

TWO AMERICAS

PART II of II

by Kyle Warmack, Program Officer

Last month's issue covered the unlawful relocation and incarceration of approximately 120,000 American citizens of Japanese ancestry during World War II; and how a struggle to enroll Japanese-American college students in West Virginia resulted in local controversy.

Though that Charleston incident highlighted a lamentable historical episode, this month's articles illuminate more humane reactions from West Virginians responding in the wake of Executive Order 9066.

Explosions from Imperial Japanese Navy bombs and torpedoes rocked the U.S. Navy's Pacific Fleet at anchor in Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, at 7:57 a.m. on December 7, 1941. By 10:00 a.m., most of America's western naval might was a flaming ruin.

In the wake of this devastating assault, American authorities reacted against Hawaii's Japanese-American population with a swiftness nearly equal to that of the attack itself. At 4:25 p.m. that same day, Governor Joseph Poindexter declared martial law and the detention of local Japanese began. By December 9, 367 *Issei* and *Nisei* (first generation Japanese immigrants and their American-born children, respectively) had been arrested. One small concentration camp was activated immediately, with three more to follow in subsequent days.

What did *not* occur, however, was the sort of mass relocation that befell 120,000 Japanese-Americans on the West Coast of the continental United States. Despite the fact that the territory of Hawaii alone was home to 157,905 people of Japanese ancestry—more than resided in the entire mainland U.S. combined, and over a third of Hawaii's total population at the time—only a tiny fraction would be uprooted and shipped to camps over the course of the war. A significant share of the credit for this humanitarian feat belongs to a West Virginian.

When Huntington native Lieutenant General Delos Carleton Emmons was appointed Hawaii's de facto military governor on December 18, 1941, he took command of an entire military district in unprecedented circumstances. His tenure followed the first foreign attack on American soil since the War of 1812. His predecessor had retired in disgrace. Emmons' area of authority was a frontline war zone complicated by the presence of hundreds of thousands of civilians packed tightly around crucial military bases. And over 150,000 of those civilians were now considered, by the mere fact of their parentage, potential saboteurs and traitors.

Into this political morass Emmons waded in the early panic-stricken days of 1942. Possessed of an avuncular grin and smiling eyes, Emmons was considered a skilled organizer and administrator, but there was little in his background or upbringing that could have predicted the deftness and humanity with which Emmons handled this potential tinderbox, since he been born into what might be termed Cabell County royalty: Delos Carleton Emmons was the grandson of Delos White Emmons (1829-1905), founder of the city of Huntington.

Since the city's founding in 1871, Cabell's county seat has borne the name of its corporate sponsor, railroad baron Collis P. Huntington. But it was the rail man's brother-in-law, Delos White Emmons, who suggested the site, purchased the land, and who represented the Chesapeake and Ohio Railroad's interests in the region. The accompanying wealth enabled Delos to acquire an enormous hilltop mansion overlooking the confluence of the Ohio and Guyandotte Rivers, subsequently dubbed Pleasant View Manor. Whenever Collis P. Huntington deigned to visit his eponymous city, he usually lodged with Delos White at Pleasant View.

Since the 1890 U.S. Census records were destroyed in a 1921 fire, it is difficult to say whether grandson Delos Carleton Emmons—the future lieutenant general—was initially raised in the Pleasant View Manor after he was

THE BROAD SIDE

born to Carleton and Minnie Emmons in 1888. What is certain, however, is that 17-year-old Delos was a fresh-faced cadet at West Point by June 1905 (the same year his grandfather and namesake died). He graduated from the U.S. Military Academy in 1909. For the next 32 years, Emmons rose steadily through the ranks in mostly stateside aviation posts, building out the budding aerial capacity of the U.S. Army.

When Lieutenant General Emmons arrived to take command in Hawaii, the oil slick from shattered battleships still coated the waters of Pearl Harbor. The pressure on the Huntingtonian to take the most drastic possible precautions was intense. On the West Coast, Emmons' counterpart General John DeWitt was soon wielding Roosevelt's Executive Order 9066 to remove Japanese-Americans from their homes and communities. DeWitt seemed to enjoy it; he "fixedly distrusted those of Japanese descent and fought even minor modification of the exclusion orders."

