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AIR MAIL

Personal

México, D.F., México,
September 6, 1945.

Dear Mr. Secretary:

I find that in my letter yesterday I forgot to make mention of one of the principal things I wanted to say. There are times, I think, when we are all filled with righteous and overwhelming anger, and I wish to tell you that I was filled with such righteous and overwhelming anger when I read in the press of the endeavors of the Army to shift some of its responsibility for Pearl Harbor on you. I have long known of this tendency of the Army to shift responsibility and to try to leave others holding the bag. I have high regard for the Army in its own sphere. Certainly in this war the performance of the Army and Navy in the military sphere has been magnificent. I would be the last therefore not to recognize this.

This makes it all the more unfortunate that the Army has this habit of trying to shift responsibility for the errors it does make on civilian administrations and officials of our Government. I recall so well our many conversations with regard to the situation respecting Japan and the Far East when I had the privilege of being associated with you in the Department itself. I recall the painstaking, extraordinary understanding, and always wise attitude which you took towards these problems and the courageous manner with which you dealt with them. I recall particularly that I had the opportunity of seeing you on a trip which I made from Habana to Washington shortly after Pearl Harbor, and the full account which you gave me of your conversations with the two Japanese with whom you had been carrying on conversations in the Department and in your apartment for months. I recall so vividly the account which you gave me of the circumstances that during two phases of the conversations you became convinced that the Japanese were planning a surprise attack, and so informed the President. I recall your telling me that you had informed the President on these two separate occasions that you did not know where they

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The Honorable Cordell Hull,
Wardman Park Hotel,
Washington, D. C.

were going to attack, but that you had the definite conviction that they were going to attack at one or more places in the Pacific. I recall your telling me that the President had indicated that he would take the best necessary steps to immediately inform the Military and Naval Commanders in the Pacific area and at Honolulu that they must exercise all proper vigilance and take all proper measures in view of the possibility of such a surprise attack.

In view of the record, it is not only astounding but almost a calamity that supposedly responsible officers of the Military branch of our Government should try to shift responsibility for their own failure to take action when the Secretary of State gave them due warning through the appropriate channels. The fact is that both the Army and the Navy, and the Army in particular, have always felt that they know more about these things than anyone else can know and that their sources of information are better. It is not the first time in the history of our country and of others that the Military have disregarded the sound advice and counsel and information of the civilian officers of Government, and with such disastrous consequences.

I remember that when I was in Germany, I believe it was in 1931, the Chancellor of Germany, Brüning, told me that without any question one of the causes of the First World War actually breaking out was the fact that the German Government disregarded the advice and counsel and information of its Ambassador in London. The then German Ambassador in London had informed the Foreign Office and the Emperor that if Germany persisted in backing up the Austro-Hungarian empire in its demands on the Slavs and war came about, which was certain, then England would join in the war against Germany. At the same time the German Military Attaché in London, a General whose name I forget for the moment, advised the General Staff in Berlin and the Emperor that Britain in no case would go to war. The Emperor and the General Staff saw fit to take the advice of the Military Attaché and disregarded the information and counsel of their Ambassador in London and we know with what result. The occasion for former Chancellor Brüning saying this to me was that the question of Germany again sending out Military Attachés was up, and he himself was not much in favor of it because of this experience.

I know that our country will know how to pass judgment in this matter, but I confess that I am filled with such anger that it was difficult for me to contain myself when

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I read some of these recent newspaper accounts. Such action by high Military authorities of our Army is unworthy of that great branch of our Armed Forces and it will not do them credit before the country. The circumstance, however, is none the less regrettable and none the less reprehensible. In my own more humble way, I have had reason to see examples of this buck-passing by the Army. They get themselves into a hole through ill-considered action and then try to pass the responsibility to civilian authorities of our Government whose advice and counsel they have disregarded, or who have acted on the request of the Military.

I was glad to see the President's statement, but I wished it could have been a little stronger. I knew under the circumstances it was difficult for him to be as strong as I felt sure he would have wished, as we have just finished a war in which the Armed Forces have played so magnificent a part, but after all, this improper action is not a responsibility of our Armed Forces as a whole, but of certain high Army officials who improperly and without basis are trying to pass on responsibility to others.

I am sure the country knows, and will increasingly know, where the responsibility lies, and now, in view of the endeavor of certain officials of the Army to so unworthily shift responsibility, it seems more important than ever that the whole truth should be known.

During the thirty-some years that I have served our Government, I have learned how undesirable it is for the Military to become mixed up in civil affairs. The degree to which the Military during the course of the war have become involved in our civil administration is extraordinary, and I am one of those who believe it presents a very grave danger in our country. I believe that the President is one of those who is fully familiar with the imperative necessity of the Army and Navy, as rapidly as possible, being limited to their proper sphere within and without our country, and I am one of those who pray that rapidly the Army will be restricted to its proper sphere and that its present intervention in civil administration at home will be eliminated and that the activities abroad where we have to use our Armed Forces, will be controlled in the most complete manner by our civil authorities so that the Armed Forces will serve only their proper purpose in our democratic structure - that of serving as the instrument of the civil authority.

I know

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I know that the way I feel about this matter is the feeling of the overwhelming majority of our people at home, and I know that our people resent this endeavor of the Army to shift its responsibility to your shoulders. I think that most of our people are filled with the same wrath that I am, and I have wanted to send you these few lines so that you may know how much my thoughts have been with you and how much I resent this dastardly procedure.

Marion joins me in affectionate regard and all good wishes to you and Mrs. Hull.

Cordially and faithfully yours,

George S. Messersmith.

GSM:fm