

E2.221

67/14
c

TO: D. S. Myer, Director
FROM: Col. Erle M. Wilson, Assistant to the Director
SUBJECT: Final Report

This report was requested on the eve of my departure from the office and must necessarily be written from memory and without notes or access to the records. It will, therefore, consist of general impressions and not be without inaccuracies.

The Adjutant General's letter assigning me to the War Relocation Authority gave no mission, nor did I ever receive from anyone in the War Department any indication as to the nature of my duties.

On reporting August 31, 1942, the Director, in the presence of the Deputy Director, Mr. Rowalt, spent more than an hour briefing me upon the general organization and future policies of the War Relocation Authority. When he concluded, he indicated that in addition to orientation, his purpose was to give me the opportunity of requesting a new assignment in case my personal views ran counter to these basic principles. This frank, friendly, and practical approach greatly impressed me and characterized our association throughout my pleasant years with WRA.

When I joined WRA, the Authority was only five months old. Mr. Dillon S. Myer had become its second Director only shortly before and its development had already gained a very high speed which, with few breathing spells, was maintained. There was few dull moments.

In the original organization, my predecessor Colonel Cress occupied the position of Deputy Director and in this capacity took a very active part in the early direction and development of the Authority. When Colonel Cress was relieved sometime prior to my coming, Mr. Rowalt properly succeeded to the

Deputy Directorship and after his death the position remained vacant. The Deputy Director's duties were performed by Assistant Directors. In the new organization, adopted shortly after my reporting, I was carried as Assistant to the Director. This designation, which carried no authority to direct or administer, reduced the level of the military assignment to that of a staff officer, which was most satisfactory to me for I had neither the desire nor the health to assume the important role of my predecessor.

In this capacity I performed such duties as were specifically assigned by the Director, including: Co-ordination of the relations between the commanders of the military guards and the Directors of the relocation centers; Any matters pertaining to the Military Police; preparation of certain correspondence with the War Department for the Director, and visits to relocation centers and to the headquarters of the 7th, 8th and 9th Army Service Commands. Probably the duty most frequently made use of was that of a Military Consultant available to any WRA personnel who had business to transact with the Military.

I attended all of the Director's conferences with Division Chiefs and all general meetings of the staff and such special conferences as were appropriate. In all these capacities definitely I was considered as one of the WRA family and the deference shown me by my associates made me feel that I was making a contribution to the success of the Authority.

Naturally my long service in the regular Army made me more conscious of the importance of the part played by the Military throughout the life of WRA and more tolerant than many of my associates, since I was better acquainted with many of the commanders and with the adverse conditions that influenced some of their decisions. The original evacuation from the West Coast was ordered by a personal friend and almost every other important development by the Military was administered or directed by some friend of long standing.

In drawing conclusions as to the moral obligation of the Army to assist WRA, it must be realized that the sole purpose of the establishment of the War Relocation Authority was to free the Army of the difficulties of the administration of such an Authority in order that the Army might better prosecute the war. This obligation was great.

Trying to divorce myself of the influence of more than 45 years service in the regular Army and speaking solely as a member of WRA, I feel that I represent the best thought in WRA in saying that the Army has met this obligation in a generally satisfactory manner. This conclusion is based upon the way in which the Army has carried out the directive of the President contained in his Executive Order creating the Authority, as well as the cooperative spirit in which the agreements based thereon consistently have been met. A few of the cases in mind would include:

- (a) The construction of the ten relocation centers.
- (b) The complete equipment of these centers for living and messing.
- (c) The purchase of rations through the Army Supply.
- (d) The purchase of fuel and at times the emergency shipments which were made promptly and in time to prevent suffering.
- (e) The ample supply to the center hospitals of equipment and medicines of the highest army standards.
- (f) The purchase of maintenance supplies through Army priorities.
- (g) The assumption of the responsibility for the transporting, feeding, and hospital care, enroute from the centers to Tule Lake of the segregees. These moves were made on troop trains priority and unusual care was taken in the guarding of these trains in order to prevent any unfortunate incidents.
- (h) The prompt removal of the few unsatisfactory military guard personnel. In some cases I would say that it was more difficult to get the Project Director to report unsatisfactory cases to the Washington Office than it was to get the offending military personnel removed.

- (i) The original supply to the centers of the complete allotment of motor equipment and at a later date, the replacement of a considerable number of these vehicles which had become unserviceable with serviceable equipment that had become out-moded for the Army.
- (j) The assistance rendered WRA by the Ordnance Repair Shops and Depots in the supply of motor parts and in making difficult overhauls.