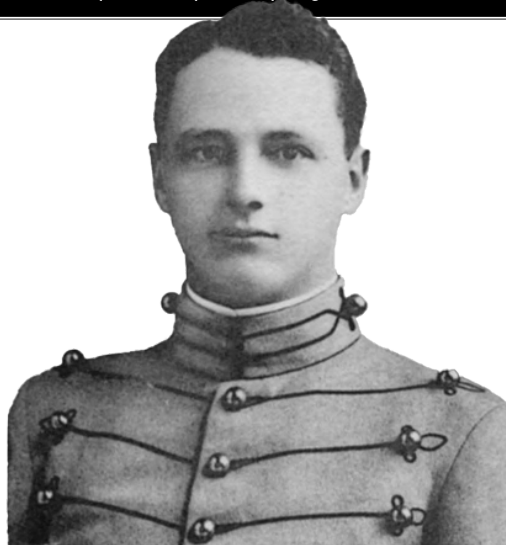
Since Emmons possessed near-absolute authority per Hawaii's condition of martial law—even greater power than DeWitt commanded—it would have been easy to advocate for the same policy of forced relocation. Indeed, he was encouraged to take this course by President Roosevelt and Secretary of the Navy Frank Knox. Powerful business interests also saw the war as an opportunity to permanently rid the islands of their Japanese-American community.

In stark contrast to DeWitt, however, Emmons refused to yield to paranoia and avarice. In his first radio address to the residents of Hawaii on December 21, he reminded them that, "While we have been subjected to a serious attack by a ruthless and treacherous enemy, we must remember that this is America and we must do things the American Way." As early as April 1942, he sent a letter to Assistant Secretary of War John J. McCloy forcefully condemning an overly sensational report from agents of the Department of Justice as, "so fantastic it hardly needs refuting."

Emmons also lambasted the territory's U.S. District Attorney, who had been agitating for rapid removal of Japanese-Americans from the islands, saying, "... he has, on several occasions, furnished information about individuals and groups which turned out to be based on rumor and imagination. He has furnished absolutely no evidence or information of value." Emmons had the further courage to send this letter mere days after Secretary Knox advocated "taking all of the Japs out of Oahu and putting them in a concentration camp on some other island."

General Emmons' strategy for dealing with people in high places clamoring for Japanese-American relocation is summed up with an interesting turn of phrase in *Personal Justice Denied*, the 1983 report of the Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of

Lieutenant Delos Carleton Emmons upon graduation from West Point in 1909. His classmates noted his bookishness: "The [library] card catalog is fast going out of use, it is so much easier to 'ask Emmons.'" U.S. Military Academy Library Digital Collection



Lt. Gen. Emmons in the 1940s. U.S. Air Force photo



Civilians (CWRIC). The report states that Emmons' actions are "only partially understood from a literal reading of memoranda between the War Department in Washington and General Emmons in Hawaii" (emphasis added). The text argues that while Emmons' official correspondence vacillated between arguments both for and against limited relocation, viewed in a fuller context the general's Washington letters and cables constitute a cunning play for time.

In short, the high-ranking Huntingtonian was probably sandbagging until cooler heads prevailed. "Perhaps he preferred wearing down the War Department by attrition rather than by a sharply focused resolution of opposing views," speculates the CWRIC. One strong example is a February 1942 War Department order that the general suspend all Army employment of ethnic Japanese. Emmons successfully resisted, citing practical concerns about cost and manpower. The War Department backed down in Hawaii—at the same time that DeWitt was ramping up for mass relocation on the West Coast.

Whatever Emmons' motives and objectives, the CWRIC is unequivocal on one point: "Just as General DeWitt largely succeeded in preventing the War Department from humanizing and relaxing the [Japanese-American] exclusion program [on the West Coast], ... so Emmons effectively scuttled the Hawaiian evacuation program that Washington sought to pursue in 1942."

