

JOHN J. McCLOY
ONE CHASE MANHATTAN PLAZA
NEW YORK, N. Y. 10005

July 24, 1981

Mr. Paul T. Bannai, Executive Director
Commission On Wartime Relocation and
Internment of Civilians
726 Jackson Place, N. W. - Suite 2020
Washington, D. C. 20506

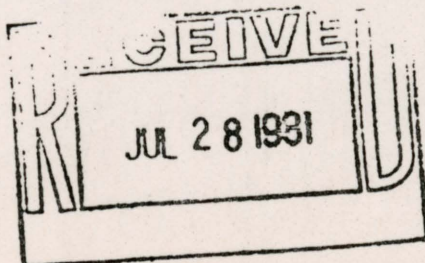
Dear Mr. Bannai:

Thank you for your letter of June 22nd. Due to the shortness of notice following my return from abroad, it was difficult for me to alter my schedule so as to enable me to appear on the first dates set for Commission testimony. I would, of course, be pleased to accept your invitation at a later date if you felt my appearance would be desirable. I regret this as I think the initial testimony, from the press accounts I have read, lacked proper perspective and ignored many important facts surrounding the Japanese relocation program.

In the meantime, in accordance with your suggestion, I am sending you this letter both to notify you of my willingness to appear before the Commission and to give you some of my present thinking regarding the subject matter of the Commission's investigation.

As your investigation probably already has disclosed, I had much to do with the early aspects of the relocation program while I was The Assistant Secretary of War following the Pearl Harbor attack. Among other things it is important to keep in mind it was a relocation program and not an internment or punitive measure. In some respects it was one of the most challenging problems with which the War Department had to deal during my wartime service with the government.

However, the events surrounding this action occurred so long ago -- some forty years in fact -- that I greatly fear any investigation of them now cannot reproduce the atmosphere, conditions and considerations which obtained at the time and which induced the action taken by the government. Without this perspective I do not believe any objective investigation can be undertaken.



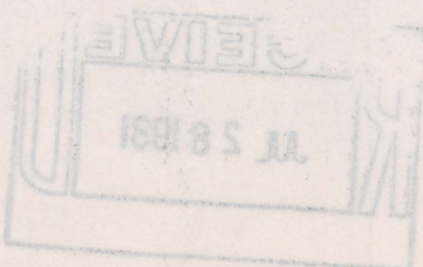
In the first place, the shock of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor and its devastating results can now be described but I doubt they can really be felt as they were then. Our entire battle fleet had been obliterated at one blow, delivered in the form of this outrageous surprise attack. With it our defenses throughout the Pacific from Hawaii to our West Coast suddenly became seriously impaired. This was, of course, the object of the attack. To put it mildly, our sense of security was stunned and, coming at a time when we were greatly preoccupied by the aggressions of another great power on the Atlantic side of the world, the implications were far reaching. In fact, Hitler's Germany declared war on this country practically simultaneously with the Japanese attack.

Over a substantial period of years the West Coast and, indeed, the entire country, had been agitated over the steady expansion of Japanese power in the Pacific. The nature of the so-called "Yellow Peril" had long been the subject of press comment on the West Coast while clear evidence of active Japanese aggression prior to Pearl Harbor stirred more immediate and substantially sharpened concern.

By chance, I was the only senior official in the War Department that Sunday morning when the news of the attack arrived and I immediately began doing what I could to implement plans for the security of the nation's capital which this startling event demanded. Shortly thereafter, urgent reports of the concern of the West Coast for its safety began to come in. These reports were addressed to the White House, the Congress and other government agencies, including, of course, the War Department.

Governor Warren of the State of California wired and phoned his anxiety for the security of his state. The Commanding General of the Department of which the West Coast was a part, General DeWitt, shortly called attention to the threat presented by the concentrated Japanese-descended population on the West Coast. As I recall it, General DeWitt subsequently notified the War Department that he could not accept responsibility for the security of the area he commanded unless steps were promptly taken to control this population with its threat of subversive action. I think it was possibly this accident of my being present at the Pentagon that morning dealing with local security problems which caused my subsequent involvement in the security problems of the West Coast.

This is not the time to recount all the pressures and considerations which set in motion the government's relocation program, even if it were possible to do so. I do recall that among



other conditions which had to be taken into account was the need for the protection of the Japanese population from possible local disorders, demonstrations and reprisals. Reports came in of barn burnings and other disturbances in the agricultural areas where a large part of the Japanese population was concentrated. Pressures on the White House and the Department increased. The Department of Justice and the Attorney General, Mr. Francis Biddle, and members of his staff were called in by the White House to give thought and advice on the legal authority to take the security moves which were being urged as well as to give guidance to those who might be called upon to implement the relocation process after the President's decision had been made. President Roosevelt, Secretary Stimson and Attorney General Biddle were all very much involved in the problems the situation presented and all were, at the same time, keenly sensitive to their responsibilities for the security of the country in time of war.

