

# *"What We're Fighting For"*

Statements By  
United States Servicemen  
about  
Americans of Japanese Descent

*Sept. 1944*

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
WAR RELOCATION AUTHORITY  
WASHINGTON, D. C.

*FROM A VETERAN OF GUADALCANAL  
PUBLISHED IN TIME, DECEMBER 20, 1943*

Recovering from malaria in a California Marine camp, 22-year-old Marine Pfc. Robert E. Borchers of Chicago one night wrote a letter to the American Legion:

"I am one of the fortunate Marines who have recently returned to this country after serving in the offensive against the Japanese on Guadalcanal... We find...a condition behind our backs that stuns us. We find that our American citizens, those of Japanese ancestry, are being persecuted, yes, persecuted as though Adolph Hitler himself were in charge.

"...I'm putting it mildly when I say it makes our blood boil... We shall fight this injustice, intolerance and un-Americanism at home! We will not break faith with those who died... We have fought the Japanese and are recuperating to fight again. We can endure the hell of battle, but we are resolved not to be sold out at home."

*FROM MARCH FIELD, CALIFORNIA  
PUBLISHED IN TIME, JANUARY 10, 1944*

Sirs:

Pfc. Raymond (actually Robert) Borchers' letter and your story "Inquisition in Los Angeles" (Time, Dec. 20) point up one of the things that has been worrying me as I get ready to take a trip.

I think I have a right to expect that the fundamental human rights which are held up as a banner for us now are still in existence when I get back. The emotional, hateful racial prejudice shown by certain Californians against anyone with yellow skin who can be called "Jap" certainly helps tear down the Constitution of our country not only for loyal Americans of Japanese descent, but for all loyal Americans.

If California succeeds in passing a law excluding all persons of Japanese descent, there is nothing which would

stop any state from passing a law excluding all New Yorkers who wear glasses (like me) or all Baptists with Swedish names...

They say many of us don't know what we're fighting for now; you keep up the good work and we'll know right well what we have to fight for, and against, when we get back.

WADSWORTH LIKELY,  
Sergeant

*FROM "SOMEWHERE IN ITALY"*  
*PUBLISHED IN TIME, JULY 3, 1944*

Sirs:

It is two years and a couple of days since I left the States with a whole hatful of company on the war's leeching business. During the ten-minute breaks in Africa and Italy we have devoted a lot of effort to trying to realize in the imagination what life is like at home.

Today a magazine (Time, April 24) comes to the beach-head and...tells a story, and these pleasant images become hideous and confused. According to the story five Japanese, including one Frank Kitagawa, are sent to Great Meadows, N.J., from an Arizona relocation center to help Ed Kowalick run his 600-acre farm.... Ed Kowalick's neighbors mount a blind patriotism against this five-man Oriental menace within their gates. A building on Kowalick's farm is burned; and Kowalick, being one man, is forced to send the offenders away. This is, as I said, a little thing. Nobody killed, nobody maimed. To show they hold no hard feelings, the farmers present Ed Kowalick with a box of cigars, and the incident is closed....

It is the schoolhouse, I think, that sticks in my craw. Presumably the small fry of Great Meadows are taught in this schoolhouse: study algebra; and Archimedes principle; and nouns; and learn that Lincoln called them "the last best hope of earth..." This is the schoolhouse where hundreds met to hunt down five, who had committed the crime of discarding their ancestry for the ties of a new country.

There are crosses with Japanese names in the American cemeteries in the bitter Italian hills. These men are worthy to bear arms; how then are they not worthy to grow tomatoes?

Since I began, a score of shells have dropped into the vicinity. They threaten my life, for which I have a high regard, but not the things that give my life sustenance. Now I feel that these things are threatened and I do not know where to go to find a clean picture of my country. It is not the matter of Great Meadows alone. Lord knows, that is only the latest and one of the least striking of the items on a long list. Somewhere in the confusion is the central matter of what is true and what is not true about our national life.

This is a very personal matter, like love or good beer or dying, and I should like someone to give me the answer.

THOMAS RIGGS, Jr.  
2nd Lieutenant

*FROM "SOMEWHERE IN BURMA"*  
*A LETTER TO THE EDITOR OF THE PACIFIC CITIZEN*

Dear Sir:

Recently in the Red Cross recreation room I chanced to come across an issue of your paper. I thought the paper was very good and the boys here seem to think the same--they suggested that it be distributed more widely.

