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**THE ARMY AS A PROFESSION OF CHOICE
FOR BLACK AMERICANS IN WORLD WAR II:
ASSESSING THE IMPACT ON FUTURE FORCE STRUCTURE**

BY

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ABSTRACT

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This study shows how prevalent institutional attitudes between the world wars influenced the Army's use of black soldiers during World War II. Using survey, reports of black veterans and other evidence, it demonstrates that racist policies adversely influenced morale and performance of black units, even though many black soldiers and some black units performed gallantly and effectively. It concludes with lessons learned from this era, focusing largely on the role of strategic leaders in shaping their organization's cultures.

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THE ARMY AS A PROFESSION OF CHOICE FOR BLACK AMERICANS IN WORLD WAR II: ASSESSING THE IMPACT ON FUTURE FORCE STRUCTURE

War is always and will ever be obscene, but faced with a greater obscenity; slavery, I would fight. While war is obscene, those who charge the machine guns, who bleed, who go down to the aid stations and who are put in body bags are not obscene; their sacrifices have no measure—theirs has a purity where mankind shines and is beyond corruption. I am not blasphemous when I say that in the brutality and evil of war, soldiers who have offered themselves up, so that their buddies may live, have in them the likeness and image of God. And damn those who debunk courage, valor, fidelity, love of country, and love of home, family, hopes and dreams for a better tomorrow. Our soldiers give up much that others may live—not only in freedom but even in luxury. They deserve our great, great gratitude and affection because they are willing to serve. They are some of God's noblest people.

—General Dick Cavazos¹

World War II marked the beginning of the end for segregated black U.S. military units. Through this era, strategic leaders attempted to implement their vision regarding Black Americans. Though substantial progress was made in the struggle for equality at home and abroad, full integration was not realized when the war ended and full integration would not come until after the Korean conflict. However, World War II marked a positive turning point in the integration of African-Americans in the Army. Many Black Americans viewed the Army as a profession of choice and as a vehicle for societal changes. In part this occurred because white and black Americans were forced to work closely within a military structure attempting to overcome a common enemy. This close contact prompted many Americans to see the contradiction of a democracy struggling to defeat extremely racist enemies while at the same time supporting racist policies at home. This awareness set the stage for later civil rights movements.

THE PAST AS PROLOGUE - QUOTAS: DISCRIMINATORY LINKAGES OF BLACK INTELLIGENCE AND COMBAT EFFICIENCY, 1920 - 1941

Army plans for training and employing black troops during World War II were based heavily on the testimonies of World War I commanders of black troops that the Army War College gathered and on the racist mores of the period. Unfortunately, these attitudes and ensuing policies were linked to notions of black intellectual capabilities and combat efficiency. As soon as the smoke had cleared from the battlefields of Europe, the Assistant Commander of the War College circulated surveys to officers who commanded black soldiers during the war. He requested comment on the troops' performances and recommendations for the use of black

troops in future wars. Their responses were largely negative,² and the observations were harmful to black integration into the Army.

In the years that followed, the staff of the War Department's Operations and Training Section (G-3) drew upon the Army War College survey to formulate policies for the future employment of black manpower. Founded on the premise that, because African-Americans were citizens, they should be subject to all of the obligations of citizenship, namely military service. However, these manpower utilization plans developed between 1922 and 1935 limited black units to sizes no larger than regiments. These policies echoed the judgments of Major General Charles C. Ballou, the commander of the all-black 92nd Division in Europe, and other World War I commanders. Their analyses cast doubt on the performance of black combat units, the intellectual capabilities of black soldiers, and the leadership abilities of black officers. Many of the studies concluded that in the event of war, "large numbers of Negroes will be found unsuited for combat duty, and for these, other parts in the mobilization must be found".³ More important, these studies influenced the Army War College Courses of the 1920s and 1930s which were attended by Regular Army officers who served in World War I and who would go on to assume key army staff positions during World War II. During this period, students such as Dwight D. Eisenhower, George S. Patton Jr., George C. Marshall, Courtney H. Hodges, Edward M. Almond, and others received instruction on the problems of employing black troops. They were likely imbued with the racist stereotypes that circulated throughout American society.

Not all commanders judged the World War I performance of black personnel as a failure. In March 1920, Vernon A. Caldwell, commander of black units in Cuba, the Philippines, and France expressed his belief that the Army should organize black personnel in units smaller than regimental size. Caldwell defended his position on the grounds that the separation of black troops into larger organizations would result in resentment within the African-American community. Emphasizing that the country's well being rested upon the efforts made by all segments of its citizenry, he stated, "Most military men recognize that national defense is no longer a matter of a Regular Army but that it is, and always had been when correctly grasped, a matter of being able to make full use of its entire manpower." Emphasizing that black units fought best when serving in white regiments, Caldwell urged the War Department to place black companies in every Regular Army organization smaller than a division. His recommendations were virtually ignored.⁴

Based on the finding of the Army War College study, the War Department set mobilization levels at approximately 50 percent for available black recruits in the event of a future war. This policy remained throughout much of the 1930s with only small revisions to the numbers to

reflect the African-American proportion in the general population. Officials revised these proportions even lower, setting the percentage of black manpower during the first mobilization stage at 9.45 percent, which reflected the 1930 census estimates of blacks in the general population.⁵ Despite several revisions, the Army's troop mobilization plans of the 1930s reiterated the racist assumptions of black soldiers combat efficiency and leadership found in previous War Department and Army War College Studies.

