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INTERVIEW WITH KARL BENDETSSEN

by Professor Jacobus tenBroek

July 8, 1952

Duration of the Interview: an hour and a quarter to  
an hour and a half

Place of Interview: Pentagon

Principal subject: The origin of the policy determination to evacuate the Japanese-Americans - made by whom on what reasoning and at what time.

Bendetsen said: 1. Ther persons who made the decision to evacuate did so on a basis of the fear of what the Japanese-Americans might do in time of threatened invasion as a result of their homeland orientation and the discriminations of the Caucasian against them. This is of course the main ground taken in DeWitt's final report and represents nothing new. Bendetsen insisted, however, that these were factors in the final decision whether the loyalty of the Japanese-Americans was in fact questionable or not. Bendetsen himself seemed to imply that the factors which created doubt in the minds of the decision-makers were also sound.

Why not  
in "Final"  
Dec "??"  
✓

2. B. insisted that G-2 intelligence reports as to the danger of invasion and the likelihood of disloyal acts were partly responsible for the final decision. I said we had seen some ONI reports, some FBI reports, Munson's report, Immigration and Treasury reports and that we were anxious to know what the G-2 reports were. He said of course that he could not tell me about reports that I had not already gained access to and that there was ~~not~~ no point in his telling me about reports that I had seen. Consequently this avenue of inquiry proved a dead end other than B's general insistence that intelligence reports were a factor in the final decision.

3. B was very emphatic on the following: (a) DeWitt began to propose evacuation within a few days after Pearl Harbor; (b) that Stimson and McCloy deliberated upon these proposals actively from then until the final decision was announced; (c) that General George Marshall was brought into close consultation; (d) that the President himself considered the subject upon several separate occasions and approved the final decision; (e) that B himslef played no part in the policy

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determination. He was a courier and collector of information from the middle of December until March when he received appointment as administrator of the program. During that period it was his job to figure out how to execute the decision once made.

Comment: B was particularly vehement in his denials that he had played a principal or an important role in making the decision. It was fairly apparent that charges and statements to that effect had stung him. It is of course important to re-examine all the available records for corroboration or refutation of B's statement. If the decision came about in the way described \* if De Witt began to make the proposal within a few days of Pearl Harbor and if the decision was actually made by McCloy, Stimson and the President after protracted consideration lasting from the middle of December until February - then: 1. the chronology of events is even more destructive of the pressure group theory than we had previously supposed; 2. the President himself actively participated in the decision; 3. the decision was basically a decision of civilians i.e. they did not merely act as the rubber stamp of the military but themselves deliberately determined the policy.

✓ 4. B insisted that neither he nor DeWitt gave access to pressure groups. B said that he only admitted groups of Japanese-Americans. He agreed however that the general context of anti-Orientalism developed over a period of fifty years had manifested nationally as well as on a state level undoubtedly influenced the decision.

✓ 5. B further corroborated what we already know namely that the Western Defense Command did not originate the idea of detention and did not believe that it was either necessary or desirable.

✓ 6. B said that he had not been given his just credit for having initiated the idea of a Japanese-American combat team.

✓ 7. B said that he had not kept up on writings about the evacuation but during the course of the conversation of what is in Grodzins, pointing out that Grodzins set out to prove the pressure group theory; that Grodzins did not "deign" to pay any attention to the assertion in the beginning of the final report that numerous factors went into the

making of the decision.

8. B said flatly and categorically that he wrote the final report. 

9. B said that he had the most complete records on the evacuation; that he didn't know what shape t they were in; that they were in a wooden box; that he didn't know what he would do with them eventually or when; that he thought he would probably give them to Stanford.

Note to self: Immediately upon return to Berkeley write to B strongly urging that this is the time to release the material in his possàssion and that he ought to give it to U.C. It may also be that B would be willing to give us some help in changing the classification of stuff now in Army files. He was very approachable, very generous with his time and I think quite anxious to be put in a better light historically. He said he was breaking a rule of 10 years silence to talk to me.

10. We had a little chit chat about the Individual Exclusion Program. B siad that he had been responsible for setting it up including the hearing procedure. He thought that he remembered that there had been only one case of the enforcement of an Exclusion order by troops, but readily agreed that this was wrong when I refreshed his memory. No new information of this subject.