I noted that most of the articles concerned the Japanese Americans fighting in the European theatre and the grand job they are doing. We, of the Merrill's Marauders (or otherwise known as the Burma Raiders) wish to boast of the Japanese Americans fighting in our outfit and the swell job that they put up. Every Marauder knows these boys by name even if they don't know ours--this is due to the courage and bravery shown by them. One of our platoons owe their lives to Sgt. Hank Goshu who translated Jap orders which were foolishly yelled to the effect that they were attempting a flanking movement. Hank---(we call him Horizontal Hank because he's been pinned down so many times by Jap machine gun fire)---guided the machine gun fire on our side which killed every Jap on that

side. The boys who fought along side of Hank agree that they have never seen a more calm, cool and collected man under fire--he was always so eager to be where he could be of the most use and effectiveness and that was always the hot spot. We asked Hank in the hospital, being his first time in battle, if he was scared or not. He answered, "You're darn rights I was scared..." That's Horizontal Hank all over, always humorous and a smile for every guy. And yet, while the other boys boast of the number of Japs they got, he doesn't talk very much about the three he has to his own account; he usually changes the subject by saying, "Honorable ancestors much regret meeting Merrill's Marauders."

I hope I haven't given the impression that I'm trying to glorify him. Many of the boys, and myself especially, never knew a Japanese American or what one was like--now we know and the Marauders want you to know that they are backing the Nisei 100%. It makes the boys and myself raging mad to read about movements against Japanese Americans by those 4-F'ers back home. We would dare them to say things like they have in front of us.

At one time during battle our platoon was assigned to the Chinese; Sgt. Goshō was always surrounded by the Chinese who insisted that he was Chinese and not Japanese. Many a humorous tale is told by Horizontal Hank on that point; the boys then just step in and pointing to him say, "He's an AMERICAN." And no truer words were ever spoken.

Yours truly,

GEORGE MILLER  
Sergeant

*FROM "SOMEWHERE IN THE SOUTH PACIFIC"*

Dear Mrs. T . . . .

...My first eleven years of public school were spent in Auburn, (Washington) Kent's rival city. Some of my best friends were Japanese. I wouldn't be surprised if some were fighting now in Italy. The only fault I found with them was that they studied so industriously that they put many of us to shame and often finished school with highest honors.

Of course, there were and are unpatriotic Japanese. These are criminals and should be treated as such. As such they have been singled out by the F. B. I. There also were and are pro-Axis white people in America, even in Los Angeles.... They, too, have been placed under surveillance by Hoover's men when apprehended.

I wonder how the two totals would tally up. Yet no one is advocating the denial of constitutional rights to the white citizenry--legally--. At least we haven't heard of it. --if they are, by the living God that made us, there'll be blood on the moon when we come back.

Yours sincerely,

ROBERT A SMITH  
Lieutenant, U. S. Marine Corps

*FROM "SOMEWHERE IN ITALY"*

*EXTRACT FROM LETTER, SIGNED JOE FROMM, PUBLISHED IN THE CHICAGO SUN, SEPT. 10, 1944*

"Similarly disturbing to overseas soldiers--especially those who are liberal and tolerant--are the growing race hatreds at home. When my outfit moved over to Cassino from the Adriatic in Italy several months ago, I read in American magazines and newspapers letters condemning all Japanese, regardless of birth, in the most bitter, intolerant and un-American manner. Japanese Americans were the target of the most vile attacks and discrimination. You can imagine my feelings and the feelings of my comrades, then, when we heard that the unit which we were relieving at Cassino was the famous 100th Battalion, consisting exclusively of Japanese Americans. You can well imagine what we thought of this bigoted group in the United States which was seeking to make life unbearable for the parents and families of these men who, we learned, protested their withdrawal from Cassino although they had been decimated by wounds and disease. This battalion of Japanese Americans since has been proclaimed the most decorated unit in the American Army and the battalion with the heaviest casualties."

*FROM A RECIPIENT OF THE CONGRESSIONAL MEDAL OF HONOR  
PUBLISHED IN THE PACIFIC CITIZEN, JULY 1, 1944*

Des Moines, Iowa. Sergt. Charles (Commando) Kelly, winner of the Congressional Medal of Honor for heroism in Italy, said here this week that the Japanese American Battalion of the 34th Division has a reputation for being a top-notch outfit.

