

FUTURE RELEASE

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SECRETARY JOHNSON APPROVES AIR FORCE POLICIES
FOR EQUALITY OF TREATMENT AND OPPORTUNITY

Secretary of Defense Louis Johnson today approved policies proposed by the Air Force to assure equality of treatment and opportunity for all members of its personnel.

Mr. Johnson also announced that he is studying statements from the Army and Navy concerning their personnel practices and policies, but had requested additional clarifying information before making a decision. He directed that this information be submitted to him, through Chairman Thomas R. Reid of the NME Personnel Policy Board, by May 25.

The statements were submitted by the Secretaries of the three military departments in response to a directive issued by Secretary Johnson on April 6. He asked them to examine their personnel practices and to suggest steps that should be made to attain the uniform equality of treatment and opportunity demanded by President Truman's Executive Order 9981.

The proposals to assure equality of treatment and opportunity for all persons in the Air Force, regardless of race, color, religion or national origin, provide for the assignment and utilization of Negro personnel on the basis of individual capacity. It permits general assignment of such individuals on an Air Force-wide basis. Heretofore, Negroes had been assigned only to special type units.

Initial step in the policy's implementation will be the deactivation of the 2,000-man 332nd Fighter Wing, an all-Negro tactical group based at Lockbourne Air Force Base, Columbus, Ohio. The majority of highly skilled Negro Air Force specialists are presently assigned to that unit. Members of the 332nd will be considered individually for reassignment throughout the Air Force and to training schools, consonant with the need of Air Force Commands and with individual capabilities.

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Present Negro strength in the Air Force is 21,026, representing 7.0 per cent of the total figure. Of that number, 316 are officers, five are warrant officers, and the balance, 20,705, are enlisted personnel. Assigned at Lockbourne are approximately 1,800 enlisted men and women and 200 officers. Among this latter group are included 11 Army Nurses and four WAF officers.

Other Negro personnel throughout the Air Force will be screened by their respective commands and their capabilities re-evaluated with a view to possible assignment changes or additional training, as indicated by individual cases.

Prior policy has specified that 10 per cent of the Air Force strength be composed of Negroes, a figure taken from the general percentage of Negroes in the national population. The new policy will relieve the earlier, administratively difficult and expensive, effort to absorb the total Negro quota into a few specialized units and into certain selected vocational specialties. Some units may continue to be manned with Negro personnel; however, all Negroes will not necessarily be assigned to Negro units.

The policy statement provides that one standard shall govern the utilization of both Negro and white personnel in the Air Force.

The new policy, which began early in 1948 as a routing staff study, is effective immediately and, under present plan, is to be completely in operation on or about December 31, 1949.

Lockbourne Air Force Base will not be inactivated. It has not been determined what unit will replace the 332nd Fighter Wing at that station.

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