

Japanese in the U.S.

Department of the Interior
War Relocation Authority - Northern California Area
Sheldon Building - 461 Market Street
San Francisco, California

SPEECH BY CAPTAIN THOMAS E. CROWLEY

Over three and one-half years ago we were stunned to learn that Japan was suddenly returning our scrap iron with dividends. The ignominy and disgrace of our initial defeat seared the heart of each of us. Our enemies had struck the first blow without warning. We were irrevocably committed to take up the challenge. And we did. All of us.

From every corner of America came her sons and daughters to serve in whatever capacity the government deemed necessary, whether it be at sea, or in the air -- at a machine gun, or at a punch press.

The common denominator of victory is teamwork -- cooperation on the part of every citizen. As it must be, for every American is directly concerned. The declaration of the four freedoms by our late President was not intended for any specially designated or privileged group of Americans; they are the precious heritage of all Americans and must be defended by all Americans for all Americans.

Today I want to tell you a little bit about what a certain group of Americans have thus far accomplished in this war: the Americans of Japanese ancestry.

Prior to the outbreak of hostilities very little, if any, attention was paid to this minority group. They operated their businesses and farms and lived their lives in apparent obscurity. Until December 7th, 1941.

To describe the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor and the Philippines as deceitful, or a flagrant outrageous treachery is indeed too insufficient to give expression to the anger that surged within us at that time. Every attendant circumstance only served to further shock our traditional American spirit of fair play. We were bitter; and let us admit the facts openly. The feeling of disappointment, discouragement and seemingly utter helplessness fanned us into a hateful rage against this despicable enemy. We were not in a position at that time to strike back. Instead we were beset by a thousand fears. In the minds of all of us one fact stood out: What about our West Coast?-- it might be attacked next. The confusion as to what happened at Pearl Harbor bred real suspicion against all Orientals -- a suspicion that flamed all the brighter in the nightly blackouts and dark uncertainty.

Suspicion soon fades without an object on which it can fasten itself. And what more opportune object of suspicion could there be than the people of Japanese ancestry who dwelled, for the most part, on our vulnerable West Coast? The howl and cry against Japanese Americans swept through the Western States. The fact that immigrants of Japanese ancestry were barred by law from becoming citizens of this country, and therefor had settled in the agricultural regions along the West Coast, was lost sight of when reasoned opinion succumbed to the more pleasurable and very human luxury of slanderous and defamatory rumors. It is impossible to over-estimate the resistance of the human cranium to undesirable facts. No doubt about it -- these people had been infiltrating our West Coast with an overwhelming singleness of purpose: to prepare the way for a Japanese invasion of our homeland.

We know what happened. There were murmurings and outbreaks of violence against these people, who were so easily detected by their characteristics. Thus, both as a matter of national security as well as affording personal protection to the Japanese Americans themselves, there followed a mass exodus of over 100,000 Americans of Japanese ancestry from their homes and farms to the various War Relocation Centers. And everyone breathed a little easier.

I think it might be better to describe these relocation centers as the streets of forgotten dreams and smashed hopes and utter disillusionment. Home and its happiness is just as real and present and desirable to the Japanese American as it is to any other man. Over two-thirds of the persons relocated were American born, and therefor citizens of this country. For the moment we had all forgotten that 150 years ago men of every nation in Europe had banded together in North America to fight for the guaranties of freedom for minorities, for race and for creed.

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Keeping in mind this background, let's examine the record and find out what these people did for America in this war -- these citizens of the United States whose loyalty was so universally the object of doubt and mistrust.

The 442nd Combat Team was formed at Camp Shelby, Mississippi, in February of 1943. It consisted of a regiment of infantry, a battalion of Artillery and a company of Engineers. The personnel of this combat team was composed entirely of Japanese Americans, save for several of the officers, like myself. Its personnel numbered in the neighborhood of five thousand officers and men. About twenty eight hundred of these men came from Hawaii. All were volunteers - for the selective service had, shortly after the outbreak of war, ceased drafting citizens of Japanese ancestry. The other half volunteered from the various relocation centers. The opportunity to serve in the armed forces, so long denied these men, was most welcome. It helped immeasurably to restore their confidence.

To those of us who were engaged in training this unit, it soon became apparent that this outfit was entirely different from any group of soldiers with whom we had previously been associated. There was no haranguing by the officers and sergeants to take this business seriously -- as was the order of the day in other outfits. These men put every ounce of sincere energy which they could muster into their training. They wanted to be the very best soldiers in the army. They wanted to show the rest of America that the Japanese Americans were doing their part; that they were just as loyal as anyone else.

