

DEACTIVATION OF THE 332nd FIGHTER WING

On a recent visit to Lockbourne Air Base April 30 to May 2, talks with officers and men at the base and with various citizen in Columbus, Ohio indicated that there was a great deal of unrest on the part of both military and civilians over the impending break-up of the 332nd Fighter Wing. Rumors stemming largely from publicity given in the Columbus, Ohio Pittsburgh Courier had lead the military and civilian personnel at Lockbourne to believe that any plan for integration would be one of integration away from Lockbourne rather than the inclusion of white personnel at the present installation. There could have been some basis for this rumor in the testimony of Lt. General Edwards before the Fahy Committee. The first information from news columns came from the Army and Navy Journal () which apparently interpreted through its columns the statements made before the Fahy Committee.

In a conference with the commanding officer and his staff, Mr. James C. Evans, Special Assistant to the Secretary of Defense, explained what had been done in the move toward integration but indicated definitely that neither he nor any one else could foresee at this point just what would happen as a result of the proposed program. He did express his view, however, that changes contemplated would not be "overnight changes" and that whatever is done would be in the interest of greater efficiency in the Air Force and certainly without any desire to work undue hardships upon the personnel to be transferred.

On Sunday, April 1, a mass meeting under the auspices of the Columbus Forum and sponsored by the Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity was held at Second Baptist Church. Mr. James C. Evans was the speaker on this occasion.

Posters and news articles had been circulated announcing as his subject "The Future of Lockbourne". Mr. Evan's prepared speech was in line with Alpha Phi Alpha's annual campaign on Education for Citizenship, and had no special reference to Lockbourne Air Base. After the speaking he was asked to answer any questions that might come from the audience and this he did with consummate skill in such a manner as to allay former apprehensions as to immediate changes which might be involved.

Among the military personnel there appeared to be a definite feeling that elimination of segregation with its attendant integration of Negro officers and enlisted men is a thing to be desired, but there was some doubts as to whether it would be effectuated in such a manner as not to penalize the Negro soldier. The primary complaint from the officers' standpoint was the difficulty of securing assignments in communities where customs are such that their children would not be deprived of good schooling under non-segregated conditions and where it would be possible for their families to enjoy the type of social and recreation activities to which they had been accustomed at Lockbourne. The question was asked repeatedly as to whether there could be some integration into Lockbourne without eliminating the Fighter Wing and abandoning the Air Base. There was a feeling that White personnel could be brought into Lockbourne where they would work harmoniously with those already on hand

DEACTIVATION OF THE 332nd FIGHTER WING
(Continued)



and all of the officers pointed to the fact that Lockbourne is actually not an all Negro unit but that integration on a small scale is actually present at the base. There is, of course, the usual and expected sentiment and pride in the past history and achievements of the 332nd Fighter Wing and the question was raised as to why it should be necessary to do away with this organization if its record is such that it might be continued but on an integrated basis.

The business men and firms in the city of Columbus are vitally interested in what is to happen at Lockbourne because many of them have established relationships with both military and civilian personnel at the base, have extended credit to them and are anxious to be assured of its continuance.