

February 19, 1944

Honorable Hamilton Fish,
House of Representatives,
Washington, D. C.

Dear Mr. Fish:

This is in further reply to your letter of February 1st inquiring as to the Army's plans for using Negro troops.

Your information concerning the utilization of certain Negro personnel from Tank Destroyer and Field Artillery units in organization of service units is correct. However, additional Tank Destroyer units organized with colored personnel have been retained. The 930th and 931st Field Artillery Battalions, both former components of the 184th Field Artillery, are currently being refilled, but present plans contemplate conversion of both Battalions to Combat Engineer units. Certain other existing Negro Field Artillery units are being converted to heavier artillery, but the 930th and 931st 155 mm. Howitzer Battalions have not been selected for conversion to heavier artillery or retention as Field Artillery owing to the unsatisfactory records of both units. To have retained these troops as Field Artillery and concurrently to have converted or stripped other Negro or white Field Artillery units with substantially higher efficiency records, would have been an uneconomical use of manpower. The present plan to convert the units to Combat Engineers is based on similar considerations.

Permit me to explain the causes of these conversions. In scheduling its mobilization program early in the war, the War Department provided a relatively large number of units of a defensive type, such as Antiaircraft Artillery, Coast Artillery and Tank Destroyer. This was, as you know, necessitated by potential enemy attacks on our coastlines and by Axis superiority in the air and in Armored units. Moreover, as the bulk of the Army was to remain in this country for some time, either in training or manning defensive installations, there was no immediate need for substantial numbers of service troops. The mobilization program at that date therefore permitted an equitable distribution of Negro personnel in all combat arms and services.

Since 1942, however, the likelihood of a direct enemy attack on our coastlines has decreased substantially, and our enemies' air power has deteriorated with respect to ours. Accordingly, economic use of available manpower has dictated conversion of many defensive units composed of both white and colored personnel to other types of units more urgently needed. The necessity of fighting a global war on many fronts has required provision of service units on a tremendous scale.



In converting combat units to service units, the War Department's selection of units to be converted has been based solely on the relative abilities, capabilities and status of training of the personnel in the units available for conversion. It so happens that a relatively large percentage of the Negroes inducted in the Army have fallen within the lower educational classifications, and many of the Negro units accordingly have been unable to master efficiently the techniques of modern weapons. To have committed such units to combat at the dates of conversion would have endangered operational successes as well as subjected the personnel to unnecessarily high casualty rates. Our limitations of manpower and urgent and immediate need for service units of a type whose mission could be efficiently discharged by the personnel concerned left no choice but to include Negro troops in conversions such as those mentioned in your letter.

Concerning the use of Negro troops overseas, our general policy is to maintain the same ratio between Negro and white troops overseas as exists in the Army as a whole. I am sure you realize, however, that it is impractical to maintain a uniform ratio of races to branches of service in all theaters.

I find that both white and Negro troops overseas have been transferred from combat to service units in the past, and that this will be necessary in the future as circumstances dictate. Such transfers are caused overseas by operational requirements and changing military situations, each problem being solved individually after full and policy has been established in such cases which is designed to operate discriminately among units according to race.

Your statement that Negro combat units overseas are used on service assignments is, of course, correct. The statement is equally applicable to white units overseas. The fact is, there is no defensible reason for not so employing combat troops when necessary, and the procedure actually is to be encouraged in order to obtain maximum manpower value. As you know, rarely are all combat units in an area committed simultaneously. The decision as to when and how any unit shall be employed rests entirely with the responsible commander.

I believe the foregoing will clarify the major problems raised in your letter. Permit me to emphasize, in conclusion, that any implication that the War Department is deliberately attempting to avoid sending overseas, or to keep out of combat, troops of the Negro or any other race, is entirely without foundation. Our personnel is distributed and employed as required, on duties individuals are qualified to perform, regardless of their racial derivations.

Large numbers of Negro troops are overseas or en route and will be given every opportunity to win battle honors and demonstrate their worth in actual combat. The War Department has every intention of continuing its past efforts to make the best possible use of its available manpower in the prosecution of the war without regard to race, religion, color, or other unmilitary considerations.

Sincerely yours,

(Sgd) HENRY L. STIMSON
Secretary of War

