



vegetables were grown in the river valleys mostly between Seattle and Tacoma but also including one vegetable growers association, mostly of Italian farmers, in the Sammamish valley. Other growers and their associations were almost entirely in the valleys of the Duwamish, White, Stuck, and Puyallup rivers, and were centered about the towns of Kent, Auburn, Summer and Puyallup. The objective of the association was so to regulate the shipments of these vegetables, largely lettuce, peas & cauliflower, to eastern markets that those markets would not be flooded with an accidental surplus and thereby unduly depress the market prices. During the dozen years or so during which this procedure was carried out under my direction, it was a successful operation, and had the full cooperation of the growers and shippers.

While my function, therefore, had primarily to do with the regulations of the shipments, inevitably I was drawn into other aspects of the problems of the growers and the shippers. For example, in one year, I believe it was 1940 or 1941, there was a strike called of farm laborers by a communist controlled union headquartered in Seattle, and I was called upon to solve the problem thereby created which in due course it proved possible for me to do. Since the workers in the shippers shed were largely itinerant laborers who followed the harvest around from one part of the country to another, they also had certain problems in connection with union labor in those sheds, and I also had the task of representing the growers and shippers in their dealings with the union, which in this case proved to be a branch of the teamsters union. On another occasion, I believe in 1942, there was a strike of lumber and saw mill workers which deprived the growers of the needed containers in order to ship their produce to market. The situation was critical, and again I was called upon to render assistance. This I did by leasing a plant producing these containers, making my own separate agreement with the lumber and saw mill workers union, thereby continuing the plant in operation and providing the growers and shippers with the necessary containers.

As can well be seen, this brought me into continuing and intimate contact over a period of years with the growers and shippers who were associated with the Washington Produce Shippers Association. Consequently, I developed a good many close friendships with the Japanese in those valleys, and many of those friendships have continued as long as these friends of mine lived, tho a good many of them have died by now due to the passage of time and ravages of age. Amongst the ethnic Japanese then resident in the valley, engaged either in shipping or growing of vegetables, I counted a good many close, personal friends, some of whom are still extant and still my good friends.

At the same time that I was managing WPSA, as I shall call the shippers association, I was also manager of WSPA, as I shall refer to the Washington State Tax Payers Association, which in itself was very largely supported by farmers associations thruout the state. At the same time I was also a member of what was known as the Seattle Municipal Defense Committee, headed by Seattle's mayor, and I was also a member of the Seattle Chamber of Commerce Was Industries Committee, of the Seattle Defense Chest, and of the King County Defense Committee.

Already in early 1942 there was much talk about the possible subversive activities of Japanese in view of the fact that we had been at war with Japan since 7th of Dec. 1941. Knowing the Japanese, as I did, I was convinced that, as indeed proved to be the case, that they were good citizens, so far as they were citizens, and that even the issei, or Japanese who had been born in Japan, were dependable people and that there was no danger from them with regard to the subversion that was so much discussed in those days. Since in point of fact no sabotage or subversive activities were ever committed by any Japanese on the West Coast, it is clear that my confidence was well placed. Therefore with a clear conscious I set about defending the Japanese and doing so in the hope no action will be taken against them, particularly in view of the fact that the majority of them, having been born in the U.S.A., were American citizens.

4

A very odd aspect of the situation developed shortly when I got in touch with the Federal Bureau of Investigation in Seattle and learned, to my satisfaction and somewhat to my surprise, that the FBI were opposed to any evacuation or incarceration of Japanese and Japanese Americans. The head of the office whose name for the moment I cannot seem to remember assured me repeatedly in several meetings I had with him and others of his staff that they were opposed to any evacuation of these people on the ground that so doing would potentially create a problem which did not exist at all. As a matter of fact, there had been a few Japanese who had been sent to this country as spies and they were well known to the FBI and at the time of Pearl Harbor were immediately caught and incarcerated and the threat that they posed, such as it may have been, was terminated. No threat, the FBI assured me, existed with regard to resident Japanese with whom I was concerned. Evidently the desire or the move to incarcerate them in what were euphemistically called relocation centers did not derive from the FBI nor from real threat that any of them posed to the security of the country. I myself am of the opinion that the urge to bring about their evacuation was a commercial urge rather than a military one. I say this because in the early days of 1942, I had been receiving correspondence from an association of growers and shippers at Salinas in California, urging me to join in bringing pressure to bear on the military in order to get the Japanese competition removed, by getting them sent away from the coast. I was extremely annoyed by this kind of correspondence and now I wish I had saved some of it as evidence, but at the time I was so simply disgusted with it that I merely threw it in the waste basket. None the less I did know that urge existed and that it was strictly a competitive one in the Salinas area in California, if not elsewhere, and I was assured in some of that correspondence that their associations in California had brought pressure to bear on General Swing which was, I believe, then the name of the West Coast commanding officer. I assume that he commanded the sixth army at the Presidio of San Francisco. I believe it was on his orders that the evacuation took place on the West coast, though doubtless authorized by someone at a higher level.