These are mentioned because unless one has reason to bring them to mind it is easy for them to be considered as a matter of course and their importance to be overshadowed by some lesser important actions, particularly if they are discordant or give cause for irritation.

There have been cases where poor Army staff work or unfortunate peculiarities of the individual concerned has been responsible for unsound decisions, but I only ask any reader who has been aggravated thereby to reserve his judgment of the Army's contribution to WRA until he has evaluated the items from (a) to (j) above.

No single event contributed more to the acceptance by the general public of the loyal Japanese Americans and their alien parents than the decision to employ Japanese American troops. The Director early realized the importance of such a decision. It was my good fortune to be present at a conference in the office of the Assistant Secretary of War when this subject was under discussion. I have always felt that the strong representation made by the Director at that time influenced the Assistant Secretary no little in reaching a decision. The soundness of this decision has been fully demonstrated by the consistent and unparalleled record of these troops on the battlefields of Europe and in the South Pacific.

The guarding of the relocation centers from the inner perimeter of the center outward was the responsibility of the Army. Initially, there was stationed

at each center for this purpose one Military Police Escort and Guard company. These companies usually contained a high percentage of limited service men and were officered by over-aged officers which, in my opinion, raised the efficiency of the companies by contributing experience and possibly a higher grade of intelligence. In a country at war the nature of the duty was unpopular and the locations of the stations were considered poor. These disadvantages, however, seemed to be offset by an independence of action and a certain freedom that, I believe, were responsible for the surprisingly high state of morale generally noted in my visits to the centers.

The maintenance of order within the center was entirely the responsibility of the project director. The military commander could exercise no authority within the center except upon the written request of the project director in which case the military commander became entirely responsible for the administration of the center. There were only two such cases (Manzanar and Tule Lake) where the Internal Security failed and the project director requested such action. In both cases, the centers were returned to the War Relocation Authority control at the earliest moment thought expedient to do so.

In all cases except when on specific duties or in emergencies, such as fire, the enlisted men of the guard companies were off limits within the centers.

Late in 1942 the Director and the Assistant Provost Marshal General issued letters simultaneously to the project directors and to the guard company commanders outlining the cooperative procedure which should govern their contacts. These letters were mutually agreed upon and produced excellent results. The guard company commanders were especially selected by the Army to meet the exceptional requirements of the position and when the few unsatisfactory selections were reported, they were promptly replaced.

At Tule Lake, the guard company was increased by the addition of one battalion and remained at, at least, ~~at least~~, a battalion strong until the guarding of the center was assumed recently by the Department of Justice. At all the other centers the guards were gradually reduced to token strength until finally removed about September, 1945.

During the life of the War Relocation Authority there were two or possibly three deaths and one or two evacuees wounded as a result of shots fired by sentries. This, I consider, remarkably few when one considers the nature of the duty, the number guarded and the provocative inclinations of some of the irresponsible evacuees.

I believe that the guards were considered by a large number of evacuees to be a protection and that the frequently voiced objections made concerning the guards, the guard towers and wire fences, were only the outward expression of frustration caused by their evacuation and certainly this was sufficient reason. This belief is strengthened by the request of an evacuee council at one center to be issued arms for their protection in the event the military guards were removed as rumored.

Early in my tour, I voiced the opinion to the Director that ^{second} ~~seemed~~ in importance only to his position in the organization of the Authority was that of the project director. My army experience qualified me to express an opinion in this regard since the administration of a relocation center so closely paralleled that of an army post and further prompted me to say that if fifty percent of the original appointments proved satisfactory, we would be most fortunate. The total number of changes will fall within that percentage, in my opinion, and by no means were all of these due to inefficiency. This, I consider, a remarkable record and a tribute to the care and good judgment used in their selection, as well as to their ability. Due credit has undoubtedly

been given to the project directors in the final report for their part in the success of the Authority.

This same thoroughness, care and superior judgment characterized the administration by the Director and his subordinates of the Washington Office in formulating the basic policies of the War Relocation Authority and in guiding their administrative application. In my opinion, there were times when the very life of the Authority depended upon this caution. Never was a government agency so badgered by yellow journalism, fanatic race-baiters, misguided organizations, and unscrupulous politicians. Fortunately, never was an agency administered by a more honest, efficient, and higher type of American citizen. Honesty won.

In conclusion, I feel that all loyal Americans in particular and all freedom loving supporters of the democratic principles of our Constitution owe to the War Relocation Authority a debt of gratitude.

/s/ Erle M. Wilson
Colonel, Infantry
Assistant to the Director

December 12, 1945