These racist stereotypes, in turn, shaped the thinking of many of the War Department officials who formulated the Army's manpower policies. These stereotypes substantiated racist assumptions regarding black intellectual abilities, the Army's racial division of labor, and the image of black troops as inefficient soldiers. For example, Secretary of War Henry Stimson's views reflect the attitudes that Army officials held regarding the employment of black troops and their strict adherence to a racial division of labor:

Leadership is not imbedded in the Negro race yet and to try to make commissioned officers to lead the men into battle — colored men — is to work disaster to both. Colored troops do very well under white officers but every time we try to lift them a little bit beyond where they can go, disaster and confusion follows. In the draft, we are preparing to give Negroes a fair shot in every service, however, even in aviation where I doubt if they will not produce disaster there. Nevertheless, they are going to have a try, but I hope to Heaven's sake they won't mix the white and the colored troops together in the same units for then we shall certainly have trouble.⁶

Expressing disdain for the African-American press and black leaders, Stimson felt that black soldiers should be relegated to service support units and excluded from other branches. Expressing little confidence in black servicemen, he frequently warned President Roosevelt against "placing too much responsibility on a race which was not showing initiative in battle."⁷ General George C. Marshall, Army Chief of Staff, echoed Stimson's reservations and cited blacks "low intelligence averages" and the evaluations rendered by World War I commanders on black units, claiming then that the difficulties that black soldiers faced resulted from a lack of confidence in their commissioned and noncommissioned officers.⁸

In May 1940, immediately after President Franklin D. Roosevelt requested Congress to expand the Armed Forces, the Adjutant General appointed an advisory committee to develop aids to appraise and classify military personnel. Dr. Walter V. Bingham served as its chairman. Although Bingham and others revised many of the World War I standards, the Army General Classification Test (AGCT) was based on a non-random sample that failed to consider variables of race and class, regional and cultural biases fully into account. For example, when War Plans and Training Division psychologists administered the AGCT to a sample composed of 3,790

Regular Army enlisted men, 600 Civilian Conservation Corps members, and a few hundred other men in late 1940, all the men were white between the ages of 20 and 29 and residing in the northeastern portion of the country. This region of the country was known for the highest rates of literacy in the nation.⁹

Although Bingham and other advisory committee members discovered some of the biases inherent in the War Department's testing methods, the result was a skewed distribution of test scores that dramatically affected the employment of black troops during the beginning stages of World War II. For example, with 100 as the average nearly 75 percent of the sample scored in the highest three levels, while only 24 percent made scores in the lowest two levels. On the other hand, because most black inductees came from communities that had poor school facilities, many blacks scored lower on the AGCT than white inductees; occupying levels lower than the standardized scores gathered by Army personnel technicians.¹⁰ To make matters worse, the Advisory Committee's claims to the contrary, many Army nonpsychologists used the AGCT scores as indexes of intelligence, confirming their poor appraisal of black soldiers and allowing them to channel African-American recruits into service-support duties such as railhead and salvage, construction, quartermaster, engineering, and ordinance. Between 1931 and 1940, the number of blacks in the Regular Army made up less than 4,000 of 118,000 and vacancies and promotions became extremely rare in most black units.¹¹ For example, examination of the listing of black units in the Protective Mobilization Plan of 1940 reveals that nearly 70 percent of those slated for activation were to be assigned to gas supply, truck, port, and railhead battalions in the Engineers and Quartermaster Corps.¹²

Few opportunities for gaining a commission in the Regular Army existed for blacks. Only one African-American, Benjamin O. Davis Jr., had graduated from West Point between 1920 and 1940. By 1940, only five black commissioned officers served in the Regular Army: three chaplains and two in combat branches. The combat branch included father and son, Benjamin O. Davis Sr. and Jr.¹³ African-Americans constituted nearly 360 of the 100,000 officers in the Organized Army Reserves, largely products of Reserve Officer Training Corps training at historically black Howard and Wilberforce Universities.¹⁴ Finally, in the few National Guard and Reserve units that survived during the prewar period, blacks received very little peacetime training and faced the constant threat of disbandment or conversion into labor organizations.¹⁵

As a result, the Army's racial policies had a profound effect on black participation in the armed forces during the prewar period. Such was the status of African-Americans in the Army as the nation stood on the eve of its entry into the World War II.

THE ROAD AHEAD: BLACK RESPONSES TO WAR AND TO WAR DEPARTMENT INTRANSIGENCE

In 1937, Robert L. Vann, Jane Hunter, George M. Murphy, West Hamilton, Mary Church Terrell, and other prominent black leaders attended a conference of the National Youth Administration in Washington on the problems of the Negro and Negro youth. Following three days of reports and open forums on matters affecting African-American life, such as education, health, housing, tuberculosis, lynching, disfranchisement, and civil rights in the District of Columbia, the group examined black participation in the armed forces. They adopted a resolution demanding proportionate representation at all levels within service branches as well as admission of blacks to federally supported service academies such as West Point and Annapolis.¹⁶ Less than a year later, Robert L. Vann, editor of the *Pittsburgh Courier*, penned an open letter to President Franklin D. Roosevelt, launching a campaign for the removal of racial barriers within the armed forces.

The outbreak of war in Europe in September 1939 and the German invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941 evoked ambivalent sentiments from segments of African-American society. During the first weeks of the European war, African-American responses ranged from cynical isolationism to rabid patriotism. Arguing that the war to save democracy was futile, many African-Americans concluded that similar forces were in the United States that aimed to destroy the civil liberties of African-Americans. Additionally, they questioned why they should serve in the war that was being fought for the control of colonial peoples. In a pamphlet entitled *Why Negroes Should Oppose the War*, noted African-Caribbean scholar and activist C. L. R. James argued that no matter who won the war, blacks would continue to face discrimination, police brutality, and poverty.¹⁷

This ranging debate continued throughout 1939 and 1940 and included other African-American leaders across the country. Before Germany extended its westward plunge into Denmark, Norway, the Netherlands, Luxembourg, and Belgium in the spring of 1940, and before Congress initiated debate on the Selective Service Act, segments of the black community held discussions that connected the Selective Service Act to other aspects of racism and poverty that blacks faced in the United States.

