

“BUG-OUT BOOGIE” – THE SWAN SONG OF SEGREGATION IN THE UNITED STATES
ARMY: DESEGREGATION DURING THE KOREAN WAR AND DISSOLUTION OF THE
ALL-BLACK 24th INFANTRY REGIMENT

BY

C2014

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Submitted to the graduate degree program in History and the Graduate Faculty of the University
of Kansas in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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Abstract

In tracing the origins of the movement to desegregate the U.S. Army, most scholars pointed to President Truman's Executive Order 9981 signed on July 26, 1948. Other scholars highlighted the work done by the "President's Committee on Equality and Opportunity in the Armed Services," also known as the Fahy Committee, which was formed as a result of Order 9981.

However, when the United States was compelled to take military action following the surprise attack by North Korean forces on June 25, 1950, the U.S. Army units sent into action in Korea were mostly composed of segregated units such as the all-black 24th Infantry Regiment. The 24th Infantry Regiment and other segregated units continued to be maintained by the U.S. Army despite the efforts of the president, prominent civilians, military leaders, and the Fahy Committee, to desegregate the armed forces. A reason espoused by scholars for why the U.S. Army was ultimately integrated was due to manpower shortages created by combat in Korea and the removal of quota restrictions on the enlistment of African American soldiers during the war.

All three theories have their strengths and cannot be discounted entirely. This study argues that the racial animosity by a large segment of senior military officers, such as Lieutenant General Edward Almond, and their attempts to portray African American soldiers and African American units as incompetent actually backfired and instead of providing the justification for continued segregation, actually gave men like General Ridgway the excuse to force the integration of the Army in Korea. The 24th Infantry Regiment in particular was singled out, often without cause, for incompetence. Using interviews from the Army Center of Military History study *Black Soldier White Army*, this study will show that the men of the *Fighting 24th*

actually showed incredible courage and determination against both the enemy forces they faced and a military leadership that demoralized and belittled them as soldiers.

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INTRODUCTION

On Armistice Day, November, 11, 1950, Master Sergeant Waymond R. Ransom, an African American member of the Regimental Intelligence and Reconnaissance Platoon, attached to the Headquarters Company, 24th Infantry Regiment, 25th Infantry Division, stood by the side of a road near Yenchon, Korea talking with one of his squad leaders. Moments earlier, a mine had detonated in the road, killing one American and injuring several others. As the injured were being led to an aid station, a number of Korean civilians armed with Russian weapons and wearing arm bands that bore the inscription, "Seoul Police Reserve Battalion" marched down the same road.

During the confusion following the land mine's explosion, Sergeant Ransom's squad leader yelled: "Hey, them people was leaving town as we were coming yesterday. Those six girls right there were leaving town as we were coming into town yesterday." As Sergeant Ransom was to relate thirty-eight years later, right after the "Seoul Police Reserve Battalion" marched out of sight a big burst of fire erupted from down the same road.

Meanwhile, a lieutenant in charge of one of the rifle companies in the vicinity was talking with Sergeant Ransom's lieutenant. Sergeant Ransom recalled that the two lieutenants were the "only two white folks in the area." The rifle company lieutenant advised Ransom's lieutenant; "Give me one of your jeeps. Then you all dash down there with a lot of firing." Sergeant Ransom's lieutenant gave the order to the men standing nearby, including Sergeant Ransom, and then jumped into the jeep and sped off.

What Sergeant Ransom's lieutenant did not know was that the night before Sergeant Ransom and another sergeant had decided "that the next fire fight if certain things happened it would be

his last,” or in-other-words, Sergeant Ransom’s lieutenant would become the victim of what has often been referred to as “fragging” – the purposeful killing of an officer, usually within the context of combat so that it appears to be just another casualty of war. When Sergeant Ransom and the other men from Regimental Intelligence and Reconnaissance Platoon rushed down the road towards the sound of gunfire they came across the jeep that had moments before contained their lieutenant. The driver was dead and the lieutenant was nowhere to be found (later confirmed Killed In Action – KIA). Around them a gun battle raged involving approximately one thousand North Korean soldiers who were the rear and flank component of the armed Korean civilians that Sergeant Ransom had moments before watched march past.

Sergeant Ransom reacted instinctively, his military training kicking in. Sergeant Ransom ordered his men to return fire and he moved to attack the enemy. According to Sergeant Ransom’s Distinguished Service Cross citation: “Sergeant Ransom moved to an exposed position and advanced while delivering a steady stream of effective counter fire into the enemy strongpoint. Although wounded several times, he continued to move toward the hostile positions.”¹

The battle quickly turned chaotic and deadly. Sergeant Ransom witnessed the enemy fire take down several of his men. One of his squad leaders, Marion Rivers, a West Indian from New York yelled to Sergeant Ransom that he had been shot in the body and needed help. Sergeant Ransom years later recalled the plea from Rivers and sorrowfully explained, “There’s nothing I can do; I gave him a grenade.” Sergeant Ransom did not elaborate whether the grenade provided

¹ Distinguished Service Cross citation from Headquarters, Eighth U.S. Army, Korea: General Orders No. 295 (May 10, 1951).

to Rivers was to assist him in fending off the enemy onslaught or just a quick and painless means for Rivers to end his life.

Sergeant Ransom explained what happened next:

One (enemy soldier) took me with two rounds through my left knee just as my left knee comes down. So I went over. This (North Korean) officer came up. I got back up on the right leg and threw a butt stroke at him. He ducked so I go over again, and when I hit the ground again he jumped on top of me. He had a pistol on a lanyard in his hand and was hitting me on the head with the pistol. I got the (pistol) away from him. He said something. So I got up on the one good leg again. He said something to the burp gunner and he shot me again. I shifted half sideways, and he hit me with several rounds. I rolled over and played dead. They stomped me around some and took my field jacket and my billfold and cap. Then they left me. After a while ... I think they shot anybody they saw was still moving. After a while two more come up and start taking my boots off. The boots don't come off so easy so they hold me upside down. This doesn't feel too good. One said he's alive or words to that effect. I think that it's time for bayonets so I say to get it over with. They think I'm asking for water. So I start cussing them out in Japanese, and they hit me with rifle butts. I play dead again, and they take the boots and leave. I roll over on my stomach into some weeds so that they couldn't see my breath because it is cold. The next thing, about 10 or 11 (American soldiers), the relief force comes up.²

Sergeant Ransom was taken away for medical care and his part of the Korean War came to a close.

Sergeant Ransom's experience was illustrative of several important factors operating during the Korean War. First, Sergeant Ransom was an African American that was still fighting within

² Interview with Waymond Ransom, August 5, 1988, Box 7, Oral Interview Notes for *Black Soldier White Army: The 24th Infantry Regiment in Korea* (BSWA), Center of Military History (CMH).

a segregated unit – the 24th Infantry Regiment – two years after President Truman’s Executive Order 9981 was supposed to have ended segregation within the Armed Forces. Second, Sergeant Ransom, while fighting alongside other African Americans, was being led by white officers, specifically, a white officer that Sergeant Ransom and his fellow soldiers disliked enough to contemplate “fragging.” Finally, Sergeant Ransom, despite facing the entrenched prejudice of a military establishment that was reluctant to end segregation, continued to fight with “extraordinary heroism” – as exemplified in his Distinguished Service Cross citation.

The story of African Americans in the Korean War is complicated. It is the story of African Americans facing continued segregation and racial prejudice while at the same time finally getting the opportunity to prove their worth in combat that had not typically been the case in earlier conflicts. Unlike, for example, World War II, where African Americans were largely shielded from combat roles, the Korean War was the first war of the Twentieth Century during which black soldiers were used in combat roles in all branches of the armed services. And most important, The Korean War was the catalyst that brought about the realization of Truman’s Presidential Order to end segregation in the armed forces. But in order for the Army to finally accept integration it required the sacrifices of men such as Sergeant Ransom and ironically, it required that the men of the all-black 24th Infantry Regiment had to face the prejudices of several prominent and senior white officers who used every setback and perceived failing of the 24th to paint all African American soldiers as cowards and unfit fighting men. Some of these senior officers would hold onto their racial biases till the day they died – long after the rest of the military acknowledged the reality that white or black – the color of one’s skin has nothing to do with their ability as a soldier.

In tracing the origin of the movement to desegregate the U.S. Army many scholars have pointed to President Truman's Executive Order 9981 signed on July 26, 1948. Other scholars have highlighted the work done by the "President's Committee on Equality and Opportunity in the Armed Services" also known as the Fahy Committee, which was formed as a result of Order 9981 to see to it that the Armed Services implemented the President's vision.³

Two years later, however, when the United States was compelled to take military action in Korea with the attack by North Korean forces on June 25, 1950, the U.S. Army forces fielded to the Korean peninsula were mostly composed of segregated units, such as the all-black 24th Infantry Regiment - this despite the efforts of the President, prominent civilian military leaders, and the Fahy Committee. The third reason espoused by scholars for why the U.S. Army was ultimately integrated was the manpower shortages created by combat in Korea and the removal of quota restrictions on the enlistment of African American soldiers during the war.

All three theories have their strengths and cannot be discounted as irrelevant. This study argues that the racial animosity by a large segment of senior military officers, such as Lieutenant General Edward Almond, and their attempts to portray African American soldiers and African American units as incompetent actually backfired – instead of providing the justification for continued segregation – actually gave men like General Matthew B. Ridgway the excuse to force

³ The issue among scholars of whether President Truman's Order 9981 or the subsequent Fahy Committee that was created as a result of Order 9981 was the more important factor is somewhat similar to the question of which came first, the chicken or the egg. Early scholars, such as Lee Nichols, Richard Dalfoimé, and Richard Stillman tend to give the lion's share of credit to the work of the Fahy Committee as being the crucial factor in the breakdown of segregation in the U.S. Army. These individuals also happened to be some of the early scholars on the topic of desegregation. Coinciding with the rise in popularity and acceptance of President Truman by historians there appeared to be a trend among recent scholarship to give more praise to President Truman and his decisiveness in signing Order 9981. Sherie Mershon and Steve Schlossman in *Foxholes and Color Lines: Desegregating the U.S. Armed Forces*, published in 1998, were both far more generous to President Truman's foresight in signing Order 9981 than previous scholars. James Rawn Jr. in *The Double V: How Wars, Protest, and Harry Truman Desegregated America's Military*, published in 2013, as one might presume from the title, was also an advocate that President Truman was the leading change agent for desegregation.

the integration of the Army in Korea. The claim of cowardice and incompetence had traditionally been the rallying cry for continued segregation of black soldiers: but with the need for replacements in white units and because of the so-called failure of black units – after three years of resisting integration the resistance of the senior Army command finally broke down. Of all the African American units in Korea, the 24th Infantry Regiment in particular was singled out, often without cause, for incompetence. Using interviews from the Army Center of Military History study, *Black Soldier White Army*, as well as documentation from the Eisenhower Presidential Library, Truman Presidential Library, and the Lieutenant General Edward Almond collection at the Military Heritage Institute, this study will show that the men of the *Fighting 24th* actually showed incredible courage and determination against a military leadership that demoralized and belittled them as soldiers.

Desegregation and African Americans in the Military: A Historiography

Before the Armed Services integrated, before American society faced the desegregation of schools and government service, what little scholarship there was geared towards African Americans was typically superficial or was permeated with the racial bias of the time. In regard to the history of the African American as a soldier, most scholarship came from historians and authors associated with the United States Army.

The United States Army War College in 1926 at the direction of the War Department sponsored a study entitled: “The Use of Negro Manpower in War.” This study, like several before and after, was designed to get at the heart of the question the War Department asked; “what do we do with the Negro soldier?” The reason the War Department asked this question

can be found under the section titled “The problem presented” in the Army War College study. The question, or “problem,” was the U.S. Constitution.

The Army War College study made the assessment at the outset: “Under the Constitution the negro has the rights of citizenship. He forms a considerable part of the population of the United States. It is evidence that he must bear his share of the burden of war.”⁴ However, “his share of the burden” did not imply that the U.S. Army was going to use African American soldiers the same as white soldiers and the Army War College study had a reason for that as well. Under the section titled “Opinion of the War College” – the study concluded: “In the process of evolution the American negro has not progressed as far as the other sub-species of the human family. As a race he has not developed leadership qualities. His mental inferiority and the inherent weaknesses of his character are factors that must be considered with great care in the preparation of any plans for his employment in war.”⁵

Without question, the Army War College study was a product of its time. The U.S. Army in 1926 was a long way from the post-integration period of the 1950s and 1960s and as “scholarship” to be considered in a historiography the material bears the significant caveat of the racial attitudes at the time it was created. The importance of the Army War College study and other similar government documents to the historiography and on this study is less to what extent they influenced later scholarship (which they mostly did not), but rather on the fact that the senior officers that commanded African American soldiers in Korea as integration started making a toe-hold in the Army – received their education regarding African Americans as soldiers by these same documents.

