

# DAY OF REMEMBRANCE

FEBRUARY 24, 1991

HONORING MR. HYMAN BRAVIN  
LOU SIEGEL'S RESTAURANT, NEW YORK CITY  
(TEXT BY CEDRICK M. SHIMO)

\*\*\*\*\*

FOR EVERY ONE OF US JAPANESE AMERICANS WHO UNDERWENT THAT TRAUMATIC WORLD WAR II EXPERIENCE, I AM CERTAIN THAT NOT A DAY GOES BY WHEN MEMORIES, SOME PAINFUL AND SOME JOYFUL, FLASHES THROUGH OUR MINDS.

THESE COLLECTIVE MEMORIES ARE AGAIN SPOTLIGHTED FOR ALL OF AMERICA TO BEHOLD ON THIS ANNUAL DAY OF REMEMBRANCE -- TO REMIND EVERY AMERICAN THAT THE SANCTITY OF OUR CONSTITUTION WAS ONCE VIOLATED BY OUR LEADERS; AND ONLY VIGILANCE BY THE CITIZENRY CAN PREVENT ANOTHER TRAGIC REOCCURRENCE.

AMONG THOSE HONORED TODAY FOR DEFENDING THE RIGHTS OF THE JAPANESE AMERICANS IS MR. HYMAN BRAVIN TO WHOM MANY NISEI AND KIBEI SOLDIERS ARE INDEBTED. I AM ONE OF THEM.

FOR ME THE WAR YEARS EVOKE MEMORIES OF MY EAGERLY VOLUNTEERING FOR THE MIS AND YET BEING OUSTED FROM THIS ILLUSTRIOUS UNIT. JUST PRIOR TO BEING ASSIGNED TO OVERSEAS DUTY I HAD VEHEMENTLY PROTESTED THE RESTRICTIONS AGAINST MY VISITING AND BIDDING FAREWELL TO MY MOTHER AND FRIENDS IN MANZANAR. AT THAT TIME THE WEST COAST WAS CLOSED EVEN TO THE NISEI SOLDIERS. AS A RESULT I TURNED FROM A YES/YES BOY TO A YES/NO DISSIDENT. IF I HAD KNOWN THEN OF THE INDIGNITIES YET TO BEFALL MYSELF, MY PARENTS AND FRIENDS I, OUT OF SPIRE, NO DOUBT WOULD HAVE BEEN A NO/NO BOY.



THOSE OF US WHO WERE OUSTED FROM CAMP SAVAGE WERE EVENTUALLY JOINED WITH OTHER ARMY DISSIDENTS INTO A SPECIAL UNIT CALLED THE 1800 ENGINEER GENERAL SERVICE BATTALION. IN ESSENCE IT WAS A LABOR BATTALION ASSIGNED TO REPAIR DAMAGES INFLICTED BY COMBAT TROOPS DURING TRAINING MANEUVERS THROUGHOUT THE SOUTHERN STATES OF TENNESSEE, MISSISSIPPI AND OTHERS. IN THOSE DAYS WE WERE REFERRED TO AS POTENTIAL TROUBLE-MAKERS, AND BY SOME AS THE "DISLOYALS" OR "THOSE DAMNED BUNCH OF COWARDS."

EVERY SOLDIER WAS DEMOTED TO THE RANK OF PRIVATE. PROMOTIONS WERE DENIED EVEN THOUGH MEMBERS HELD KEY POSITIONS IN THE MOTOR POOL, QUARTERMASTER, HEADQUARTERS AND SO FORTH. THAT THIS UNIT PERFORMED ITS DUTIES ADMIRABLY IS A MATTER OF RECORD AS RESEARCHED BY DR. SHIRLEY CASTELNUOVA, A POLITICAL SCIENCE PROFESSOR, WHO IS CURRENTLY WRITING A BOOK ABOUT THE "1800."

MANY WERE EVENTUALLY CLEARED AND TRANSFERRED TO OTHER MILITARY UNITS SUCH AS THE 442 AND EVEN TO PANAMA FOR THE DEFENSE OF THE CANAL. HOWEVER, FOR EVERY SOLDIER WHO WAS CLEARED, ANOTHER "DISSIDENT" TOOK HIS PLACE. I BELIEVE WE REMAINED AT BATTALION STRENGTH UNTIL THE END OF THE WAR. THIS INCLUDED SO-CALLED "QUESTIONABLE" AMERICANS OF GERMAN AND ITALIAN DESCENT WHO WERE ALSO RELEGATED TO THE "1800."