Black efforts to gain a greater role in the armed forces served as a galvanizing force during the presidential election year of 1940. Increasingly, black intellectuals, labor leaders, civil rights activists, and eventually communists and socialists realized that their collective empowerment in American civil society could not be achieved without the strategic application of protest politics to administrative posts within control of the White House. The most obvious

target was the War Department and its racial policies. Mary McLeod Bethune, an influential advisor in the National Youth Administration, reported that blacks were demanding the appointment of a black advisor to the Secretary of War and warned the White House that "There is grave apprehension among Negroes lest the existing inadequate representation and training of colored persons may lead to the creation of labor battalions and other forms of discrimination against them in the event of war".¹⁸

As the election drew nearer, Roosevelt moved to defuse black criticism of black participation in the armed forces. As many scholars have pointed out, Roosevelt personally had little to do with the cause of civil rights and the issue was not one of the President's priorities.¹⁹ But on 5 September 1940, the White House, with an eye on election-year politics, expressed dismay over the attention that the Army's racial policies had attracted from black leaders. The White House directed the War Department and the Navy to prepare a statement publicizing the need for an equal proportion of African-Americans in the military.²⁰ During a cabinet meeting held a week later, Army Chief of Staff George C. Marshall and Secretary of War Stimson informed the President that plans had been developed to organize several new black regiments in the Army and to accept ten percent of the total African-American population during the initial stages of mobilization.²¹ Following their announcements came a string of White House press releases aimed at assuring segments of the African-American community that they would have proportional opportunities within the armed forces.²² The first announcement declared that 36,000 African-Americans would be drafted in the initial call for 400,000 soldiers under the Selective Service Act.²³ Significantly, these press releases represented the first time that the War Department's policies regarding black participation in the event of an emergency had been revealed to the public.

More importantly, these statements allowed War Department officials to claim that they promoted equal opportunity for blacks in the Army when, in fact, they had no intentions of abandoning their traditional racial policies. For example, after his 13 September 1940 meeting with Roosevelt, Stimson told the Army General Staff that he wanted an "exact statement of the facts in the case and how far we can go in the matter".²⁴ In a late September letter to Senator Henry Cabot Lodge, Jr., Marshall pointed out that although political pressure had forced the Roosevelt Administration to announce that African-Americans would be accepted in the Army on a proportional basis, the War Department's policies had not changed.

It is the policy of the War Department not to intermingle colored and white enlisted personnel in the same regimental organization. The present exceedingly difficult period of building up a respectable and dependable military force for the protection of this country is not the time for critical experiments, which would

inevitably have a highly destructive effect on morale — meaning military efficiency," he claimed.²⁵

Although Roosevelt had assured Walter White, National Youth Administration Advisor on Negro Affairs; T. Arnold Hill; and A. Philip Randolph, the head of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters that African-American officers and enlisted men would be employed throughout the Army and that black reservists would fill regular Army and National Guard vacancies "regardless of race," during a conference held in late September of 1940, Roosevelt authorized the release of a press statement sanctioning the Army's racial policies.²⁶ Following this statement, Roosevelt and the War Department faced tremendous criticism from various segments of the African-American community. Then, feeling compelled to shore up dwindling African-American political support, they promoted retired officer Benjamin O. Davis, Sr. to Brigadier General, appointed Judge William H. Hastie as a special assistant to the Secretary of War, and appointed Campbell C. Johnson as advisor to the Director of Selective Service a week before the general election.²⁷ Realizing that blacks had gained little from the President's Election Day concessions, early in 1941 A. Philip Randolph called for 100,000 African-Americans to march on Washington. Although Roosevelt had preempted this move by establishing the President's Committee on Fair Employment Practices, Army officials were able to continue their discriminatory policy based on the racial division of labor and military efficiency.²⁸ By 7 December 1941, a tenuous relationship between African-Americans, the Federal Government, and black soldiers had been forged.

STATESIDE EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING OF BLACK PERSONNEL AND UNITS AT REGULAR ARMY FACILITIES: 1941-1944

In 1940, many young African-Americans faced the immediate prospect of either being drafted or ordered to active duty. During the initial stages of the Selective Service Act, more than 1.8 million African-Americans registered, reflecting roughly ten percent of the total U.S. population. Many black youth expressed very little concern over the Selective Service process because of the logjam caused by the War Department's system of racial quotas. Throughout early 1941 and 1942, nearly 28,000 blacks were passed over by the Selective Service. By early 1943, Selective Service officials estimated that approximately 300,000 blacks awaited induction after being notified of their selection.²⁹ Many black draftees were sent home. Their induction was delayed due to slow construction at many sites, which they were to receive segregated basic training.

Hindered by inadequate training facilities and a hostile white community, black soldiers advanced through the various stages of their military training. Judge William Hastie and War

Department Officials tried to develop measures to lessen the tensions between black soldiers, military policemen and local civilians, however racial flare-ups continued in many stateside areas throughout much of the war. Nevertheless, by late December 1943, black servicemen from the 93rd were on the troop transport ships *West Point*, *General John Pope*, *Lurline*, and *Torrens* heading for the South Pacific.

