

## **Major John H. Culley, .Relocation of Japanese Americans: The Hawaiian Experience, 24 Air Force Law Review 176 (1984)**

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The Japanese Navy struck a crippling blow at the American Pacific fleet stationed at Pearl Harbor on 7 December 1941. Along with reports about the devastation on “battleship row,” newspapers and radios carried mysterious rumors impugning the loyalty of those residents of Hawaii who happened to be of Japanese ancestry. These individuals were alleged to have poisoned drinking water, set signal lights and fires, dispatched homing pigeons, and sent short-wave radio messages to the enemy. Japanese trucks were alleged to have blocked roadways while signals were cut into the sugar cane fields pointing the way to Pearl Harbor. The situation quickly got out of hand until an harassed Lt. Gen. Walter C. Short found it necessary to warn the public against “unfounded rumors and fantastic flights of your imagination.” He cautioned citizens to “check carefully the authenticity and accuracy of rumors you may hear.”<sup>&\*1</sup>

In this highly emotional atmosphere, Americans began discussing the wartime disposition of the resident Japanese as well as the Japanese Americans. The dismal fate of these people in California has been described in numerous studies as not only the most deplorable violation of civil liberties in American history but also a blot in the history <sup>\*177</sup> of American race relations. However, the treatment of Japanese Americans in Hawaii, 2,000 miles closer to the battle zone than California, shows a lesser known aspect of America's wartime racial mentality. In the aftermath of the surprise assault, local military leaders, aided by the FBI and influential non-Japanese Hawaiians found themselves defending the rights of Japanese Americans against efforts by the nation's highest leaders to duplicate in Hawaii the concentration camps and deportation of the tiny West Coast Japanese minority.

The key figure in this drama was Lt. Gen. Delos C. Emmons who replaced Lt. Gen. Short as military governor of Hawaii two weeks after martial law was declared in Hawaii on the day of the Pearl Harbor attack. This critical event removed the territory of Hawaii from the control of the Interior Department and put the islands under the plenary authority of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. The military quickly moved to try to verify the widespread allegations about incidents of sabotage and espionage. The commander of the sunken fleet of battleships, Rear Adm. Husband E. Kimmel, stated on 12 December that fifth column activities caused great confusion during the attack. However, Army investigators under Lt. Gen. Emmons found no evidence to support the colorful news media accounts of enemy activity in the islands either during or after the attack.<sup>&\*2</sup>

General Emmons soon took the dramatic step of publicly contradicting his coworker, Admiral Kimmel, who was relieved of his command on 17 December. On 21 December General Emmons blasted attempts to question the loyalty of any group resident in Hawaii. He indicated confidence in the loyalty of resident Japanese and provided opportunities for them to demonstrate their loyalty by acting as territorial guards and participants in other civil defense activities.<sup>&\*3</sup> His chief of military intelligence, Col. Kendall J. Fielder, later explained General Emmons' philosophy in these early days:

How differently a Himmler or a Heinrich would have handled this delicate situation! Does anyone believe for a moment that any of the Axis crowd would give one of the enemy race a fair chance to prove himself? ... It would take much too long to tell you of the many concrete ways in which many of these people who were on the spot have proved their love for America ... Americans of Japanese blood ... are Americans--and until they prove (or show themselves dangerously capable of proving) traitorous, they should be treated as Americans.^&\*4

General Emmons backed his opinion with a long letter sent through Army command channels to his civilian supervisor, Secretary of the Navy Frank Knox. The General argued against any wholesale movement of the Japanese on the Hawaiian islands. However, Secretary \*178 Knox was firmly committed to removing not only all 20,000 resident Japanese but also 98,000 Japanese Americans from the island of Oahu to a concentration camp on another island. Secretary Knox was also frustrated by the dilatory efforts of the War Department to approach the “Japanese problem.”^&\*5 President Roosevelt was greatly intrigued by the Knox plan and suggested that the Japanese population be relocated to an Army internment camp located on Molokai island.

The Army had other ideas. General Emmons soon became aware of the internment scheme and wondered about the wisdom of the President's plan in view of Japan's ability to strike Hawaii at will. He privately expressed little faith in the loyalty of Japanese in the event of an actual invasion of the Hawaiian islands by the Japanese Army. The War Plans Division of the War Department raised the ante by using General Emmons' arguments to suggest that the only possible solution to “the Japanese question” was to remove all Japanese and Japanese Americans from Oahu to the mainland. When Secretary of War Stimson and Army Chief of Staff George C. Marshall presented this plan to the President and Secretary Knox, Roosevelt was staggered and attempted to press for adoption of his Molokai plan whereupon a furious debate ensued.^&\*6 After a month of discussion the War Department plan was adopted on 13 March 1942 with the ominous recommendation by the Joint Chiefs of Staff that “all Japanese residents of the Hawaiian Islands (either U.S. citizens or aliens) be transported to the United States mainland and placed under guard at a concentration camp in such locality as is most suitable.”^&\*7

