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(RIFLE RANGE)

To : The Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians

From: Emmet L. O'Connor , Lt. Col. Infantry. (Retired)

Sirs:

I had the distinct honor of being one of the early selection of officers to serve with the 442d Regimental Combat Team. At the time of selection I was assigned to the Office of Military Governor of the Territory of Hawaii with station at Iolani Palace in Honolulu.

I was born and raised in the Territory of Hawaii and grew up among the people of Japanese ancestry as well as attending school with them. As far as I am concerned, we were all Americans.

Being the senior officer in Hawaii assigned to the newly designated 442d RCT, I became the commanding officer of the 3000 to 3500 casuals who had volunteered for combat service with the unit. My assignment was to deliver these men to the unit at Camp Shelby, Miss. There were three other caucasian officers and several young lieutenants of Japanese ancestry, recent graduates of the University of Hawaii ROTC program, to assist me.

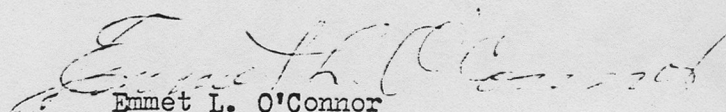
Upon arrival at Camp Shelby, the Hawaii Budda-heads were dispersed among the various units comprising the combat team where they joined the cadre of Kotonks from the mainland US. These latter, were the people whose families were incarcerated behind barbed wire fences, some even living in horse barns, and under armed guard. These were the people, citizens of these United States in most cases, who had been uprooted from their homes and herded like so many cattle to the so-called "Relocation Centers".

During the following months of strenuous training to prepare these young men for whatever lay ahead of them, and later on during combat when new replacements joined the outfit, I was asked why the people of Japanese ancestry were imprisoned behind barbed wire while the people of German and Italian ancestry were not. We were at war with Germany and Italy as well as Japan, yet only those of Japanese ancestry were imprisoned. Their people had committed no acts of sabotage nor were they, or had they been guilty of spying for the enemy. Questions for which I had no answers.

Young men joining the 442d from the concentration camps ( I call them that because to me these 'centers' were just that) told of aged Grandparents in the twilight of their lives facing the fact that they could end their lives in this land of freedom, behind barbed wire as prisoners. Of young children of pre-school age separated from other racial groups and forced to live behind barbed wire fences. Of their parents, in many cases second and third generation removed from Japan. Of brothers and sisters who had been swept out of college and herded off to live as prisoners. The young soldiers were confused as to why their people were being treated as they were.

The Budda-heads from Hawaii couldnt understand why the families and friends of the Manilani Kotonks were kept as prisoners, while their people back home in Hawaii were living in freedom.

There is no way that the United States of America can fully and justly compensate the thousands of men, women and children who were so dispically treated by our government during World War II. The loss of personel property, homes and businesses as as serious as they were, are nothing compared to loss of pride, the loss of faith in the country and the shame of being kept and treated as prisoners while their young men were going off to die for the country that was keeping the Nikkei imprisomed.

  
Emmet L. O'Connor