RACE, LABOR, AND WAR: THE EMPLOYMENT OF BLACK TROOPS IN THE AFRICAN, PACIFIC, AND EUROPEAN THEATERS

Black soldiers and prominent black leaders soon discovered that receiving an overseas assignment was a battle in and of itself. As black servicemen continued combat instruction, Army officials struggled to place them in overseas theaters. Much of this struggle was due to the unwillingness of foreign governments and theater commanders to accept black troops. In early 1942, the Governors of British West Indian and Atlantic possessions rejected the War Department's request to station black troops on American bases located in those areas. They argued that the presence of well-clothed and well-paid black soldiers would disrupt their colonial authority.³⁰ Australian authorities informed the War Department that African-Americans would not be welcomed in their territory.³¹ In April 1942, a War Department decision to deploy black troops to the British Isles was rescinded and replaced by one allowing for the assignment of only service units after the British Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden and others called for limits on the number of black troops assigned to Britain.³² Even the Governor of Alaska, Ernest Gruening, contested the presence of black troops in his territory. He believed that mixing of black personnel with Native Americans and Eskimos would be unacceptable.³³ By May 1942, only 15,679 black troops were deployed overseas, with another 23,000 projected for overseas locations.³⁴

Although Secretary Stimson and members of the Operations Division were determined to move black troops overseas, the War Department adhered to a policy of sending African-American soldiers only to countries where the general population would accept them.³⁵ In the countries where black troops were accepted, some theater commanders canceled their requests for additional personnel when they learned that only black units were available. South Pacific Theater Commander Lieutenant General Millard F. Harmon argued in 1943 that logistical problems and transportation difficulties placed a premium on receiving the most effective troops. Some commanders, such as Southwest Pacific Theater Commander General Douglas MacArthur, felt that black troops could be assigned to their areas if they were placed in zones away from population centers. Consequently, the movement of black troops to overseas theaters was precarious.

Facing growing criticism from sectors of the African-American society over the Army's use of black troops in combat zones overseas, the newly created Advisory Committee on Negro Troop Policies met in early 1943 to discuss the issue. Formed in August of 1942 and headed by Assistant Secretary of War John J. McCloy, its members included Brigadier General Benjamin O. Davis, Sr. of the Inspector General's Office; Truman Gibson, Jr., civilian Aide to the Secretary of War; and the directors of personnel for the Army Air Forces, Army Ground Forces, and Army Service Forces. After discussing the situation, the committee recommended to Secretary of War Stimson that "Negro combat troops be dispatched to an active theater of operations at an early date." In the opinion of the committee, "Such action would be the most effective means of reducing tension among Negro troops." Stimson, however, decided to ignore the committee's recommendation and agreed with his staff's recommendation to convert the remaining cavalry outfit into a service corps.³⁶ Stimson and other staff members based their secret decision on other plans that would release white soldiers for front-line duty in combat and technical jobs.³⁷ But when New York Congressman Hamilton Fish publicly asked Stimson why black combat units were being converted and why the War Department had not committed black troops to front line duty in the 26 months following Pearl Harbor, Stimson replied that "It so happens that a relatively large percentage of Negroes inducted into the Army had lower educational classifications and many of the black units had been unable to efficiently master the techniques of modern weapons"³⁸

For example, when the 2nd Cavalry Division arrived in North Africa early in 1944 it learned that the unit was to be immediately disbanded and transformed into labor units, unloading ships, repairing roads, and driving trucks. Some of troops were disappointed by the War Department's decision; others expressed relief at not having to go into battle. In the months that followed the breakup of the 2nd Cavalry Division, the War Department circulated a survey among former division members asking them if they preferred to be placed in action or remain in their service jobs. The survey revealed that only 27 percent of the men chose combat. What the War Department survey failed to realize, however, was that the attitudinal responses of the black 2nd Cavalry Division members had more to do with bouts of racism within their own ranks than anything else. One veteran, who recalled the racial dynamics in the unit during the period, stated, "we spent too much time hating and fighting our officers to have much energy left for the Germans".³⁹

After facing a firestorm of criticism from the black press, black leaders, and national protest groups, Stimson and other War Department officials were forced to devote more attention to the problem of committing black troops to combat areas overseas.⁴⁰ By the end of

February 1944, the McCloy Committee had convened at Stimson's request and recommended that the Operations Division commit black Infantry, Field Artillery, and other units into combat.⁴¹ A week later, Stimson, McCloy, and other directors of the War Department's agencies met to discuss the Advisory Committee's recommendation and decided to commit some of the units of the 93rd Division, then entering the Southwest Pacific Area, into combat as quickly as possible. They also agreed to create a regimental combat team of selected men from the 92nd Division and to deploy it in future theaters of operations.⁴² As many scholars such as Richard Dalfiume have documented, "Like the drafting and assignment to units, the commitment of Negroes to combat was a reaction to pressure rather than the planned fulfillment of a need".⁴³

In July and August of 1944 in the other World War II theater of operations, George Patton's 3rd Army and Courtney Hodges' 1st Army pursued the Germans across France after defeating them at the Normandy Peninsula. The rout had taken American planners by surprise, for few of them thought that the enemy would collapse so quickly and completely. Supplies in massive dumps in the rear areas of advancing U. S. forces were now needed immediately as Patton and Hodges prepared to open new offensives east of Paris. Allied tank units needed nearly one million gallons of gas per day. By late August, the logistical requirements that Patton and Hodges' tanks posed to the Advance Section planners in the Communications zone gave rise to the Red Ball Express. This group consisted of predominately black drivers, infantrymen, and mechanics in several quartermaster and transportation companies and battalions. By the end of the offensive, the Red Ball Express had supplied the 3rd and 1st Armies at the rate of 3.5 tons a minute and had contributed greatly to the liberation of northern France. Years later Chester Jones, a soldier who served in one of the trucking units during the period, recalled,