Other forces, both inside and outside the Government, were working against this grandiose scheme to purge Hawaii's Japanese population. These influences began when Army and Navy intelligence organizations began investigating the allegations of Japanese espionage and sabotage during the Pearl Harbor attack. After a detailed investigation, Army intelligence analysts concluded there had been no sabotage and only one suspicious act on the island of Niihau shortly after the attack.^&\*8 Those conclusions were further supported in February 1942 when the intelligence officer of the Eleventh Naval District, Lt. Comdr. K. D. Ringle reexamined the whole problem of the espionage and sabotage potential of Japanese Americans and submitted his report to \*179 the Chief of Naval Operations, Adm. Ernest J. King. He reviewed not only the product of an extensive U.S. Navy study of the West Coast and Hawaii but also confidential reports made by the Department of Commerce, State Department, and Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI). Commander Ringle concluded that the problem of Japanese Americans had been “magnified out of its true proportion” mainly “because of the physical characteristics of the people.” Ringle recommended that legal restraints, in the interest of the war effort, be applied to agitators on the radio and in the press who were making unfair racist attacks on these people who

were no more of a threat to America's security than their more numerous brethren from Germany and Italy. He concluded that most Japanese Americans were not only loyal but incapable of committing sabotage. He called the West Coast mass evacuation and incarceration both unwarranted and unwise. Commander Ringle suggested that Japanese and Japanese Americans be treated just like other Americans and advocated giving Japanese Americans a responsible place in the nation's war effort.<sup>9</sup>

Commander Ringle's views were echoed in a separate investigation conducted by a special representative of the State Department, Curtis B. Munson. This official began by stating that the consensus of opinion in Honolulu was that there would be no racial uprising of the Japanese in Hawaii. The "big bulk" of the first generation Japanese as well as ninety-eight percent of the second generation Japanese citizens of Hawaii were considered loyal. He estimated that a maximum of 1,500 Japanese were considered dangerous. He also cited an FBI report that there were only about 400 suspects among individuals of Japanese ancestry and only 50 or 60 could be considered sinister. This supported John Edgar Hoover's view that the demand for evacuation was "based primarily upon public political pressure rather than on factual data" and that the FBI was fully capable of handling the small numbers of suspects then under surveillance.<sup>10</sup>

Congress entered the fray in March 1942 when it published the findings of the select House Committee Investigating National Defense Migration (the Tolan Committee). Although the report focused on the tragic West Coast removal program, it featured the courageous efforts of Hawaii's sole Congressional delegate Samuel Wilder King to extend the investigation to Hawaii. He began by quoting a report by Honolulu's police chief, W. A. Gabrielson, that there was neither sabotage nor the deliberate blocking of traffic on 7 December or the weeks following that date. Next, he offered an impressive array of testimony by civilian <sup>180</sup> and military leaders who were prepared to refute the irresponsible press rumors concerning espionage, sabotage, and other fifth-column activity in Hawaii. Strangely enough, the Hawaiian hearings were never held. Instead, affidavits were taken from the officials suggested by Delegate King but largely ignored in the Committee's final report.<sup>11</sup>

Perhaps the key reason for this was the fact that a debate was developing in the press over the disposition of the Japanese and Japanese Americans in Hawaii. The New Republic, on 6 April 1942, examined the validity of the various espionage and sabotage stories carried by the press immediately after the attack on Pearl Harbor and concluded that they were spurious.<sup>12</sup> After discussing the valiant efforts of Delegate King, in the 25 July 1942 issue of the Nation, Albert Horlings examined the question of Hawaii's 150,000 Japanese by reciting the largely discredited rumors that appeared shortly after the assault. Two weeks later, in the same magazine, T. H. Ige replied in a study of Hawaii's loyal Japanese that echoed the sentiments of General Emmons, Colonel Fielder, Commander Ringle, and Delegate King that Americans of Japanese descent were behaving in Hawaii just like all other victims of the Pearl Harbor attack. A week later Horlings published a rejoinder in which he pointed out that he was still for the evacuation because of the racial loyalties of Hawaii's Japanese.<sup>13</sup>

Socialist Norman Thomas, in a blistering July 1942 attack on the treatment of Japanese Americans on the West Coast, blamed the news media for the hostile attitude towards all Japanese and Japanese Americans that developed in the nation six weeks after the bombing of

the Pacific fleet. After citing official government reports revealing the absence of fifth-column activity in Hawaii, he contrasted the elaborate coverage of circumstantial sabotage and espionage rumors by the press and radio with the paltry coverage of the subsequent exoneration of Americans of Japanese ancestry. Thomas concluded that “the truth about Hawaii never caught up with the sensational falsehoods. It cannot be said that the press or radio did much to help circulate the truth.”<sup>14</sup>