I have just gone thru my date book for the early months of 1942 and I have made a series of notes day by day as to the things I was doing to try to dissuade the authorities from carrying out this then continuing threat of removing the Japanese from their homes and businesses in this area. As a member of various defense committees, some of which I mentioned above, but including another one called Defense Survey Committee and several others, I sought to convince them that no threat existed amongst our own Japanese fellow citizens and fellow residents of this area. It became evident I was not very successful at this and that the hysteria was growing as time went on. Some of the reasons for it may have been a grand jury investigation of a Japanese, of the name of Masuda, in which I was called upon to testify although I have no recollections of what it was I was called upon to talk about and I don't have any idea right now what it was that Mr. Masuda may have been accused of doing. At any rate, the very fact of the existence of a grand jury investigating a Japanese was some what alarming to lot of people and also supported in a sense some of the jingoistic attitude of the weekly paper in Seattle called the Argus which was pretty violent in its opposition to the Japanese and in its support of their removal from the area. I remember that at one time the Argus damned me very extensively editorially for being a subversive character in that I was opposing the evacuation of the Japanese in this area. Without bitterness, I can look back upon it with measure of amusement when I consider that I was the one who went to war in World War Two while my critics stayed home making money.

I attended many conferences of federal and state officials on the matter of the then pending evacuation of the Japanese. As I have above related, I also represented the farmers in settling a communist inspired strike of farm laborers. The only way this could be done was simply by refusing a deal with them and by bringing about their expulsion from the valleys. I made a good faith effort to try to deal with that union, but when I went to their office in a warehouse building on Western Avenue in Seattle, I found the office adorned with a soviet

flag the whole length of the wall and a P-38 pistol hanging on a nail in the middle of it. This exemplified the attitude I found there and consequently I had no choice but to lead the farmers in the valley in a flat rejection of dealing with the communists and in discharging all of the communist laborers who had been planted on their farms. Recalled that on the first day of May, May Day being a well known communist celebration, I was called to the window of my office on First Avenue in Seattle to see a communist parade going by carrying soviet flags, and including a flat bed truck on which there three gibbets erected, and three dummies hanging from them, labeled "Mayor of Kent", "Mayor of Auburn", and "Floyd Oles". I still take some pride in the fact that I am certainly one that very select group who have been hanged in effigy in a communist parade.

By looking at my date book of those days I see that, back as early as early February 1942, I was meeting with the Japanese American Citizens League in Seattle and I was meeting with the survey committee of what was called the Seattle Municipal Defense Committee. I was so busy with these things in the evening that I see , on the tenth of February, my note book says "not much sleep in these days". I see that on February 20th I attended a conference on alien evacuation in Olympia at the governor's office and then I see that on the 27th I made a statement before what was called the Tolaln committee on alien evacuation. I see that at four thirty in the afternoon on the 27th I conferred with the officers of the department of justice down in the Federal building about alien evacuation. On the 28th of February I attended another conference with the FBI who of course were my supporters on the matter of evacuation because they did not believe in it. On March 2nd I see that I appeared before the Tolan committee and talked with them and a number of other U.S. government officials. On March 4th another FBI conference on the same subject. Day after day I was spending hours down in the valley, both in the days and evenings on the matter of the shipments of vegetables, getting ready for them, and on labor matters. Then came another conference on the 16th of March at the governor's office about conditions in the valley. On the

