

2 December 1948

MEMORANDUM TO THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE:

I. Introduction

Early this year I initiated in the Department of the Army discussions involving an experiment with a unit of reasonable size in the interests of a complete elimination of segregation between white and Negro races. Several specific ideas were being considered when I reached the conclusion that the inadequate size of the Army and the tenseness of the international situation made it inadvisable for any experiment of this type to be undertaken in the Spring or Summer.

Consequently, when the Negro group, assembled by your office last April 26, queried me as to the possibility of an experimental unit, I replied that an experiment of this type would not be appropriate at that time and would be harmful to national defense.

Similarly, when the Russell and Maybank amendment to the Selective Service Act proposed (in part) voluntary non-segregated units, both you and I opposed the suggested amendment. I did not think the time appropriate, and I called the attention of the Senate Armed Services Committee to the inflexibility of such a unit and the difficulty of utilizing it fully in the event of an emergency.



After the size of the Army began to increase as a result of the Selective Service Act, I started a more specific study of this proposal. I was in part led to do this by the fact that apparently some Southern political leaders, as well as representative Negro leaders, had suggested a voluntary non-segregated unit as another approach to solution of the problem of non-segregation in the armed forces.

A definite plan, which in many respects is like that hereinafter proposed, was prepared at my direction by the General Staff for consideration in September. However, I thought that the institution of such a plan prior to the election would not only be misinterpreted as a purely political move but would also, because of an apparent political tinge, have less chance of being considered a typical experiment. Therefore, I have delayed a complete formulation or submission to you until this time.

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II. Proposal

I propose, but only if similar action is taken by the Navy and the Air Force, to establish a completely non-segregated Army post with approximately 5,000 officers and enlisted personnel assigned to the following units:

- (1) One Infantry regimental combat team.
- (2) One Engineer battalion.
- (3) One station hospital and medical complement.
- (4) One post headquarters.

Of the enlisted men, roughly 10% will be Negro, this being approximately the average proportion in the Army at present.

Of the non-commissioned officers of the cadre, approximately 5% will be Negro, this also being the average proportion in the Army at present.

The initial officer strength will be approximately 3% Negro. The present percentage of Negro officers is 1.4%, but in the commissioning of new officers a higher percentage of qualified Negroes is being obtained and a higher percentage commissioned.

The plan must be applied both to combat units and to service units. Negroes and whites will be distributed through each occupation and function in the Camp in similar proportions, that is, they will be in rifle squads, communication squads, medical squads, headquarters detachment, etc. This distribution will provide for Negro non-commissioned officers commanding both white and Negro soldiers and Negro officers commanding both white and Negro junior officers and both white and Negro non-commissioned officers and other enlisted men.

Housing, messes, recreational facilities for officers, non-commissioned officers and other enlisted men will be on an entirely non-segregated basis. Medical officers and chaplains will serve men and officers of both races and their families without any principle of segregation being applied.

Officers and enlisted men assigned to this unit will be selected in an impartial and representative manner, in order that the unit, as nearly as possible, may be typical of the Army as a whole. In the case of enlisted men, any person so selected may, within three days after being notified, apply in writing for a cancellation of his orders, whereupon his orders will be cancelled. Officers will not be given this option.



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It will be of the utmost importance that there is widespread understanding of the project under discussion, but that on the other hand the typical nature of the experiment not be adversely affected either by too much publicity or non-representative publicity. The subject of accurate and factual press and related coverage of the project is, therefore, of particular importance. One possibility that occurs to me is that by voluntary means or otherwise the number of press or other non-relative visits be limited and that there be adopted a complete non-segregation policy for all visits to the installations involved, that is, by an arrangement under which no segregated groups -- for example, no all-white group of editors -- would be invited to visit the installations.

As stated above, the implementation by the Army of such a plan as this is contingent upon the Navy and Air Force adopting the same or closely comparable plans. In my opinion the plan for the other two services should specify the same proportions in officers, non-commissioned officers and enlisted men as the proportions outlined above even though the Navy and the Marines might have to call Reserves to active duty to fill their officer quotas.

While my judgment would not in any sense be determinative of the way in which the other Services should undertake this project, I submit the following as possible solutions.

For the Navy, the plan should include:

- (a) A Marine detachment;
- (b) Either a large combatant ship or a division of smaller craft;
- (c) A shore station where the social problems for individuals and their families will approximate those confronting the Army.



For the Air Force the experiment should include at least one group each of bombers and fighters, and one complete air base facility. There should be Negro pilots and there should be Negroes in bomber crews.

In all three services Negroes should serve in combat positions as well as in other positions, and Negroes must command white officers and white enlisted personnel as well as Negroes.

The experiment should last for one year, at which time an evaluation of the results in all three services should be made at the Secretary of Defense's level.

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III. Comments

The objective of these experiments should be to study the following factors:

(1) The willingness of white and Negro troops to serve in non-segregated units.

(2) The efficiency and probable combat value of non-segregated units.

(3) The exercise of command by Negro officers and Negro non-coms over white troops and mixed groups of Negro and white troops.

(4) The social problems involved.

(5) The morale, discipline and esprit de corps of the units.

(6) The 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.



It is recognized that the experiment has a number of possible weaknesses. For example, the right to ask for a cancellation of the orders may tend to confine the experiment to white and Negro troops who wish it to succeed. Since in time of war men cannot be given the right to exercise options as to where and with whom they will serve, any conclusion drawn from this experiment may be challenged as invalid and inapplicable to the Armed Forces as a whole — which possibly points up to the fact that, if this experiment should succeed, it ought to be followed by one which eliminates the voluntary aspects for the enlisted men who participate in it.

Furthermore, the fact that the unit is experimental may well produce pressures from groups outside the Army, both during the period provided for an election not to serve and during the lifetime of the experiment itself. This may tend also to make the experiment non-typical.

Another weakness is the probability that, if the experiment fails for any reason, the Armed Forces will be accused of having sabotaged it no matter how sincere their efforts will have been. Fairness and openness in operation and sound public relations may minimize this difficulty.

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It is recognized that there are, generally speaking two methods of approaching the non-segregation problem in the Armed Forces. One is the experimental method set out above. The other is the gradual reduction of the size of units which are segregated and the extension of the principle of non-segregation in schools, hospitals and in special types of units. This latter course is already being pursued in the Army and will continue regardless of whether or not the suggested experiment is made. The General Staff of the Army thinks that this present method is the best approach.

IV. Recommendation

As already indicated above, it is my recommendation that the National Military Establishment as a whole -- but not the Army separately -- go forward with this project. It is suggested that you give this matter careful consideration in order that if the experiment is to be made it can be effected as soon as possible -- preferably early next year.

Kenneth C. Royall
Secretary of the Army

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