These debates and discussions were much on the mind of key administration officials as they moved to implement the deportation decision of 13 March. The military authorities found a quagmire of difficulties surrounding their proposed removal of Hawaii's Japanese and <sup>181</sup> Japanese American population. Originally, the evacuees were to be shipped to the west coast on board empty returning ships. However, the Navy began complaining that adequate shipping was not available for the huge involuntary migration planned by the President and his advisers. The evacuation of 20,000 wives and children of servicemen from the war zone quickly assumed priority over the resettlement plan. Army officials led by General Emmons and Assistant Secretary of War John J. McCloy began mentioning the fact that the Japanese were an indispensable element in the skilled labor force of the islands and could hardly be spared in the war-torn environment of Hawaii. General Emmons argued that the proposed removal would be both highly dangerous and impractical unless they could be replaced by an equivalent skilled labor force from the mainland.<sup>15</sup>

In the face of mounting opposition, Navy Secretary Knox and President Roosevelt continued to pressure the military to implement the drastic decision of March 1942. However, by 15 July 1942, Admiral King and General Marshall had concluded that the project was unfeasible and they presented a joint memorandum to the President recommending a drastic change in the policy towards the Japanese and Japanese Americans in Hawaii. They persuaded the Secretary of Navy and the Secretary of War to agree that no United States citizen considered by military authorities to be a danger to national security would be transferred to the mainland for internment. The legal reason for this change was the availability of habeas corpus proceedings on the mainland which the American Civil Liberties Union had used to block the interment of thirteen Hawaiian-born Japanese. Instead, dangerous individuals would be interned in the Hawaiian Islands under the authority vested in the military governor. The Commanding General, Hawaiian Department was also authorized to “evacuate to the United States, for resettlement in areas to be established by the War Relocation Authority, up to 15,000 persons, in family groups, from among the United States citizens of Japanese ancestry who may be considered as potentially dangerous to national security.”<sup>16</sup> Two days later, the President reluctantly approved this memorandum which substituted evacuation and resettlement for internment. The military governor of Hawaii at last had complete control of the fate of the Japanese in Hawaii. Under General Emmons' control, the target number for individuals to be transferred to mainland relocation camps gradually fell from 15,000 to 5,000 to 1,500, with the criteria of “potential danger” becoming more and more diluted in the process. It was difficult for the teams of two to three G-2 military intelligence officers, who were hard put to explain the exemplary loyalty of Hawaii's Japanese citizens and <sup>182</sup> residents to designate anyone as a member of this category. Finally, Assistant Secretary of War McCloy advised General Emmons to work out an alternative evacuation plan to satisfy Secretary Knox and President Roosevelt.

When the great Hawaiian evacuation finally got into high gear, a total of 1037 individuals were involved, including 912 American citizens. This small group included special categories of Japanese residents who General Emmons chose to evacuate. A group of Nisei (second generation Japanese Americans educated in the United States), held in the Sand Island detention camp along with spouses and children who chose to accompany them, were evacuated. Wives and children of aliens who had earlier been interned on the mainland were also authorized to join their relatives. Another group that was considered “potentially dangerous” on the islands but harmless on the mainland were also shipped out. This included both alien and citizen fishermen with a knowledge of the waters, persons who had requested repatriation to Japan, a number of Kibei (American-born Japanese educated in Japan), and other released detainees under surveillance. Even this tiny number of Japanese and Japanese Americans was considered harmless by Colonel Fielder who explained “the evacuation is merely a matter of relieving pressure .... They really aren't dangerous and not bad at all.”^&\*17

The lessons of this decent and admirably restrained treatment of Hawaii's citizens and residents of Japanese ancestry reflected favorably on many military and civilian government officials. Historian Andrew Lind noticed a remarkable coincidence:

It was a source of considerable amazement to wartime visitors to learn that almost all the officials responsible for the policies governing the treatment of the Japanese in Hawaii during the war were Southerners. The various commanding generals, the head of Military Intelligence, and the director of the FBI through most of the war, had been born and had lived much of their lives below the Mason and Dixon line. Any preconceptions they may have held regarding the race problem in the South were presumably not applied to Hawaii. Quite probably, on the other hand, they had lived in Hawaii long enough to be influenced by its prevailing sentiments on race relations.^&\*18