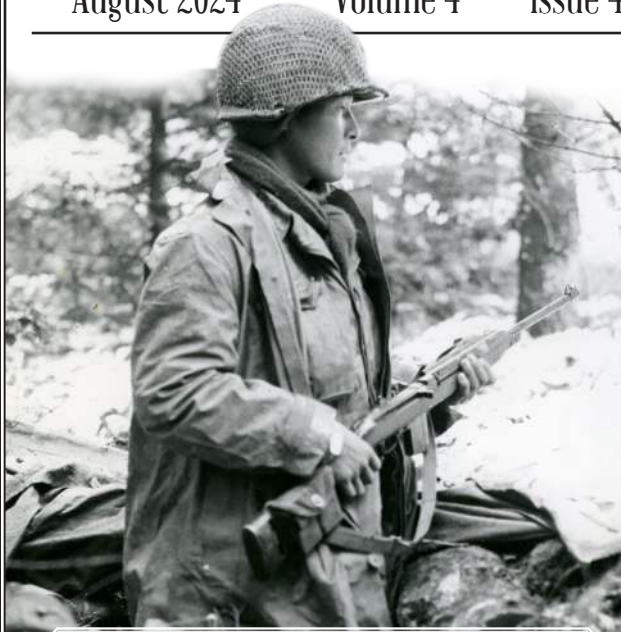
So successful was Emmons—working with Assistant Secretary of War McCloy and other sympathetic Army and Navy officials in Hawaii—in stemming the tide that by the war's end, fewer than 2,000 Hawaiian residents of Japanese ancestry were relocated to the U.S. mainland—a far cry from General DeWitt's 120,000. Colonel Thomas Green, one of Emmons' confederates, later said, "We were [on] the defensive all the way, but in the face of tremendous odds, we succeeded ... in preventing the plan of ruthlessly tearing all the Japanese of whatever station or origin from their homes and placing them in detention camps."

Delos Emmons' 18-month record in Hawaii was not perfect. After the war, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that martial law was carried too far in Hawaii, and military tribunals had held sway where civil courts should have been allowed to function (*Duncan v. Kahanamoku*, 1946). 2,000 Japanese-American citizens in the islands were still held without trial, and without evidence that they had engaged in any subversion or sabotage. But there can be little doubt that Emmons, in the face of enormous pressure, helped prevent the type of grievous mass wrong that was perpetuated against the same vulnerable group of citizens on the West Coast.

Any supposition that the Cabell Countian's sympathies were only skin-deep is answered by the sequel to his Hawaiian tenure. In an ironic twist, General Emmons' next assignment was Western Defense Command, taking over for the virulent General DeWitt. There he advocated for the relaxation of exclusionary policies and the speedy return of Japanese-American citizens to their homes from behind barbed wire.

The policies and attitudes espoused by Delos Carleton Emmons also form a sharp contrast to those of West Virginian Walter Hallanan, whom we covered in the

(continued on back)



ABOVE: A soldier of the all Japanese-American 442nd Regimental Combat Team observes German positions in northern France, December 1944.

During his Hawaiian command, General Emmons lobbied for the creation of a Nisei combat unit. He lent support to the creation of the Varsity Victory Volunteers (VVV), comprised of Nisei from disbanded Hawaii ROTC companies. The VVV later formed the core of the 442nd, which in turn became one of the most decorated units in American military history.

National Archives photograph

(continued from front)

previous issue. Thousands of miles from the fighting, Hallanan bitterly denounced the mere possibility that a handful of American citizens—who happened to have Japanese ancestry—might come to Charleston to continue their college educations in wartime. Meanwhile Emmons, a military officer responsible for hundreds of thousands of lives in a theater of war, staunchly advocated for the rights and freedoms of 150,000 of those same citizens despite substantial risk to his career and command—a legacy for which West Virginia can be justifiably proud.

Lt. Gen. Delos Emmons retired from the military in 1948 to Hillsborough, California, until his death in 1965. He is interred in Arlington National Cemetery.



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IN THE HEART OF THE MOUNTAINS

Other West Virginians found ways to welcome their fellow citizens back into society after the stigma of the Japanese-American internment camps. The people of Mercer County did just that in December 1944—two years after the Morris Harvey College episode from the previous issue—when young Mary Miyasaki arrived to discuss her past year of experiences in the camp at Heart Mountain, Wyoming.

Mary, a native of Los Angeles, was just 22 years old when she was rounded up and shipped hundreds of miles east in the autumn of 1942. By next January, Mary was serving as assistant music director of the camp's Merrie Meddlers Glee Club (after having previously organized a 52-person chorus at the Pomona Assembly Center). In April 1943, however, she was allowed to leave the camp for a job in Indianapolis with the United Christian Missionary Society.

Thanks presumably to the National Japanese American Student Relocation Council (discussed in the previous issue), however, Mary soon gained the opportunity to rekindle her interrupted higher education. Though she could not return to the University of California, Los Angeles, in September 1943 she received a scholarship to Lynchburg College in Virginia.

Perhaps as a result of her prior Missionary Society work, Mary seems to have been a popular speaker in religious settings after her arrival on the East Coast. In February 1944, she addressed the annual Methodist Student Conference in Farmville, Virginia. And later that year, she journeyed to Princeton, West Virginia, as the guest of honor for three days of activities centered around her presence, culminating in another address to a church audience.