⁴ John J. Fulmer, *U.S. Army War College: The Use of Negro Manpower in War* (Washington D.C.: U.S. Army, 1926), 1.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 2.

Officers leading African American soldiers in Korea were reminded that the soldiers under their charge were fighting in order to uphold their Constitutional “share of the burden of war.” Perhaps these officers would also remember the attachment to the Army War College study titled: “Analysis of the physical, mental, moral and psychological qualities and characteristics of the negro as a sub-species of the human family” that informed the future leaders of the Army in 1926 that “the negroes racial experience as a slave has bred in him a peculiar form of mind ... (making him) by nature sub-servient (sp).” The article went on to elaborate that based on their scientific understanding the “Negro ... instinctively regards the white man as his superior. He is willing to give way to the white man as a general rule and he does this unthinkingly. His period of service as a slave and his mental caliber cause him to accept unhesitatingly as proper and natural, work that would disgust the white.”⁶ It was this “subservience” to the “white man” that led the Army to call for an officer corps in black units composed mostly of white officers.

Although by the time of the Korean War the Army War College study was nearly twenty-five years old, the conclusion of that study had numerous supporters among senior Army leaders in Korea, such as Lieutenant General Edward Almond, who fervently believed the 1926 reports conclusion that “in physical courage it must be admitted that the American negro falls well back of the white man and possibly behind all other races.”⁷ Another characteristic of the 1926 Army War College study and several other studies prepared by the Army between World War I and World War II was that African American officers posed their own unique problems.

The study informed future Army officers that; “they (African American officers) cliqued together and sought at all times to protect members of their own race, no matter whether they

⁶ Ibid., 6.

⁷ Ibid., 7.

were right or wrong ... their principal idea was not that they were in the service to fight for their country, but that they were there for the advancement of their racial interests.” According to the Army study, African American officers were not to be looked upon by their white counterparts as an ally in leading black soldiers; on the contrary, they should be looked upon as impediment to the good order of the unit. As basis for this conclusion, the Army study provided the observation of an unnamed 92nd Division Commanding General in World War I who stated: “The mass of colored troops distrusted their colored officers – to them the colored officer was simply a ‘stuck-up nigger’ – thus the negro officer was handicapped by the prejudices of his own race.”⁸

With the advent of World War II, the Army attempted to tone down some of their more blunt assessments of African American soldiers. A good example is the Army Service Forces Manual titled “Leadership and the Negro Soldier” that was published in 1944. The Army did not attempt to portray the African American as a “sub-species” of the human family in this manual and actually went at great lengths to praise black soldiers in a chapter titled “The Negro Soldier in American History.” More importantly, the Army appeared to give some recognition to the problem of racial prejudice among the leadership in the Army. But as with the 1926 study, the main goal of the Army Services manual was “focused directly and solely on the problem of the most effective military use of colored troops.” However, the “most effective military use of colored troops” did not mean they would be integrated. On the contrary, the Army stated in no uncertain terms; “It is essential that there be a clear understanding that the Army has no authority or intention to participate in social reform as such but does view the problem as a matter of

⁸ Ibid.

efficient troop utilization.”⁹ From World War II to the beginning of the Korean War, “efficient troop utilization” in reference to African American soldiers would be through a segregated system.

Comparing the 1926 Army War College Study and the 1944 Army Service Forces Manual, one is immediately struck by the vast difference in tone. This is not necessarily attributable to an enlightening of racial views by the Army but has to do with the intended audience and the goals of each document. While the 1926 study was classified as “Secret” and was only meant for distribution to officers attending the Army War College and other select senior officers of a peace-time Army, the 1944 manual was meant for junior officers recently drafted into the U.S. “citizen” Army fighting a global war. In 1944, the Army needed the manpower of the country’s African American community and it was in their best interest to address some of the issues faced by black soldiers.

Under the section titled “Carry-Over of Civilian Attitudes” the manual made a point to address what would appear obvious to the average black soldier in 1944; “In civilian life every Negro, at one time or another, has either been told, or has read, or has been made to feel that he is considered inferior by the majority of white people.”¹⁰ Yet, the manual wanted the junior officers to understand that despite the continued bias towards black soldiers by society as a whole, the current use of black soldiers in segregated units was regarded as appropriate by a “sizeable minority” of black soldiers and a clear “majority” of white soldiers. For the black soldier who disagreed with segregation the manual noted; “Those who think white and Negro

⁹ *Leadership and the Negro Soldier: Army Service Forces Manual* (Washington D.C.: Headquarters Army Services Forces, 1944), iv.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 12.

soldiers should be in the same outfits are more often better educated and from the North,” as if that distinction should have special meaning.¹¹

Despite the attempts of the 1944 manual to justify the continued use of segregated units in the Army; its structure, verbiage, and content was geared towards acknowledging the potential of African American troops. The Chapter titled “The Negro Soldier in American History” touted the military accomplishments of black soldiers while leaving out the criticism that often had been the backbone of previous government sponsored histories. Even the notorious Brownsville, Texas uprising was conveniently left out of the chapter – once the clarion call to prevent blacks from serving in combat units.

The first true “scholarship” to come out regarding integration of the Army appeared in 1954 with the publication of *Breakthrough on the Color Front* – the same year that the Army “officially” declared that all units and commands of the Army were integrated. The author, Lee Nichols, had been a journalist for the United Press during the Korean War and witnessed firsthand the move towards integration during the conflict. As a journalist, Nichols was able to gain access to several prominent politicians and officers who had knowledge of the behind-the-scenes efforts to move integration forward. Nichols also had access to several government documents and studies to include the classified “Project Clear” which was a sociological survey of racial attitudes by Army soldiers and officers during the Korean War.

As a first attempt at telling the story of integration, Nichols work deserves praise. Unfortunately, because of the very “recent” nature of some the subject being described and classification of government documents used, the references are sporadic or non-existent.

¹¹ Ibid., 14.

Nichols acknowledged as much in the preface: “Since they are official records ... I have not always felt it necessary to name the source ... and in many cases (they) were given to me on a confidential basis.”¹² Despite the scarcity of references, Nichols told a compelling story of an Army slow to come to terms with the need to integrate troops. Nichols observed for some in the Army it was “also a story of bitter resistance, tradition – crusted ‘brass in braid,’ some of whom had to be retired to make room for new ways, of stubborn politicians who would not see that old methods had outlived their usefulness.”¹³ As several later scholars pointed out, one of the concepts that Nichols observed in the Army’s move towards desegregation had to do with the “un-bunching” of African American soldiers in order to increase their effectiveness.

Nichols actually claimed to have received the concept of “un-bunching” from a “hard-boiled southern general.” The general described it thus: “In civilian life they [Negroes] are bunched. They’ve got to be unbunched.”¹⁴ The underlying inference of the comment was that when African American soldiers were put together (as in segregated units) they became less effective as soldiers – a concept that fit in well during the Korean War with the constant attempts to portray units like the 24th Infantry Regiment as failures. The unnamed “southern general” might have also drawn from his previous Army education to come up with the concept that African American’s when placed together became unruly. In the 1926 Army War College study under the section of “Psychology” the study warned the white Army officers that “a curious feature of the negro’s psychology is his susceptibility to the influence of crowd psychology. We have some painful experiences along this line in the army, notably the Brownsville riot.”¹⁵ Again,

¹² Lee Nichols, *Breakthrough on the Color Front* (New York: Random House, 1954), ix.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 11.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 9.

¹⁵ Fulmer, *U.S. Army War College: The Use of Negro Manpower in War*, 7.

citing the Brownsville riot was the Army's fallback position on claiming that Africa American soldiers could not be trusted. This will be explored further in Chapter I.

Breakthrough on the Color Front was also remarkable for exposing the significant push-back the Fahy Committee received from senior Army officers. The Executive Secretary of the Fahy Committee, E.W. Kenworthy, informed the author that "the committee sparred almost continuously with Army officers who try to mislead it about the handling of Negroes." Secretary Kenworthy said he had an "Army representative" who proved particularly intractable. The "Army representative" would call up Secretary Kenworthy and tell him "well, you saw through that gimmick, but we'll think up another one that will stop you."¹⁶ The obstacles to the Fahy Committee by senior Army officers and civilian leaders will be explored further in Chapter I.

Nichols in *Breakthrough on the Color Front* also acknowledged that what finally broke down the resistance to integration in the Army was the Korean War. According to Nichols, "military leaders, including General Omar N. Bradley, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff until August 1953, said the war hastened Army integration by at least ten years."¹⁷ Nichols did not clarify why the Korean War caused the Army to suddenly relent on integration – that would be left to later scholarship to address.

Race and the Military: The Vietnam Era Historiography

In the late 1960s just as the Vietnam War was starting to intensify the topic of racial attitudes and the history of African Americans in the military again received notice; first with the publication of the Army's official history *United States Army in World War II, Special Studies:*

¹⁶ Nichols, *Breakthrough on the Color Front*, 92.

¹⁷ Ibid., 97.

The Employment of Negro Troops in 1966, then Richard Stillman's *Integration of the Negro in The U.S. Armed Forces* in 1968, and finally Richard Dalfiume's *Desegregation of the U.S. Armed Forces: Fighting on Two Fronts 1939-1953* that was published in 1969. While the Army history was only concerned with the history of African American soldiers during World War II, this was the first in-depth accounting by the Army to detail the actions of black soldiers in combat units since the Army integrated. The author, Ulysses Lee, was chosen for the project due to his background as a Professor of English and former member of the Office of the Chief of Military History from 1946 to 1952. Lee was also a former Army officer who was considered to be the "military history specialists on Negroes in the Army."¹⁸

Lee discussed briefly the history of African American's as soldiers in the years prior to and during World War I as a way of background. His analysis of the inter-war years was more detailed. Lee wanted to show that the Army prior to World War II was attempting to formulate a plan for the use of African American troops that would be more successful than the strategy employed during World War I – a strategy that relegated the majority of black soldiers to manual labor and rear-line services as opposed to combat roles. According to Lee, the largest obstacle to full utilization of black soldiers was "how best to build efficient military units from a portion of the population which, in general, had had little experience in the skills and responsibilities that go with efficient military administration and leadership and which, under existing peacetime conditions, had little opportunity to develop them."¹⁹ While technically true, the main reason why black soldiers were relegated to a support role was the strong racial views of Army officers in the years between World War I and World War II.

¹⁸ Ulysses Lee, *United States Army in World War II, Special Studies: The Employment of Negro Troops* (Center of Military History – United States Army, Washington, D.C., 1966), vii. The claim as a specialists on blacks in the Army was based on his previous research and writings on the topic.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 21.

Most likely, it was the racial prejudices of Army officers that explained why “during the 1920’s the subject of the future employment of Negro troops came to be considered so sensitive that it was felt that it was not in the best interest of the service to disseminate information concerning it to widely.”²⁰ The lengths that the Army was willing to go were recorded by Lee:

The policy of cloaking plans for the use and designation of Negro units in secrecy went so far in the late twenties that Negro units, as such, virtually disappeared from all except the war Department’s own plans. After 1928, corps area commanders were not permitted to show on their mobilization plans those units which were to receive Negro troops. These instructions were not rescinded until 1938, when corps area commanders and chiefs of arms and services were directed to indicate “appropriately” the Negro units in their plans.²¹

Lee also acknowledged the 1926 Army War College Study which he described as one of several “brief summaries” that were prepared during the interwar years to provide “field grade” officers with “a representative summary example of the personality problem which commanders expected to meet in the employment of Negro troops.” To his credit, Lee was direct in describing the insensitivity of these earlier Army “studies.”²² Moving from the inter-war years, Lee next focused on events during World War II – the main focus of *The Employment of Negro Troops*. One of the chapters, chapter VII, in *The Employment of Negro Troops* was devoted to

²⁰ Ibid., 36.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Lee provided this sample from the 1926 study: “As an individual the Negro is docile, tractable, lighthearted, carefree and good-natured. If unjustly treated he is likely to become surly and stubborn, though this is usually a temporary phase. He is careless, shiftless, irresponsible and secretive. He resents censure and is best handled with praise and by ridicule. He is unmoral, untruthful and his sense of right doing is relatively inferior. Crimes and conventions involving moral turpitude are nearly five to one as compared to convictions of whites on similar charges. On the other hand the Negro is cheerful, loyal and usually uncomplaining if reasonably well fed. He has a musical nature and a marked sense of rhythm. His art is primitive. He is religious. With proper direction in mass, Negroes are industrious. They are emotional and can be stirred to a high state of enthusiasm. Their emotions are unstable and their reactions uncertain. Bad leadership in particular is easily communicated to them.” Ibid., 45. Besides being grossly stereotypical, racist, and in some cases contradictory with itself – the important point of this statement was that it was created by and for the “field grade” officers that would lead soldiers (in some cases African American soldiers) in combat in World War II and Korea.

the officers for African American soldiers. Lee made the astute observation at the beginning of the chapter that, “A great deal depended upon the wisdom and approach of a commander. The officers of a given unit reflected the approach taken by the commander of that unit, and sometimes, by the commander of the post on which the unit was located or of the higher unit to which the organization was assigned or attached.”²³ In most institutions, the role of a leader is crucial to the effectiveness of the institution as a whole, but this is especially true in a military organization.