The activities of Delegate King revealed the lack of local economic and political pressure calling for Japanese removal. Authorities on the scene in Hawaii were in almost total agreement that the Japanese and Japanese Americans be treated as much like those of German or Italian descent as possible under the circumstances. The racist attitude of the nation's highest civilian war leaders like President Roosevelt and Secretary Knox formed a surprising contrast to the more practical attitudes on the part of the nation's military commanders who, under martial law, were in charge of the disposition of the inhabitants of \*183 Hawaii. This contrasting attitude was highlighted in the Supreme Court case of *Korematsu v. United States* by Associate Justice Owen J. Roberts, who had conducted his own investigation of Hawaiian espionage and sabotage three weeks after the Pearl Harbor attack. He concluded initially that the assault had been greatly abetted by Japanese spies, some with “no open relations with the Japanese foreign service” and that too close an adherence to the U.S. Constitution had seriously inhibited the work of the FBI.^&\*19 Justice Roberts, in discussing the fate of a West Coast detainee, blasted government assertions concerning military necessity by pointing to the case of Hawaii which, unlike California, was both 2,000 miles closer to Japan and under military rule. Justices Robert H. Jackson and Frank Murphy joined Roberts in dissent and argued that the west coast exclusion had no reasonable relation to the threat of espionage or sabotage. Military intelligence and FBI reports were ignored in this exercise in group punishment that also ignored individual guilt and legalized racism because those of Japanese ancestry were seen as belonging to an “enemy race” and bound

to an enemy nation by racial, cultural, and religious ties.^&\*20

This contrast between the racism rampant on the west coast and the tolerance of the Hawaiian community was highlighted by Curtis B. Munson's report to the State Department:

The result of this is that the Hawaiian Japanese does not suffer from the same inferiority complex or feel the same mistrust of whites that he does on the mainland. While it is seldom on the mainland that you find even a college-educated Japanese-American who talks to you wholly openly until you have gained his confidence, this is far from the case in Hawaii. Many young Japanese there are fully as open and frank and at ease with a white as white boys are. In a word Hawaii is more of a melting pot because there are more brown skins to melt--Japanese, Hawaiian, Chinese and Filipino. It is interesting to note that there has been absolutely no bad feeling between the Japanese and the Chinese in the islands due to the Japanese-Chinese war. Why should they be any worse towards us?^&\*21

#### Footnotes

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1

Andrew W. Lind, *Hawaii's Japanese, An Experiment in Democracy* at 41-43 (1946).

2

J. Garner Anthony, *Hawaii Under Military Rule*, at 1-10 (1955). See also a detailed discussion of the media rumors in Gwenfred Allen's *Hawaii's War Years* as well as Lind, *Hawaii's Japanese* at 38-61.

3

Radio Address by Lt. General Delos C. Emmons, 29 *Hawaii Educational Rev.* 137 (1942).

4

Morton Grodzins, *Americans Betrayed*, at 299 (1949).

5

Michi Weglyn, *Years of Infamy*, at 175 (1976). For material on the initial delineations of "the

Japanese problem” see FDR's memo 10 Aug. 1936 proposing that hostile Japanese living in Hawaii whose loyalty is directed to Tokyo be incarcerated in “a concentration camp in the event of trouble.” This memo responded to Navy concern about Japanese efforts to photograph and map Hawaiian military positions after 1924. Rocky Mountain News, February 11, 1983, at 58.

6

Stetson Conn, Rose C. Engelmana Byron Fairchild, *Guarding the U.S. and Its Outposts in The U.S. Army in World War II--The Western Hemisphere* at 209-11. Office of the Chief of Military History Department of the Army, (1964) [hereinafter cited as Conn].

7

Weglyn, *supra* note 5, at 175.

8

Conn, *supra* note 6, at 207.

9

Jacobus Ten Broek, Edward N. Barnhart & Floyd W. Matson, *Prejudice, War and the Constitution* at 298-99 (1954), see also Weglyn, at 284.

10

Weglyn, at 46-47, 284.

11

House Select Comm. Investigating Nat'l Defense Migration, 77th Cong., 2nd Sess. at 31 (1942), see also Lind, at 43-49.

12

Japanese in Hawaii Found U.S. Army Absolutely Fair and Impartial, 106 *The New Republic* at 445-46 (April 6, 1942).

13

A. Horlings, *Hawaii's 150,000 Japanese*, 155 *Nation* at 69-71 (July 25, 1942). T. H. Ige, *Hawaii's Loyal Japanese: Reply to A. Horlings*, 155 *Nation* at 122 (August 8, 1942).

A. Horlings, *Still For Evacuation: Rejoinder to T. H. Ige*, 155 *Nation* at 140 (August 15, 1942).

14

Norman Thomas, *Democracy and Japanese Americans* at 5 (1942).

15

Weglyn, at 50. Conn at 207-08.

16

Roger Daniels, *The Decision to Relocate the Japanese Americans* at 70-71 (1975).

17

Weglyn, at 86-89.

18

Lind, at 71.

19

Roger Daniels, *Concentration Camps U.S.A.: Japanese Americans and World War II*, at 49-50 (1971).

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*Korematsu v. United States*, 323 U.S. 214 (1944).

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Lind, at 71.