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RECOMMENDATION
for the award of
THE MEDAL FOR MERIT
to
DILLON S. MYER

It is recommended that the Medal for Merit be awarded to Dillon S. Myer in recognition of his "exceptionally meritorious conduct" as the Director of the War Relocation Authority "in the performance of outstanding services in the furtherance of the prosecution of the war."

The basis upon which this recommendation rests is the extraordinary significance to American democracy of the services rendered by Mr. Dillon S. Myer at a time when the United States had joined with other liberty-loving nations of the world in a struggle for survival against the forces of totalitarian oppression and racism. Mr. Myer's far-sighted administration of a controversial war agency resulted in a program which, by reason of its involvement with a racial problem, carried a potential of peril to the very soundness of our national integrity, but which, under his leadership, became an affirmation of American faith in the validity of democratic processes. He saved American democracy from the shame of utilizing an anti-democratic formula to dispose of a racial minority, and in doing so he salvaged for American democracy a minority group that has proved itself highly worth saving. Warring on American soil against racism within the United States, he won for democracy a victory as real as the victory won by American armed forces overseas.

The case for the award is predicated on the consistently high quality of wisdom, resourcefulness, integrity and courage displayed by Mr. Myer throughout his administration of a complex and controversial wartime program which involved more than 100,000 Americans of Japanese ancestry.

The critical situation confronting Mr. Myer when, on June 17, 1942, he became Director of the War Relocation Authority.

Under the initial impact of war with Japan, an American minority, whose existence had previously escaped the notice of the majority of the American people, was suddenly thrust into the national limelight. This minority, of comparatively recent appearance in the United States—1884 being the year when its ancestral country, Japan, first permitted general emigration—was small as well as little known: it formed slightly less than one-tenth of one per cent of the total population of the continental United States. Nevertheless, the fact that 88.5 per cent of the entire group lived within the three Pacific Coast States became, after the outbreak of war with Japan, a matter of concern to our military authorities.

In the judgment of the Commanding General of the Western Defense Command, such concentration within the vulnerable coastal area of a minority that was racially and culturally affiliated with a powerful enemy and that was presumed to include a small, unidentifiable number of potential saboteurs, constituted a grave menace to national security. Accordingly, he recommended, as a precautionary measure dictated by military considerations, the exclusion from the coastal area of

all persons of Japanese ancestry.

It happened that the Commanding General's recommendation coincided with the desire of the long-established, highly-organized anti-Oriental groups of the West Coast. These anti-democratic forces had for forty years been harassing the Japanese Americans with the obvious aim of driving them permanently and completely from the coastal states. The presence of this minority group was resented on two primary counts: first, because its members were of a non-white race; and second, because many of its members had offered too energetic competition to Caucasians in certain fields of enterprise. The war with Japan and the need for taking every reasonable precaution to safeguard the West Coast permitted the anti-democratic pressure groups to advance toward their long-coveted objective under the banner of patriotism and in vociferous support of the Commanding General's security recommendation.

The United States Government, in the period when the Pacific Coast was under threat of invasion, acting in good faith upon the recommendation of the military commander responsible for the protection of that area, provided for the exclusion from home and source of livelihood of more than 100,000 people, two thirds of whom were American citizens by birth, and only a small number of whom were believed to be dangerous. In sanctioning a mass evacuation on the basis of race and ancestry, the Federal Government unintentionally gave apparent support to the doctrines of the racists.

Mass fear and distrust of this small and little known segment

of the American population, intensified by the continuing successes of the Japanese enemy across the Pacific and stimulated by the rising fury of the racists, interpreted the exclusion order as an official warning against the entire minority of Japanese Americans. A war-shaken, misinformed public was increasingly inclined to support the racists' demand that all Japanese Americans should be held in concentration camps for the duration of the war and then be deported to Japan. There was at that period little public realization of the implications to American democracy of such a program.

On June 17, 1942, when Mr. Myer became Director of the War Relocation Authority, the mass evacuation of the Japanese American minority from the Pacific Coast had been ordered and was partially accomplished. More than 100,000 people with Japanese faces had been uprooted from their homes and herded into temporary camps set up at race tracks and fair grounds in the coastal states. There they remained until somewhat more suitable shelter could be provided for them in the more isolated parts of the interior. By mid-June the camps in the interior were in process of construction by the Army Engineers and were already filling rapidly with dislocated and bewildered evacuees, as closely scheduled trains shuttled between assembly points and the unfinished barrack camps which were beginning to be called relocation centers. Armed military guards patrolled the barbed wire fences which enclosed these communities. Once inside the fences, the evacuees became the responsibility of the War Relocation

Authority, the civilian agency created to relieve the military of the responsibility of caring for the dispossessed people. The central question facing the new Director of the War Relocation Authority as he entered office was: What shall be done with the people in these centers?

