

'Message of Faith,' Spirit in Memorial WWII-era Japanese-Americans honored

Faiza Rahman
June 30, 2001

Japanese-Americans who fought in World War II and those who were sent to internment camps were honored Friday at a ceremony to mark the opening of a national memorial to their service.

The afternoon event took place as Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi was scheduled to arrive in Washington for a working visit with President George W. Bush.

The National Japanese American Memorial, between Union Station and the Capitol, consists of granite walls listing more than 800 Japanese-American soldiers killed during WWII. It also includes the names of the 10 internment camps and statements about Japanese-American history by Sen. Daniel Inouye (D-Hawaii) and Harry Truman, among others. Encircled within the walls is a 14-foot-tall bronze statue of two cranes struggling through barbed wire. In front of the walled area is a pool of moving water with five large rocks symbolizing the five Japanese islands.

The memorial has been in the making since 1988 after Congress passed an official apology to victims of the interment and entitled former internees to \$20,000 each. In 1992, former President George Bush allocated federal land to the National Japanese American Memorial Foundation for the project. Since then, the foundation has raised \$8.6 million for the project, foundation spokeswoman Jennifer Devlin said. The memorial officially was dedicated in November.

Among the prominent Japanese-American officials who participated in Friday's ceremony were Rep. Robert Matsui (D-Calif.), Inouye and Transportation Secretary Norman Mineta. They spoke of their experiences in the 1940s.

Matsui and Mineta were among the 120,000 Japanese-Americans sent to internment camps by the federal government during World War II. Inouye served alongside 30,000 other Japanese-Americans in the war. He was one of the 20 Japanese-Americans honored earlier this year with a Medal of Honor for his service.

Matsui specifically honored the original Japanese immigrant generation called the "Issei," the American-born generation called the "Nisei" and the Japanese-Americans who fought despite the prejudice against them at the time.

"At no other time in history have we seen such courage, such strength and such patriotism," he said.

Mineta said the memorial also symbolizes the Japanese-American spirit. "The message of this memorial is not just one of tragedy - it is a message of faith," he said.