Lee discussed the issue of leadership by describing a series of “reputed” events that took place at Fort Huachuca in Arizona under the command of then Major General Edward Almond – the commanding general of the African American 92nd Division during World War II. Lee’s focus in discussing the “alleged” events in Arizona were designed to show “the effect of the belief that actions of commanders stemmed from racial notions” and in this case it dealt with rumors “fostered if not founded in the distrust which the men of the division felt toward their commander.” In 1943, stories about General Almond had reached the FBI and the White House, resulting in Mrs. Roosevelt forwarding a letter to the War Department with one of the accusations she received regarding General Almond. In the letter, General Almond was reputed to have told a meeting of division mess sergeants and supply officers that “Nigger” soldiers will not eat spinach or celery and that generally speaking Almond liked to use the word “Nigger” in everyday conversation. Another story was that after a jeep turned over and injured an African American serviceman, General Almond only quipped “Did it hurt my truck?”²⁴ The War Department dutifully sent out an inspection team under African American Brigadier General

²³ Ibid., 183.

²⁴ Ibid., 184.

Benjamin O. Davis who reported back that the rumors could not be corroborated. Whether the alleged incidents took place cannot be proved, however, as will be discussed in a later chapter, General Almond was one of several senior Army officers in World War II and Korea that held a strong bias towards African American soldiers. Overall, Lee's *The Employment of Negro Troops* was a well written narrative of the actions of African American soldiers in World War II and it went a long way toward rectifying the earlier government "studies" that belittled the actions of black soldiers.

Richard Stillman in *Integration of the Negro in the U.S. Armed Forces* approached the topic of integration not from the standpoint of a historian but as a student of political science. In the introduction Stillman explained "As a student of politics, I am interested not in value judgments or moral questions but rather in the political forces that brought about what eventually happened to Negroes in uniform."²⁵

According to Stillman, the "political" reality for African American soldiers and the military was that the "Negro and the military organization always have been interdependent, from the smoke-filled battlefield to the smoke-filled Pentagon conference room."²⁶ This can best be interpreted as African American soldiers used service in the armed forces to further the fight of equality in both the military and in civilian life and the military used the African American soldier to meet the demands of war. The assertion that some in the African American community looked at military service as a means of furthering their rights as civilians was true, African American leaders such as William E. DuBois said as much in various public statements, however, prior to World War II and Korea the military gained far more from the use of African

²⁵ Richard J. Stillman, *Integration of the Negro in the U.S. Armed Forces* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1968), 2.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 1.

American personnel than African American's received in equality in either the military or civilian life. Stillman made the assertion, "From the Revolutionary War until 1940, the relationship between the Negro and the military had been inconsistent. When the military needed men, Negroes served. When it did not, Negroes were rejected."²⁷ This hardly strikes the reader as an "interdependent" relationship and sounds more one-sided towards the military.

After discussing the political machinations of President Truman on race issues, Stillman turned his focus to the Fahy Committee's attempts to enforce Presidential Order 9981.²⁸ Just as Lee Nichols had related in *Breakthrough on the Color Front*, the largest obstacle the Fahy Committee faced came from the Army brass. Stillman also laid part of the blame at the feet of the civilian military secretaries. "The Army's situation, from 1947 until early 1949, was the result of Secretary Kenneth C. Royall's submission to the conservative fears of his generals," he charged.²⁹ According to Stillman, it was not until the Korean War when the Army officers finally realized that "segregation is an irrational force that prevents efficient allocation of human resources" that integration was approved.³⁰ Stillman was right to call segregation an "irrational force" but his argument that the Army suddenly realized this during the Korean War and did an about-face is too simplistic. Part of Stillman's problem was his attempt to synthesis all human actions as caused by "political" calculations – this might work for the political scientist but in

²⁷ Ibid., 20-21.

²⁸ Stillman portrayed Truman as a skilled politician (despite the media coverage of his day and some scholarship since which attempted to show Truman as a political novice) who used his skill to maneuver on race relations. During the Democratic caucus Stillman noted: "Seeking to maintain party unity, Truman at first sided with the Southern Conservatives against a strong civil-rights plank in the Democratic platform. However, in a Convention revolt led by Mayor Hubert H. Humphrey of Minneapolis, the liberals pushed through a strong civil-rights plank over Truman's objections ... (and despite his initial attempt to side with the Southern Conservatives) upon returning to the White house from the convention, the President summoned his two racial advisers, Philleo Nash and Clifford Ewing. The product of their efforts was Executive Order 9981." Ibid., 40.

²⁹ Ibid., 47.

³⁰ Ibid., 60.

human history causation tends to be far more complicated. In the case of integration, there were multiple factors at play in the Army's decision.

In 1969, Richard M. Dalfuime, a professor at the University of Wisconsin, published *Desegregation of the U.S. Armed Forces: Fighting on Two Fronts 1939-1953*. Dalfuime's study was unique because he focused on the military's attempt to impose "separate-but-equal" during World War II. According to Dalfuime, World War II was a transitional period for African American soldiers because of the increased emphasis on allowing black soldiers to experience combat and to enter services and units that previously black soldiers had not been allowed in – such as the Army Air Force and Marine Corps. Despite their attempts to provide "separate-but-equal" the military always fell short because "the thinking behind military policy was focused on the separate to such an extent that efficiency, supposedly the major goal of the military, was always subordinated to the goal of segregation."³¹ This led to some unintended consequences that only placed further burdens on the military structure when segregation "was carried to ridiculous extremes." As an example, Dalfuime cited the experience of a lone black officer stationed at Camp Wheeler, Georgia. As the only black officer on base, he was provided with his own two-story bachelor officer's quarters where he stayed by himself and in the mess area an entire section had to be "fenced off" for him to take his meals.³²

During World War II, the Army attempted to address some of the inefficiencies related to African American soldiers by appointing Assistant Secretary of War John J. McCloy to head the "Advisory Committee on Negro Troop Policies." As a result of their inquiries, "reports coming in to the committee disclosed that Army policies to ensure equal treatment of Negroes were not

³¹ Richard M. Dalfuime, *Desegregation of the U.S. Armed Forces: Fighting on Two Fronts 1939-1953* (Columbia, Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 1969), 63.

³² *Ibid.*, 67.

generally known or followed by commanders in the field.” Instead of attempting to address the non-compliance by senior Army officers the committee appeared to spend most of their time disparaging the “Negro” press. McCloy himself was reported to have complained, “This discrimination now has gotten such momentum in the Negro press that one demand granted leads only to another, and you do not bury any issue permanently by concession.”³³ In the face of this opposition by African American newspapers, Dalfuime argued that the Army resorted to maintaining the status-quo – a survival and coping mechanism the Army initially employed in the Korean War as well.

Dalfuime, as Lee Nichols had acknowledged previously in *Breakthrough on the Color Front*, realized that integration happened in the Army because of the Korean War. “There is no doubt that the Korean War pushed the Army to complete integration much sooner than would have been the case without a war,” but Dalfuime also stated: “this occurred only because of the foundation laid down by the Fahy Committee.”³⁴ Almost as an afterthought, Dalfuime made a very important observation about one other factor that influenced the transition to an integrated Army during the Korean War – the elimination of quotas on the recruitment of African Americans into the Army. Dalfuime noted, “Negro enlistments had been 8.2. percent of the total in March, 1950; without the quota they shot up to 22 per cent of the total in April.”³⁵

The influx of African American soldiers posed a problem for Army commanders trying to maintain segregated units. It meant that the extra troops would have to be placed in African American units (already in some cases over-strength), while many white units were desperately short on personnel. This was a problem that sometimes became self-correcting when regiment

³³ Ibid., 86-87.

³⁴ Ibid., 201.

³⁵ Ibid., 202.

and battalion officers of under-strength white units took it upon themselves to get replacements no matter what their skin color. Dalfuime cited an unnamed commanding officer of the Ninth Infantry Regiment that had two white units and one black unit who viewed the problem thus: “We would have been doing ourselves a disservice to permit [Negro] soldiers to lie around in rear areas at the expense of still further weakening our [white] rifle companies.”³⁶ The Ninth Infantry Regiment commanding officer put the extra troops where they were needed, not where they were supposed to be placed based on the policy of segregation. Of course, not everyone in the Army command structure saw the solution pragmatically. “The Army General Staff and General Mark Clark, Commander of the Army Field Forces,” Dalfuime noted, “took the position that the integration in Korea had not been proven a definite success and continued to argue that the best way to reduce the overstrength in Negro units was to reimpose the racial quota.”³⁷ General Clark was overruled by Secretary Frank Pace, representing another example when the civilian leadership had to force the Army leadership to accept integration.

As the Vietnam War wound down, two further studies examining African Americans and race relations in the military were published: Jack D. Foner’s *Blacks and the Military in American History* and Johnny Butler’s *Unsanctioned Institutional Racism in the U.S. Army*. While Foner’s work was passionate, it was mostly a re-hash of previously published history on African American’s in the armed services.

In 1974, when *Blacks and the Military in American History* was published, Jack Foner was a professor at Colby College in Waterville, Maine. Having established one of the first black studies programs in the country, Foner’s personal history played a role in his approach to his

³⁶ Ibid., 204.

³⁷ Ibid., 209.

study. Foner had been backlisted from higher education for almost 30 years after he was called in front of the Joint Legislative Committee to Investigate the Educational System of the State of New York in 1941 for a supposed “communist” association and for his out-spoken stance on civil rights for African Americans.³⁸

Foner was sympathetic to the plight of African American soldiers in a segregated Army and was successful in demonstrating that some black soldiers did not passively accept the military’s racially biased directives. As an example, he cited an incident in Indiana where a hundred black flying officers were arrested after refusing to sign a document that committed them to not attempt to enter a white officer’s club, and another incident when a black officer resigned his commission, stating: “I am unable to adjust myself to the handicap of being a Negro officer in the United States Army ... prolonged observation reveals that inconsistencies over and above a reasonable amount are rampant. Sins of omission, sins of commission, humiliations, insults – injustices, all – are mounted one upon another until one’s zest is chilled and spirit broken.”³⁹ This was an important theme to bring out and sometimes one overlooked in mainstream scholarship. In the history of African Americans in the military it is easy to get drawn into viewing everything through the prism of victimhood (which African Americans had reason to claim), but at the same time the story of blacks in the military is also a story of individuals taking a stand for their beliefs and taking action to redress racism – a topic that will be explored further in Chapter II.

This was also one of the first works to explore the role of African Americans and racial bias in the Vietnam War. Foner observed that “the Vietnam period has been characterized by black

³⁸ William H. Honan, “Jack D. Foner, Historian and Pioneer in Black Studies, Dies at 88” *The New York Times* December 16, 1999.

³⁹ Jack D. Foner, *Blacks and the Military in American History* (New York: Praeger, 1974), 152.

servicemen's recognition that, when discrimination in its more blatant forms ended, it was replaced, just as in society as a whole, by a new racism ... more subtle, although no less immoral, then the more overt examples of bigotry.”⁴⁰

Unsanctioned Institutional Racism in the U.S. Army originally began as a doctoral dissertation by Johnny Butler in the field of Sociology. As the title makes clear, this work was more focused on the “Institution” of the U.S. Army and less on the individual actors within the Army that put in place and executed Army policies and directives. Also, Butler was quick to point out that his focus was on the “unsanctioned” institutional racism as opposed to “sanctioned” institutional racism – as were seen in Jim Crow Laws. Butler stated, “Jim Crow Laws are classic examples of sanctioned institutional racism. On the other hand, unsanctioned institutional racism is when policies which sanction the differential treatment of certain races have been removed, but differential treatment is still realized.”⁴¹ This approach may make sense from a sociological standpoint, but from a historical perspective it fails to capture the essence of what the Army did and did not do in regards to race relations.

In fact, the U.S. Army, despite the efforts of some senior officers, went to great lengths after President Truman's Order 9981 to attempt to remove “institutional” racism from the Army. Butler stated in reference to institutional racism “racist behavior or attitudes of individuals do not necessarily account for racial inequalities in institutions.” The history of the integration process in the Army up to and during the Korean War is rife with the “institution” (Army) ordering commanders to provide “equal treatment” but individual officers ignoring these directives – the opposite of Butler's definition of “institutional” racism – sanctioned or otherwise.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 201.

⁴¹ Johnny Butler, *Unsanctioned Institutional Racism in the U.S. Army* (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University, 1974), 12.