And prove it they did! At Camp Shelby was also located another battalion of Japanese American Infantry, the now famous 100th Battalion. It was composed of Japanese American members of the Hawaiian Territorial Guard. In June of 1943 this Battalion embarked for Africa and first went into action in Italy in the mountains above Salerno, as a part of the well-known 34th Division - the Red Bull Division - the division which has seen more action in this war than any other division in the Army. The 100th Infantry saw heavy action all the way up the Italian boot to Cassino, the Anzio Beachhead, and to Rome. It spearheaded the bloody crossing of the Volturno River, a famous milestone on the road to Rome. And distinguished itself again in the crossing of the Rapido against bitter enemy opposition.

During this time the 442nd Combat Team was completing its training at Camp Shelby, and also served as a source of replacements for the 100th Infantry whose losses were heavy. In April of 1944 the 442nd Combat Team left Camp Shelby to embark for Italy. And in June the 100th Infantry joined the 442nd as its first Battalion. There the entire Combat Team entered battle in the vicinity of Grosseto and spearheaded the Fifth Army drive up to the Arno River, fighting enroute the bloody battle of Belvedere, which earned a Presidential citation for the 100th Infantry -- capturing such strongholds of the Germans as the great port of Leghorn which was so badly needed by the Fifth Army as a supply point -- Cecina -- Castellina -- San Luce -- crossing the Arno River and breaching the defenses of Pisa.

At this point, the Combat Team, having fought up in Italy, a distance of over sixty miles in thirty days, earned a much needed rest as well as the admiration of the rest of the soldiers of the Fifth Army who had witnessed its splendid performance. And it also earned something else -- the jibes of Axis Sally, the well-known German radio commentator who broadcast daily to the Allied troops. The 442nd had become an object of attention by the Germans. It was during this rest period that General Clark and King George of England personally reviewed the Combat Team. General Clark presented the Presidential Citation.

Again into the line for a month, this time further inland -- on the Arno River near Florence, where the regiment forced another crossing of the river and drove the enemy to his winter line in the Appenines.

At the end of September the Combat Team departed from Italy and sailed to Marseilles from whence it moved up north to the vicinity of Epinal, France, where it was part of the Seventh Army and was attached to the 36th Division. On October 14, the Regiment attacked in the forested mountains of the Vosges, again acting as a spearhead, which seemed to be the reward of combat efficiency.

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It was here that military precedents fell like Germans. Never before in history had the Vosges been cleared in a military operation -- and this in the face of an enemy who fought with the determination and fanaticism born of the knowledge that only his Fatherland lay behind him. Every inch of ground was bitterly contested and our losses were heavy. The campaign was highlighted by the spectacular rescue by the Japanese Americans of a Battalion of the 36th Division which had been cut off for several days without food, water, or ammunition. It is significant to note that during these seven days the Regiment fought unceasingly day and night to effect this rescue, suffering a casualty rate which was triple the total number of the soldiers rescued. Our Japanese boys lived the most famous of the Commandments: "Greater love than this hath no man, that he lay down his life for his friends." The hills in the vicinity of LaCrossette are red with the blood of hundreds of Japanese Americans who were killed and wounded in their valiant struggle to free their comrades.

After over a month of steady fighting in difficult weather and obstinate terrain, the Regiment was relieved and sent down to southern France to hold the line near the French-Italian border in the Maritime Alps. It was relatively a quiet sector and afforded us an opportunity to lick our wounds and recoup our losses. When the Regiment had been built up to full strength again, it was relieved, sent to Marseilles, and thence back to Italy, where a new and important assignment awaited.

Briefly it was this: the Regiment was to launch a heavy attack along the Ligurian Coast sector of the Fifth Army front for the purpose of drawing enemy troops away from the center of the line. And so before dawn on the fifth of April the Regiment attacked, capturing Mount Belvedere which more than one division had attempted to take at various times throughout the winter. By a brilliant maneuver, one battalion of the regiment succeeded in getting in behind the enemy under cover of darkness, thereby throwing him into complete disorganization. Town after town along the sea coast fell to the Regiment's steady advance: Massa, Carrara, the great Naval Base of LaSpezia. The feint to the left worked perfectly - as did a similar British maneuver on the Adriatic - so that by the fifteenth of April the Fifth and Eighth Armies were able to launch the main drive and thus punch through the center at Bologna bringing the war in Italy to a rapid and successful conclusion.

There you have an overall picture of the part played by this Japanese American Combat Team in the European Theatre where it spent over 230 days in front line combat.

What about the individuals who built this glorious battle record by their valor and blood alone? Their achievements are mirrored by the spectacular record of the Regiment which has come to be known as one of the most decorated units in the history of the United States Army. Their loyalty is unquestioned. I have with me a letter written by Colonel James Hanley of our Regiment - it was written last winter in the mountains in France at a time when the outfit was recovering from the terrific fighting in the Vosges mountains. It was written to the publisher of the Mandan Pioneer in Mandan, North Dakota in response to a clipping from that paper sent by the publisher to Colonel Hanley.***

***extract from the "Mandan Pioneer":

"A squib in a paper makes the statement that there are some good Jap Americans in this country -- but it didn't say where they are buried."