19th of March I had a meeting with something called Farm Security Administration which seem to have been a federal body. On the 24th of March I had a meeting in the evening at Olympia again with the Farm Security Administration. Finally, everything else failing, I went to San Francisco on April 1st by United Air Lines, stayed at the Drake Hotel and on the second day of April had a all day conference with two organization that met jointly, called the Wartime Civil Control Administration and the War Relocation Board. The head of the latter was Dr. Milton Eisenhower and I remember that on the second of April I had dinner with Milton Eisenhower at an oriental cafe of some kind in San Francisco. On the third of April there was a final conference on the Japanese evacuation, about which I was not successful, and that evening I returned to Seattle. I see that the next day, April 4th, the whole day was devoted to WPSA, Washington Produce Shippers Assn. At eleven o'clock I met again with the Seattle Municipal Defense Committee at the Mayor's office. On the 11th of April my notes say that I spent all day and evening in preparing maps and data for something called the Wartime Civil Control Administration. Again on the 13th I was spending the whole day on the Produce Shippers Association situation and on the 14th I was in Olympia for conferences with Governor Langlie and his cabinet members on the Japanese situation. On the 15th I had breakfast with a group of Japanese from the valley, also on 15th of April I see that I was in Puyallup, Sumner, and Kent and went down to inspect what was called the Puyallup Assembly Center. The 20th of April I spent all day in the valley. On the 21st of April I made a report to King County Defense Council at nine o'clock in the morning and at 11 o'clock I made similar report to Seattle Municipal Defense Council which met in the Mayor's office. On the 22nd I spent all day with the Japanese in the valley. On the 23rd of April I represented the growers at the federal hearing about shipping containers, at the Olympic Hotel. On the 27th of April I attended a produce shippers meeting all day long at Auburn. On May 5th again I talked to the Seattle Municipal Defense Council at the Mayor's office. I see that on the 7th of May at 2 o'clock in the afternoon I testified in federal court in what was called the Masuda case. I

haven't any idea what that was all about. And again on the 8th of May at 11 o'clock in the morning I met at the Mayor's office with the Seattle Community War Council. A changed name for the Seattle Community Defense Council.

On May 9th, with sadness and embarrassment and regret, I spent the whole day down in the valley and all I was doing really was saying good-bye to my friends who were about to be evacuated. It was on the 11th that the evacuation, which had already had been known to be about to happen, was actually formally ordered. I was spending most of my time in the valley amongst the Japanese, not all of whom by then had been evacuated although the orders had been that they should be evacuated by May 16th, but they weren't. I see that on the 22nd of May I went down to Kent to attend a conference on farm labor and there was a train there on which my Japanese friends were being shipped out that afternoon. That was the last I saw of many of them. I see that my diary on the 22nd of May contained a last, and I must say a rather despairing sentence, which reads as follows, "Last Japanese leave by train from Auburn to Pinedale, California."

Meanwhile the Argus in Seattle had been giving me some very bad publicity and a deputy prosecuting attorney in King County who had previously had been a state senator was threatening to indict me for unfair labor practices for refusing to negotiate with the communist union. At the same time, the chairman of the committee of the Seattle Chamber of Commerce of which I was a member sent me a letter, which I wish I had saved, which told me that if I did not resign from the Chamber of Commerce he was going to take steps to have me ejected from it, on the ground of my being a subversive character. I did not resign from the Chamber, but I did refrain from going to any further meetings of his committee.

As will readily be seen, I was very deeply involved in the evacuation of the Japanese in the spring of 1942. As a matter of fact, the episode left some scars. In retrospect I can only say that under similar circumstances I would have done the same thing over again precisely as I did it in those days.



9

My colleagues of the Washington State Taxpayers Association supported me. They not only permitted me, but encouraged me, to continue my work for the Washington Produce Shippers Association during that trying period. There is no doubt that I made a good many enemies by my championing of the Japanese but now it is obvious that I was right and my critics were wrong. The Japanese, both citizens and non-citizens, came out of the wartime period triumphantly vindicated, with a wartime record second to none. Most of my good friends of those days amongst the Japanese are no longer with us. Their friendship was something which I valued highly while they lived, and their memories will remain forever green, a precious part of my life experience. And I think back about my long and happy relationship with people like my good friends, Tom Sakahara, Ernie Saito and Doc Hanada and Harry Kuramoto and Tom Iseri and so many others, I realize that I was the gainer by that experience and that in losing a battle I won a lot of friends who remained friends as long as they lived.

One last comment. Being a reserve officer in those days, I was finally called to active duty and the Boy Scout troop of which I was the Scout Master put on a farewell dinner for me at the Elks club. I don't know who arranged all the details of the dinner, but my troop committee members were there, all of the Scouts themselves, and the master of ceremonies at the dinner was the agent in charge of the FBI office in Seattle, a very fine gentleman and I regret still that I don't remember his name. I do however remember the last thing he said to me in the speech that he made when they gave me a going present of a wrist watch. I was then a army captain and he referred to me in that style, saying, "Captain Oles, I want to assure you that you can go away with a clear conscience because you have done a good work even tho it has not been wholly successful. You had our support in it and I can give you an additional assurance which I am sure you will appreciate. We were ready for the Japanese Pearl Harbor when it came and I assure you we will be ready for the Russian Pearl Harbor when that comes".

That is my story about the Japanese evacuation of 1942. It was a very bad mistake, involving the unconstitutional deprivation of liberty of the American citizens involved, but it was an episode which I am sure will never be repeated with regard to any other minority amongst us.