

WAR RELOCATION AUTHORITY  
Room 5305, 350 Fifth Avenue  
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John W. Vandercook, Blue Network and NBC News Commentator, discussed the reaction of the American people to the recent announcements of Japanese atrocities committed against American and Filipino war prisoners in two coast-to-coast broadcasts from New York City over the Blue Network on Friday and Sunday, January 28 and 30, 1944. The following are verbatim excerpts from Mr. Vandercook's comments.

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Friday, 10:00 - 10:15 P.M., January 28, 1944, Blue Network

The detailed, horribly graphic accounts of wholesale Japanese atrocities in the Philippines have left the American people sick, darkly angry, and, in a sense, bewildered. Secretary of State Cordell Hull, who has a fine gift for righteous anger, remarked today "it would be necessary to assemble all the demons available from anywhere, and combine their fiendishness to describe the conduct of those who inflicted these unspeakable tortures."

The Secretary of State indicated that the United States government has already protested against those massive, inexcusable barbarities on the island of Luzon. Mr. Hull admits, however, that all such protests have been ineffective. White House secretary Stephen Early offered just as little encouragement to any hope that the Japanese can be induced to mend their ways. He explained that the United States "can no longer expect to get medicine, clothing, or other supplies to American prisoners of war who are in the hands of the Japanese." The Red Cross admits that the usual wartime mechanisms of contact between belligerents, in behalf of war prisoners, have entirely broken down.

One cannot help, though, but be somewhat surprised at the suggestion of hopeless finality in Mr. Early's statement. It is true that actual means of communication between this country and the Japanese home islands and the Jap-conquered territories are almost wholly lacking. There is no neutral state like Switzerland or Sweden in the Asiatic Pacific area which can act as an intermediary. It does seem highly unlikely, though, that all efforts to establish that roundabout contact with our prisoners in Jap hands will simply cease. No matter how discouraging the outlook may appear, it goes without saying that the appropriate authorities will keep on trying - until the war is over.

The Japanese, of course, have us at a great disadvantage, Chiefly as a result of the Japanese victories in the Philippines, the Japs hold great numbers of American prisoners, and what is of no less concern, - for the sense of human decency has no frontiers and draws no color line - even greater numbers of Filipino, Dutch, and British prisoners. We, after twenty-six months of bitter warfare, have in our possession the incredibly small handful of only three hundred and seventy-seven Japanese prisoners. Further to weigh down the scales of our helplessness, Americans individually and collectively care, and care most bitterly, about what may happen to our lean, despairing men who must stare, through the months and years, through the barbed-wire prison fences at the strutting little Jap soldiers who have become their masters.

The Japanese government for its part, by tradition, and actually by law, cares not a whit what may happen to their nationals who become our prisoners of war. It is the long established practice in the Japanese services that any man who falls alive into the hands of the enemy is to be considered dead. His family and his friends disown him. If a Jap prisoner of war manages to escape and should be so foolish as to find his way back to his own lines, he would not be welcomed - as in every other army in the world - with embraces. He would be put under arrest. A court martial would promptly inquire as to why he had allowed himself to be taken alive. Japan, therefore, does not fear reprisals against her prisoners.

Inevitably, in the hot indignation aroused by the stories just released, there will be some in this country who will point out that in Hawaii and on the mainland we do have, either under direct surveillance or in the war relocation camps, some quarter of a million men, women, and children of the Japanese race, against whom they will propose that we should vent our rage. Any who make that suggestion will rank themselves even lower in the scale of decent, human values than the Jap officers who were responsible for the horrors of Luzon. As every civilized human-being knows, but sometimes finds it hard to remember, there can be no contest in brutality. As every page of man's bloody history has shown, those who descend to the methods of bestial men simply befoul themselves. We could never equal the evil that has been done to us. Do we even attempt it - if any cruel, unthinking men among us even propose it - we shall merely make matters worse. No one who has ever appealed to the court of "Judge Lynch" has ever won his case. Of course we shall not avenge ourselves upon those Japanese civilians we have in our power. And, because we will not, we and not the Japs will win this war.

The Japanese troops, one must remember, have already been trained to believe that any Jap who falls into our hands will be hideously tortured. There have been touching stories which every American has been proud to hear of the almost hysterical joy and relief of wounded Japs on discovering that they receive kind treatment at the hands of their captors. We should only serve the purpose of those enemy propagandists if now, in our red indignation, either at home or on the fighting fronts, we give the lie they have told any support of truth. Our best weapon, plainly, is to oppose their barbaric practices with our humane and American practices. Perhaps that is a hard dose to swallow. But no one who reflects for a moment can fail to admit that is the only thing we can do.