"They've taken a lot, just like all outfits in Italy," Kelly said. "But they have a reputation among other U. S. divisions of being a tough battalion. Everybody likes them."

*FROM "SOMEWHERE IN THE SOUTH PACIFIC"  
PUBLISHED IN PM, NEW YORK, MAY 4, 1944*

Dear Editor:

I have just finished reading Harold Lavine's article on West Coast prejudice against Japanese-Americans in the Jan. 21 issue of PM.

I have had constant dealings with Japanese-American boys serving in our Army. When I first arrived in this theater of operations, I was an enlisted man and I shared a tent with one of these boys. There were a number of other Japanese-Americans in the company and there wasn't a single man in that outfit who didn't like and respect these boys. They are all courageous, sincere, loyal and swell fellows.

At my present station where I am serving with a Marine unit, we have a group of these Japanese-American boys. They are, like the previous group I mentioned, good Americans and well liked.

If there are any groups of Americans who have reason to hate and distrust Japs, they are the Marine and Army units who have been in combat with them. Yet, all of these Marines and Army boys will swear by the integrity and loyalty of the Japanese-American soldiers.

Many of these boys have parents and sisters and brothers in relocation centers. They are there not because they aren't loyal Americans, but because the Government has seen fit to put them there as purely precautionary measures. Though they are not happy about it, the Japanese-American soldiers understand and appreciate the necessity for such action under the circumstances.

My own sentiments and that of others with whom I have discussed Mr. Lavine's article are that Japanese-Americans should have the same rights guaranteed to them as are guaranteed to any other Americans--the right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

I would like to see jailed and convicted for making murderous threats the members of those organizations who wrote District Attorney Houser of Los Angeles County that they have "pledged to kill any Japanese who come to California now or after the war."

MORRIS KRITZ  
2nd Lieutenant

*FROM CAMP CARSON, COLORADO  
PUBLISHED IN TIME, FEB. 14, 1944*

Sirs:

We are just back from overseas where we were trying to preserve democracy for the very same people who say the Nisei should be deported.

I was bodyguard to an American-of Japanese descent who was risking his life to act as an interpreter for us. He was a target for both Jap and American bullets....

I wish to God that some of the people at home who say: "Democracy is for the white race only" could be made to go out and fight for it.

SERVICEMAN'S NAME WITHHELD.

**FROM A VETERAN OF THE ITALIAN CAMPAIGN  
PUBLISHED IN TIME, FEB. 14, 1944**

Moore General Hospital,  
Swannanoa, N. C.

Sirs:

There are a lot of people in these United States who have nothing but a one-track mind. In some of the articles of your Letters to the Editors (Time, Jan.-17) I saw some of these people in (a) true light.

I just came from Italy where I was assigned to the Japanese 100th Infantry Battalion. I never in my life saw any more of a true American than they are. To these people who don't have any military rank, probably don't even know that these little "yellow-bellies" (as one writer wrote) are saving his skin: I only wish that these people could witness these little "yellow-bellies" fight.

Ask anyone who has seen them in action against the Jerry (to) tell you about them. They'll tell you when they have them on their flanks they are sure of security in that section....

They, my friends, are not the little "yellow-bellies"; you are.

E. D. CHASSE,  
2nd Lieutenant

**FROM A VETERAN OF GUADALCANAL  
PUBLISHED IN THE DAILY CALIFORNIAN, FEB. 10, 1944**

Statements made by Marine Private Terrell Tennant, Guadalcanal veteran, after an interview with Sgt. Ben Kuroki at the University of California at Berkeley, February 9, 1944.

"The thing that I felt and that a lot of the boys feel when they come back from the Pacific area is disgust at the attitude of the man on the street. He assumes that he knows what we are thinking and feeling. He tells us that because

we have been taught to hate the Japanese we are fighting, we naturally will hate every Japanese...."That assumption is erroneous....Of course there are exceptions, but often a feeling of having been let down arises when we come back home and find that the things we are fighting against over there are believed and expounded in our own country...."Sergeant Kuroki is doing a great job. He is fighting both the battles in which we are engaged and so are thousands of other Japanese-Americans. The man on the street owes them a debt--a debt that could be partially paid by honest acceptance of them and their families."