When General Patton was breaking through and running all over the place, it was the Red Ball Express that kept him supplied. Our truckers did a fantastic job driving with those slits, cat-eyes as we called them, at night loaded with high octane gas and all kinds of ammunition and explosives. Our speed was thirty to forty miles an hour no matter what the weather, and we drove every night.⁴⁴

THE CASE OF THE 92ND INFANTRY DIVISION

Upon arriving at Naples, Italy, in early August 1944, the 92nd Infantry Division faced challenges in their use and employment. After reporting to the 1st U. S. Armored Division, elements of the 92nd's 370th Regimental Combat Team participated in seizing the Arno River occupied the town of Lucca, then cracked the Gothic Line on the southern slope of the Northern Apennines. The 92nd's 598th Field Artillery Battalion used its 12 105-mm howitzers with uncanny accuracy to deliver the needed fire for the rapidly advancing infantry battalions. In pursuit of the rapidly retreating German forces, the unit continued its advance along the Serchio

Valley north of Pescia, capturing control of Highway 12 along Lima Creek and reaching Lima in the process. In October, the infantrymen, led by 92nd Division Commander Edward M. Almond, became a part of Task Force 92. Elements of the unit ventured northwest across the ridges of Mount Cauala to capture the city of Massa, only to encounter fierce enemy resistance after six days of costly fighting. The treacherous terrain and steady counterattack fire from strongly fixed German fortifications meant African-American soldiers paid a heavy price for their role in the Mount Cauala-Mount Castiglione Offensive.⁴⁵

Most of the men spent a great deal of time pinned down under enemy fire. "We made seven assaults in ten days before we were finally taken off of Hill California," Charles Brown, a veteran who served in the 370th later recalled. "During that period we were pretty well slaughtered and reduced to a fair-sized single platoon".⁴⁶ Another soldier echoed Brown's recollections:

Our situation on the mountain was as bad as it could be. Our position on the mountain was exactly face-to-face with the Germans. The only thing separating us was a mound of rock. We could almost toss cigarettes back and forth, to give you an idea of the proximity. We knew their position and they knew ours. We knew exactly when their mortars were going to lay down a barrage and they knew when ours were going to do likewise. Nobody had ever gotten half way along that mountain path without getting clobbered, and we had the casualty list to prove it. They, too, had learned a lesson the hard way. The Germans appeared to have settled for this Mexican standoff. Not our command, they kept calling to throw us into that meat grinder. We tried at night, in the rain, in fog, and paid for it.⁴⁷

The 92nd's Commanders cited the unit's problems, which were common to all inexperienced units, to validate reservations they had regarding the fighting abilities of black soldiers as well as to compensate for poor staff planning. The division's acting Inspector General Charles Welch filed a report claiming wholesale retreats in disorder and alleging the disappearance of key platoon leaders and noncommissioned officers during the unit's encounter with enemy fire. Instead of re-training the soldiers, Commander Almond court-martialed, demoted, and transferred many of them. From October 1944 to May 1945, more than 1,800 court-martials were held; likewise, nearly 1,500 officers and enlisted personnel were transferred out of the division as the unit was reorganized.⁴⁸

Almond offers this description of the 370th's activities in late October 1944:

During this action the enemy resistance was stiff and well organized and in consequence the Negro units exhibited serious combat deficiencies; such as mass hysteria, lack of pride of accomplishment, lack of trust, exaggeration of danger, enemy strengths and capabilities, loss of equipment and failure to employ basic combat principles in training.⁴⁹

The views of the 92nd Division Commander were echoed among his staff officers. In a late November 1944 meeting with Major Oscar J. Magee of the Army Service Forces' Intelligence Division, 92nd Chief of Staff William J. McCaffrey stated "Although there had been many examples of individual heroism on the part of Negro officers and soldiers in the division", it was his "belief that the Negro is panicky and that his environment hasn't conditioned him to accept responsibilities."⁵⁰ During this meeting, a section chief expressed his dislike for his assignment with black troops, stating, "I don't trust Negroes. White officers who work with them have to work harder than with white troops. I have no confidence in the fighting ability of Negro soldiers."⁵¹

Officers in the 92nd high command failed to ask whether the soldiers had been given the tools to accomplish their tasks. But this important factor was not overlooked by many of the 92nd Division members. Major Clark, a young black Second Lieutenant from Tulsa, Oklahoma, who served in one of the division's field artillery battalions, recalled, "In Almond's command of the 92nd Division, racist assumptions and political considerations were paramount in every major decision. Black officers were considered inferior, and therefore limited to lower grades".⁵² Another black soldier, Charles Brown, believed the immediate blame should have been placed on the Army staff system: "After days of futile assaults," he recalled, "Major Wren phoned Colonel Sherman and told him Hill California was as formidable as was first reported by us; that it was a major obstacle which required coordinated support: planes, tanks and artillery and that an infantry company could not possibly take that mountain. Ten days and seven assaults later, headquarters decided we were not lying and goofing off on the job".⁵³ Another 370th soldier echoed Brown's assessment, recalling, "Things became a befuddled mess".⁵⁴

The lack of trust between Almond, his staff and the unit's black officers and enlisted revealed itself in the 92nd's subsequent combat assignments. During the winter of 1944, the 370th, and its newly arrived sister components (the 371st Infantry and the 365th Infantry) advanced to seize Castelnuovo in the Serchio River Valley while holding the coastal line south of Massa. They were joined by the all-black 366th, who relieved the 365th. The 366th had spent eight months guarding Army Air Forces bases in southern Italy before being assigned to the 92nd. Split into two sectors, the 370th attacked over three miles of rather difficult terrain only to be turned back by hostile enemy fire. Meanwhile, the 365th and the 371st performed platoon and company attacks against strongly entrenched enemy positions along the southern Massa coastal line. These attempted advancements bore little success due to low unit morale and poor staff planning. The casualty lists for the 92nd's actions dramatically illuminated these

deficiencies: 5 officers and 152 enlisted personnel were killed, 14 officers and nearly 300 enlisted men were wounded, and 153 black personnel were reported missing in action.⁵⁵