Giving Butler the benefit of the doubt, the majority of *Unsanctioned Institutional Racism in the U.S. Army* was focused less on the Army prior to and during the Korean War and more on the U.S. Army during the Vietnam War. Butler acknowledged as much, “our concern is not the processes which served to integrate blacks into the Army, but the unequal treatment of blacks in a professedly integrated and equalitarian Army.”⁴² Ultimately, the main question Butler wanted to answer was “just how equal is the black enlisted man in uniform; is there discrepancies between official policy, which in reality began nearly thirty years ago, and perceived reality?”⁴³ The answer in 1974, according to Butler, was that, despite the gains made by the Army, African Americans were not equally distributed in higher enlisted ranks or by specialty – with a disproportionate amount of black soldiers in the lower enlisted ranks and non-technical assignments. Also, there was a difference between white and black soldiers in promotion rates with black soldiers having a “systematically” slower promotion rate.⁴⁴ These observations were not in dispute, but Butler’s assertion that they stemmed from unsanctioned institutional racism in the U.S. Army was not as convincing.

Post-Vietnam to Current Historiography

The next scholarly work to deal with African Americans and race in the military was Richard O. Hope’s *Racial Strife in the U.S. Military: Toward the Elimination of Discrimination*, published in 1979. Hope provided an abbreviated history of black soldiers – drawing from most of the literature already discussed. Hope’s main premise for his work was to discuss his experience working with the Department of Defense on a program titled “Defense Race

⁴² Ibid., 54.

⁴³ Ibid., 64.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 131.

Relations Institute” (also known by the acronym happy military as DRRI).⁴⁵ The goal of the program was to use “change agents” in educating servicemen and women on the history of minorities in the military and to tackle head-on racial biases by individual soldiers. Hope had a perfect opportunity to explore the Army’s use of “affirmative action” and other educational programs to thwart lingering racism among service members but instead spent most of the time detailing the stresses of working for the DDRI as a “change agent.”

In 1985, the Center of Military History published *Integration of the Armed Forces 1940-1965* as part of its Defense Studies Series. As with many of the published series from the Center of Military History, the project was a collaborative effort under the direction of Morris J. MacGregor. Because the goal of the Defense Studies Series was to examine the history and role of the Office of Secretary of Defense, *Integration of the Armed Forces* is a top-down perspective study. MacGregor examined the post-World War II efforts to restructure the Army with added emphasis on the utilization of African American troops. To his credit, MacGregor was blunt in assessing the lack of progress in several of the Army’s early attempts to reform – including the efforts of the Gillem Board.

Discussing the selection of men to serve on the Gillem Board, MacGregor commented that “none of the board members was particularly prepared for the new assignment.” General Gillem himself seemed an odd selection to head-up the board. General Gillem was a Tennessean who had commanded the XIII Corps in Europe during World War II (which oversaw several black

⁴⁵ Hope noted: “The DRRI was established by the Department of Defense under directive 1322.11 issued in June 1971. It also established the Race Relations Education Board to oversee the education program and the institute. Its chairman is the Assistant Secretary of Defense (Manpower and Reserve Affairs).” Richard O. Hope, *Racial Strife in the U.S. Military: Toward the Elimination of Discrimination* (New York: Praeger, 1979), 4. The DRRI was the same entity that created a film in 1971 titled “The Black Soldier” which elicited the ire of Retired Lieutenant General Edward M. Almond who saw it as propaganda and inaccurate in its praise for African American soldiers in World War II and Korea. This will be discussed further in Chapter IV.

units), and other than his assistance in writing one of the War College studies on the use of black troops (likely the 1926 study previously discussed) General Gillem's selection was owed "to the fact that he was a three-star general, available at the moment."⁴⁶ The Gillem Board for the most part appeared to have just gone through the motions – calling witnesses with knowledge of how best to handle African American troops (witnesses like General Almond). This method was only marginally better than the one used during World War II when the McCloy Committee sent out questionnaires to senior Army officers – a practice that Truman Gibson, a civilian spokesman for African American issues, openly ridiculed as impractical.⁴⁷

MacGregor pointed out that the Gillem Board at least resulted in several recommendations that were encompassed in War Department Circular 124 – announced on April 27, 1946. One of the recommendations of Circular 124 was that the various armed services would set up a "staff group on racial affairs." One of the opponents to even this half-hearted move to address racial inequalities in the armed services was the Assistant Chief of Staff for Personnel, Lieutenant General Willard S. Paul. General Paul announced that he would not establish the requisite "staff group" and used as his excuse manpower shortages and "the small volume of work envisaged."⁴⁸ Apparently, General Paul did not see any racial problems to address in the current system. MacGregor admitted that because of the intransigent nature of the senior officers in the Army

⁴⁶ Morris J. MacGregor, *Defense Studies Series: Integration of the Armed Forces 1949-1965* (Center for Military History – United States Army, Washington, D.C., 1985), 153-154.

⁴⁷ Truman Gibson, writing about the use of questionnaires stated, "Mere injunctions of objectivity do not work in the racial field where more often than not decisions are made on a basis of emotion, prejudice or pre-existing opinion ... much of the difficulty in the Army has arisen from improper racial attitudes on both sides. Indeed, the Army's basic policy of segregation is said to be based on the individual attitudes and desires of the soldiers." *Ibid.*, 132.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 198.

and other military services post-World War II, the “Gillem Board policy was doomed from the start.”⁴⁹

One of the recommendations of the Gillem board that was put into effect by the time the Korean War started was reducing the size of all-black units. During World War II, there were entire divisions, such as the 92nd Division, that were composed of African American soldiers. In 1950, at the start the Korean War, the all-black divisions had been scrapped in favor of all-black regiments, such as the 24th Infantry. Of course, the 24th Infantry Regiment was not new to post-World War II, but had seen action extending back to the Indian Wars in the late 1800s. However, MacGregor argued that because of the perceived failure of even these smaller segregated units, such as the 24th Infantry Regiment in Korea, this “struck another blow at the Army’s race policy.” MacGregor commented, “reduce the size of the black units, the Gillem Board had reasoned and you will reduce inefficiency and discrimination.” MacGregor concluded that this had clearly failed during the Korean War, given the perceived failure of the 24th Infantry Regiment.⁵⁰

Unfortunately, MacGregor’s assertion that the 24th Infantry Regiment was a failure was based on the appraisal of the unit by several senior Army officers whose opinions probably had much to do with the racial make-up of the 24th, and the “official” Army History of the Korean War, written by Roy Appleman that concluded the 24th Infantry Regiment could not be counted on in

⁴⁹ MacGregor also said the Gillem board was doomed to failure because of the institutional attachment to segregation. MacGregor stated, “Segregation was at the heart of the race problem. Justified as a means of preventing racial trouble, segregation only intensified it by concentrating the less able and poorly motivated. Segregation increased the problems of all commanders concerned and undermined the prestige of black officers. It exacerbated the feeling of the nation’s largest minority toward the Army and multiplied demands for change. In the end Circular 124 was abandoned because the Army found it impossible to fight another war under a policy of racial quotas and units. But if the quota had not defeated the policy, other problems attendant on segregation would probably have been sufficient to the task.” Ibid., 206.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 440.

the face of the enemy.⁵¹ As will be shown in later chapters, the perceived success or failure of the 24th Infantry Regiment had much to do with the timing of the critique and who was making the critique. One minute the 24th was praised, the next minute it was an utter failure as a military unit.

In the 1980s, there was only one significant work published on African Americans in the military, Bernard C. Nalty's *Strength for the Fight: A History of Black Americans in the Military*. Nalty's work was designed as an overall history of African Americans in the military and did not really uncover any new ground – other than to bring the history of African American's in the military up to the 1980s. Nalty also continued to allow the Appleman narrative that the 24th Infantry Regiment was a failure in the Korean War to stand. While noting that some white units had their weak moments in the face of the enemy, Nalty stated “among the troops who performed badly were the black soldiers of the 24th Infantry ... in one skirmish, for example, almost an entire company melted away, leaving the commander, most of his noncommissioned officers, and a few riflemen to man the unit's foxholes.”⁵² Nalty, who had also worked as a period as a historian for the U.S. Marine Corps, Joint Chiefs of Staff, and Air Force did not want to rock the “proverbial” boat when it came to the Army's official history.

The scarcity of scholarship in the 1980s was replaced by a flood of new works in the 1990s. This was linked to a renewed interest in African American studies – including those relating to the military. The topic also gained renewed attention by the Army's rising officer corps with two papers on the topic coming from a student at the Army War College and a student at the

⁵¹ The specific Appleman work that influenced MacGregor was the Center of Military History sanctioned study titled *South to the Nakdong, North to the Yalu (June-November 1950)*, published in 1961.

⁵² Bernard C. Nalty, *Strength for the Fight: A History of Black Americans in the Military* (New York: Free Press, 1986), 256.

Army Command and General Staff College. Colonel Raymond B. Ansel submitted to the Army War College, *From Segregation to Desegregation: Blacks in the U.S. Army 1703-1954*, as his thesis in 1990; and Major Otis M. Darden submitted *The Integration of Afro-Americans into the Army Mainstream (1948-1954)* as his thesis in 1993 at the Army Command and General Staff College. Colonel Ansel's thesis relied heavily on previous scholarship but was noteworthy for his discussion of the effects of *Project Clear* – the secret survey conducted during the Korean War to ascertain the impressions of troops to integration.⁵³ Major Darden's thesis was more targeted than Colonel Ansel's and the focus of his research was the question, "Did Truman's Order 981 actually desegregate the Army?" His conclusion was that the order "did not, in and of itself, integrate the Army, it did start the process that ultimately led to desegregation."⁵⁴

One of the more unique works to be published in the 1990s was Lyle Rishell's *With a Black Platoon in Combat: A Year in Korea*. Rishell had served as a white platoon leader of Able Company, 24th Infantry Regiment in Korea. His first hand-account provides insight into the interactions he experienced with his African American troops and also attacks the Appleman assertion that the 24th was a failure.⁵⁵ Rishell wasn't the only 24th Infantry Regiment veteran to write personal accounts, refuting the narrative of the 24th as a failure. Charles M. Bussey was an African American officer in the Engineer Battalion attached to the 24th Infantry Regiment who

⁵³ Colonel Raymond B. Ansel, *From Segregation to Desegregation: Blacks in the U.S. Army 1703-1954* (Carlisle, Pennsylvania: U.S. Army War College – thesis, 1990)

⁵⁴ Major Otis M. Darden, *The Integration of Afro-Americans into the Army Mainstream (1948-1954)* (Fort Leavenworth, Kansas: U.S. Army Command and General Staff College – thesis, 1993), iii.

⁵⁵ Rishell addressed the issue head-on, stating: "Several authors have written completely untrue accounts of the 24th Infantry and have insinuated that soldiers of the regiment had 'bug-out fever,' the urge to run or withdraw in the face of overwhelming forces. They have also perpetrated the nonsense that members of the 24th sat around campfires signing the 'Bugout Boogie.'" Lyle Rishell, *With a Black Platoon in Combat: A Year in Korea* (College Station, Texas: Texas A&M University Press, 1993), 46-47.

wrote *Firefight at Yechon: Courage and Racism in the Korean War* in 2002.⁵⁶ While his account regarding a battle outside Yechon, Korea is still hotly contested, Bussey, like Rishell provided a perspective on the 24th Infantry Regiment lacking in other works regarding the Korean War and the 24th Infantry Regiment.

The most relevant scholarship of the 1990s to this dissertation was embodied in, the publication of *Black Soldier White Army: The 24th Infantry Regiment in Korea* – a study conducted under the direction of the Center of Military History (CMH). This work was largely the result of political pressure brought on the Army by veterans of the 24th Infantry Regiment who fiercely believed that the previous Army account of their unit by Appleman was a disservice to African Americans who had fought in Korea and to African Americans in general.⁵⁷ The CMH denied that they were going to “re-write” Appleman’s account. General Roscoe Robinson Jr., an advisor on the CMH study, claimed the goal was to write an unbiased history of the 24th

⁵⁶ Charles M. Bussey, *Firefight at Yechon: Courage and Racism in the Korean War* (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 2002). For a perspective of African American veteran accounts of not only the Korean War but other 20th Century wars see Yvonne Latty, *We Were There: Voices of African American Veterans, from World War II to the War in Iraq* (New York: Harpers Collins, 2004).

⁵⁷ The veterans of the 24th Infantry Regiment were sensitive to the way the 24th was portrayed in Roy Appleman’s “official” Army history series of the Korean War. In *Disaster in Korea: The Chinese Confront MacArthur*, Appleman didn’t pull any punches in his analysis of the performance of the 24th Infantry, noting that “the story of the 24th Infantry in the Eighth Army attack on 24-28 November is largely one of disorder, ineptness, breakdown of communications, units getting lost in bad terrain, heavy personnel and equipment losses, and a cause of concern to friendly units on its flanks.” Roy E. Appleman, *Disaster in Korea: The Chinese Confront MacArthur* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1989), 142. Veterans of the 24th Infantry Regiment were quick to point out that many of Appleman’s conclusions regarding the 24th’s fighting record were based on reports by white officers that had their own biases of African American troops. David Carlisle, an African American West Point graduate who fought alongside the 24th Infantry with the black 77th Engineer Combat Company (same unit as Charles Bussey) said the reason that the white officers criticized the 24th and in his opinion why Appleman didn’t refute those criticisms was “as simple as this – because the troops were black. It’s the product of racists – tending historians goaded on by racists senior army commanders.” *Los Angeles Times* “Army: Blacks Look Back at Record in Korea,” November 15, 1989.