*FROM "SOMEWHERE IN ITALY"*

*EXTRACT FROM A LETTER WRITTEN BY LIEUT. MARSHALL HAINES TO VERNON McCANN OF THE AUBURN (CALIF.) JOURNAL, PUBLISHED IN THE PACIFIC CITIZEN, SEPT. 9, 1944.*

"...The liaison officers from my battalion say that this Japanese American infantry outfit is the best damn infantry they have ever worked with....

"See where there is a lot of controversy about the Japanese returning to California. Also that proper respect has not been shown the Japanese American soldier. Things like that sure go against the grain with me....

"We had been sitting and living in foxholes at Anzio some 63 days. Then the big push out and the capture of Rome. They (the Japanese-American infantrymen) wiped out the last heavy German resistance we met some 12 miles south of Rome and then it was practically a walk into the city.

"I know that all of the combat men here in Italy think the world of the Japanese American soldiers. Their record is so outstanding that they have recently been awarded a Presidential citation.

"They have never failed to take an objective since I have been fighting with them. They have shown as much bravery as the American doughboy, and in some cases more. I have never heard them speak the Japanese language at any time."

Haines, a former employee of the Auburn post office, wrote that people who show disrespect to any fighting soldier makes a soldier think: "Am I fighting that someone of that type can have a free country?"

*FROM A VETERAN OF THE ALEUTIAN CAMPAIGN  
PUBLISHED IN THE SACRAMENTO (CALIF.) BEE,  
JAN. 14, 1944*

Dear Sir:

It was with quite a bit of concern that I read the December 20th issue of Time and noted therein an article describing witch hunts against loyal Americans of Japanese ancestry.... TIME quotes...as stating: "We have been told it would be unhealthy for Japanese--even American-born--to be seen on California streets, and that returning Marines and soldiers would slit their throats."...

I believe I can express the attitude of the soldiers who have met the Japanese in combat. I was with the men who froze under fire for 21 days on the bleak snow-covered slopes of Attu. There we saw our best friends killed in a maniacal demonstration of Japanese fanaticism. No one can accuse us of being soft hearted toward the Japanese. The demands of battle develop an impersonal outlook on the subject of death to an enemy.

On the other hand battle gives one a balance of outlook, which from the Time account, is entirely lacking in certain Japanese baiting circles. We have gone into battle with loyal Americans of Japanese ancestry and they have acquitted themselves with honor and glory. Imagine the risk such a man takes when he volunteers and joins the army. Not only must he be careful of enemy fire, but he must take caution that he is not mistaken by his own troops as an enemy. We soldiers glory in the fact that these Japanese boys are with us giving their full measure of devotion, while their brothers and sisters, in some instances, are in relocation camps.

Have no fear that returning soldiers would desire to slit the throats of loyal Japanese at home. Such a threat is only for those who do not know; for those whose courage has not been tested and seek refuge in pompous phrases.

It is not the returning soldier who will wish to torment and hound the loyal American-Japanese. We'll do our fighting on the battlefields against our country's enemies, and not on the streets at home against our country's friends....

If there is a problem with disloyal Japanese at home (and from all accounts in *The Bee*, there is), quietly take the necessary steps and quell them and oust any incompetent administrators. But leave the United States the kind of a place we are fighting to keep it. Go after the disloyal Japanese; ...but do it the American way....

RALPH T. LUI,  
Captain, U. S. Army

*FROM "SCOMEWHERE IN THE PACIFIC"*  
*PUBLISHED IN THE STAR-BULLETIN, HONOLULU, T.H.*

To the Editor:

Never before have I taken a pen in hand and written to a newspaper editor but "there comes a time in every man's life," I suppose. I have been watching with growing disgust the efforts of some misguided politicians in California to create an issue out of the Japanese-American problem. I see, now, where the same poisonous thinking is spreading to Colorado....

Do the newspapers of California or Colorado print the casualty lists of the Japanese-Americans killed or wounded from the city of Honolulu, alone? I think some people would be dumbfounded if they saw those lists every day, as we do, here. I don't know how the population of Honolulu compares with Denver or Los Angeles (the city of Angels), but I would bet that Honolulu suffers more casualties among its Japanese-Americans than those two mainland cities do in their whole populations.