I have heard it suggested, long after the event, that the President did not take into account the full implications of his wartime order. From what I saw and experienced from the conferences which took place during the consideration of the action, I would strongly differ from those who now take that view. I do not recall that I had any direct contact with the President in regard to the matter, although I do know that the Secretary of War maintained close contact with the President and the White House. I believe from my meetings with the Secretary that the President was fully informed and gave the situation careful thought. Moreover, I believe that conscientious and determined attempts were made to alleviate the indisputable distress and hardship which the relocation imposed on many.

As promptly as possible, control over the program was removed from the jurisdiction of the Army (which initially was the only agency equipped to deal effectively with the logistics of the problem) and was placed in the hands of civilian agencies set up for this purpose. These were, as I now recall it, presided over first by Mr. Milton Eisenhower and later by Mr. Dillon Myer, both men of established liberal and sympathetic instincts. A sustained and enlightened effort was made to introduce schooling and other facilities into the camps and to expedite the redistribution of relocatees into areas around the country where jobs could be obtained and where life could be taken up with less threat of discrimination and violence than had been present on the West Coast. Legislation was proposed to alleviate the losses engendered by the relocation and to conserve the property of those relocated at the time. Indeed, as I recall, I initiated, or at least helped to initiate, the

legislation, and appeared at least once or twice in support of it. Substantial testimony was taken regarding the relocation program, and some legislation was passed. It does not seem necessary to go over the same ground again now.

I hope the Commission will find, as I believe to be the case, that the whole operation was as benignly conducted as wartime conditions permitted. I gained the impression, after making considerable effort to follow the destinies of those who had been relocated, that on the whole the deconcentration of the Japanese population and its redistribution throughout the country resulted in their finding a healthier and more advantageous environment than they would have had on the West Coast following the Pearl Harbor attack and the reports of Japanese atrocities in the Philippines and the Southwest Pacific.

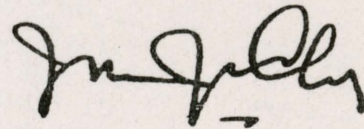
This country, as well as our Allies, was forced to confront a number of unpleasant wartime dilemmas and the Japanese situation was one of them. My belief and hope is the Commission will conclude, after an objective investigation, that under the circumstances prevailing at the time and with the exigencies of wartime security, the action of the President of the United States and the United States Government in regard to our then Japanese population was reasonably undertaken and thoughtfully and humanely conducted. There has been, in my judgment, at times a spate of quite irresponsible comment to the effect that this wartime move was callous, shameful and induced by racial or punitive motives. It was nothing of the sort.

One fact I would urge the Commission to refer to if any report is made in connection with its examination of the relocation program is the role which the 442nd Combat Team played in establishing once and for all the fundamental loyalty of our Japanese population. As a result of many appeals made to me by members of our Japanese-descended population after the attack on Pearl Harbor, I sought and obtained authority from the Army to permit these groups to form and serve in an integrated combat unit in our Armed Forces. This, at first, encountered some opposition and it was not easily overcome. However, such a unit was formed as the 442nd Combat Team, and the famous 100th Battalion from Hawaii was a part of this unit. Composed of Americans of Japanese descent, it became one of the most highly decorated combat organizations in the entire Army. It served with great distinction in a number of hotly contested European campaigns. Its record of courage and military achievements was spectacular. The reputation it earned did much to rid the country of the unjust discriminatory laws and prejudices to which, at one time, our Japanese population had been subjected.

Whether the then-existing government acted wisely in the light of present hindsight and perspectives long after the victory is, I suggest, quite beside the point. As one who was present and active in the War Department at the time, I believe the action was thoughtfully and carefully taken by authority of the President under what were then wartime conditions. The President was advised by civil and military statesmen of the highest stature, character and experience. Careful examination of the law was made by the Attorney General and later litigation in the highest courts supported the action taken.

I believe, therefore, in the interests of all concerned, the Commission would be well advised to conclude that President Roosevelt's wartime action in connection with the relocation of our Japanese-descended population at the outbreak of our war with Japan was taken and carried out in accordance with the best interests of the country considering the conditions, exigencies and considerations which then faced the nation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to be "John G. J. J. J.", written in a cursive style. The signature is positioned to the right of the word "Sincerely,".