THE END OF THE WAR DID NOT MEAN AUTOMATIC DISCHARGE FOR THE MEMBERS. A SPECIAL HEARING WAS HELD FOR EACH SOLDIER TO DETERMINE WHETHER HE WAS TO RECEIVE AN HONORABLE DISCHARGE OR A DISCHARGE "WITHOUT HONOR" -- THE SO-CALLED "BLUE DISCHARGE" WHICH WAS ONE STEP ABOVE A DISHONORABLE DISCHARGE.



IT WAS AT THIS JUNCTURE THAT MAJOR HYMAN BRAVIN WAS ASSIGNED TO DEFEND THE MEN OF THE 1800. I BELIEVE HE WAS A CAPTAIN AT THAT TIME. AND IT WAS HERE THAT OUR PATHS FIRST CROSSED -- HE WAS MY COUNSEL AS I RIGHTFULLY RECEIVED MY HONORABLE DISCHARGE PAPERS. ALSO, AS THE INTERPRETER FOR MANY OF THE KIBEIS I WAS ABLE TO PARTICIPATE IN MANY HEARINGS OTHER THAN MY OWN. THIS IN TURN ENABLED ME TO GET BETTER ACQUAINTED WITH MR. BRAVIN WHO WAS NOW BECOMING AWARE OF THE PLIGHT OF THE "1800" SOLDIERS.

AFTER THE HEARINGS HE WAS ASSIGNED ELSEWHERE -- ASSUMING THAT EVERYONE WOULD BE RECEIVING AN HONORABLE DISCHARGE. BUT UNFORTUNATELY, MANY WERE ISSUED "BLUE DISCHARGES" WHICH MEANT THE LOSS OF EVERYTHING EXCEPT THEIR CIVIL RIGHTS -- NO MUSTERING-OUT PAY, NO GI BILL OF RIGHTS, NO VETERANS HOSPITAL RIGHTS, AND SO FORTH. THE FACT THAT MOST WERE KIBEIS WHOSE VERBAL EXPRESSIONS WERE MUCH LIKE THAT OF THE "ENEMY" CERTAINLY DID NOT ENDEAR THEM TO THE HEARING BOARD.

AFTER THE WAR MR. BRAVIN AND I MANAGED TO KEEP IN TOUCH WITH EACH OTHER THROUGH THE ANNUAL EXCHANGE OF CHRISTMAS CARD NOTES. THEN IN 1981 I WAS APPROACHED BY KIYOSHI KAWASHIMA WHO WAS ONE OF THOSE WHO HAD RECEIVED A "BLUE DISCHARGE." HE STATED THAT NOW THAT HE HAD BOTH THE TIME AND ESPECIALLY THE FINANCIAL RESOURCES, WANTED TO TAKE LEGAL STEPS TO CLEAR HIS ARMY RECORD.

IT WAS THEN THAT I CONTACTED HYMAN FOR ADVICE. HE WAS SURPRISED TO LEARN THAT SO MANY WERE NOT ISSUED HONORABLE DISCHARGES. HE DECIDED THEN AND THERE TO HANDLE THE CASE HIMSELF. HE SOON DISCOVERED THAT A RE-HEARING BOARD WAS MEETING IN LOS ANGELES TO RE-HEAR VIETNAM VETERANS WHO WERE ATTEMPTING TO CLEAR THEIR



RECORDS. MR. BRAVIN MANAGED TO GET THIS 35 YEAR OLD CASE ON THE DOCKET AND HE, AT HIS OWN EXPENSE, FLEW TO LOS ANGELES TO REPRESENT KAWASHIMA AND 30 OTHER "1800" MEMBERS.

ON THE DAY OF THE HEARING I WAS PRESENT TO APPEAR AS A WITNESS. I KNEW HYMAN HAD SPENT COUNTLESS HOURS PREPARING HIS CASE AND WAS MORE THAN CONFIDENT HE WOULD PREVAIL.

WHEN THE HEARING COMMENCED I RECALL THE BOARD CHAIRMAN CALLING UP KAWASHIMA AND ASKED ONLY TWO QUESTIONS: "WERE YOU IN THE U.S. ARMY?" "YES SIR." "DID YOU EVER DISOBEY AN ARMY ORDER?" "NO SIR." "CASE DISMISSED. YOU WILL SOON BE NOTIFIED OF THE CHANGE IN YOUR DISCHARGE STATUS." IT WAS ALL OVER IN A COUPLE OF MINUTES. THE ONE BLACK OFFICER ON THE BOARD WINKED AT KAWASHIMA, SMILED AND SAID, "GOOD LUCK, MR. KAWASHIMA." NEEDLESS TO SAY WE WERE ALL RELIEVED AND ELATED

KAWASHIMA WAS ALL SMILES WHEN I WENT UP TO CONGRATULATE HIM, BUT HYMAN LOOKED A LITTLE DISAPPOINTED. I'M SURE HE WAS ITCHING TO TEAR INTO THE ARMY BRASS AND WAS LOOKING FORWARD TO A SLAM-BANG COURT BATTLE. I GUESS IF I WERE ON THE BOARD, I WOULDN'T WANT TO TANGLE WITH HYMAN WHO, TODAY AT AGE 78, REMAINS AS FEISTY AS EVER.