I can see what the Japanese-Americans in our armed forces are fighting and dying for. They are not only fighting for America but they are fighting for the right of their families to live side by side with the more fortunate races that have made our nation the great nation it is today. They are fighting for tolerance. They are fighting to prove they and their families had nothing to do with December 7, 1941,

They had no axe to grind and a lot of them are giving their lives to prove it. Probably their last thoughts, as they fall mortally wounded, far from their homes in Hawaii, are, "Well, perhaps this will prove we are Americans."

I wonder what the more fortunate ones think as they read the newspapers in some hospital in Africa or Italy.

I speak only for myself as I write this letter. I don't know what my fellow soldiers think on the subject, as I have never brought the subject into open discussion, but knowing my fellow soldiers as I do, I think they would certainly be against those hair-brained schemes of radicals who have nothing better to do during this war than to sit around thinking of ways and means of persecuting a minority.

I know that immediately this letter is published, if it should be, that loyal sons and daughter of California and Colorado will want to jump on me with both feet. I know what their argument will be, "Why judge the whole state by what a few nitwits do and say?"

I understand that argument, perfectly, because it is my argument, too. Why judge a whole race of people and refuse them the right to return to their homes in the western states after the war just because of what a disloyal, small minority of their race has done? No one in this war is persecuting the German-Americans and Italo-Americans, and there is no reason in the world why they should, so why impose a penalty, after the war, upon the Japanese-Americans?

When I meet a Japanese-American on the street in the same uniform as my own, I know he is fighting two wars, our war and his own private war for his people against public opinion and racial discrimination. I am sorely tempted to salute him and say, "Thou art a better man than I am, Gunga Din."

I am enclosing a clipping from my home town paper, proving that all states are not alike, some extend a helping hand to a fellow American who is down.

(Note: The clipping is from the Peoria (Ill.) Star. It relates Peoria employers are offering jobs to Japanese Americans.)

I am not of Japanese blood but I would be proud to have a transfusion from one of those boys on the Italian front.

DUDLEY C. RUISE,  
Pfc. USA

*FROM "SOMEWHERE IN ENGLAND"  
A LETTER TO THE EDITOR OF THE LAMAR (COLO.)  
DAILY NEWS*

Dear Sir:

In England the thousands of Yanks who are "sweating out" their own individual D-Day now very seldom express belief in the opinion that "this time is the last time." The crafty deceit and hypocrisy of certain highly placed spokesmen for all nations of earth have impeded the progress of the great ideals expressed in the Atlantic Charter to such an extent that our hope has been reduced to the fervent wish that the seeds of the next war which are already being thickly sown will take several decades to bear their evil fruit.

Meanwhile many of us learn with despair and wrath that racism without justice, mercy or logic which invites whole races of men according to the racial descent and prejudices of the loud-mouthed adherents of this evil doctrine is assuming menacing proportions at home. All that is lacking is incorporation of this spirit into the political program of our two major parties for America to begin the maelstrom which has engulfed Germany.

To get down to cases--by what rule of logic is a loyal American of Japanese ancestry placed on a moral level with the executioners of Allied prisoners and airmen in Japan and looked upon as creatures or things NOT endowed by the Creator with the inalienable rights of human beings and citizens of the United States?

"He is a Jap!" is the angry reply of the bigot and modern counterpart on racial lines of the religious inquisitors of an age that was marked by religious wars but much better united than we in the idea that all races belong to the human family.

At this point I am reminded of an American infantry regiment which in its days of training had great things predicted for it by Carl Sandburg--a man of good will--and which a little later in the invasion of Italy distinguished itself in action.

Why don't our American racists demand the internment of all Japanese-Americans in uniform? Or rather the extinction of the entire race as something by nature evil and sub-human?

And why don't they apply the same rule to all Americans of German descent which would include General Eisenhower and Willkie? The Gestapo has been as ruthless in its treatment of Poles and Russians as the Japanese in China.

Hypocrites--They dare not be logical even in their own perversion. They know that if this rule of the mob were generally established the next war with its many political changes and new alignments would place some of their ancestral countries behind enemy lines. The names of these American racists very often tell their ancestry.

Every sane man and woman in America has, by reason of the fact that the Creator bestowed upon humanity the exclusive gifts of reason and free will; the chance to become a model citizen of our free republic.

The fountains of peace will never be laid by any but men of good will....

Sincerely,

JAMES CORNING  
Lieutenant