In London late today, Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden revealed to the House of Commons a similar record of Japanese bestialities against British prisoners. . . . . It is significant that, so late in the war as this, both the British and the American governments have chosen to release their terrible indictments of the Japanese enemy within the same twenty-four hours. The Allied attitude during this war toward the publication of so-called "atrocities stories" has been a curious tale of hesitation. But before one decides to be too indignant about it, there are several things one must remember. In the first place, there has been no organized effort on the part of anyone to prevent the publication of exact and detailed records of many, at least, of the countless, utterly inhuman

acts done in this war both by our Japanese, and let us never forget, by our German enemies as well. Anyone who has eyes to read, or ears to hear, or a heart to feel, has had a chance to study innumerable all-too-legible pages of that bloody record. But a number of polls that have been taken have revealed an astonishing fact. An enormous number of insufficiently informed Americans have simply not believed it. We live in a "wise-guy" generation. At the end of it, I hope. In the period of reaction that followed the last war, it became the fashion to say, in the face of a vast amount of evidence to the contrary, that all the "atrocities stories" of the last war were false. That cynical and incorrect impression has remained. It has persisted so stubbornly that American officials who are responsible for the dissemination of information have frankly hesitated to encourage the publication of stories of barbarity in this war. They have been afraid that that old reaction would make too many of us believe we were being lied to. The result of that public misconception, it was feared, might, by contrast, start many Americans to thinking again that our enemies were not such bad fellows after all.

That was the whole tendency of our thinking in the foolish 'twenties about Germany. And look what happened! Even today, many men who should know better have revealed an astounding lack of a sense of proportion. An indignant senator describes the Jap atrocities on Luzon as "the worst thing that ever happened." Has he forgotten, then, what the Germans did to the Jews in Warsaw? Has he forgotten the butchery at Lidice? Or did he not believe those stories? For they were true. More people have been tortured and butchered by the Germans in Europe, simply because the Germans have had greater opportunities, in all probability, than by the Japs in Asia. If there can be any degrees at such dark depths, the German fault was greater. For the Germans are heir to a far older, and better, civilization, than are the Japanese. Perhaps because of that pre-war habit of cheap cynicism, many of us in this country have shown far too little indignation in this war. If we can employ the truth as a clean weapon of our wrath and not let it poison the well-springs of our own humanity, we can scarcely have too much of it....

Sunday, 5:00 - 5:30 P.M., January 30, 1944, Blue Network

The story this week, of course, which dominated all other news, was the grim tale of Japanese barbarities against the American and Filipino prisoners in the Philippines. But another story - one growing out of that, and one still not finished - has been just as remarkable. That has been the reaction of the American people to that appalling record of man's inhumanity to man. The publication of such atrocities is inevitably attended by certain risks. It is like lifting the lid from some deep pit of the inferno; or uncorking the genie in the bottle. The reek of such actions is so foul that it may poison the senses of all who come too close to it. It is easy to become blinded and drunk with the black rage that has moved the guilty barbarians themselves. America recoiled at the stink of it - then, with a few exceptions, has remained cold and steady sober. It is a tribute to the quality of the civilization which we in this country have helped create; to the brand of civilization, founded on justice, and morals, for which we fight.

We want revenge. The few frightened mutterings in reply that have come over the Japanese radio show the Japs are well aware of it. We intend, as we always have intended, but with a new and even harsher resolution, to win a forever-to-be-remembered victory against Japan.

But the American people, as a mass, still propose that it shall be a clean victory. Not one responsible voice in the United States has suggested that we, for our part, should ever descend to the methods of savagery which we so despise. The poison released by that long record of the Japs' savagery has not seriously infected us. For that the United States has as much reason to be proud as Japan has to be ashamed. In our feeling toward the Japanese we skirt the edge of an abyss. But we have not yet fallen into it. Nor does there seem to be great danger that the overwhelming majority of us will. That danger is, in hating Japan, and in hating the Japanese for their treachery and for their atrocious acts, that our hate will take on a sharper edge because the Japanese are of another race. Thinking that follows that twisted course leads those who are guilty of it into the company of Adolph Hitler; of the Nazis who brought this evil on the world; of the Japs themselves. No one who reads that record of Luzon can fail to realize that some at least of the calculated brutalities of the Japanese against the American prisoners were inspired by the fact they had, in their power, men of another, and a hated, race. It was a manifestation of the same spirit that made the Japanese victors at Hongkong at once establish their headquarters in a big hotel on the China side - a hotel that, till then, had been barred to people of the Oriental race.

All thoughtless Americans who suggest that we should revenge ourselves upon Japanese civilians; the poor-whites who snarl on the street corners near the Jap relocation camp near Tule Lake and talk of wholesale lynching - simply work to perpetuate that evil. They play straight in the hands of the Japs. They help make it certain that the war will last for many years and cost countless lives. They injure the living American prisoners still in Jap hands as surely as if they had struck them across the face with the edge of a Samurai sword. We are no more at war with a whole race, or a color of skin, in the Pacific, than we are at war with the whole white race, in Europe. We are at war not with races, not with colors - but with the deeds men do.

I came upon a small item on an inside page in this morning's paper. It reported in two short paragraphs that in the one little town of Sarny, in old Poland, the Germans before they were driven out had killed some thirteen thousand men and women. Was that any better than what happened on Luzon because those who were guilty of that butchery were of another color? Of course not! And not one American in ten thousand thinks so....

We carry into this war a weapon as powerful in the winning of battles and the saving of lives as all of our tanks and guns and bombs together. It is not a perfect weapon. It has been stained over and over again, during the long years we have been building it, by our own mistakes. It was today blunted by a man who

publicly declared we could never again find room in free America for any person of the Japanese race. But, at worst, it is a better weapon for winning than any carried by our enemies. It is the American reputation. Our reputation for justice for fair dealing, for kindness, for our sturdy belief in the equal potentialities for good or evil in all men - without respect to race, or creed, or color. That reputation is our Joshua's horn.