Infantry Regiment and “it is not – as certain concerned individuals and media representatives have erroneously suggested – to rewrite Appleman’s *South to the Naktong, North to the Yalu*.”⁵⁸

Colonel John A. Cash, the lead author of the CMH study, attempted to cool the inflamed passions of the 24th veterans by assuring them that the new CMH study would be a “from the bottom up” approach instead of Appleman’s “from the top down” effort.⁵⁹ The focus by the authors of *Black Soldier White Army* on interviewing as many enlisted personnel as possible was one of the remarkable benefits of this CMH study because it provided not only depth to their study but a wealth of personal impressions that could be used in future historical studies – including the one you are reading. Because the interview material created by *Black Soldier White Army* is an integral part of this study, the conclusions and arguments in *Black Soldier White Army* will be analyzed further in later chapters.

One of the first to utilize the interview material collected by the CMH for *Black Soldier White Army* was popular historian Gerald Astor, who released his own study titled: *The Right to Fight: A History of African Americans in the Military* in 1998. Astor originally attempted to conduct most of his own interviews with veterans as he had done previously on a study on World War II. In his World War II study Astor found “veterans were quite willing to share their experiences” for the most part. However, for *The Right to Fight*, Astor realized that with the additional component of “race” entering the picture when attempting to interview veterans of the Korean

⁵⁸ Noted in the Third Review Panel Meeting of the 24th Infantry Regiment Study, November 7, 1989, Box 1, Oral Interview Notes BSWA, CMH.

⁵⁹ Ibid. Colonel Cash acknowledged that the passions created among the veterans of the 24th could be particularly divisive. Colonel Cash observed first-hand the strain placed on various members of the 24th veterans group during an annual reunion of 24th Infantry veterans. Colonel Cash reported that while over 300 attended the annual reunion in 1989 compared to 200 in 1988 (as the issue of Congressional action on forcing the Army to take a second look at the 24th was reaching a peak), only one white officer attended in 1989 as opposed to ten in 1988.

War he “encountered considerable reluctance.”⁶⁰ *The Right to Fight* was an overall history of African Americans in the military from the Revolutionary War to modern day, following more or less the same pattern as *Strength for the Fight*. The chapter dealing with the Korean War, primarily because the source material came from the CMH study, sounds very similar to *Black Soldier White Army*.

The study, *Foxholes and Color Lines: Desegregating the U.S. Armed Forces*, was published in 1998 and was focused on the process of desegregation post-World War II in the armed services. Authors Sherie Mershon and Steven Schlossman admitted in the introduction that this work was based primarily on secondary sources and published collections of primary sources as opposed to new research or interviews with veterans. What was unique was the underlying impetus for their work. The book was originally a sponsored study by the Defense research Institute of the RAND Corporation on behalf of the Office of the Secretary of Defense under the Clinton Administration to provide information and analysis relevant to the development of policies towards openly homosexual military personnel. According to the authors, “Our work focused on investigating historical analogies between the military’s treatment of homosexuals and its treatment of racial minorities, especially blacks.”⁶¹

After completing the original research for the Office of the Secretary of Defense, the authors decided to put their research together in a study of desegregation and not “formally discuss the

⁶⁰ This reluctance came from both white and black veterans. Astor provided an example from a retired (white) general who had commanded African Americans in World War II and Korea that wrote, “my decision [not to cooperate] reflects no disrespect for your competence as a writer. I observed the commotion that publication of the history of the 24th Infantry Regiment caused and I do not care to be involved in a similar controversy.” And a black veteran of the Korean War informed Astor “I’ve talked to white writers before and they never get it right.” Gerald Astor, *The Right to Fight: A History of African Americans in the Military* (Novato, California: Presidio Press, 1998), vii.

⁶¹ Sherie Mershon and Steven Schlossman, *Foxholes and Color Lines: Desegregating the U.S. Armed Forces* (Baltimore, Maryland: John Hopkins University Press, 1998), vii.

analogies between homosexuals and racial minorities that prompted the original RAND project.”⁶² In their analysis of the Korean War and desegregation, the authors cited not only personnel shortages but also “racial tensions” as causing a change in opinion by senior officers towards integration.⁶³ The “racial tensions” cited were more directed at dissatisfaction by African American soldiers to segregation as opposed to resistance to integration by white troops. Regarding the acceptance by white soldiers to integration, the authors referred to the results of *Project Clear*. “*Project Clear* did not influence the desegregation process that was already underway in the Far East in 1951, but the research findings did assist Army officials in planning for worldwide desegregation of the Army and persuading reluctant commanders to cooperate.”⁶⁴

Foxholes and Color Lines is a useful anthology of the military’s efforts to desegregate because it also follows the efforts of the Army in the 1960s to ensure the armed services continued to fight discrimination involving military personnel, both on and off military installations. In discussing the efforts of the Gesell Committee, chaired by Gerhard Gesell in the early 1960s, the authors noted the committee “recognized that the lack of action (by the armed services in addressing racial issues off base) was deeply rooted in the organizational culture of the military, and the prevailing belief among military officers that community affairs lay outside their professional competency and responsibility” and that “there were no incentives for officers to devote time and effort to ameliorating off-base discrimination against black service personnel.”⁶⁵ The Gesell Report recommendations were meant to address the reluctance by officers to tackle off-base discrimination and were ultimately implemented over serious

⁶² Ibid., viii.

⁶³ Ibid., 219.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 245.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 291.

opposition by the officer corps and some politicians. This will be discussed further in Chapter IV in regard to General Edward Almond's post-retirement efforts to fight integration.

In 2001 Gail Buckley published *American Patriots: The Story of Blacks in the Military from the Revolution to Desert Storm* and Robert B. Edgerton released *Hidden Heroism: Black Soldiers in America's Wars*. Both anthologies were designed to provide a comprehensive history of African Americans in the military. Buckley used individual stories of African American soldiers to give the reader a list of "black heroes." For instance, Buckley devoted most of the last chapter to chronicle the life and service of the exceptionally talented first African American Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Colin Powell.⁶⁶

For *Hidden Heroism*, Robert Edgerton stated that he drew upon his own military service in the Air Force during the Korean War as his introduction "to a racially integrated world that I had not previously experienced" as a white man. Edgerton's work is one of the most thorough anthologies analyzing the use of blacks as soldiers and their treatment in society both in the north and the south in Antebellum America. In an argument that could have been voiced by senior Army leaders in the early twentieth century, Edgerton quoted Confederate General Clement H. Stevens who responded to the suggestion that the Confederacy turn to African Americans as soldiers by asserting, "The justification of slavery in the South is the inferiority of the Negro. If we make him a soldier, we concede the whole question."⁶⁷

Again in 2013, the topic of desegregation of the military was addressed with the publication of James Rawn Jr.'s *The Double V: How Wars, Protest, and Harry Truman Desegregated*

⁶⁶ Gail Buckley, *American Patriots: The Story of Blacks in the Military from the Revolution to Desert Storm* (New York: Random House, 2001).

⁶⁷ Robert B. Edgerton, *Hidden Heroism: Black Soldiers in America's Wars* (Boulder: Westview Press, 2001), 29.

America's Military. Rawn saw the African American community as being very much involved in forcing the military to change. Rawn followed the careers of influential African Americans such as Emmett Scott – former secretary to Booker T. Washington – who was pulled into government service as an advisor to Secretary of War Newton Baker on “Negro” issues around the time of World War I, to judge William H. Hastie who filled a similar position to Scott’s during World War II. Rawn also addressed the movement of African American’s to the north during World War I and the inter-war period who found “along with better jobs ... (they also) gained political power” with the power of the vote.⁶⁸

The newfound political power of the African American community – referred to at the time by politicians as the “Negro vote” made an impression on the Democratic Party and the Franklin Roosevelt Administration. It was under political pressure (and the threat of a black protest march on Washington D.C.) that President Roosevelt signed Executive Order 8802: Prohibition of Discrimination in the Defense Industry on June 25, 1941.⁶⁹ Rawn argued that because of this new political power by the African American community during World War II the black newspaper the *Pittsburgh Courier* christened the idea of the “Double V campaign” in February 1942. The “Double V campaign” meant that “Black Americans and their allies of all races would fight for victory overseas and a victory at home.”⁷⁰

⁶⁸ Rawn James Jr., *The Double V: How Wars, Protest, and Harry Truman Desegregated America's Military* ((New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2013), 82.

⁶⁹ Executive Order 8802 read in part: “the policy of the United States that there shall be no discrimination in the employment of workers in defense industries or government because of race, creed, color, or national origin.” Ibid., 126-127.

⁷⁰ The actual quote from the newspaper that Rawn used to describe the campaign came from a defense contractor who stated: “the first V for victory over our enemies from without, the second V for victory over enemies within. For surely those who perpetuate these ugly prejudices here are seeking to destroy our democratic form of government just as surely as the axis forces.” Ibid., 141-142.

As one could expect from the title, the political power of the African American community was also influential for President Harry Truman. Unfortunately, Rawn tended to follow previous scholarship on describing President Truman's conversion from being considered a "safe" segregationist to a "radical" civil rights president.⁷¹ The biggest drawback to Rawn's *The Double V* was that his narrative of events went from President Truman signing Order 9981 to General Ridgway's order to desegregate forces in Korea in the summer of 1951 in a mere four pages – overlooking the biggest part of the story and the part of the story on which this study intends to focus.

⁷¹ Rawn did provide several illuminating quotes that other scholarship did not address. One was by South Carolina Democratic Senator Burnet Maybank who reportedly told a supporter upon hearing of President Roosevelt's death and the ascension of President Truman, "Everything's going to be all right – the new President knows how to handle the niggers." Rawn also quoted the managing editor of the *Kansas City Star* who wrote, "The country thinks of Truman as a Kansas Cityian. He isn't. He's a rural Jackson County-ite – down where they really fought the Civil War ... In the Senate Truman's closest friendships were with the Old South." Ibid., 204-205.

CHAPTER I

Riots, Wars, and Committees: The Road to Integration

African American soldiers have fought in virtually every military conflict from the Revolution to modern day.⁷² The history of the African American soldier went through a transformation period in post-Civil War America that mirrored the country's growing bias against the black race in general as "Jim Crow" (segregation) laws took hold in the South. For example, whereas in the Civil War and immediate post-Civil War period African Americans served onboard U.S. Naval vessels side-by-side with their white shipmates, by the beginning of the 20th century and the dispatch of Theodore Roosevelt's "Great White Fleet," African Americans were only allowed to serve as a mess-men or valets.

Any examination of the integration of African Americans into the United States Army during the Korean War must begin with a look at the Army at the beginning of the century. The young officers in the Army during the early years of the century were the same officers who ultimately fought for or against integration later in their military careers. The history of African Americans in World War I, particularly the official Army report of a tarnished record, was also used to set the tone for the inter-war years. Senior officers in the Army used that record as justification for continued segregation in World War II and the early part of the Korean War.

In the summer of 1906, in the dusty border community of Brownsville, Texas, what has alternatively been described as an "affair," "incident," and "riot" was used for the next forty years as the *casus belli* for distrust between the white officers in the Army and the African American soldier. During the summer of 1906 racial tensions were already high between

⁷² The exception was the Mexican-American War of 1848. Although there were African Americans employed as valets to white officers, there were no black units committed to action.

members of the predominantly white Brownsville community and members of the all-black 25th Infantry Regiment (Buffalo Soldiers) when a disturbance kicked up on the evening of August 13. The clash resulted in the shooting of a white bartender and the wounding of a police officer. Immediately, the white citizens of Brownsville turned to blame the entire affair on the black soldiers at nearby Fort Brown. The problem was that the evidence of any involvement by the black troops of the 25th Infantry Regiment hinged on a handful of questionable “eye witnesses” and a smattering of shell casings.