The difficulties of the 92nd Division continued well into the next year. By March 1945, the limited, yet deadly, struggles of the 365th and the 366th Infantry Regiments to improve their positions in the Serchio Valley near Viareggio and the division's costly advance across a heavily mined area to capture the Cinquale Canal on the 8th of February led to 5th Army Commander Mark W. Clark's decision to again restructure the 92nd Division. Under Clark's plan, the 366th was withdrawn to the Viareggio area, where it was designated an engineer general service outfit in reserve areas behind the 442nd Infantry Regiment (an all-Japanese American unit). The 370th was reconstituted with the division's best officers and placed back in the line of battle. The men of the 365th and the 371st occupied defensive positions south of Viareggio as replacement troops. The new division was now composed of the 442nd, which was made of Japanese-Americans, and the 473rd, a white unit consisting of re-trained antiaircraft artillerymen.⁵⁶ Clark's move was significant and represented the Army's first steps toward integrating the armed forces. For many veterans who served in the 366th, Clark's initiative came at a tremendous cost, the practical dissolution of the unit. Willard A. Williams, a soldier who was with the 366th during the period, described the effect of this dissolution:

More than half of the men of the 366th had been killed or wounded in action, but the fighting of our regiment was discredited so miserably that on March 14, 1945 at Bottinaccio, Italy, it was deactivated as a combat regiment and converted into two service units. A more devastating blow could not have been dealt this group of soldiers who were proud of their outfit and their contribution to winning the war. We were completely shattered. As far as I was concerned, this ended the history of the 366th, which had been written in blood in the mountains of northern Italy.⁵⁷

Colonel Howard Queen, Commanding Officer of the 366th Infantry before being relieved in late 1944, declared this respect for the 366th: "General Almond may have succeeded in decimating the ranks of 366th and wounding their pride, but he never destroyed their self-respect".⁵⁸ The newly constituted 92nd Division continued its operations along the Ligurian Coast until the German Forces in Italy surrendered on 2 May 1945.

OTHER EXPERIENCES OF BLACK TROOPS

Although most African-American servicemen encountered racial discrimination in the European and Pacific Theaters, the military exploits of all-black troops during the war did not go unnoticed. In the siege of Brest, the all-black 333d and 969th Field Artillery Battalions, under the control of the 8th Corps Artillery, reinforced the fire of the 8th Division during its attack on the Crozon Peninsula.⁵⁹ The 969th, commanded by Major Einar Erickson, provided indirect fire

for the 90th Division and occupied defensive positions near Rennes. In the Ardennes, three battalions of black artillerymen distinguished themselves during the German counteroffensive of December 1944. During the Battle of the Bulge in the Bastogne-Houffalize area, the 969th Field Artillery group helped to hold off German forces that sought to encircle Bastogne. The group endured seemingly endless bouts of dwindling ammunition and alarmingly high casualty rates. The men in the outfit earned the Distinguished Unit Citation. Taking notice of the unit's unswerving dedication, 101st Airborne Commander Major General Maxwell D. Taylor praised their gallantry:

The officers and men of the 101st Airborne Division wish to express to your command their appreciation of the gallant support rendered by the 969th Field Artillery Battalion in the recent defense of Bastogne, Belgium. The success of this defense is attributable to the shoulder-to-shoulder cooperation of all the units involved. This division is proud to have shared the battlefield with your command.⁶⁰

The performances of black armored units also earned commendation. The 761st Tank Battalion was overflowing with confidence when it entered France, 31 October 1944. The tanker troops had just completed their training at Camp Hood, Texas, where they had earned the praise of Second Army Commander Ben Lear and had been greeted enthusiastically by 26th Division Commander, Major General Willard Paul, upon their arrival in Europe. The unit had scarcely been in Europe a week when General George S. Patton told them:

Men, you're the first Negro tankers to ever fight in the American Army. I would never have asked for you if you weren't good. I have nothing but the best in my Army. I don't care what color you are, so long as you go up there and kill those Kraut sonsabitches. Everyone has their eyes on you and is expecting great things from you. Most of all, your race is looking forward to you. Don't let them down; don't let me down.⁶¹

A week later, the black tank unit was committed to combat south of Metz. Spearheading the attack for the 26th Division, the 761st spent 183 days in action, from 31 October 1944 to 6 May 1945, in France, Belgium, Holland, Luxembourg, Germany, and Austria. They fought both as a separate tank battalion and as detachments with the 26th, 71st, 79th, 87th, 95th, and 103rd Infantry Divisions and the 17th Airborne Division.⁶² Many of their engagements resulted in great losses in personnel and equipment. The battalion was instrumental in supporting the 104th's attack and capture of Vic-sur-Seille, Moyenvic, and Benzange-la-Petite, but lost many tanks and 18 men during its storming of the town of Morville-les-Vic, largely as a result of the well-camouflaged German pillboxes that were concealed by the newly-fallen snow. The day before the battalion's initial encounter with the enemy, the 761st lost its commander to a mishap at Arracourt, France. Nevertheless, their performances of November 1944 won them special

commendation from General Paul who cited the speed with which they adapted themselves to the front line under the most adverse weather conditions.⁶³

THE FUTURE: SAME ... BUT DIFFERENT - COMMENTS FROM WORLD WAR II VETERANS

Assessing black Americans' overall military performance in World War II and its impact on future force structure; we should recall the historical patterns of the Army's culture regarding the utilization of African-American service members. The historical pattern and institutional culture has been one of: Recruit – Restrict - Reject – Recruit. African-American veterans of the units employed and others have meanwhile contended that the units did far better than their critics would concede. They see racial prejudice as the fundamental problem. But what did African-Americans' contribution in World War II portend for the future?

