The Enemy That Never Was

While evacuation proceeded at its leisurely pace, the progress of the Japanese military reached its peak and began to decline. The Battle of Midway on June 6, 1942 almost decisively disposed of any possibility that the Japanese might marshall the naval effort necessary for an invasion of North America or for sustaining their precarious foothold on the Aleutians.

Yet despite the immediate recognition of this military fact, the evacuation was remorselessly continued and accelerated, and no attempt made to mitigate its harshness. Protests by other provinces against acceptance of Japanese evacuees would surely have been swiftly and incisively overcome with an appeal towards patriotism had there been a real military urgency; the Commission would have accelerated its search to find accommodation for women and children much earlier than it did and would have ignored the sensitivities of the white population over having the evacuees thrust into their localities. But in the summer of 1942, the permanent housing in the "interior settlements" had not yet been constructed. Could "military necessity" or "national security" justify mass evacuation after Midway had removed the last threat of sustained attack, as Allied military leaders had judged at that time?

Even before Midway, military leaders — in Canada and the United States — did not expect an invasion. Admiral Stark, U.S. Chief of Naval Operations, testified before a Congressional committee in February, 1942, that he did not believe it would be possible for the enemy to engage in a sustained attack on the Pacific coast at that time, although sporadic raids were probable. Despite losses at Pearl Harbour, the U.S. Navy did not expect Japanese naval attacks east of Hawaii, but believed that strikes on Puget Sound, San Francisco or the Panama Canal were not beyond the range of possibilities. This was apparently the view of Roosevelt, Churchill and the British, Canadian and American Chiefs of Staff as well. During the series of eight meetings between Roosevelt and Churchill and concurrent meetings of Chiefs of Staff, there was serious discussion over the possibility of attacks on the west coast by naval bombardment, mine-laying, attacks by "human torpedoes" or even carrier-borne air attacks or actual seaborne expeditions of troops, though the last seemed highly fanciful. Churchill stated that although the west coast might be "insulted" on occasion, he could see little likelihood that the Japanese would attempt an invasion of the continent. But beyond conjecture over spectacular "nuisance" raids, the main concern was with the possibility of a major attack on the Panama Canal. As even this was considered as "purely local" and "incidental," all apparently agreed that the main problem was still on the far side of the Pacific.

Even in February, when the Japanese were making spectacular progress, Allied leaders still felt no concern about an invasion; on the contrary, the greatest anxiety was over containing the south and westward thrust of Japan from enveloping Australia and India. And in the April 14, 1942, meeting between Churchill and British and American military leaders, it was reported that "full provision" had been made by the Chiefs of Staff in Washington for measures necessary to hold the Alaska-Hawaii-Australia line in the Pacific. Thus the danger of invasion after Midway was practically non-existent and before Midway was fairly remote — contrary to the claims of civilians in British Columbia. (Page 222, 223)

Ken Adachi, journalist and author, also wrote extensively on the history of Japanese Canadians, particularly in *The Enemy that Never Was*. In this passage, he deals with the military situation.

The Enemy that Never Was. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1976.