Dictated July 9, 1952

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE  
OFFICE OF PUBLIC INFORMATION  
PRESS BRANCH

KARL ROBIN BENDETSSEN  
ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF THE ARMY

Karl Robin Bendetsen was born in Aberdeen, Washington, October 11, 1907, the son of Albert M. and Anna (Benson) Bendetsen. He was graduated from Leland Stanford University, California, in 1929 and received his law degree from that institution in 1932. He began his West Coast law practice at Aberdeen that same year.

He served in the Washington State National Guard from 1921 to 1924, and in the Officers Reserve Corps, as a Lieutenant of Field Artillery, from 1929 to 1940.

In 1940, he was called to active duty as a captain in the Judge Advocate General's Department, was transferred to the General Staff Corps shortly thereafter and promoted successively to the grades of major in 1941 and lieutenant colonel in early 1942. He was promoted to colonel March 1, 1942.

He was responsible for the drafting and assisted in the processing of the Service Extension Act of 1941, and aided in the organization and establishment of the Office of the Provost Marshal General, within which he later organized and directed the aliens division and the prisoner of war information bureau.

He was the War Department's representative on the Board which drafted the Soldiers' and Sailors' Civil Relief Act of 1940. In 1941, he drafted the executive order and the operating instructions for the seizure of the North American Aviation plant, and the following year did the same work in connection with the seizure of Air Associates plant, Bendix, New Jersey, and assisted in the operation of that plant.

He left the War Department in 1942, and became an Assistant Chief of Staff G-5 of the Fourth Army, with headquarters at San Francisco.

He served in the European theater of operations from August, 1943, until July, 1945 -- initially as a member of the Combined Staff which planned the Normandy invasion, later as Deputy Chief of Staff of the Forward Communications Zone in Normandy, and thereafter with General Bradley's 12th Army Group.

In July, 1945, he returned to the War Department where he remained in the service until the end of that year. During that period he served on a number of Boards having to do with unification, and postwar organization of the Army. After leaving the service he resumed the practice of law in San Francisco.

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In the spring of 1948, he served about three months as special consultant and acting deputy to the Honorable James Forrestal, the first Secretary of Defense. This was during the critical period when the Berlin blockade began and during the initial phases of unification.

On August 11, 1949, he was appointed Special Consultant to Secretary of the Army Gordon Gray. He became a member of the Civilian Components Policy Board of the Department of Defense, September 21, 1949, and in addition to his other duties served on the Personnel Policy Board and the Management Committee of the Department of Defense.

He was nominated as Assistant Secretary of the Army by President Truman January 24, 1950, confirmed by the Senate January 26, and sworn into office February 2.

He was awarded the Distinguished Service Medal in late 1942.

In 1947, he married Maxine Bosworth, of Dallas, Texas.

E N D

Up to date as of 14 February 1950

C O P Y

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STATE OF NEBRASKA

LINCOLN

August 28, 1942

Mr. Frank Bane, Executive Director  
Council of State Governments  
1313 East 60th Street  
Chicago, Illinois

Dear Frank:

I am today writing Secretary of War Stimson as follows:

"I am writing to protest the manner in which your department is handling the relocation of Japanese. I have received a number of requests to approve the entry of certain Japanese or Japanese-Americans into Nebraska. It would appear to me that this is entirely a matter for federal authorities to decide. I do not believe any Governor has the personnel necessary to investigate these people as individuals or as groups. In fact, the states have been specifically requested to permit the F. B. I. to handle all investigations relative to the loyalty of residents of this country. I feel that the decision relative to the entrance of these groups into states should be made entirely by federal authorities upon the basis of investigations they have made, and I think it is unfair to the Governors to ask them to pass on the matter.

Sincerely yours,

ss/Dwight Griswold  
Governor



DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY  
OFFICE OF THE CHIEF OF INFORMATION  
WASHINGTON 25, D. C.

CINFO

18 December 1951

Mr. Edward N. Barnhart  
Asst. Professor  
Department of Speech  
University of California  
424 Wheeler Hall  
Berkeley 4, California

Dear Mr. Barnhart:

In response to your request of 8 December, we are enclosing a copy of the citation accompanying the award of an Oak Leaf Cluster to the Distinguished Service Medal earned by Lieutenant General John Lesesne DeWitt in 1943.