"Dear Charlie,

Just received the Pioneer of Jan 20 and noted the paragraph enclosed.

Yes, Charlie, I know where there are some good Japanese Americans -- there are some 5000 of them in this unit; they are American soldiers -- and I know where some of them are buried. I wish I could show you some of them, Charlie. I remember one Japanese American. He was walking ahead of me in a forest in France. A German shell took the right side of his face off. I recall another boy -- an 33 had been trying to get us for some time -- finally got him. When they carried him out on a stretcher the bloody meat from the middle of the thighs hung down over the end of the stretcher and dragged in the dirt. The bone parts were gone.

I recall a Sergeant, a Japanese American if you will, who had his back blown in two. What was he doing? Why he was only lying on top of a white officer who had

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been wounded, to protect him from shell fragments during a barrage. I recall one of my boys who stopped a German counter-attack single-handed. He fired all his BAR ammunition, picked up a German rifle, emptied that, used a German Luger Pistol he had taken from a prisoner!

I wish I could tell you the number of Japanese Americans who have died in this unit alone. I wish I could tell you the number of wounded we have had -- the sightless eyes, the missing hands, the broken minds. I wish I could tell you the decorations we have won.

I wish the boys in the 'Lost Battalion' could tell you what they think of Japanese Americans. I wish that all the troops we have fought beside could tell you what they know.

The marvel is, Charlie, that the boys fight at all. They are good soldiers in spite of the type of racial prejudice shown by your paragraph.

I know it makes a good joke -- but it is the kind of joke that prejudice thrives upon. It shows a lack of faith in the American idea. Our system is supposed to make a good American out of anyone. It certainly has done it in the case of these boys.

Some people make one wonder just what we are fighting for. I hope it isn't racial prejudice.

Come on over here, Charlie, I'll show you where some 'good Jap-Americans' are buried.

J. M. HANLEY
Hq 442nd Inf,
c/o PM, NY, NY."

Before I finish I feel that I must tell you the story of one Japanese American who at one time was in my company - Pfc Murakami.

It was on the Arno River near Florence. We were on the south side of the river; the Germans held the north. The enemy artillery was particularly harassing and deadly. Private Murakami volunteered to cross the river in an effort to spot German gun flashes at night from a more advantageous position, but very dangerous. He did so -- occupying a house on the German side, and radioed back the location of gun flashes so that we could bring counter battery to bear on the enemy. He did an excellent job; but in the course of it he was seriously wounded by shrapnel. He knew the value of his mission, and in spite of his wounds, stayed on, and kept calling back gun flashes while he bled to death. We found his body later, still clutching his portable radio. A hero? One of Americas finest. Yet his achievement was a daily occurrence in the lives of his generously courageous comrades. It stands out in my memory because I knew him very well, and because he died.

At the time I left the Regiment this summer to come home, I had no idea that I would have the opportunity of bringing their story to you. When the chance came I eagerly accepted, because I want everyone to know that the Japanese Americans formed one of the finest Combat Units in the Army.

On their behalf I ask you not to deprive them of the very thing they have fought so valiantly for: equal opportunity among their fellow citizens for themselves and their families.

The abolition of race prejudice is one of the things America entered this war to effect. The preservation of liberty and justice for all at home as well as abroad is one of the goals for which we have been striving - not only the Japanese Americans, but every American citizen who fought and died thus far in this war. I urge you to keep faith with them.

The unfortunate circumstances of this war plus the raucous cries of a few loud-mouthed bigots have worked hand in hand to paint a dismal future for these people. Now they shattered the ill-founded suspicions and have demonstrated their loyalty to a degree beyond question.

Now that these people are returning from the War Relocation Centers, help them to carry on where they left off. Many of them will return to the West Coast, for this is home. Do all in your power to see that they are extended the same constitutional guaranties as are other minority groups. When you discover or hear of the

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right of free enterprise being denied them, or of boycotts being enforced against them, or of unthinking acts of violence directed against them, let your voice be heard, and loudly, in declaiming race bigotry.

Intolerance is the mother of crime. I urge you not to be afraid to speak up for them. Public opinion can be either a man's strongest ally or his worst enemy. I urge you to remember the hundreds of Japanese Americans who died on the battle field in our war - thousands more who were wounded in our war. I saw no differences in color between the blood of Japanese Americans and the blood of other American soldiers as it flowed on the ground in Italy and in France that Freedom might live.

Before you lend a willing ear to the evil babbling of the exponent of race prejudice who erroneously styles himself an American ask yourselves what he has done for our country in this war. In the words of the Greatest of Generals, "Let him who is without sin cast the first stone."

/s/ Thomas E. Crowley
Capt. Inf.

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