

Armed Guards and Towers

When the initial prisoners arrived at Heart Mountain, the barbed wire fence intended to keep the internees from leaving was not finished. The internees created a petition protesting the construction of the barbed wire fencing, which garnered 3000 signatures, and in November 1942, it was submitted to WRA Director, Dillon Meyer. Although this delayed the project, the fence was still completed by December. The inmates at the camp found the Army's justification for erecting the barbed wire fence to be suspect, to say the least. In the petition the internees signed, they noted that the fence proved that Heart Mountain was not simply a relocation center, but a concentration camp, and the Japanese Americans were essentially prisoners of war.

In addition to the imposing barbed wire fencing that surrounded the perimeter of the camp, there were also nine guard towers spread throughout the camp. This provided the guards with a higher vantage point, which allowed them to more effectively watch over the internees at all times. Although these guard towers were physically imposing, their presence also created another psychological facet to the Japanese Americans' internment. Given their cramped living quarters, privacy was already a relic of the past, but the guard towers only further increased the lack of privacy felt by Heart Mountain internees, as there were eyes on them at all times.

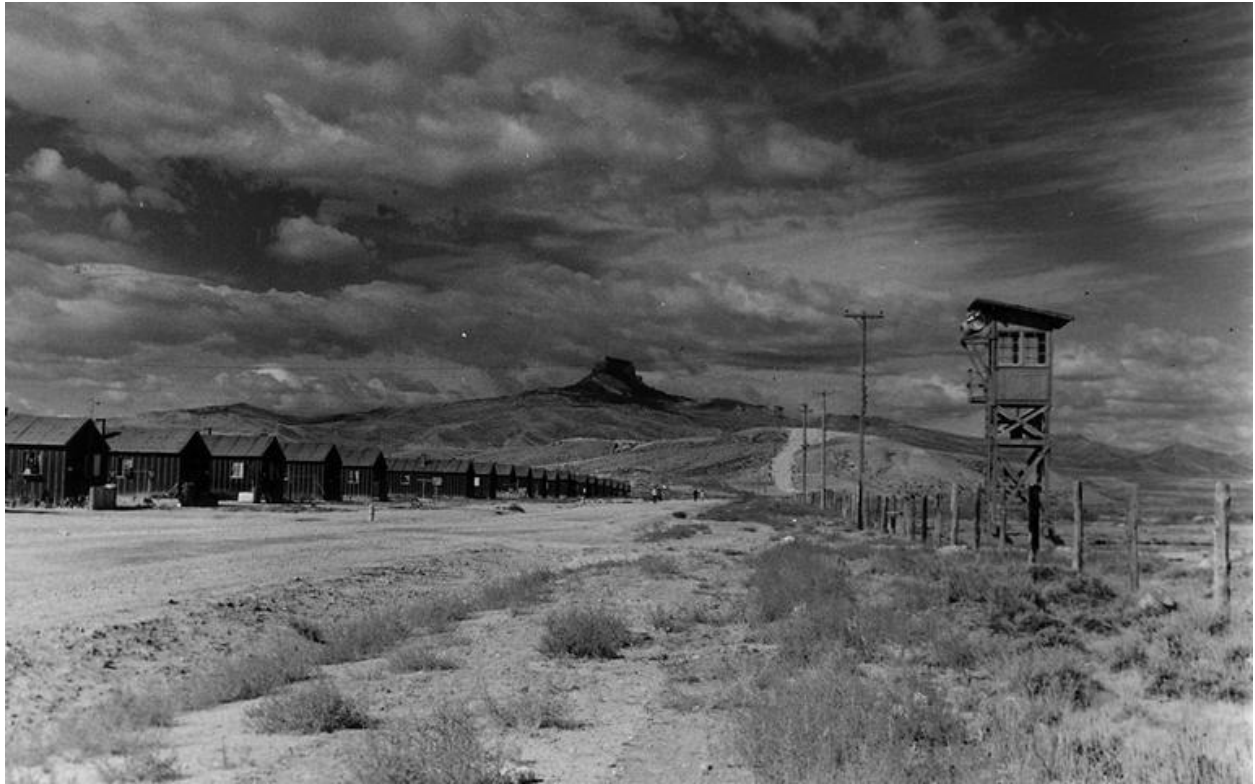
The internees at Heart Mountain did not often interact with the guards, as even their eating facilities and places of worship were kept segregated from each other. Although they lived closely together within the confines of the camp, internees and guards were not typically on a first name basis with one another. The fact that guards often rotated in and out of the camp did not lend itself to much social interaction between the two groups.

Historical images



Young girl near guard tower, May 31, 1944, Heart Mountain concentration camp, Wyoming.
Courtesy of the Heart Mountain Wyoming Foundation and Yoshio Okumoto

Link: <https://encyclopedia.densho.org/sources/en-ddr-hmwf-1-15-1/>



A Japanese internment camp guard tower at Heart Mountain. (National Archives)

Link: <https://www.wbur.org/onpoint/2011/08/26/internment-examined>



One of nine guard towers on the perimeter of the Heart Mountain Relocation Center.

Source: Mackey, Mike. *Heart Mountain: Life in Wyoming's Concentration Camp*. Second ed. Powell, WY: Western History Publications, 2000.

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