For guidance, he had only the broad language of Executive Order No. 9102,^{1/} which had created his agency, and the official explanation of the evacuation order. Briefly summarized, the military reasoning which led to the evacuation was: this racial minority was believed to contain a small number of unidentified (and not readily identifiable) individuals who, if the opportunity arose, might give aid and comfort to the Japanese enemy; therefore, the whole group must be removed from the vulnerable coastal area, to be dealt with as the civilian agency created for the purpose saw fit.^{2/}

American government had never before encountered the problem of dealing with a mass of people, many of whom were American citizens, who had been excluded from home and source of livelihood on a basis of race and without specific charges having been preferred or proved against any individual in the group. Accordingly the experience of American government and administration provided no guidance to the new Director of the War Relocation Authority.

It is true that there was a guidepost implicit in the history of

^{1/} See Exhibit No. II

^{2/} See Exhibit No. III

democratic administration and procedures, a guidepost which suggests the propriety of defending the rights and privileges accorded by the Constitution of the United States to every citizen and resident alien who shall not have been charged with and convicted of a specific crime. However, the circumstances of the evacuation, the wartime fear and distrust of anyone associated with an enemy nation, and above all the racists' perversion of the Government's actual reasons for the evacuation into a blanket charge of disloyalty against the entire Japanese American minority--these factors all conspired to blur and weaken in the minds of a war-shocked public the moral obligation of a democratic state to every individual within its jurisdiction. This attitude was tersely summarized in the words of a nationally known journalist who climaxed a column devoted to the evacuation with the phrase: "To hell with habeas corpus!"^{3/}

While there was a desire, shared by many people of good will, to protect the Japanese Americans from injustice and the consequences of wartime excesses of prejudice, the arguments for dealing with the evacuees on an individual basis in accordance with democratic practice had not been articulated. Despite the contentions of the West Coast racists, some of the most stalwart champions of the rights of the evacuee group have been found on the West Coast, but these people of good will were less vocal and less organized than the exponents of

^{3/} See Exhibit No. IV

racist doctrine; they had good hearts but low voices.

The arguments of the racists, on the other hand, were carefully and cogently articulated. On the West Coast those arguments had been developed in the days before the annexation of California by the United States. ^{4/} With little alteration they had been directed in turn against the Mexican Californians, the Chinese and finally the Japanese. For forty years the racists had been concentrating their talents for agitation and invention against the Japanese, and under stimulus of war with Japan, they soared to new heights of passion and eloquence to urge the abrogation of the Bill of Rights in regard to the people of Japanese ancestry.

In mid-June of 1942, a rising tide of war-begotten, anti-democratic public sentiment accepted the racist cry of "A Jap's a Jap no matter where he was born! You can't trust any of them. Shut them up for the duration and then ship the lot of them back to Japan." Mr. Myer might have moved with the tide and so have established a precedent for undemocratic handling of unpopular minorities in time of war. He chose to go against that tide, and in doing so he set a precedent of just and honorable treatment for dislocated minorities in time of national emergency.

^{4/} See Exhibit No. I

Mr. Myer's swiftness to grasp the complexity and significance of the problem.

With the voice of good will almost lost in the clamor of racism, and with tides of unreason, hysteria, and jingoism threatening to engulf the evacuee population, Mr. Myer was capable of recognizing and of analyzing the dangers inherent in the situation.

He perceived that mass detention of any group, without due process of law, must logically lead to mass disaffection with the country which has so dealt with the group, that such disaffection must lead in turn to overt acts which would provide the racists with plausible and persuasive grounds for urging mass deportation. To state the matter another way, the evacuation might well have become a ready-made formula which racist factions could use in achieving the deportation of any "undesirable" group. It was evident to Mr. Myer that an America unable to devise a better solution to a domestic race problem than concentration camps and ultimate deportation of the whole minority involved would be in an untenable position to argue the case for democracy with other nations; furthermore, continued detention in the United States of America of a small racial minority against whom no charges had been preferred, no crimes proved, would be an infamous repudiation of the very ideals and principles for which millions of American men were offering their lives on foreign battle fields. It is of supreme importance that Dillon Myer recognized at once the vital necessity of proving to the world and to our own citizenry that the United States, faced with a wartime evacuation problem,

had no need to seek an answer in totalitarian example, but could, by faithful adherence to democratic concepts, convert a potential disaster into an actual victory for democracy, and at the same time establish a precedent for equitable treatment of dislocated minorities.

Mr. Myer's positive statesmanship in devising a program which could save the faith of a stigmatized minority and prevent the country from making a costly mistake.