In an election year and reflecting the country’s rising racial tensions the incident in Brownsville, Texas, went almost immediately to the top of the military chain-of-command, President Theodore Roosevelt.⁷³ The War Department reacted swiftly and the white commanding officer of the 25th, Major Charles W. Penrose, was instructed to begin an inquiry. Major Penrose realized in short order that the official story provided by the citizens of Brownsville had inherent flaws. For instance, on the night in question, August 13, 1906, Major Penrose had received warnings of potential racial strife between citizens and his troops and as a precaution Major Penrose had placed his men under curfew. Somehow, “allegedly” fifteen (not the 20-30 reported by the citizens of Brownsville) of his men had “found a key to the barracks

⁷³ President Roosevelt was notified of the incident on August 16, 1906 in a telegram from the Mayor of Brownsville, Texas. Edmund Morris in *Theodore Rex* provided the full text of the telegram:

At a few minutes before midnight on Monday, the 13th, a body of United States soldiers of Twenty-fifth United States infantry (colored), numbering between 20-30 men, emerged from the garrison inclosure, carrying rifles and abundant supply of ammunition, also begun [sic] firing in town and directly into dwellings, offices, stores, and at police and citizens. During firing, one citizen, Frank Natus, was killed in his yard, and the lieutenant of police, who rode toward the firing, had his horse killed under him and was shot through the right arm, which has since been amputated at the elbow. After firing about 200 shots, the soldiers retired to their quarters. We find that threats have been made by them that they will repeat this outrage. We do not believe their officers can restrain them ... Our condition, Mr. President, is this: our women and children are terrorized and our men are practically under constant alarm and watchfulness. No community can stand this strain for more than a few days. We look to you for relief; we ask you to have the troops at once removed from Fort Brown and replaced by white soldiers.

Edmund Morris, *Theodore Rex* (New York: Random House, 2001), 453.

and gone on their murderous rampage downtown.”⁷⁴ The problem with this account was that while the “murderous rampage” was supposedly still raging Major Penrose had conducted a “call to arms” and “found all soldiers present or accounted for.” Edmund Morris in his biography of Theodore Roosevelt noted somewhat sarcastically that “the culprits must have sprinted back as soon as they heard the bugle and snuck into line in time to holler ‘Present’ when the roster was read.”⁷⁵ As to hard evidence, the best Major Penrose could come up with was “seventy or more Army-rifle shell casings” which matched some “clean” rifles belonging to the 25th that were presented to him by citizens of Brownsville. Brigadier General William S. McCaskey attempted to warn the War Department not to jump to a hasty conclusion by informing them that the “Citizens of Brownsville entertain race hatred to an extreme degree ... provocation given the soldiers not taken into account.”⁷⁶ This warning was ignored by the War Department.

Rather than back away from Major Penrose’s version of events, the War Department doubled down and sent Major Augustus P. Blocksom to conduct interviews of the men of the 25th in order to obtain an admission of guilt by one or more of the black troops. Major Blocksom discovered to his chagrin that none of the men of the 25th were willing to admit any guilt or name a guilty party. The disgruntled officer made the personal observation in his official report that “the colored soldier is much more aggressive in his attitude on the social equality question than he used to be.” To the U.S. Army in 1906, Major Blocksom’s personal expression was seen as a warning to the War Department that the men of the 25th could cause further race problems to the Army command.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 453.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

The War Department and ultimately President Theodore Roosevelt were most interested in Major Blocksom's conclusion. He argued that if the soldiers of the 25th did not break ranks and talk, they should all "be dismissed from the service and debarred from reenlistment in the Army, Navy and Marine Corps."⁷⁷ This radical step would have the added benefit of removing a potentially burdensome group of racially "aggressive" black soldiers.

President Roosevelt approved of Major Blocksom's proposal, according to Morris because it played into TR's gentlemen code. Roosevelt found it unthinkable that the responsible (guilty) soldiers in the 25th would be able to resist doing the honorable thing and confess if faced with the expulsion of all their comrades in arms. Unfortunately, what Roosevelt did not consider, or was unable to consider, was that perhaps the reason no one was willing to confess was because there were no guilty members in the 25th and the whole affair was concocted by the citizens of Brownsville. Before he made his decision Roosevelt instructed the War Department to make one more attempt to get the men of the 25th to confess.

The War Department turned to General Ernest A. Garlington, an Army officer who presumably understood the "Negro" by his associations with them growing up in Greenville, South Carolina. General Garlington had no more luck than had Major Blocksom. General Garlington only found "a wooden, stolid look" from the men of the 25th that he interviewed and each soldier "positively denied any knowledge" of the incident in Brownsville. General Garlington chalked up the reticence of the soldiers of the 25th to a racial coping mechanism. He wrote; "The secretive nature of the race, where crimes to members of their color are charged, is

⁷⁷ Ibid., 454. President Roosevelt also found the silence by the men of the 25th disturbing when he retorted: "The colored man who fails to condemn crime in another colored man ... is the worst enemy of his own people, as well as an enemy to all the people." Ibid., 455.

well known.”⁷⁸ The men of the 25th were protecting the guilty parties because of allegiance to their race was the only logical conclusion the South Carolinian could draw from the wall of silence.

Based on General Garlington’s report and the scant evidence it contained President Roosevelt approved the mass dishonorable discharging of 167 black soldiers. One of the soldiers had served 27 years and at least twenty five had served more than 10 years. Included in the mass dishonorable discharge were six recipients of the Congressional Medal of Honor and thirteen who had received citations for bravery in the Spanish-American War.⁷⁹ Fully aware of the potential political fallout from Special Order 266, President Roosevelt signed the order on November 5, 1906, but did not release the order until after the mid-term elections.⁸⁰

The complete lack of attention paid to the officers of the 25th Infantry Regiment was the most glaring omission of the Army’s handling of the Brownsville affair. Of the white officers of the 25th Infantry Regiment only one would face a court martial for the “Affray at Brownsville” as it was labeled by the court martial. That officer was Captain Edgar Augustus Macklin. Captain Macklin was found not-guilty of “neglect of duty, to the prejudice of good order and military

⁷⁸ Ibid., 464.

⁷⁹ Jack D. Foner, *Blacks and the Military in American history* (New York: Praeger, 1974), 98. Special Order 266 was unique in the annals of Presidential orders in that it completely disregarded the soldiers’ right of due process in presenting a defense to the allegations. The actual order itself stated: “By Direction of the President, the following-named enlisted men [in] Companies B, C, and D, Twenty-fifth Infantry, certain members of which organizations participated in the riotous disturbance which occurred in Brownsville, Texas, on the night of August 13, 1906, will be discharged without honor from the Army by their respective commanding officers and forever barred from reenlisting in the Army of the United States, as well as from employment in any civil capacity under the government.” Morris, *Theodore Rex*, 466. On September 28, 1972, the Army cleared all 167 dishonorably discharged black soldiers of any wrongdoing related to the Brownsville affair.

⁸⁰ Edmund Morris attributed the election of Hughes as Governor of New York and the re-election of Congressman Nicholas Longworth of Cincinnati to the delay in publication of the Special Order – since both elections were close and swayed toward the Republicans as a result of the African American vote. Morris, *Theodore Rex*, 466.

discipline, in violation of the sixty-second article of war.”⁸¹ In a prelude to what would happen with the 92nd Division in World War II and the 24th Infantry Regiment in the Korean War, the officer’s received a pass on responsibility for the (supposed) failures of the unit.

President Roosevelt had his doubts about the responsibility and accountability of the officers of the 25th Infantry Regiment. After re-reading Major Blocksom’s report and another study conducted by a retired Union Army general, the president wrote in a confidential letter to his Secretary of War, William Howard Taft, that he was “uncertain whether or not the officers of the three colored companies ... are or are not blamable.”⁸² Edmund Morris in *Theodore Rex* provided a more candid explanation for why President Roosevelt made the decision he did without considering the officers of the 25th through a conversation between President Roosevelt and his friend and novelist, Owen Wister:

Mr. Wister: When you turned those niggers out of the army at Brownsville, why didn’t you order a court of enquiry for the commissioned officers? .

President Roosevelt: Because I listened to the War Department, and I shouldn’t. Of course, I can’t know all about everything.

Mr. Wister: And so, the best you can do is stop, look, and listen – and then jump.

President Roosevelt: Yes. And then jump. And hope I’ve jumped right.⁸³

⁸¹ The official “specification” of the charge as reported in the court martial read: “In that Capt. E.A. Macklin, Twenty-fifth Infantry, having been regularly detailed as officer of the day and having duly entered upon that duty, on August 13, 1906, did neglect and fail to perform the duties enjoined upon an officer of the day in case of alarm, retiring to his quarters, from which it was found impossible to arouse him or bring him forth during the continuance of a considerable amount of small-arms fire at or in the vicinity of Fort Brown, Tex., and the alarms sounded in consequence thereof. This at Fort Brown, Tex., August 13-14, 1906.” “Affray at Brownsville, Tex., August 13 and 14, 1906. Proceedings of a general court-martial convened at headquarters, Department of Texas, San Antonio, Tex., April 15, 1907, in the case of Capt. Edgar A. Macklin, Twenty-fifth United States Infantry” Senate Document, Serial Set Vol. No. 5254, Session Vol. No. 21, 60th Congress, 1st Session.

⁸² Morris, *Theodore Rex*, 472.

⁸³ Ibid., 473-474.

For a man who placed great weight on personal responsibility President Roosevelt put the blame on making a hasty, ill-informed decision that did not take into account the actions or responsibility of the 25th Infantry Regiment's officers, on someone else, the War Department. President Roosevelt was also a man who once he made the "jump" did not back away from his decision. In a special message to the Senate on December 19, 1906, Roosevelt doubled down on his support of the Blocksom report and likened the men of the 25th to "mutineers and murders" who should be thankful the penalty was not death. Roosevelt opined, "A blacker (crime) never stained the annals of our Army."⁸⁴

The Senate Committee on Military Affairs conducted their own investigation into the Brownsville affair and found on a vote of nine to four that President Roosevelt was justified in his dismissal without honor of all 167 members of the 25th Infantry Regiment. The vote was pure political theater and had nothing to do with the weight of the evidence. For instance, the spent shell casings retrieved from the scene by the citizens of Brownsville were shown to have "definitely been fired by Springfield rifles belonging to the Twenty-fifth," however, "the actual firing had occurred during target practice at Fort Niobrara in Nebraska, long before the battalion was ordered to Texas." The appearance of these casings in Brownsville was found to be due to

⁸⁴ Ibid., 473. In many ways, the response by President Roosevelt to the Brownsville incident should be viewed through the prism of Roosevelt's ego as opposed to an inherent racial bias towards African Americans. Booker T. Washington called Theodore Roosevelt "our friend," referring to Roosevelt's solicitous nature towards African Americans. President Roosevelt prided himself on looking at his fellow man equally even if that did not necessarily mean he felt everyone was equal. An example of Theodore Roosevelt standing up for the rights of African Americans occurred during a reception at Carnegie Hall for the new Russian premier Alexander Kerensky in 1917. The reception occurred immediately after a deadly race riot in East St. Louis that spawned out of a labor strike where a number of black strikebreakers were beaten and murdered. During the reception, Samuel Gompers, the head of the American Federation of Labor (AFL) took the stage to tell a sympathetic audience that the black strikebreakers "got what they deserved." Despite the pro-union audience, Theodore Roosevelt jumped up and got into Gompers face telling the crowd, "Murder is murder, whether white or black. I will never stand on any platform and remain silent and listen to anyone condoning the savage brutal treatment of Negro strike breakers." Peter N. Nelson, *A More Unbending Battle: The Harlem Hellfighters' Struggle for Freedom in WWI and Equality at Home* (New York: Basic Civitas, 2009), 27.

budget issues. As Morris recounted, instead of wasting the shell casings the used cartridges were transported with the unit to Texas and “stored in an open box on the porch of the barracks hut at Fort Brown, available for any soldier – or passing civilian – to help himself.”⁸⁵ In 1906, the need of the War Department and Army to remove racially “aggressive” and obstinate African American soldiers from the ranks was more important than due process determination of fact.

The mishandling of the black soldiers of the 25th Infantry Regiment was without question a travesty of justice. The processing of the black troopers by the War Department after the Brownsville incident was also a blatant demonstration of the extent the military and Army were willing to go in order to maintain the racially inferior status of black soldiers. Even the thought that the white, trigger-happy citizens of Brownsville in their excitable state on August 13, 1906, might have been responsible for the killing of their own barber and wounding of the police lieutenant was unthinkable. Surely the black soldiers posted nearby had been responsible – they had to be responsible. And once the idea was put forth, the Army and War Department eagerly threw their weight behind the effort to place the blame on the black soldiers. For the next forty-odd years, the legacy of the Brownsville incident in the Army was that without close, constant, leadership by white officers – black soldiers could become riotous. As the 1926 Army War College study warned: “A curious feature of the negro’s psychology is his susceptibility to the

⁸⁵ Ibid., 509-510. For further information on the Brownsville incident see: John D. Weaver, *The Brownsville Raid* (New York: Norton, 1970) – the most comprehensive work on the Brownsville incident and the manuscript responsible for Congress’ reappraisal of the dismissal of the 167 black soldiers which ultimately led to their pardon in 1972. Unfortunately, at the time of Congress’s action, only one veteran, Dorsie Willis, was still alive to see his regiment’s vindication. Another monograph that came out around the same time as Weaver’s was: Ann J. Lane, *The Brownsville Affair; National Crisis and Black Reaction* (Port Washington, New York: Kennikat Press, 1971). The full text of the Senate Committee on Military Affairs is also published online at the Hathi Trust Digital Library, “Hearings before the Committee on Military Affairs, United States Senate concerning the affray at Brownsville, Tex., on the night of August 13 and 14, 1906.”

influence of crowd psychology. We have some painful experiences along this line in the army, notably the Brownsville riot.”⁸⁶

Prior to and during World War I, the Army insisted that African American soldiers realize their place in society and not make trouble. The legacy of Brownsville taught the Army leadership that for the good working order of the military the black soldier had to accept his (inferior) position in society. It was for that reason that General Charles Ballou, commander of the 92nd Division, issued Bulletin No. 35 to his African American troops at Camp Funston in Kansas in 1917. The order directed “officers and men to refrain from going where they were not wanted regardless of their legal rights.” This order was sparked by an incident in Manhattan, Kansas involving a black sergeant who attempted to enter a “white only” theater. According to the Army and General Charles C. Ballou, the black sergeant was “guilty of the great wrong in doing anything no matter how legally correct, that will provoke racial animosity.”⁸⁷ The black sergeant needed to realize his place in society.

