

W. Stuart Symington to James Forrestal, with attached proposal, December 22, 1948. Security Classified Records, Record Group 220: Records of the President's Committee on Equality of Treatment and Opportunity in the Armed Services.

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DEPARTMENT OF THE AIR FORCE
WASHINGTON

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22 Dec 1948

MEMORANDUM FOR MR. FORRESTAL



Reference is made to Mr. Royall's confidential memorandum of 2 December 1948 and to your memorandum of 17 December 1948 which requests comments on Mr. Royall's proposal to form experimental units of mixed races. We present the following comments.

a. The experiment would not be conclusive. There are so many artificial features involved that success or failure of this experiment would not be predictive of success or failure under other conditions. For example, the station chosen for the experiment would in itself have a definite influence both on the securing of volunteers to man the station and on the community reaction to the experiment. Results obtained where all enlisted men involved are agreeable to the imposed conditions cannot be accepted as indicative of results where all personnel are not so agreeable.

b. The arbitrary quotas proposed violate the principle of equal opportunity. The experiment would be unfair to the Negro since the proportion of Negroes who have the ability to compete equally with white personnel is not as great as the one-to-ten ratio of the population or the one-to-ten ration of the proposed experiment.

c. The public relations aspects of the experiment are particularly undesirable. By its very nature, the attention and searching scrutiny of the Negro press and various pressure groups would be focused upon this activity which, through its artificiality, is of minimal military significance but of major significance in the current public controversy on purely racial issues.

d. It appears that the Air Force would be able to conduct such an experiment without difficulty. There are enough trained Negro technicians in the Air Force to man 10% of the position vacancies involved in the experiment and to perform the duties creditably. However, these Negroes would not be representative of the overall Negro population of the Air Force nor of the Negroes which would come into the Air Force in wartime. Because of the voluntary nature of the enlisted participation there should be no particularly insurmountable social or morale problems.

Officers would probably accept and rationalize their participation since resignation would be the only alternative open to them. It appears,

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however, that the Negroes would suffer by virtue of the experiment since, if successful, the success could be attributed to the special conditions involved, and if unsuccessful might reflect unjustly upon those functions which the Negro is capable of performing in the Armed Forces.

In view of the considerations outlined above, the Air Force prefers to refrain from participation in the proposed experiments.

The Air Staff has completed a study initiated more than six months ago which has now taken into consideration Mr. Royall's suggestions. The study aims to assure equality of treatment and increased opportunity for all persons in the United States Air Force. My office is now considering this study with a view to establishing the Air Force position in this matter. I expect this to be completed in the immediate future.



/s/ W. Stuart Symington

W. STUART SYMINGTON

A Proposed Experimental Plan for Integration

On 2 December 1948 the Secretary of the Department of the Army set forth in a memorandum a suggested plan for a VOLUNTARY unit operating on a NON-SEGREGATED basis. It provided for about 5000 officers and enlisted men with Negro participation at 10% of the enlisted strength, 5% non-commissioned officers and 3% of the officers. (At the time of this proposal Negro officers were 1.44% of the total officer strength.)

There were to be combat and service units and every activity was to be conducted on a non-segregated basis. Enlisted men assigned to this unit could obtain a cancellation of orders, but with officers there was no such choice. The proposal was made contingent upon the adoption by the Navy and Air Force of the same or closely comparable plans.

Objective: To study the following factors:

1. Willingness of white and Negro troops to serve in non-segregated units.
2. Efficiency and probable combat value of non-segregated units.
3. Exercise of command by Negro officers and Negro non-coms over white troops and mixed groups.
4. Social problems involved.
5. Morale, discipline and esprit de corps of the units.
6. Opportunity afforded Negroes for advancement (and the degree to which Negroes proved competitively qualified and took advantage of such opportunity) as compared with similar opportunity in segregated units.
7. The degree to which the experience gained from the experiment can be regarded as typical of the Armed Services as a whole.



Weaknesses of the Experiment:

1. Right of cancellation of orders may tend to confine the experiment to white and Negro troops who wish it to succeed.
2. If the experiment should succeed it ought to be followed by one which eliminates the voluntary aspects for the enlisted men.
3. Pressures from outside groups may tend to make the experiment non-typical.
4. Fairness and openness in operation and sound public relations needed to avoid accusation that the operation has been sabotaged.

Alternatives to the Experiment:

1. Gradual reduction of size of units which are segregated (now being pursued).
2. Expansion of the principle of non-segregation in schools, hos-

2. expansion of the principle of non-segregation in schools, hospitals, special types of units (now being pursued).

(General Staff of the Army thinks the above is the best approach).

Recommendation: That the National Military Establishment as a whole go forward with this project and that it be effected as soon as possible, preferably early in 1949.