Against the pressure for group detention with its threat of progressive disaffection, disloyalty and deportation, Dillon Myer launched a program involving individual appraisal, leading to progressive relocation, reintegration and rehabilitation of the evacuee minority. Against a wide-spread racist propaganda and hostile public attitude, he initiated a program to replace misinformation and vicious invention with factual information and to win for the loyal evacuees public recognition of their right to be fully accepted as Americans.

Mr. Myer's ability to carry out the program which he planned.

Not only did Mr. Myer have the acumen to recognize what kind of program was required to meet this emergency, but he also possessed the resourcefulness to devise the means of operating that program, and finally he had the qualities which enabled him to execute the policies which he set forth. The successful conduct of the relocation program required courage, keen intelligence, breadth of vision,

prescience, sense of timing, and unwavering devotion to a high ideal.

Assuming the directorship of the War Relocation Authority on June 17, Mr. Myer left Washington almost immediately to investigate the barrack communities then in process of construction and to see personally the people whose problems had become his responsibility. He met them, he talked with many of them, and he asked for their opinions. Then he returned to Washington and drew up policies under which the relocation program could operate.

As early as July 20, 1942, he adopted a tentative leave policy to permit Nisei students and workers to leave the camps and resume normal life outside the evacuated area; by September 26 the broader, permanent leave policy was issued, permitting any evacuee, citizen or alien, whose record with security agencies was clear to apply for leave. These regulations were published in the Federal Register on September 29, and became effective on October 1.

It was also in July of that year that Mr. Myer began to plead the right of the Nisei to be inducted into the Army in the same manner as any other citizens. In urging this course, Mr. Myer stressed the point that to deny the Japanese Americans the privilege of fighting for their country was to deprive these young citizens of the most convincing method of demonstrating their loyalty.

At the outbreak of hostilities between the United States and Japan, approximately 5,000 Nisei were serving in the American armed forces. Many of these were discharged, after the attack on Pearl Harbor, because of distrust in the minds of individual commanding

officers, and after March 31, 1942, War Department regulations prohibited the induction into the Army of anyone of Japanese ancestry—with the exception of those who were qualified to serve as instructors and interpreters in the ranks of Military Intelligence. Selective Service Boards were then automatically classifying all Nisei registrants as 4-C, unacceptable for military service because of ancestry.

Throughout the latter half of 1942, Mr. Myer continued to recommend that the armed forces should be opened to the Nisei. Others, particularly John J. McCloy, joined Mr. Myer in urging this course. On January 28, 1943, the Secretary of War announced that Nisei would be permitted to serve in a volunteer, segregated combat team. Selective Service continued to classify registrants of Japanese ancestry in 4-C until a year later, January 20, 1944, by which time Nisei volunteers had demonstrated their value to the Army in the Italian campaign.

The brilliance of the war record of the Nisei in Europe and in the Pacific is now a commonplace, and the part their services have played in winning acceptance of their minority group by the country for which they have fought and died cannot be overestimated—nor can Mr. Myer's prescience in grasping, back in July of 1942, what a cauterizing influence Nisei valor in battle would have upon prejudice on the home front.

However, Mr. Myer did not postpone inauguration of a program to create better understanding of the Japanese Americans until the

Nisei volunteers should have been trained for action and then sent into battle. He worked steadily to correct uninformed or misinformed public attitudes toward the evacuated people. Through cooperation with existing friendly groups and individuals, through wide dissemination of factual information about the evacuees and about the relocation program by means of agency press releases, carefully documented pamphlets, and lectures given by himself or by qualified staff members throughout the country, and increasingly through the services of relocation offices established at key points about the country, Mr. Myer battled ignorance and intolerance in America.

Throughout the period of waiting for his efforts to win just consideration for loyal and law-abiding evacuees, Mr. Myer dealt directly and candidly with the evacuees in the centers. In the months when bewildered young Americans with Japanese faces were obliged to wait behind barbed wire and under armed guard for their country to grant them the right to work and live and die with other Americans, Mr. Myer never allowed them to forget that they had friends who believed in them and who were working for them. He appealed to the Nisei to accept the hardships of the evacuation as a challenge. He kept alive their faith in the American way of life, and most important of all, he kept alive their faith in themselves. Officers in whose command the Nisei boys have fought have said that they had never seen anything to equal the morale of the

Nisei soldiers. High morale in active warfare was almost too much to expect from young, freedom-loving Americans who had spent dreary months of detention and inaction in relocation centers. But Mr. Myer had made it clear to them that service was a challenge and a test of their fundamental Americanism. They rose to that challenge.

The courage and steadfastness of purpose displayed by Mr. Myer in 1943, the most turbulent and difficult period of the relocation program.

