attack on Pearl Harbor. Among the 35 million men who registered for the draft, 12,000 were war resisters like Fukushima. Among those ranks, 6,086 conscientious

objectors (COs) served prison terms, as opposed to their country. Fukushima and the rest served in CPS assignments. A good number—some still living—have local ties.

The Selective Training and Service Act of 1940 was the basis for both compulsory military service and legal recognition of COs, who “by reason of religious training and belief were conscientiously opposed to participation in war in any form.” Instead, they were assigned noncombat military service or “work of national importance” under civilian direction.

Fukushima spent one day in court and never served a prison term. But he did endure a year and a half in internment camps and more than a year of CPS duty. After V-J Day, he asked to be transferred to a veterans’ psychiatric hospital under the auspices of the Brethren Church in Lyons, N.J., where he was an orderly. A few months passed, and Fukushima decided he’d had enough. He walked out. “I said, ‘This is ridiculous,’” he recounts.

When the government caught up with him, he was served a U.S. District Court summons. “I was prepared to go to prison,” Fukushima says.

Instead, the judge concluded that Fukushima had been through enough and didn’t deserve a sentence. “If you’re doing civil disobedience, you have to make your intentions well known. You don’t hide it,” Fukushima says. “If you do it, and no one acknowledges it, then it served no purpose.”

A 1951 Swarthmore College graduate, Fukushima taught chemistry there from 1956 to 1961. He then moved to Drexel University before landing in aerodynamic analytical design in Boeing’s helicopter division. “Fortunately, I didn’t work on any gunships,” he says.

Fukushima’s association with Swarthmore makes sense. The Swarthmore College Peace Collection pays homage to him and other war resisters. Housed in the basement of the school’s McCabe Library, it includes more than 200 major manuscript groupings, 3,000 smaller document sets, 12,000 books and pamphlets, 400 current periodicals, 3,000-plus backdated periodical titles, 1,700 reels of microfilm, and at least 20,000 photos of peace leaders, demonstrations, marches and conferences.

The collection was established around 1930, when Jane Addams of Hull House, one of Chicago’s oldest and largest social and human service agencies, donated her peace and social justice ephemera. It remains a repository for the records of nongovernmental organizations and individuals who’ve worked for nonviolent social change, disarmament and peaceful conflict resolution. The material covers pacifism, conscientious objection, civil disobedience, internationalism, progressivism, African-American protest, feminism and the history of social work.

Toshiyuki Fukushima also battled his share of race and peace demons. When he turned 18 in 1939, he registered for the draft. But after Pearl Harbor, he was among 120,000 Japanese-Americans evacuated from the West Coast and sent to live in internment camps. Then a University of Washington sophomore, Fukushima joined his mother in a parking lot. “Typical Army barracks,” he recalls. “Walls but no roof.”

When he left the camp, Fukushima was still under the jurisdiction of the War Relocation Authority. In the summer of 1943, he came to Philadelphia to work for the Student Relocation Committee, since he couldn’t yet re-enroll in school. He was assigned to live in Mt. Airy with Quakers Reid and Margaret Cary—the latter whose son, Steve, was an assistant director at Big Flats, a Friends CPS camp in New York—and would become vice president at Haverford College. A Haverford graduate, Reid was assistant

to the executive secretary of the AFSC and a liaison to the Student Relocation Committee. Margaret, a noted entomologist, was a Bryn Mawr alum.

Fukushima was working as a draftsman for Kellett Aircraft Corp. when the government changed its mind about second-generation Japanese-Americans. In the winter of 1944, he answered his draft notice with a petition as a CO. It was granted, and he was assigned to Big Flats. He remained there until the spring of 1945, doing “work of national importance,” he jests.

In the winter, he shoveled snow. In the spring, he worked at a tree nursery. At another Friends CPS camp in Tennessee, he cleared trails in the Great Smoky Mountains. Then he volunteered to go to Welfare Island, N.Y. (now called Roosevelt Island), in the middle of East River, for two stints in the government’s Life Raft Experiment. He took in 400 calories a day and gave daily blood and urine samples to help determine the minimum number of calories needed to survive. He was there when V-J Day was announced.

In 2008, the University of Washington finally honored Fukushima and 446 other once-evacuated Japanese-Americans with honorary degrees. He calls resistance a personal choice, though he admits it takes enormous courage to refuse to fight.

“This country has its problems, but I don’t know of any other place I’d want to live,” he says.