"What We're Fighting For"

Statements By
United States Servicemen about Americans of Japanese Descent

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
WAR RELOCATION AUTHORITY

WASHINGTON, D. C.
1944

FROM A VETERAN OF GUADALCANAL

DECEMBER 20, 1943

Recovering from malaria in a California Marine camp, 22-year-old Marine Pfc. Robert E. Borchers of Chicago one night wrote a letter to the American Legion:

"I am one of the fortunate Marines who have recently returned to this country after serving in the offensive against the Japanese on Guadalcanal... We find...a condition behind our backs that stuns us. We find that our American citizens, those of Japanese ancestry, are being persecuted, yes, persecuted as though Adolph Hitler himself were in charge.

"...I'm putting it mildly when I say it makes our blood boil... We shall fight this injustice, intolerance and un-Americanism at home! We will not break faith with those who died... We have fought the Japanese and are recuperating to fight again. We can endure the hell of battle, but we are resolved not to be sold out at home."

* * *

FROM MARCH FIELD, CALIFORNIA

JANUARY 10, 1944

Sirs:

Pfc. Raymond (actually Robert) Borcher's letter and your story "Inquisition in Los Angeles" (Time, Dec. 20) point up one of the things that has been worrying me as I get ready to take a trip.

I think I have a right to expect that the fundamental human rights which are held up as a banner for us now are still in existence when I get back. The emotional, hateful racial prejudice shown by certain Californians against anyone with yellow skin who can be called "Jap" certainly helps tear down the Constitution of our country not only for loyal Americans of Japanese descent, but for all loyal Americans.

If California succeeds in passing a law excluding all persons of Japanese descent, there is nothing which would stop any state from passing a law excluding all New Yorkers who wear glasses (like me) or all Baptists with Swedish names...

They say many of us don't know what we're fighting for now; you keep up the good work and we'll know right well what we have to fight for, and against, when we get back.

WADSWORTH LIKELY,
Sergeant

OldMagazineArticles.com

"What We're Fighting For"

Statements By
United States Servicemen about Americans of Japanese Descent

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
WAR RELOCATION AUTHORITY
WASHINGTON, D. C.
1944

★ ★ ★

FROM "SOMEWHERE IN ITALY"
JULY 3, 1944

Sirs:

It is two years and a couple of days since I left the States with a whole hatful of company on the war's leeching business. During the ten-minute breaks in Africa and Italy we have devoted a lot of effort to trying to realize in the imagination what life is like at home.

Today a magazine (Time, April 24) comes to the beachhead and...tells a story, and these pleasant images become hideous and confused. According to the story five Japanese, including one Frank Kitagawa, are sent to Great Meadows, N.J., from an Arizona relocation center to help Ed Kowalick run his 600-acre farm.... Ed Kowalick's neighbors mount a blind patriotism against this five-man Oriental menace within their gates. A building on Kowalick's farm is burned; and Kowalick, being one man, is forced to send the offenders away. This is, as I said, a little thing. Nobody killed, nobody maimed. To show they hold no hard feelings, the farmers present Ed Kowalick with a box of cigars, and the incident is closed....

It is the schoolhouse, I think, that sticks in my craw. Presumably the small fry of Great Meadows are taught in this schoolhouse: study algebra; and Archimides principle; and nouns; and learn that Lincoln called them "the last best hope of earth..." This is the schoolhouse where hundreds met to hunt down five, who had committed the crime of discarding their ancestry for the ties of a new country.

There are crosses with Japanese names in the American cemeteries in the bitter Italian hills. These men are worthy to bear arms; how then are they not worthy to grow tomatoes?

Since I began, a score of shells have dropped into the vicinity. They threaten my life, for which I have a high regard, but not the things that give my life sustenance. Now I feel that these things are threatened and I do not know where to go to find a clean picture of my country. It is not the matter of Great Meadows alone. Lord knows, that is only the latest and one of the least striking of the items on a long list. Somewhere in the confusion is the central matter of what is true and what is not true about our national life.

This is a very personal matter, like love or good beer or dying, and I should like someone to give me the answer.

THOMAS RIGGS, Jr.
2nd Lieutenant

OldMagazineArticles.com