Few historical problems are more perplexing than those that accompany an attempt to reconstruct the performance of a military unit in combat. Did we learn anything?

It became clear to me that at the age of 58 I would have to learn new tricks that were not taught in the military manuals or on the battlefield. In this position I am a political soldier and will have to put my training in rapping-out orders and making snap decisions on the back burner, and have to learn the arts of persuasion and guile. I must become an expert in a whole new set of skills.

— Attributed to George C. Marshall

General Marshall is alleged to have made this observation as he reflected upon his early years as Chief of Staff of the United States Army (CSA) in the months prior to World War II. It is obvious from this comment that Marshall believed that his previous education, training, and experience had not adequately prepared him for the leadership role he had embarked upon. As the CSA, his success depended upon his ability to persuade influential people and organizations, both internal and external to the government, to employ their efforts on behalf of his vision of a winning wartime strategy and for the mobilization of an Army necessary to make that strategy a reality.⁶⁴

Leaders are always role models. Members of the organization, and society in general, closely scrutinize the behavior of strategic leaders. The ways strategic leaders conduct themselves during routine periods and in times of crisis reveal their personal values, beliefs, and assumptions. Thus, their behavior affects certain aspects of the organization's culture as subordinates react to strategic leaders' behavior. It comes down to two key questions: Whom did we work with? What did we learn?

We learned that the tenure of any individual strategic leader is limited and that subordinate leaders must be selected, mentored, and trained to carry on the vision. What beliefs have leaders passed on to their subordinates? The history of the United States Army has been built on great leaders who produce great subordinates who, in turn, become great leaders in their own time. George C. Marshall learned leadership from John J. Pershing, former commander of the Buffalo Soldiers. Then Marshall's followers became great captains themselves: Dwight D. Eisenhower, Omar N. Bradley, George S. Patton, Jr., and Matthew B. Ridgway among them.⁶⁵

What impact did the Army War College courses of the 1920s and 1930s "special survey on the employment of black troops" have on the socialization process of student officers such as Dwight D. Eisenhower, George S. Patton Jr., George C. Marshall, Courtney H. Hodges, and Edward M. Almond (former commandant of Army War College in the early 1950s)? Did these students inherit the racial stereotypes that circulated throughout American society in their establishment of strategic culture in their organizational culture? Organizational culture is built on values that are derived from and deemed essential by the strategic leadership of the organization. Individual perceptions of what is important form members' operating values, which in turn affect shaping the Army's organizational culture.

Changing organizational culture is difficult, but not impossible. In fact cultural change is imperative if an organization is to grow, develop, and adapt to the changing environment within which it exists. However, it takes time to change an organization's culture, usually between five and ten years, so strategic leadership of an organization must have patience to see change through. Strategic leaders also share certain characteristics. The following traits are the most common: 1) vision, 2) mentorship, 3) compassion, 4) integrity, and 5) professional competence. We cannot overemphasize the importance of vision and institutional integrity. A very large void in one byproduct of the inefficient usage of available black manpower was its attendant fiscal irresponsibility. This inefficiency possibly contributed to less timely realization of the nation's wartime strategy.

Among the sources that proved most valuable to the study were the transcripts of oral presentations pertaining to two conferences of Black Americans in World War II. Both conferences were held at Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania, and jointly sponsored by the following entities: U.S. Army Military History Institute, the Black Employees and the Strategic Studies Institute – Outreach Program. The first conference was held on 9 September 1992 and the second conference was held in September 1993. Several veterans, current and former officers who served in "Colored Units" shared their thoughts. These Army leaders shared their

knowledge and experiences with a new group of future leaders and developers of Army Strategy. Many of these shared commentaries are applicable today and relevant to today's institutional Army. The participants' recollections corroborated many events that occurred during and immediately after World War II. They filled in several gaps noted in selected oral histories, war diaries, and selected unit records.

Additionally, several conference attendees completed World War II survey form questionnaires developed by the U.S. Army Military History Institute. Perspectives vary widely, depending on an individual's responsibilities and his location on the battlefield. The views and understanding of a private will hardly resemble those of a unit commander. Each reflected the truth of what happened in his own way as they served in the army as a profession of choice. The following comments were taken from the unpublished surveys of soldiers assigned to the 92nd Division who attended the first conference held on 9 September 1992:

- Morale - 1st SGT Harold Russell, Jr. wrote that his unit's morale declined after "General Almond's remark that he didn't send for us."
- Instances of particularly bad leadership by MG Almond, Division Commander:
 - CPT Jesse Brewer wrote, "General Almond caused our Division to suffer a tremendous number of casualties."
 - CPT Jehu Hunter wrote, "MG Almond sending [sent] a reinforced battalion on an assault across a coastal plain without first having secured the commanding high ground."
 - CPT Rufus Johnson wrote, "[MG Almond] To knowingly order men to their death out of racial prejudice is certainly poor leadership."

One of the most interesting presentations during the first conference was that of Lieutenant General (Retired) Benjamin O. Davis, Jr. He stated that the "Good Old Days were really the Bad Old Days", referring to his personal experiences and observations of the Army as a profession of choice for black Americans in World War II. In essence, he stated that we are not there yet, but positive change is taking place today between races.

