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28 August 1945

MEMORANDUM FOR MR. McCLOY

Although Truman Gibson's memorandum dated 8 August 1945 does not call for any action on your part, it raises the question of how the Army is to handle its planning with regard to use of Negroes in the post-war period. It is pretty well recognized that in this field the Army has not found the right answer in terms of most efficient use of available manpower.

I think two things are needed. The first is the designation of a first-class officer or group of officers of high rank with the special assignment of planning for the use of Negro troops. In the past, the subject has been rather unpopular and change has taken place as a result of yielding to pressures rather than on the basis of forward planning. The officers in G-1 and ASF assigned to deal with the problem have had relatively low rank and have not, in my opinion, been particularly qualified for the job. Moreover, for them it was merely one duty among a number of others. The higher-ranking officials who have had to deal with the problem have not been able to give it the attention it deserves. Although Gibson has made a number of valuable contributions, he is not in a position to have any really strong influence on policies. No one person has had the responsibility, the authority, and the opportunity to do the job and as a result it has been neglected.

I think that the present time would be appropriate for the designation of a really well-qualified officer or group of officers to study the subject.

Appointment of a representative civilian group, not all Negro, to advise the selected officer would also be desirable.

However, I do not think that a mere study, even by a highly qualified officer, would be sufficient. Some indication of direction from high Army levels is needed as a basis for the study and I think this requires a basic change in policy. I recommend that the basic Army policy be changed to call for eventual non-segregation and assignment of Negro troops solely on the basis of ability and that the designated officer be directed to plan on this basis.

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I recognize that this cannot be accomplished at once or a hundred per cent. No one can claim, in view of the table of AGFC scores shown on Page 3 of Gibson's memorandum, that Negroes in general now make as good soldiers as whites in general. It is not necessary to resort to racial theories to explain the difference; lack of educational, occupational and social opportunities is a sufficient explanation. The fact remains, however, that if Negro troops are assigned on the basis of qualifications, many service units will have sixty or seventy per cent Negroes. Those cases will present a special problem and, where the proportion of Negroes is as large as that, it will presumably be necessary to make the unit entirely Negro.

This is the kind of problem with which the study can deal, given a basic direction. Inquiry can be made as to the areas in which non-segregation can be attempted first and the methods by which it can be introduced. In this framework, the study can make use of the available experience in non-segregation (Officer Candidate Schools, hospitals, integrated platoons in ETO, and the experience under the Navy's new policies) instead of merely generalizing, as in the past, on the disappointing and not very relevant experiences with large segregated units.

In the absence of any such basic direction I am afraid the study would be as unfruitful as those that have been made in the past. If there is a basic change in the Army's policy, the practice can be allowed to evolve gradually on a trial and error basis.

If the basic change in policy recommended above is adopted, we shall have a number of difficulties. There will be a certain amount of social friction. There will also be a considerable amount of professional Negro agitation, since it can be expected that Negroes, on a purely competitive basis, will initially not achieve as much rank or as many desirable positions as they do on the present segregation system. The table of AGFC scores seems sufficient evidence of this. However, I do not see any cause for alarm in these difficulties. We shall be on firm ground and will be able to defend our actions by relying on the unassailable position that we are using men in accordance with their ability.

SOMMERS

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