World War I

The performance of African Americans in World War I is a point of debate among military historians to this day. Recruited into segregated units led by predominantly white officers, the “Negro” units in World War I were usually delegated to support roles such as transporting goods across France to the front lines or delegated out piecemeal to French units, out of the view of other white American soldiers. According to Peter Nelson in *A More Unbending Battle: The Harlem Hellfighters’ Struggle for Freedom in WWI and Equality at Home*, “of the four hundred thousand African Americans who served in the war, only about 10 percent saw combat, while the

⁸⁶ Fulmer, *The Use of Negro Manpower*, 7.

⁸⁷ Foner, *Blacks and the Military in American History*, 116.

rest were employed as stevedores, porters, cooks, waiters, and ditch diggers or in the construction and repair of cantonments, roads, and railroads, either abroad or at a military facilities at home."⁸⁸ Before those African American soldiers entered military service though; the white and black communities first had to decide whether African Americans should be used in the war in Europe at all.

From the perspective of the Army the use of African Americans in the war effort would be beneficial because they could be employed as laborers, thus freeing more white Americans from manual labor and making them available as combat troops – a theme used by the Army in numerous manpower studies during the interwar years. Another reason expressed for the drafting of blacks into the military, particularly by community leaders in the South was that this could be used as a means “to decrease significantly the number of young black men in their counties.”⁸⁹ This was an important consideration for southern communities that were facing the exportation of a large numbers of young white men for the war effort, better to balance out the ratio of blacks versus whites left in a given community through a military draft.

For those in the African American community the question of whether to serve in the “white man’s war” was a subject of intense debate. African American leader and editor for the magazine *Crisis*, William E. DuBois, wrote an article explaining why the African American community needed to answer the call for service. The article in part stated:

We the colored race have no ordinary interest in the outcome. That which the German power represents today spells death to the aspirations of Negroes and all darker races for equality, freedom and democracy. Let us not hesitate. Let us, while this war lasts, forget

⁸⁸ Nelson, *A More Unbending Battle*, 57.

⁸⁹ Rawn, *The Double V*, 29.

our special grievances and close our ranks shoulder to shoulder with our white fellow citizens and the allied nations that are fighting for democracy. We make no ordinary sacrifice, but we make it gladly and willingly, with our eyes lifted to the hills.⁹⁰

Besides “fighting for democracy,” DuBois, ever the optimist at the time, was trying to convince the African American community that unselfish service to America in her time of need must be rewarded with greater opportunities for blacks upon return from service. Although black troops returning from service after the Spanish-American War saw no improvement in their social condition, perhaps this time, in a war of global significance, argued Dubois and other black leaders, the results would be different. DuBois’ optimism rubbed off on some in the black community. For instance, many of the blacks who signed up for service expressed a belief that their service would be rewarded by white society upon their return.

A black captain commented while boarding a ship for France: “I am leaving today a wife and three children. As great as the sacrifice is, I shall be satisfied never to see American again, if my wife and children will share greater opportunities and enjoy more liberty than I now enjoy.”⁹¹ Another black officer explained to one of his enlisted troops why he was fighting in this war. “If we can’t fight and die in this war just as bravely as white men, then we don’t deserve an equality with white men, and after the war we had better go back home and forget all about it. But if we can make America really proud ... then I am sure it will be the biggest step towards our equalization as citizens.”⁹² Not everyone in the African American community shared the vision of the two officers.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 26.

⁹¹ Ibid., 43.

⁹² Nelson, *A More Unbending Battle*, 65.

One dissenter was A. Philip Randolph, who asked his fellow black citizens in the publication *Messenger*: “Since when has the subject (black) race come out of a war with its rights and privileges accorded for such a participation ... Did not the Negro fight in the Revolutionary War, with Crispus Attucks dying first ... and come out to be a miserable chattel slave in this country for nearly one hundred years?”⁹³ The Army did not help matters when General Pershing had the all-black Twenty-fourth and Twenty-fifth Infantry Regiments and the Ninth and Tenth Cavalry Regiments sent to Mexico, the Philippines, and Hawaii instead of Europe, or when the Army pronounced African American Colonel Charles Young medically unfit on the eve of war in a blatant attempt to prevent him from going to France and becoming the first black general.

While the battle waged across the pages of the various black newspapers across the country, the U.S. government made at least one astute decision. Emmett J. Scott, former secretary to Booker T. Washington, was appointed to government service as a special assistant to Secretary of War Newton Baker, on “Negro” issues within the War Department. Scott provided a sound and even-headed voice in the all-white War Department and his presence allowed the department to take into consideration the viewpoint of African Americans on some of the more contentious issues that crossed the secretary’s desk. Of course, Scott’s appointment did not imply that the built-in racial attitudes of the white men of power miraculously disappeared; on the contrary, as James Rawn reported, War Department officials purposefully snubbed Scott by listing him in the United States Blue Book and Official Register as a “clerk” instead of his real position “special assistant.”⁹⁴ His appointment was important, nonetheless, because it demonstrated that at least during a period of national crisis the opinion of the black community mattered.

⁹³ Ibid., 21.

⁹⁴ Rawn, *The Double V*, 47.

In his official capacity, Emmett Scott met regularly with Secretary Baker and, according to one scholar, his “advice often reached the desk of the President of the United States.”⁹⁵

Although his critics in the African American community claimed that Scott did not push hard enough, his appointment to such a position was a watershed moment that would lead to the appointment of Judge William H. Hastie to a similar position during World War II.

The biggest obstacle the African American men faced in the military at the beginning of World War I was the ingrained sense of racial superiority of the senior white officers that led them. In a pattern seen again in World War II and the Korean War, these white officers damaged the crucial relationship a leader is supposed to have with subordinates through their words and actions. A case in point was General Charles Ballou, the commander for the African American 92nd Division. General Ballou’s reaction to the incident at Camp Funston involving the black soldier who attempted to enter a “whites only” theater was not necessarily meant to cause harm to his soldiers or disparage their race. His order issued in Bulletin Number 35 was primarily designed to prevent the 92nd from getting into a racial disturbance with the white community which could potentially harm its training and ability to be sent overseas. Perhaps if General Ballou had merely warned his men to not start a racial incident regardless of their legal rights the order might not have sparked as much outrage, but General Ballou went further.

After warning the black troops to avoid race incidents “NO MATTER HOW LEGALLY CORRECT (bold used in original order)” they might be General Ballou continued, “The success of the Division with all that success implies is dependent upon the good will of the public. That public is nine-tenths white. White men made the Division, and they can break it just as easily if

⁹⁵ Ibid.

it becomes a trouble maker.”⁹⁶ By using the phrase “white men made the Division, and they can break it just as easily,” General Ballou appeared to his men as just another white bigot. The order sparked mass meetings calling for General Ballou’s resignation. The Army saw the issue differently and felt General Ballou was perfectly in his right as a commander to make such an order. But the damage had already been done. Emmett J. Scott noted, “At no time during his incumbency as the head of the Division was General Ballou able to regain the confidence of the colored masses, with whom he had been immensely popular to prior to this episode.”⁹⁷ Another white officer who also worried about his men causing a racial incident was Colonel William Hayward, commander of the New York Fifteenth National Guard that was federalized as the 369th Infantry Regiment under the 93rd Division for World War I.

The 369th Infantry Regiment was in many ways the exception to the rule for African American units when it came to their service in World War I, spending an incredible 191 days in the trenches during the war, more than any other American unit, white or black.⁹⁸ And the 369th’s exceptional record during the war was due in part to the caliber of white officers that made up its cadre of leaders, starting with Colonel Hayward. Colonel Hayward and his other white officers were not career military officers from the South as was the case in most of the other African American units, but instead ambitious men from New York who wanted to make a name for themselves and for the black men they led. So when the 369th received orders to travel to Spartanburg, South Carolina in order to finish their training, Colonel Hayward knew that the unit’s first test would not come on the battlefield of France but on the racial battlefield.

⁹⁶ Lee, *The Employment of Negro Troops*, 10.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 11. Scott definitely felt sympathy for General Ballou who he regarded as one of the more fair white generals and far less racially biased than the majority of senior offices in the Army during World War I.

⁹⁸ Nelson, *A More Unbending Battle*, xi.

Historian Peter Nelson observed, “Hayward understood, as did his men, that a repeat of the events in Houston would destroy any chance they had of seeing action in France,” referring to the 1917 race riot in Houston that pitted members of the Twenty-fourth Infantry Regiment at Camp Logan against the white citizens of Houston, Texas.⁹⁹ Instead of giving his men an ultimatum in the form of a military edict Colonel Hayward elicited the support of his men.

Colonel Hayward carefully explained the precarious nature of the unit if the men gave into race provocations by the white citizens in the nearby town and was able to get each and every soldier to essentially swear to turn the other cheek and not strike back. Colonel Hayward also ensured that his officers maintained close contact with the soldiers in order to step in themselves if need be to deflect problems. It was not long before the oath given to Colonel Hayward by his men was put to the test. In one incident described by Nelson in *A More Unbending Battle*, two white men threw one of the black 369th soldiers off a sidewalk and into a street for no reason. A crowd gathered around the black soldier expecting a fight. Instead of fighting back the soldier told the assailants, “I promised my colonel I wouldn’t strike back.” Before the situation could turn ugly the black soldier received an unlikely ally, a white soldier from the Seventh Regiment who was also training nearby. The white soldier stepped forward and said, “Well I didn’t promise my colonel I’d keep my hands off you bullies,” diffusing the situation. The nearby white soldiers who had been training with the 369th had already shown solidarity with their fellow soldiers, explaining, “The colored soldiers are all right. They’re fighting for our country. They’re our buddies.”¹⁰⁰ Unfortunately, this type of solidarity between white and black troops was rare during World War I.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 37.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 39.

Having escaped any serious race issues during their time in South Carolina, the 369th was sent off to France where it was immediately put to work building rail lines and other manual labor – consistent with the majority of black units. Despite the pleadings of Colonel Hayward to anyone who would listen, including General Pershing, it appeared that the 369th was destined for non-combat duty in France until fate intervened in the form of a seriously depleted and demoralized French Army.

The French government wanted to use the incoming American units to fill the gaps in their rapidly depleted ranks but General Pershing demurred; Americans would serve under and with Americans. Under continuing pressure, General Pershing decided to give the French several “minority” units that included African American units and a Puerto Rican unit. One of the units released to duty with the French was the 369th.

In a letter to Colonel Reginald L. Foster, Colonel Hayward described the 369th’s experience of being assigned to the French:

There are no American troops anywhere near us, that I can find out, and we are “les enfants perdus,” and glad of it. Our great American general simply put the black orphan in a basket, set it on the doorstep of the French, pulled the bell, and went away. I said this to a French colonel ... and he said, “Weelcome leetle black babbie.”¹⁰¹

Hayward concluded his letter with the exclamation that the French were “wonderful – wonderful – wonderful!” For the black soldiers of the 369th the French WERE wonderful. In stark contrast to their treatment by the white citizens of South Carolina, the French welcomed the black soldiers of the 369th with open arms. As several veterans of the 369th would recall, the

¹⁰¹ Jeffrey T. Sammons and John H. Morrow, *Harlem's Rattlers and the Great War: The Undaunted 369th Regiment & the African American Quest for Equality* (Lawrence, Kansas: The University Press of Kansas), 207.

white French soldiers would actually salute black officers and shake hands with them. Colonel Hayward in a letter to Emmett Scott addressed the lingering question that he and Scott had wrestled with when they first received notice of the 369th assignment to the French; “How will American Negro soldiers, including commissioned officers ... get along in service with French soldiers and officers?”

Colonel Hayward enthusiastically proclaimed to Scott, “The French soldiers have not the slightest prejudice or feeling. The *poilus* (reference to the French soldiers) and my boys are great chums, eat, dance, sing, march and fight together in absolute accord.”¹⁰² This cordiality toward African American soldiers by white French soldiers did not go unnoticed by the Army command. Senior white Army officers were concerned that the French would “spoil” the black soldiers and make them agitate for greater rights once returned to the United States. Again, the Army was worried about black troops not realizing their place in society.