If this office can be of any further service to you, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Sincerely yours,

*Thaddeus P. Floryan*  
THADDEUS P. FLORYAN  
Lieutenant Colonel, Artillery  
Chief, Pictorial Branch

1 Incl  
1 Copy Citation

April 29, 1942

Information for Liaison Branch,  
War Department Bureau of Public Relations,  
Regarding the Evacuation and Relocation Program.

X-ref  
Report Div.

Evacuation of West Coast Military Areas

War in the Pacific, including numerous attacks by Japanese submarines on American shipping, and the continuing danger of attack against Pacific Coast cities and war industries, has made it necessary to consider the entire western coastal area as a potential combat zone, and has led to the military decision that all persons of Japanese ancestry, regardless of nationality, should be evacuated from this area. Military area No. 1 was delineated by Proclamation No. 1 of March 2, 1942, by Lt. Gen. John L. DeWitt, and evacuation of persons of Japanese ancestry was ordered in subsequent proclamations.

This decision to evacuate this area recognized:

1. That in the event the West Coast should become a zone of combat, the intermingled presence of more than 100,000 persons of Japanese ancestry would become a distinct hazard and a cause for untenable confusion, without regard to questions of loyalty.
2. That although the large proportion of the Japanese group might be loyal to the United States, or loyal under most conditions, military considerations could not permit the risk of putting them to the test of being present during an invasion by an army of their own race.

3. That once removed to the interior, the elements of danger are greatly minimized, and in most cases entirely eliminated.

The evacuation of Japanese from the West Coast military area encompasses the movement of approximately 115,000 persons. It includes men, women and children of all ages, skills and occupations; some with strictly rural background, but also a large number who have been reared in large cities.

The W.C.C.A.

The evacuation program is being handled by the Wartime Civil Control Administration under the direct and immediate supervision of the Assistant Chief of Staff for Civil Affairs of the Western Defense Command and Fourth Army. Although the evacuation is a military operation, a number of civil agencies of the Federal Government have been requested to help in a coordinated way with the multitude of problems involved in suddenly cutting off the normal business, economic, and social relationships of the large population being evacuated. The Department of Justice, the Federal Reserve Bank of San Francisco, the Federal Security Agency, the Department of Agriculture, the Treasury Department, and the Alien Property Custodian, among others, are cooperating with the W.C.C.A. on this task.

The military responsibilities and operations are closely interwoven with actions by civilian agencies in all phases of the evacuation and relocation program.

Priorities of evacuation are determined on the recommendation of Sector Commanders, and the most sensitive and critical areas are cleared first. These areas are then divided into evacuation zones. Exclusion orders and specific instructions to the population to be evacuated are published and posted throughout the evacuation zone at least one week in advance of the actual evacuation.

Under Army direction, a civil control station is established within each evacuation zone, where the evacuee is instructed how to prepare his family, his household goods for movement, and is instructed to return at an appointed time with his family for identification and medical examination.

The control station acts as a valve through which the flow of evacuees to assembly centers is regulated. These centers are conveniently located throughout the military area, and act as collecting stations, where evacuees are registered, inoculated, fed and housed, and otherwise readied for their removal from the combat zone. Each assembly center is organized and managed by a trained staff, and the ration served is equivalent to that of the Army. Assembly centers are under military guard.

From assembly centers, evacuees are transported to relocation centers, located outside of the military zone, where evacuees will live and work for the duration of the war. The transportation of evacuees is handled by the Army, and proceeds either by train, auto, or busses in an Army convoy.

The Relocation Program

The relocation of evacuees in suitable areas and the provision of useful work for them contributing to the war effort are the responsibility of the War Relocation Authority. However, many of its operations are undertaken jointly with the Army, and are in part military operations.

The Authority was established by President Roosevelt's Executive Order of March 18, 1942, and was authorized to formulate and effectuate a program for the relocation, maintenance and supervision of populations evacuated from military areas. The President's Executive Order also included a provision for establishing a War Relocation Work Corps under which persons evacuated from military zones would have an opportunity to enlist for useful employment under management of the War Relocation Authority and under the protection of the United States Army.