Mary Miyasaki's Princeton debut fell on Friday, December 8, 1944, the day after the Pearl Harbor attack's third anniversary. This timing would not have

been lost on her various Mercer County hosts, and it must have sent a strong local message that Japanese Americans were not to be ostracized—though the *Bluefield Daily Telegraph*, which misspelled her surname three times, did take pains to state that Mary had never been to Japan.

That first evening, she gave a speech at the Woman's Union, after which the musically inclined Mary played several pieces for the group on their new electric organ. On Saturday evening Mary was again the toast of the town at a party in the home of Orville Wilson, a local alumnus of Lynchburg College. The primary thrust of her visit arrived on Sunday morning, December 10, when she was the keynote speaker at Princeton's First Christian Church at 805 Straley Avenue (built in 1907, where it remains active to this day). Her lecture topic was "Life in the Japanese Relocation Centers and the Work of the Japanese Church in America."

The *Bluefield Daily Telegraph's* whirlwind society blurbs imply that Mary also spoke for Bluefield's Rotary Club the Friday she arrived, and returned again to Bluefield on Sunday evening to lecture for another church there. If all five of her engagements came to fruition, then Mary completed something of a Mercer County goodwill tour that December. Whether she left behind any recollections of her time in West Virginia is undetermined, but it certainly seems that the people of Princeton gave her a warm Mountain State welcome.

Mary Miyasaki passed away in 2009 at the age of 89.



Japanese Student To Speak In City During Week-end

Mary Miyasaki in the Bluefield Daily Telegraph on December 8, 1944, in a notice about her upcoming speaking engagement in Princeton, West Virginia.

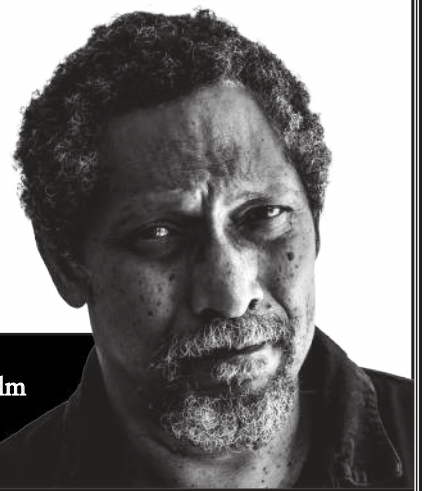
EVENTS AUGUST-SEPTEMBER 2024

Visit the EVENTS tab at wvhumanities.org for the most up-to-date information!

- Until Sep 29 **Born of Rebellion - Civil War and statehood traveling exhibit at the Byrd Center, Shepherd University. Open during regular public hours.**
- Aug 26 **APPLICATION DEADLINE: West Virginia Folklife Program Apprenticeships - see wvfolklife.org for details and to sign up for virtual application workshops (Aug 12 at noon, Aug 14 at 5:30pm). Contact Folklorist Jennie Williams with questions at williams@wvhumanities.org**
- Aug 29 **Historian Elisabeth Griffin - Amicus Curiae Lecture, Marshall University Brad D. Smith Foundation Hall. 7pm**
- Sep 16 **Illustrator Nate Powell - Art in the Libraries featured speaker, WVU Downtown Library. 5pm**
- Sep 17 **Historian Denver Brunsman - Amicus Curiae Lecture, Marshall University Brad D. Smith Foundation Hall. 7pm**

- Sep 26 **Poet Crystal Wilkinson - A.E. Stringer Visiting Writer, Marshall Univ. Brad D. Smith Foundation Hall. 7:30pm**
- Various Dates **Historic cemetery preservation workshops - In-person around the state, hosted by the Preservation Alliance of West Virginia. Sign up and find information at pawv.org. (Aug 3) Ripley - (Aug 10) Mooresville - (Aug 17) Weston (Aug 24) Beckley - (Aug 31) Bramwell - (Sep 7) Huntington - (Sep 14) Mannington**
- Various Dates **History Alive! See the Events tab at wvhumanities.org for upcoming presentations!**

SAVE THE DATE! The 2024 McCreight Lecture speaker is Pulitzer Prize finalist Percival Everett, author of *Erasure*—now the Oscar-winning film *American Fiction*. Don't miss this October 17 event in Charleston! Watch www.wvhumanities.org for details.



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