

Truman Gibson Jr. negro types in Italy
Command of 1st
STATEMENT OF TRUMAN K. GIBSON, JR.,
CIVILIAN AIDE TO THE SECRETARY OF WAR,
AT PRESS CONFERENCE, MONDAY, APRIL 9, 1945,
WASHINGTON, D. C.

The press has already reported that Negro and white Infantrymen are now fighting side by side in Germany. In France I visited some of the Negro platoons before they left for the front and talked with the men being trained at the Reinforcement Training Center. What I saw and heard was evidence that the Supreme Command in SHAEF was following in racial matters what must be the basic policy of any Army, in any war, namely, that of utilizing most efficiently all available resources of men and materiel to defeat the enemy.

Such a policy is working. At the Training Center a white noncommissioned veteran, who was assisting in the training program, said graphically, if ungrammatically, about the Negro trainees: "Sure they'll get along all right. It don't matter whose firing next to you when you're both killing Krauts." The Texas-born, battle-scarred Commanding Officer of the Center was confident that the trainees, all of whom volunteered for the training course with all noncommissioned officers taking a reduction to the grade of private, would do well in combat. He said, "These men will fight because they have been trained and treated just like the other soldiers here and they know they are going to be used in the same manner, in the same Divisions. They want to fight. When the first group went out we had only two cases of AWOL among all the Negro soldiers in the Center. We found out where the two men were when we received a wire from a front line Division Commander informing us that they had reported to him to fight."

The estimate of this officer has been confirmed by the report of an official observer who spent time with some of the platoons in the fighting around Remagen where the first of the units was committed to combat. He reported that the Negro soldiers fought as well as any others and that the mistakes they made were the same as those made by other troops lacking battle experience.

This policy of making the best use of all soldiers is further evidenced in the excellent performance of the Service of Supply troops throughout the theater. These troops, a large percentage of whom are Negroes, regard themselves as soldiers performing vital jobs. They had a very real identification with the fighting front. In one Quartermaster Depot, manned by Negro personnel, the first sergeant when questioned as to why the men were working voluntarily around the clock, replied: "We have got to keep the supplies moving and all of us want to do our part." The officers in this unit were white and were enthusiastic about their men and their work. Discussing their men, Negro officers in a Quartermaster Truck Company said that on many occasions their drivers had insisted on delivering white Infantrymen into dangerous territory late at night far in advance of the debarkation points because "they hated to see the 'Doughs' walk."

In the European Theater of Operations are the first units of Negro nurses and Wacs to go overseas. The nurses, stationed at a hospital in the north of England, are busy treating American soldiers who have been wounded in action. They are described by their Commanding Officer as being the equals professionally of any nurses in the area. The Wacs officer and man the Central Postal Directory for the entire European Theater of Operations. Their efficiency has drawn repeated praise from the Commanding Officer of the United Kingdom Base Section. They have adjusted exceptionally well in the short time they have been overseas to their

work and the community in which they are situated.

Generally, on both the Continent and in England, it was apparent that the attitude of the Supreme Command that there should be no discrimination against any soldier on account of his race had reached all elements of the Command. Discriminatory acts and incidents that have occurred were regarded by the soldiers as being individual in nature. As a result of my trip to the Mediterranean and European Theaters I am impressed that such differences as exist between soldiers are not due to racial characteristics but to such factors as training, motivation, and environment. The fact that the Commands in these theaters believe this is encouraging. Certainly the record being made by Negro soldiers gives the lie to any charge that Negroes cannot and will not fight.

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