Ralph Lazo

My name is Ralph Lazo. I am 18 and am currently enlisted in the U.S. Army. I am from Los Angeles, CA. I lived there and studied at Belmont High School until 1942. I had many friends at school who were from Japanese ancestry and never had problems or quarrels with any of them, they were my friends. I remember the day of December 7th, 1942, the day Pearl Harbor was bombed, how everyone was confused and anxious about what would happen next. When I think back on the day of the bombing I remember how weird it all was. While I can think of no justification for the Japanese Empire having bombed Pearl Harbor, I also can’t see how the U.S thought that an appropriate come back would be to incarcerate all people of Japanese ancestry. The lives of innocent people were lost on the day of the bombing but the freedom of equally as innocent folks was taken for years as a result. When the signs of Japanese internment started showing up on lampposts it was chaos. I remember one of my friends asking what I would do without them; he wondered if I would go along with them. Well, why not?

I told my father that I was going to camp, he thought that I had meant some sort of weekend stay-away camp, but later, I guess he saw my name in a newspaper article and realized where I actually was. He didn’t do anything about it, though. He figured I was safe, and he was right. The barbed wire and watch towers provided more safety than I had ever known.

I spent all of 1942, 1943, and part of 1944 in the Manzanar Internment Camp in California. I attended Manzanar High School with many of my friends from back home. I got $12 a month delivering mail and later I worked as a recreation director for $16 a month. I lived there because I wanted to stand by my friends, not send them into the dark alone like the rest of my country. I wanted to show them that I disagreed with what our country was doing to them. I stayed in the barracks with Japanese/Japanese American families. It was my home for about two years. Of course it was not the comfort of where I came from. The barracks were cold and more like a room with a designated area for each person instead of a home filled with life and love. Some of them were incomplete and let the rain, wind, and cold in freely. We lived our lives according to how the U.S. guards wanted us to, with a schedule and with *very* limited privileges.

Then, in August of this year I was drafted into the Army and left the camps to fight in defense of my country.

I do not see people of Japanese ancestry as a danger or threat to this country any more than a white American would be. I grew up with these people and became very good friends with them. I chose, when this country turned their backs on their entire race, to stand by them because I didn’t see the danger or evil in their souls as others saw in the color of their skin or the slant of their eyes.