

STATEMENT TO THE COMMISSION
ON WARTIME RELOCATION AND INTERNMENT OF CIVILIANS
GENERAL MARK W. CLARK, UNITED STATES ARMY, RETIRED

Washington, D. C.

July 14, 1981

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Madame Chairwoman and Members of the Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians:

While age and health reasons prevent my testifying in person before this Commission, I cannot allow this opportunity again to pay tribute to the Japanese Americans who served in World War II to pass without some words of recognition. Accordingly I am submitting this brief statement for the record.

Although 38 years is quite a long time ago, and I do not have documents available to me, my memories of their gallantry under extraordinary circumstances, especially in Italy, remain among my most cherished recollections.

To begin with, though, I would be remiss if I failed to mention and do honor to the many thousands of Japanese Americans who served in the Pacific in World War II, mostly as language and intelligence specialists. They were not just desk soldiers and many served in the front lines, some even behind enemy lines. Because they happened to look like the Japanese enemy, theirs must have been an especially difficult and dangerous task. But their services were so effective that General Willoughby, General MacArthur's Chief of Intelligence, estimated that the Nisei shortened the Pacific War by two years and saved possibly millions of American casualties and billions of dollars.

However, the Japanese American troops whom I knew best and who served under my command in the Fifth Army during World War II were those of the 442nd Regimental Combat Team, and it is of them that I shall comment principally.

The Nisei advance guard, as it were, was the 100th Infantry Battalion, organized in Hawaii of former Japanese American National Guardsmen. It entered combat in Italy in September 1943 and distinguished itself from the beginning.

Later, while retaining its proud name, the 100th became the First Battalion of the 442nd Infantry Regiment, with members of the original battalion becoming the replacement unit for the newly activated 442nd.

As some may recall, following the outbreak of war, the Selective Service System decided not to induct qualified Japanese Americans, especially since most of those on the continental mainland were evacuated from their homes and associations on the West Coast of the United States because of--as was determined later--unfounded suspicion that some of them might be disloyal.

Thousands of Japanese Americans both in the then Territory of Hawaii and the mainland resented this attitude and volunteered to fight--and, if necessary, to die for their country.

In response to this mass appeal, on January 22, 1943, the Department of War authorized the formation of an all-volunteer Japanese American Combat Team, to be activated at Camp Shelby, Mississippi, on February 1, which would be composed of the 442nd Infantry Regiment, the 522nd Field Artillery Battalion, the 232nd Combat Engineer Company, and the 206th Army Ground Forces Band.

President Franklin D. Roosevelt approved this action, declaring, "...No loyal citizen of the United States should be denied the democratic right to exercise the responsibilities of his citizenship, regardless of his ancestry. The principle on which this country was founded and by which it has always been governed is that Americanism is a matter of the mind and the heart;

Americanism is not, and never was, a matter of race or ancestry. A good American is one who is loyal to this country and to our creed of liberty and democracy..."

In any event, while many thousands from Hawaii volunteered, so did thousands from the ten wilderness War Relocation Centers to which they had been evacuated in the spring of 1942 because of suspected disloyalty. These young volunteers decided to prove in battle that they were loyal Americans, and to earn for themselves and their posterity their place in America for all time to come. Over the objections of many who wished to use them in non-combatant services and to mix them into other units, they succeeded in obtaining their desire--a Japanese American combat regiment.

As their team motto, they adopted a slang phrase: "Go For Broke", a gambler's term "to shoot the works", "to go all out to win", now an often-used expression of Americana. And "Go For Broke" they did, becoming in the words of Chief of Staff Marshall, "the most decorated unit in American military history for its size and length of service".

On July 15, 1946, President Harry Truman reviewed elements of the 442nd, then known as the "Christmas Tree Regiment" because of its many decorations and awards. In a little more than two years, this unit had participated in seven major campaigns in Italy and France, received seven Presidential Distinguished Unit Citations, suffered 9,486 casualties, and was awarded 18,143 individual decorations, according to the Final Report on Special Groups of the Selective Service System. Its original strength was about 3,500 men.

In affixing the seventh Presidential Distinguished Unit ribbon to the colors of the 442nd on the White House mall, President Truman said, "I think Americanism is not a matter of race or creed, but of the heart. You fought not only the enemy, but prejudice--and you won."

I was honored to have the 442nd Regimental Combat Team under my command in Italy until September 1944 when, to my regret, I lost them to my friend General Eisenhower for the landing in Southern France. In that theater, as they had done in the Mediterranean, they performed superbly, climaxed by their rescue in the Vosges Mountains of Northeastern France of the so-called Lost Third Battalion of the 141st Regiment of the 36th Texas Division. In this single action, which has been recognized as one of the "greatest" land battles in American history, more than 75% of these infantrymen committed to the rescue effort were either killed or wounded.

To my great satisfaction, and upon my personal appeal to General Eisenhower, the 442nd Infantry was returned to me early in 1945 and performed some of their most distinguished service in the foothills of the Apuan Alps, thereby contributing much to victory in that sector of the European war.

Many veterans of the 442nd, and many other Japanese Americans, also served with equal distinction under my United Nations Command in the Korean War, as they subsequently did in Viet Nam under other commanders.

The heroic exploits of the Japanese American soldier, especially in World War II, should be an inspiration to all of what courage, loyalty, honesty, and devotion to America and its democratic ideals can achieve--for Japanese Americans have triumphed over bigotry and prejudice, eliminated discriminatory legislation and practices, and secured new opportunities and dignity for themselves and their children.

I doubt that all this could have been accomplished in a few short years without the spectacular battle performance of Nisei GIs in the service of our country. By its very nature, the invaluable service of Japanese Americans in intelligence activities in the Pacific War could not have become well-known until after the war's end and much of it is still classified information.

On the other hand, the well-publicized bravery, dedication, and brilliant achievements of the 442nd Regimental Combat Team aroused the admiration of the American public at the time and brought home the fact that Japanese Americans too were loyal citizens and could and would fight for our country at least as well as any others. It was the spearhead of the effort to demonstrate beyond all doubt that those of Japanese origin in this nation had earned their right to be respected as Americans by their fellow citizens. It is not too much to say that within the space of a few months this small military unit convinced most Americans of their individual merit as citizens.

When it is recalled that many of these Japanese American volunteers for military service had fathers and mothers, and brothers and sisters, in these so-called detention camps, and when it is emphasized that the F.B.I., Navy Intelligence, and Army Intelligence today admit that there was not a single case of espionage or sabotage against the United States by any person of Japanese ancestry resident in this country before, during, and after December 7, 1941, I hope and trust that this Commission will find that a grave injustice was done to a very patriotic sector of our population and that early and appropriate remedies will be provided to those Japanese Americans who suffered and sacrificed much solely on account of their race and accident of birth.

May I conclude this statement by thanking the Commission for inviting my comments concerning Japanese American troops in World War II and by repeating the words of our then Commander-In-Chief, "Americanism is a matter of the mind and the heart; Americanism is not, and never was, a matter of race or ancestry!"

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