

WAR DEPARTMENT  
OFFICE OF THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY  
WASHINGTON, D. C.

13 March 1944  
(Dictated 12 March 1944)

Mr. Saburo Nakashima, Chairman,  
Heart Mountain Community Council,  
Heart Mountain Relocation Project,  
Heart Mountain, Wyoming.

Dear Mr. Nakashima:

Your letter of March 7, 1944 addressed to the Honorable Henry L. Stimson, Secretary of War, containing a petition signed by the Community Council of the Heart Mountain Relocation Center, has been forwarded to this office for action and reply. The War Department has given careful thought to your communication and has arrived at the decisions which have governed our policy only after complete consideration of all factors involved. I should like to discuss those portions of your petition which pertain to the War Department.

1 and 2. Universal Application of the Draft and Induction Into Other Branches. The use of citizens of Japanese American ancestry in certain assigned units has not been based upon any policy of racial discrimination. I am inclosing for your information a copy of a reply prepared in this office to a recent communication on the same subject which I believe will explain the War Department's viewpoint.

3. Evacuation and exclusion from the West Coast is based entirely upon military considerations and will be constantly reviewed in the light of the changing military situation.

6. Accord the Same Treatment to Japanese American Soldiers as to other Americans. War Department has no policy of discrimination against Japanese American soldiers or any other racial group. Where evidence that such discrimination has existed in our armed forces proper action has been taken to eliminate such conditions.

Sincerely,

HARRISON A GERHARDT

Lt. Col., General Staff Corps

Inc. Executive to Ass't Secretary of War  
cpy ltr 4 Mar 44 re racial discrimination



4 March 1944

Dear

Your letter of February 26, 1944, addressed to the Honorable Henry L. Stimson, Secretary of War, has been referred to this office. I note in your third paragraph that you desire an expression of opinion from the War Department regarding the status of Japanese American citizens now located in Heart Mountain, and the reason for discriminating against them by compelling them to accept service in branches of the armed forces where they are segregated. Insofar as the War Department is concerned their citizenship status is determined by the laws of the United States as in the case of any other individual, and as such, citizenship status is not within the jurisdiction of the War Department.

I note further that you mention discrimination against Japanese American citizens on the part of the War Department by compelling them to accept service in certain branches of the armed forces. I should like to point out that the use of Japanese Americans in specific units is not based upon any discrimination policy. The assignment of personnel in the armed forces is based upon military considerations and not upon racial derivations. I should like to explain more fully some of the reasons which make it necessary at this time to assign these inductees to specific units.

The War Department does not consider it advisable to utilize Japanese Americans in the Pacific theater of operations. If a Japanese American unit were present in combat in the Pacific it would be possible for the enemy Japanese to secure American uniforms from dead soldiers and mingle with American Japanese units, thereby causing considerable confusion and increasing hazards of enemy infiltration. Should this occur it would jeopardize the American Japanese soldier inasmuch as his facial characteristics make it difficult to distinguish him from the enemy infiltrator. Again if a Japanese American were captured in the Pacific it is felt that retaliation measures taken by the Japanese would be in the form of extreme torture, since it seems apparent from past Japanese actions that such individuals might not be considered as prisoners of war.

If they were generally assigned to all units it would then be necessary to screen units which are to be employed in the Pacific theater before such a unit could be shipped. This would not only add an additional step in the present process but would tend to delay getting our units ready for combat and would further result in disrupting the efficient operation of the combat unit by removing, in an advanced state of training, personnel from the organization. Since it is impossible to forecast, at the time an organization begins its training, in which theater of operations



that particular unit will be used it would be uneconomical to assign Japanese Americans under a general assignment policy. It has therefore been deemed advisable to utilize this group in a homogeneous combat organization. It must be remembered that an organization such as a combat team includes units of Infantry, Field Artillery, Engineers, and medical personnel in which there is a wide range of opportunity to employ various abilities and skills.

Certain Japanese Americans have been employed as interpreters in the Pacific theaters but this use has been made of Japanese American personnel with the full realization by the War Department of the risks involved to these individuals.

May I point out that the privilege of requesting assignment in a specific branch is, as you have pointed out in your letter, a privilege and not an obligation upon the War Department to see that these requests are always granted. It is impossible to comply with every assignment request which a candidate makes upon induction. It is the War Department's policy to assign an individual to the branch of service which he chooses if that is consistent with our military needs, since it is realized that this is one determinant in the process of proper assignment of personnel. However as the character of the war continues to change from defensive to offensive operations, the number of different types of units which are required will change in increasing measure. This necessitates a constant conversion of units from one type to another and in this conversion the wishes of the individual will often have to be subordinated to the overall military need.

I feel that the Japanese American citizens who will now be inducted should accept their assignments, wherever they may be, with the spirit that they are fulfilling an obligation to their country and that largely upon their manner of performance will be judged the loyalty and sincerity of all American citizens of Japanese descent.

Sincerely,

(SIGNED)

HARRISON A. GERHARDT  
Lt. Col., General Staff Corps  
Executive to Ass't Secretary of War