Throughout 1943, with the relocation program in its infancy and the Nisei recruits not yet ready for battle experience, the racists rallied under the banner of super-patriotism to harry Mr. Myer through the yellow press, from the lecture platform, from the legislatures of various states, and in a few instances from the Congress of the United States. Foremost among the harriers were some members and employees of a sub-committee of the House Committee on Un-American Activities, whose tactics and practices have been described by one of their own committeemen who repudiated their motives for and manner of conducting an investigation of Dillon S. Myer and the War Relocation Authority.

In the midst of investigations of the program and malicious attacks from race-baiters and fanatics, Mr. Myer had the courage to urge the War Department to rescind the mass Exclusion Order. His first recommendation on that subject was in a memorandum dated March 11, 1943.^{5/} At that time the war picture had changed; mounting

^{5/} See Exhibit No. XIII

victories won by the American armed forces in the Pacific had dissipated the threat of invasion of the West Coast; furthermore, it had been officially established that no single act of sabotage had been committed by any Japanese American at the time of the attack on Pearl Harbor or since, either in Hawaii or in the continental United States.

Through all the virulence and fury of the last large-scale offensive of the racists, Mr. Myer forged ahead with the relocation program, and he continued to tell the truth about the evacuated people, facing the enemy in its own strongholds, lecturing in and out of the evacuated area. In that troubled year he made many badly needed and effective speeches, but two of them were "land-mark" speeches: one was made to prominent Californians gathered together at a Commonwealth Club meeting in San Francisco on August 6^{6/}; the other was delivered before the State Adjutants of the American Legion in convention at Indianapolis on November 16.^{7/} On the latter occasion, Mr. Myer was able to inform the State Adjutants that a battalion of Nisei soldiers was in action in Italy. Before the end of that year, he was able to reinforce his lectures with official War Department releases which testified to the courage and achievement of the Nisei in battle.

Tirelessly throughout the year of 1944, while relocated evacuees

6/ See Exhibit No. XIV

7/ See Exhibit No. XVII

were quietly demonstrating their worth to American life and industry, and while Nisei in uniform were daily mounting up honors and casualties overseas, Mr. Myer continued to urge upon the War Department the reopening of the West Coast to the evacuated people, so that those Japanese Americans who wished to return to their homes might do so. On December 17, 1944, the War Department announced the rescission of the mass Exclusion Order, effective January 2, 1945.

The final period of the relocation program.

The revocation of the Exclusion Order did not mean an end of problems for the War Relocation Authority or for Mr. Myer. There were tremendous obstacles to be overcome before the artificial communities which war had created in the wastelands of the country could be abandoned. There were obstacles in the form of transportation problems and housing problems, and in the violent resistance offered by the thinning ranks of West Coast racism to the return of the natives. However, Mr. Myer, with the support of a healthy and fair-minded public opinion which his own efforts had helped to awaken, had, by the end of November 1945, restored the last occupants of the relocation centers to the mainstream of American life.

Because of Mr. Myer's clear vision, brilliant planning, tireless effort, and superior executive ability--and perhaps because he has an unwavering faith in the innate fairness and decency of the American people--what was in 1941 the least known, most misunderstood,

most locality-bound American minority has become within a period of four years a well known, widely distributed minority whose Americanism has been recognized by fair-minded people throughout the nation and by fighting Americans on every battle front of the war.

A. Schmitt

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CITATION TO ACCOMPANY THE AWARD OF THE MEDAL FOR MERIT TO DILLON S. MYER

Dillon S. Myer, for exceptionally meritorious conduct in the performance of outstanding services to the United States.

As Director of the War Relocation Authority, Mr. Myer organized and directed the program for the readjustment of the 110,000 men, women, and children of Japanese ancestry who were, because of military necessity, evacuated from their homes on the West Coast early in the war. Against the pressure for group detention of the evacuees, with its threat of progressive disaffection, disloyalty and deportation, Mr. Myer launched and completed a program involving individual appraisal, leading to progressive relocation, reintegration and rehabilitation of this racial minority.

Because of Mr. Myer's clear vision, brilliant planning, tireless effort, and superior executive ability, and because of his unwavering faith in the innate fairness of the American people, what was in 1941 the least known, most misunderstood, most locality-bound American minority has become within a period of four years a well-known, widely distributed minority whose Americanism has been recognized by fair-minded people throughout the Nation and by fighting Americans on every battle front of the war.

Mr. Myer's far-sighted administration of a controversial war agency resulted in a program which, by reason of its involvement with a racial problem, carried a potential of peril to the very soundness of our national integrity, but which, under his leadership, became an affirmation of American faith in the validity of democratic processes. Warring on American soil against racism in the United States, he won for American democracy a great and significant victory.

/s/ Harry S. Truman

May 8, 1946