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OPINIONS ABOUT NEGRO INFANTRY PLATOONS IN WHITE
COMPANIES OF 7 DIVISIONS

Based on survey made in May-June, 1945, by Research Branch
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OPINIONS ABOUT NEGRO INFANTRY PLATOONS IN WHITE

COMPANIES OF 7 DIVISIONS

What do the white company grade officers and the white platoon sergeants in E.T.O. think of the combat performance of Negro rifle platoons which were attached to their companies in March and April and fought side by side with white platoons through VE-day?

This question is answered by a survey, made in late May and early June, 1945, by personally interviewing 250 respondents, namely, all available white company grade officers and a representative sample of platoon sergeants in 24 companies containing Negro platoons in several infantry divisions, namely, the 1st, 2nd, 9th, 69th, 78th, 99th, and 104th. Standardized questions were used in the survey, which was conducted by five trained interviewers of the Research Branch, I and E Division, E.T.O.

In all except one of the companies visited, the standard organization of three rifle platoons and one heavy infantry platoon had been augmented by one rifle platoon of colored soldiers. The colored platoons were made up of men from rear echelon units who volunteered for service with the infantry and were trained for approximately six weeks in reinforcement depots, usually by a white officer or non-com who later led them into combat.

In generalizing the opinions here reported, the fact that the Negro infantrymen in these platoons were volunteers must be kept in mind, as must also the fact that not all of the platoons experienced heavy and arduous fighting.



Opinions of White Officers and Enlisted Men in Companies with Negro Platoons.

QUESTION: "How did you feel at first about serving in a company that had white platoons and colored platoons?"

	White officers	White non-coms
<u>Relatively unfavorable</u> ("Skeptical", "didn't like it", "thought it'd cause trouble", etc.)	64%	64%
<u>Relatively favorable</u> ("Willing to try it", "made no difference," "didn't mind", etc.)	33%	35%
No answer	<u>3%</u> 100%	<u>1%</u> 100%

QUESTION: "Has your feeling changed since having served in the same unit with colored soldiers?"

	White officers	White non-coms
No, my feeling is still the same	16%	21%
Yes, have become more favorable toward them*, ("feel more respect for them", "like them better", etc.) . . .	77%	77%
No answer	<u>7%</u> 100%	<u>2%</u> 100%

*NOTE: No cases were found in which an individual reported his attitude had become less favorable.

QUESTION: "How well did the colored soldiers in this company perform in combat?"

	White officers	White non-coms
Not well at all	0%	0%
Not so well	0%	1%
Fairly well	16%	17%
Very well	84%	81%
Undecided	<u>0%</u> 100%	<u>1%</u> 100%

NOTE: In commenting on this question, respondents frequently gave detailed accounts of combat performance. Positive qualities stressed were aggressiveness in attack, effective use of fire-power, adeptness at close-in fighting, team-work in battle. Negative qualities reported in a few instances were that at first the men sometimes went forward too rapidly -- too far in an attack. Some officers stressed the fact that these colored soldiers, being volunteers, may have had exceptional combat qualities. Others mentioned that in their units there had not been an adequate test under the most severe type of fighting, such as sustained attacks under heavy mortar or artillery fire. It should be noted, however, that the performance of the colored troops was rated just as high, if not higher, by the white officers and non-coms in those companies in which the colored platoons have had severe fighting as by respondents from other units.

QUESTION: "With the same Army training and experience, how do you think colored troops compare with white troops as infantry soldiers?"

	White officers	White non-coms
Not as good as white troops	5%	4%
Just the same as white troops	69%	83%
Better than white troops	17%	9%
No answer	<u>9%</u> 100%	<u>4%</u> 100%



QUESTION: "How have the white and colored soldiers gotten along together?"

	White officers	White non-coms
Not well	0%	0%
Not as well in garrison as in combat	14%	4%
Fairly well	7%	36%
Very well	73%	60%
No answer	6%	0%
	<u>100%</u>	<u>100%</u>

NOTE: Replies are somewhat more favorable from white officers and white non-coms with a Northern background than from those with a Southern background, but differences in opinion are not great. Actual friction between white and colored soldiers is said to have been confined to isolated cases involving white soldiers from "outside" units who did not know the combat record of the colored troops. Evidence indicates that white and colored soldiers have gotten along best together in those units in which they have shared the heaviest combat. While many of the officers in further questioning expressed some doubt as to how well the situation would work out if their unit remains in the Army of Occupation, or other semi-permanent garrison status, 9 out of 10 said there had been no difficulties as yet.