Relocation Centers — The selection of relocation centers is a joint operation by the Army and the War Relocation Authority. The Army is particularly interested in the sites of such centers from the military standpoint. The Authority is interested in the economic and physical factors which must be considered in establishing new communities. Thus each potential site must meet these joint Army - WRA standards:

1. All relocation centers must be located on public lands so that improvements at public expense become public, not private, assets. Any land acquired for this purpose will remain in public ownership.

2. All centers must be located at a safe distance from strategic works.

3. Because of manpower needs in the armed services, and in view of the fact that the minimum guard unit can guard 5,000 persons as easily as smaller groups, first attention will be given to sites adequate for 5,000 persons or more.

4. Transportation and power facilities, water supply, soil, climate, and similar factors must be satisfactory.

5. Each center must provide work opportunities throughout the year for the number to be relocated there. Work within the area will be of three types — public works, food production, and the production of goods and services contributing to the war effort.

The selection of sites are announced jointly by the Wartime Civil Control Administration and the War Relocation Authority. Where it is necessary to acquire land, acquisition is carried out by the Army. The basic housing for the new community is constructed by the Army.

Each relocation area is declared to be a military reservation, and will be protected for the duration by limited service military police.

The War Relocation Work Corps — Enlistment of evacuees in the War Relocation Work Corps is accepted as a clear indication of the

enlistee's willingness, in the public interest, and for the duration of the war, to give up some freedom of movement he enjoys in peace time. Any employable evacuee more than 16 years of age is eligible for enlistment. Upon enlistment the Federal Government accepts an obligation to provide the enlistee with an opportunity to work so that he may earn a living for his family and also may contribute to national production. The enlistee agrees, in effect, to let the Government decide where and how he can most usefully serve the Nation for the duration of the war.

Wages of Enlistees -- At relocation centers, the Federal Government not only guarantees the enlistee the safety which wartime conditions require, but also shelter, food, work, clothing, education and medical care for himself and his family. The wage policies have not yet been finally determined, but in no event will the net cash wage of evacuees exceed the minimum cash wage of the American soldier -- \$21 a month. In fixing the wage policy the War Relocation Authority will respect the obligations of the United States under international treaties or conventions which may be found applicable in this particular situation.

#### Public Relations

Cooperation with W.C.C.A. -- Public relations of the evacuation program are being handled through the Public Relations Office of the Wartime Civil Control Administration, Whitcomb Hotel Building, San Francisco, Calif.

Public relations of the operating phases of the relocation program in the San Francisco region are handled by the Information Service of the Regional War Relocation Authority, Whitcomb Hotel Building, San Francisco. Edwin Bates is chief of the regional Information Service.

All releases and other informational material dealing with the relocation program and emanating from the WRA regional office for public distribution, are cleared with the W.C.C.A., and are issued through the facilities of the W.C.C.A.

Project Public Relations Men -- The War Relocation Authority will maintain public relations representatives at each relocation center to answer press inquiries, furnish informational material to the regional office, and perform related assignments. The projects already announced, and the public relations men assigned to them are:

The Manzanar Relocation Center, Owens Valley, Calif. -- Robert Brown, Bishop, Calif. Status of project: Now in operation with population of approximately 4,000. Final population will be 10,000.

The Colorado River Relocation Center, Parker, Arizona -- Harper Simms, care of Indian Service, Parker, Arizona, for 30 days. Will be succeeded by Norris James, now being trained at San Francisco office. Status of project: Construction of housing nearing completion, and first evacuees to be moved in within next few weeks.

The Gila River Relocation Center, Sacaton, Arizona -- Public relations representative now being selected. Status of project: Construction of housing on this project now under way at this location.

The Minidoka Relocation Center, Eden, Idaho -- Public relations representative not yet selected. Status of project: Construction of housing just starting on this project.

**Field Public Relations Representatives:**

Carson Taylor, San Francisco office, WRA. Acts as advance man on projects in southwest.

George Dean, San Francisco office, WRA. Acts as advance man on projects in California and northwest.

Future Projects -- More relocation centers will be announced in the near future. As each is announced, the Washington office will inform the Liaison Branch of the Bureau of Public Relations of the War Department regarding the location, and the WRA information representative assigned to the project.