THIS COURT REVERSAL, AS IN THE CASE OF REDRESS, VINDICATED THE FACT THAT OUR RESISTANCE TO THE TRAMPLING OF HUMAN RIGHTS WAS JUSTIFIED; AND IS ANOTHER EXAMPLE OF AMERICAN DEMOCRACY AT WORK, PERHAPS SLOWLY, BUT INEXORABLY IN THE DIRECTION OF JUSTICE FOR ALL. WE OF THE "1800" HAVE NEVER BEEN ASHAMED OF OUR POSITION AND HAVE ALWAYS HELD ARE HEADS HIGH. THE "1800" HAS BEEN FALSELY MALIGNED FOR MORE THAN 4 DECADES, BUT TIMES HAVE CHANGED. LAST YEAR THE NATIONAL



COMMANDER OF THE AMERICAN LEGION IN INDIANAPOLIS, SENT ME A LETTER OF APOLOGY WITH AN INVITATION TO JOIN. NEED I SAY MORE?

WITH THE BLUE DISCHARGE STIGMA REMOVED THE FORMER "1800" SOLDIERS REPRESENTED BY MR. HYMAN FINALLY RECEIVED THEIR LONG OVERDUE MUSTERING-OUT PAY. THESE WERE COMBINED AND OFFERED TO MR. BRAVIN TO HELP OFFSET SOME OF HIS EXPENSES. HE STUBBORNLY REFUSED TO ACCEPT A CENT.

IN 1985, THE "1800" HELD THEIR FINAL RE-UNION DINNER -- THIS TIME TO HONOR MR. BRAVIN WHO FLEW IN FROM NEW YORK. BY HOOK OR CROOK WE WERE DETERMINED TO PRESENT HIM WITH A SPECIAL PLAQUE AND TO TRICK HIM INTO ACCEPTING A SMALL MONETARY COMPENSATION. AN EXCERPT OF MY REMARKS THAT EVENING WENT LIKE THIS: "...AND NOW WE WOULD LIKE TO PRESENT HIM WITH A LITTLE TOKEN OF APPRECIATION WHICH CERTAINLY IS NOT ENOUGH TO COMPENSATE HIM FOR HIS TIME AND EFFORT. AND MAY I EXPLAIN TO HY THAT THIS TIME HE ABSOLUTELY CANNOT RETURN IT. ACCORDING TO THE NISEI BOOK OF ETIQUETTE, PAGE 10, PARAGRAPH 4, SECTION 2, IT READS THAT IT WOULD BE AN AFFRONT AND AN INSULT TO RETURN A TOKEN OF APPRECIATION WHEN IT IS PRESENTED ALONG WITH A PLAQUE IN FULL VIEW OF AT LEAST 50 PEOPLE. ~~SAID TO HIM~~

~~HE SAID TO HIM~~ PERHAPS YOU CAN BUY A RING OR SOMETHING EQUALLY NICE FOR YOUR WIFE DEANNIE." END OF QUOTE. I'VE OFTEN WONDERED WHETHER HY EVER BOUGHT SOMETHING FOR DEANNIE... DID HE, DEANNIE?

ALL KIDDING ASIDE, TO THE MEN OF THE "1800" MR. HYMAN BRAVIN IS OUR HERO. HE IS NOT GENERALLY KNOWN AMONG THE NISEI CIRCLE AND HAS NOT BEEN INCLUDED AMONG THOSE COUNTLESS FRIENDS WHO HAVE FOUGHT FOR THE CIVIL RIGHTS OF THE JAPANESE AMERICANS. SO ON BEHALF OF THE "1800"



MAY I EXPRESS OUR SINCEREST THANKS TO THE NEW YORK DAY OF  
REMEMBRANCE COMMITTEE FOR RECOGNIZING AND HONORING OUR HERO.

~~THE NEW YORK DAY OF REMEMBRANCE COMMITTEE~~  
~~FOR RECOGNIZING AND HONORING OUR HERO.~~