LESSON LEARNED

A reoccurring theme throughout this historic context is the direct parallel between the common attitude toward African-Americans in American society and that reflected in American military racial policy. It became clear that black American soldiers' perception was, in part, the product of injustices that had afflicted the black soldier from the very beginning of the American republic. Therefore, the events, attitudes, and philosophies related here have relevance and

significance far beyond the history of the Army. Though the chronology and mechanisms of institutional racism is a significant portion of this project, it is included only to illustrate strategic processes and outcomes.

SUMMARY

The wartime contributions of African-American soldiers reflected the War Department's strict adherence to segregation and indifference to black manpower and the self-organizational efforts of black soldiers to maintain their dignity under the most adverse circumstances. But many black soldiers realized they were fighting a three-front war. The first involved a struggle against fascism. The second was the battle they waged against racism at home and within the Armed Forces. The third was the everyday battle that was both aided and hampered by disputes within the African-American community over the image of the soldier. The stateside training facilities and the overseas embarkation points are critical to the African-American experience in World War II: They provided the physical as well as the psychic spaces in which black soldiers struggled to resolve these conflicts. The struggles that black soldiers waged took on special significance after the war, when the Army began its uneven movement toward integration prior to the Korean War and the American society began to acknowledge its class oppression and racism.

This project has identified lessons learned in the application of strategic leadership and competencies during black Americans' quest to make the Army a profession of choice.

WORD COUNT = 8001

ENDNOTES

¹ Dr. Roderick R. Magee II, ed. *Strategic Leadership Primer*, Department of Command, Leadership, and Management, (Carlisle Barracks, PA: U.S. Army War College, 1998), 36.

² Major General Charles C. Ballou, formerly the commander of the all-black 92nd Division in Europe, expressed his belief that the use of black soldiers from the Civil War through 1917 revealed that they were liabilities rather than assets and used racist generalizations to suggest that black troops be placed in labor battalions and regiments commanded by white officers. Ballou contended that the black soldier "has little capacity for initiative, is easily stampeded if surprised, and is therefore more dependent than the white man on skilled leadership." Reflecting upon his own experience as the commander of the 92nd, he stated, "I simply forgot that the average Negro is a rank coward" and that "his faults and virtues stemmed from being children of people in whom slavish obedience and slavish superstitions and ignorance were ingrained." He went on to denigrate the performance of black officers and dismissed the performance of the 93rd Division's regiments, claiming that their success was based on the replacement of black officers by white personnel. Advising against the formation of segregated divisions, Ballou recommended that the War Department limit the size of black units to no larger than a regiment. The responses of other field grade officers of the 92nd were similar, employing racial stereotypes and sexual myths couched in popular beliefs to demonstrate the lackluster performance of black personnel and to advise against the formation of all-black divisions. Responding to the Army War College in April of 1920, former 92nd Division Chief of Staff Allen J. Greer wrote, "the average Negro is naturally cowardly and utterly lacking in confidence in his colored officer." "Every infantry combat soldier should possess sufficient mentality, initiative, and individual courage; all of these are, generally speaking, lacking in the Negro" he stated. Another former 92nd officer wrote, "My experience confirms the belief that, with Negro officers, the Negroes cannot become fitted as combat troops." He, like Ballou and Greer, recommended the assignment of black troops to labor and pioneer units no larger than a regiment, arguing "it would be unwise to place more than one such regiment in a division". A commander of the all-black 368th Infantry claimed that black soldiers lacked home training and commented "the average Negro has the mentality of an overgrown child so naturally it takes longer to train them." Advising against the formation of all-black divisions, he argued that no part of the country would permit the assembly of black divisions without protest. Reacting to the Army War College survey in early April, former 370th Infantry Commander, Major Thomas A. Roberts, described the officers and enlisted men in the unit as untruthful, illiterate, and lacking in initiative and a sense of responsibility. "I favor no larger unit than a regiment," he suggested.

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⁴ Colonel Vernon A. Caldwell. 1920 Letter to Assistant Commandant, General Staff College entitled "Use to be Made of Negroes in the U.S. Military Service." dated March 14. Army War College, U.S. Army Military History Institute, Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania.

⁵ Memorandum, G-1 for the Chief of Staff, entitled "Use of Negro Manpower in Time of Emergency." Entry 43, Box 442, G-1 Personnel, RG 165, April 26. Records of the Military Intelligence Division, National Archives National Records Center, Suitland, Maryland. 1937.

⁶ Henry Stimson. 1940 Diary entries, September 27, October 25. Henry Simpson Papers, Yale University, New Haven CT. Internet. <<http://www.library.yale.edu/un/papers/stimson.htm>>

⁷ Ibid., Oct 25, 1940.

⁸ Larry I. Bland (editor). 1991 *George C. Marshall: Interviews and Reminiscences for Forrest C. Pogue*. George C. Marshall Foundation, Lexington, Virginia.

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¹² Brigadier General F.M. Andrews. Memorandum entitled Employment of Negro Manpower. Entry 43, Box 442, G-3, Operations and Training, Record Group 165, June 3. Records of the Military Intelligence Division, National Archives National Records Center, Suitland, MD. 1940.

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²⁰ Orlando Ward. Memorandum for the G-1. Secretary of the General Staff, September. Entry 43, Box 127, Record Group 165, Records of the Military Intelligence Division, National Archives National Records Center, Suitland Maryland. 1940.

²¹ Morris J. MacGregor and Bernard C. Nalty eds. Marshall, General George C. Memorandum for the G-1. Chief of Staff, September 1940. In *Black Soldiers in World War II, Volume 5, Blacks in the United States Armed Forces: Basic Documents*. Scholarly Resources, Wilmington, Delaware, 1977: 25.

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