QUESTION: "If colored soldiers are used as Infantry, do you think they should be set up by platoons as they are here, or would some other way be better?"

	White officers	White non-coms
In the same platoon with white soldiers	7%	1%
In a platoon within the same company	62%	89%
In separate companies	18%	12%
In separate battalions or larger organizations	10%	2%
No answer	3%	0%
	<u>100%</u>	<u>100%</u>

NOTE: Most of those interviewed volunteered one or more reasons for their answer.

Among those who favor the platoon basis, the reasons given, in order of frequency, are:

- (1) Competition-emulation ("encourages friendly competition"; "each tried to make a good showing"; "gives them something to come up to").
- (2) Avoidance of friction ("saves any chance of trouble to have them in their own platoon"; "because of the old feeling of boys from the South").
- (3) Better discipline and control among the colored soldiers ("whites have a steadying influence on them"; "colored boys feel more secure in combat this way").
- (4) Feeling of participation or non-discrimination on part of the colored soldiers ("gives them the feeling of being with the white boys"; "avoids that feeling of being set apart and discriminated against").
- (5) Improved inter-racial understanding ("work close enough together so they can each get to know the other better and see what they do").

Among the minority who favored separate companies or larger units, the main reasons given were avoidance of friction (especially in garrison situations) and better discipline. A few men gave as their reason their personal feeling of not wishing to be in a company containing colored troops.



Independent Check in a Cross-Section Survey.

In the course of a survey of a representative cross-section of 1710 white enlisted men in ETO field forces, to ascertain men's information and orientation needs, two questions were asked about the use of Negro troops. This survey was independent of the interviews tabulated above.

The responses to the two questions asked in the cross-section survey were tabulated separately for four sub-groups indicated below. The sample in some groups is small and therefore subject to a larger margin of error than is customary in Research Branch reports.

QUESTION: "Some Army divisions have companies which include Negro and white platoons. How would you feel about it if your outfit was set up something like that?"

Percentage of white enlisted men answering: "Would dislike it very much"

Cross-section of field force units which do <u>not</u> have colored platoons in white companies (1450 cases)	62%
Men in same division, but <u>not</u> in same regiment as colored troops (112 cases)	24%
Men in same regiment, but <u>not</u> in same company as colored troops (68 cases)	20%
Men in company with a Negro platoon (80 cases)	7%

QUESTION: "In general, do you think it is a good idea or a poor idea to have the same company in a combat outfit include Negro platoons and white platoons?"

Percentage of white enlisted men saying:
"Very good idea" or
"fairly good idea"

Cross-section of field force units which do <u>not</u> have colored platoons in white companies	18%
Men in same division but <u>not</u> in same regiment as colored troops	50%
Men in same regiments but <u>not</u> in same company as colored troops	66%
Men in company with a Negro platoon	64%



NOTE: these differences in attitude, varying with extent of experience with platoons of colored troops, can hardly be attributed to differences in geographical origin. For example, 31% of the white soldiers whose company has a Negro platoon are from the South; as are 34% of the soldiers in the cross-section of field force units.

Background Information About Colored Troops in those Infantry Platoons

The soldiers in the Negro platoons were somewhat superior to other colored troops in ETO in education and AGCT, but the differences actually are not striking.

Percentage who had graduated from high school:

Colored in infantry platoons	22%
Colored in ETO (cross-section)	18%
White riflemen (cross-section)	41%

Percentage with AGCT scores above Class IV:

Colored in infantry platoons	29%
Colored in ETO (cross-section)	17%
White riflemen (cross-section)	71%

Percentage from the South (including border states):

Colored in infantry platoons	67%
Colored in ETO (cross-section)	76%

As compared with white riflemen the Negro infantrymen were somewhat younger. 10% of the colored were 30 years old or over -- as were 20% of the white riflemen.

Branches of service from which the transfer to infantry were made were as follows:

	Percent of total Negro volunteers
Corps of Engineers	38%
Quartermaster Corps	29%
Transportation Corps	26%
Signal Corps	3%
Ordnance Dept.	2%
All other branches	2%

Of all who were converted to riflemen, 63% came from the following six military occupation specialties, in order of frequency:

- Truck driver, light (MOS 345)
- Duty soldier III (590)
- Longshoreman (271)
- Basic (521)
- Foreman construction (059)
- Cargo checker (470)