In response to the close association between the white French and black American soldiers General Pershing authorized the release of a communique to the French Army command. The directive was labeled “To the French Military Mission stationed with the American Army – Secret Information Concerning Black American Troops.” The statement released to the French then went on to describe the nature of race relations in the United States:

It is important for French Officers who have been called upon to exercise command over black American troops, or to live in close contact with them, to have an exact idea of the position occupied by Negroes in the United States ... Although a citizen of the United States, the black man is regarded by the white American as an inferior being with whom relations of business or service only are possible. The black is constantly being censured

¹⁰² Nelson, *A More Unbending Battle*, 91-92.

for his want of intelligence and discretion ... The vices of the Negro are a constant menace to the American who has to repress them sternly. We must prevent the rise of any pronounced degree of intimacy between French officers and black officers ... We must not eat with them, must not shake hands or seek to talk or meet with them outside the requirements of military service. We must not commend too highly the black American troops, particularly in the presence of Americans.¹⁰³

The American Army command wanted essentially for the French to treat the African American soldiers the same way they treated black soldiers, as second-class and inferior human beings. To the French Army's considerable credit they completely ignored the American Army recommendations and treated the men of the 369th the same as any other American military unit.

After their initial training and familiarization with the French weaponry the men of the 369th were placed on the line. Their baptism by fire was not long in coming. One of the first soldiers to prove himself in battle was Private Henry L. Johnson. A Distinguished Service Cross citation recounted Private Johnson's actions in May 1918:

While on a double sentry duty, Private Johnson and a fellow soldier were attacked by a raiding party of Germans numbering almost twenty, wounding both. When the Germans were within fighting distance, he opened fire, shooting one of them and seriously wounding two more. The Germans continued to advance, and as they were about to be captured Private Johnson drew his bolo knife from his belt and attacked the Germans in a hand-to-hand encounter. Even though having sustained three grenade and shotgun wounds from the enemy, Private Johnson went to the rescue of his fellow soldier who was being taken prisoner by the enemy. He kept on fighting until the Germans were chased away.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰³ Rawn, *The Double V*, 63-64.

¹⁰⁴ Citation posted at: www.arlingtoncemetery.net/henry-johnson. Private Johnson was awarded the Croix de Guerre, one of France's highest military honors while in France. The United States Army failed to recognize Private Johnson at the time with a medal. In 1996 he received posthumously the Purple Heart and in 2003 his son, Herman

Colonel Hayward wrote an after-action report and visited the site of the engagement personally to corroborate the account of the battle he had received from Private Johnson and the other soldier. Fortuitously for the press conscious Colonel Hayward, the 369th had several journalists visit the unit immediately after Private Johnson's engagement. One of the journalists, Irvin S. Cobb, was hardly the image of a sympathetic journalist for a black Army unit. Cobb was a Southern "humorist" from Kentucky who wrote about the "reconstructed South" with typical racial stereotypes, but after reading Colonel Hayward's report and visiting the battle site he was visibly impressed. Cobb explained his impression of Private Johnson's action to the 369th's Major Arthur Little:

Cobb: How much special training for this trench fighting did Henry Johnson have before he licked those twenty-four Germans?

Little: Same as the rest of the regiment, no more than three weeks. In theory. In practice, taking away the time spent changing stations and the ordinary routine of our early days with the French, I'd guess the special training our men have had would equal about a week of what the draftees are getting in the cantonments back home.

Cobb: Seems to me, that if he'd had the normal training our men at home are getting today, by tomorrow night Henry would have been storming Potsdam.¹⁰⁵

Cobb turned his enthusiastic first impression into a story titled "The Battle of Henry Johnson" that was picked up by several newspapers including the *New York World*. Cobb concluded his article with the bold statement "If ever proof were needed, which it is not, that the color of a

Johnson, a World War II veteran and member of the Tuskegee Airman, received the Distinguished Service Cross on behalf of his father. An attempt to get Congress to authorize the issuance of the Congressional Medal of Honor was not successful. Although some African Americans did receive medals during World War I those were the exception as opposed to the rule. For instance, as noted by Robert Edgerton in *Hidden Heroism*, white National Guard officer Major Warner A. Ross of the 3rd Battalion of the 92nd Division's 365th Regiment attempted to get recognition for their unit, "Ross recommended some forty officers and men for medals for their bravery, but none, including Ross himself, ever received any decoration from any source. He reported that his recommendations reached headquarters but believed that certain regular army officers saw fit to head them off." Edgerton, *Hidden Heroism*, 95.

¹⁰⁵ Nelson, *A More Unbending Battle*, 105-106.

man's skin has nothing to do with the color of his soul, this twain then and there offered it in abundance."¹⁰⁶ Cobb's story turned Private Henry Johnson into the African American version of Sergeant York and a point of pride for the black community back in Harlem and across the country.

During the early months of American involvement in World War I the newspapers in the United States ran numerous reports detailing the bravery of African Americans. One heading in the *Boston Post* declared "NO COLOR LINE THERE" and that "in the service of democracy there is no such distinction."¹⁰⁷ The praise heaped on Private Johnson and the flowery articles in the nation's press gave some in the black community back in the United States hope that finally a change was on the horizon in race relations. Under the surface, though, a different picture was coming out of the battlefields of France, a rumbling by white Army officers that the black soldier could not be counted on in a time of crisis. Clearly, there was a [disconnect] between the glowing praise in the press and the ultimate verdict by the United States Army at the end of the war. One of the white officers who went from a supporter to detractor on the performance of black troops was General Charles Clarence Ballou.

William E. DuBois traveled through France during World War I and observed firsthand the behavior of General Ballou and was not impressed with what he saw. DuBois wrote: "It seems that instead of trying to increase morale of his division, it was General Ballou's intention to discourage the men as much as possible. His action in censuring (African American) officers in the presence of enlisted men was an act that tended toward breaking down the confidence that the men had in their officers." DuBois also reported, General Ballou referred to his unit as the

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 108-109.

¹⁰⁷ Lee, *The Employment of Negro Troops*, 6.

“rapist division” when speaking to other white officers and was “constantly casting aspersions on the work of the colored officers and permitted other officers to do the same in his presence.”¹⁰⁸

The tone used by General Ballou appeared to rub off onto some of his staff. His chief of staff, Lieutenant Colonel Allen Greer considered that “the average Negro is naturally cowardly ... (and that) they have been dangerous to no one except themselves and women.”¹⁰⁹ It also probably didn’t help matters that General Ballou and his commanding officer, General Robert L. Bullard, did not see eye to eye on Ballou’s leadership of the 92nd Division. According to Robert Edgerton in *Hidden Heroism*, partly as a way to embarrass General Ballou and partly to demoralize the black soldiers of the 92nd, General Bullard had Ballou “removed from command, returned to the United States, and reduced to his permanent rank of colonel.”¹¹⁰

Major General Robert L. Bullard, the first Infantry Division Commander (“Big Red One”) was another senior white officer who held a very low opinion of African American soldiers. Bullard wrote in his 1925 memoir that African Americans as soldiers were “hopelessly inferior (and) if you need combat soldiers, and especially if you need them in a hurry, don’t put your time upon Negroes.”¹¹¹ Bullard also shared the common belief that African Americans were a threat to women. Robert Edgerton described how Bullard and other white officers of the time described African Americans as “depraved” - a reference to the belief that given the opportunity black men would “repeatedly rape white women.”¹¹² With this insurmountable negative

¹⁰⁸ Richard J. Stillman, *Integration of the Negro in the U.S. Armed Forces* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1968), 18.

¹⁰⁹ Nelson, *A More Unbending Battle*, 183.

¹¹⁰ Edgerton, *Hidden Heroism*, 98.

¹¹¹ Elliot V. Converse, *The Exclusion of Black Soldiers from the Medal of Honor in World War II: The Study Commissioned by the United States Army to Investigate Racial Bias in the Awarding of the Nation’s Highest Military Decoration* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland, 1997), 25.

¹¹² Robert B. Edgerton, *Hidden Heroism: Black Soldiers in America’s Wars* (Boulder: Westview Press, 2001), 120.

tradition to overcome, it is little surprising that at the conclusion of World War I the newspaper accounts of valor were replaced by the Army with accounts of cowardice and incompetence.

It is a fact that not all of the African American units that saw combat in World War I fought as well as the 369th “Harlem Hellfighters” but this does not mean that those other units were failures or more importantly that their record should have been used to disparage all black troops.¹¹³ Much of the blame should have been placed at the feet of the officers. When the 368th broke ranks and fled in the face of the enemy they were not alone. Peter Nelson observed that other American, British, and French units had also at one point during the war panicked and deserted their posts, but “no one said it was because they were white.”¹¹⁴ However, after the 368th was relieved in disgrace on September 28th, two of the senior officers further demoralized the men by calling them “rank cowards.”¹¹⁵ While the officers of the 368th called their men “cowards” the officers in the 369th such as Colonel Hayward praised his men as “positively the most stoical and mysterious men I’ve ever known. Nothing surprises them ... do you wonder that I love them, every one, good, bad and indifferent?”¹¹⁶ Is it any wonder the record of the two units were so different?

In several instances the Army high command seemed to want to intentionally harm the relationship between officers and enlisted in the African American units, as was the case with the strange order to the French Army. In another example, General Pershing for no discernable military reason decided in July 1917 to restructure the officers in the African American units,

¹¹³ Regarding the moniker “Harlem Hellfighters,” author Peter Nelson stated, “It’s impossible to pinpoint exactly when the more colorful name “Hellfighters” was first applied to the 369th, since the enemy gave them the name, a fact ascertained after a German prisoner told his interrogators that his comrades were particularly wary of confronting colored American troops.” Nelson, *A More Unbending Battle*, 104.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 183.

¹¹⁵ The officers were Major J.N. Merrill and Major Norris. Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 91-92.

including the 369th. General Pershing wanted the units to have all white or all black officers. For the 369th this meant that the black field officers were replaced by white officers, a move that produced a protest by Colonel Hayward. His protest was to no avail – the only black officer he was allowed to keep was James Reese Europe presumably because as the unit’s band leader he could not be spared.¹¹⁷ The sudden change in leadership in a unit would have a serious impact on the morale of the troops in any unit, but even more so in a segregated unit already struggling to overcome racial prejudices. The black soldiers in the affected units had to contend with developing new relationships with a whole new cadre of officers while still wondering if the removal of their previous officers was racially motivated.

As the war drew to a close in the fall of 1918 the Army was already solidifying their opinion that black troops had been a failure in combat. The units of the 92nd Division were the target of the harshest criticism while the units of the 93rd that had been assigned to the French were largely ignored, and for good reason. Their record would not fit into the overall narrative the Army had designed. In his study of the 369th Nelson recounted that, “of the 369th Regiment’s original two thousand men, over thirteen hundred had died or been wounded by the time the Battle of Meuse-Argonne was over, including fifty-five officers. It was the highest casualty rate of any American regiment.”¹¹⁸ The African American soldiers in the 369th were not cowards, and as a result, they were largely ignored by the Army command.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 151. Colonel Hayward and other officers such as Major Arthur Little remained committed to pushing for fair treatment for the 369th even after the war. Hayward resigned his position after the war when the 369th was removed from federal service and reconstituted as a New York National Guard unit as did Arthur Little when the command position fell to him, “both men believing the Fifteenth should be commanded by an African American.” Ibid., 224. Another white officer, Captain Hamilton Fish, later became a Congressman and a leading advocate for racial equality and civil rights.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 203-204.

The Interwar Years

When black troops returned to the United States at the end of the war, many were filled with a new pride in themselves, their race, and their country. The words of DuBois and other African American leaders rang in their ears, offering a promise of a change in race relations in America. The returning black soldiers were quickly disabused of the idea of a change once they landed back in the United States. In one incident, a black soldier who had just returned to America and was waiting for a train to take him and his unit home walked up to a Military Police (MP) officer and asked where the nearest restroom was located. In a flash the MP took out his baton and clubbed the poor soldier over the head and had him hauled off in handcuffs. The soldiers' white officer walked up to the MP to ask what had happened. The MP stated, "The Niggers were feeling their oats a bit." According to the MP, he had been told by his commanders to "take it out of them quickly, just as soon as they arrived, so as not to have any trouble later on."¹¹⁹ The service of returning African American veterans had changed nothing in the eyes of the Army and the majority of whites, particularly in the South.

James Rawn observed in his study; "The year after the war ended, white mobs lynched eleven black veterans. Seventy-eight African Americans were lynched in 1919, including fourteen who were burned alive. Race riots erupted in twenty-eight cities across the nation." For William E. Dubois, the racial violence was almost too much to fathom. He wrote: "They cheat us and mock us; they kills us and slay us; they deride out misery. When we plead for the naked protection of the law ... they tell us to GO TO HELL!"¹²⁰ African Americans had shed blood, sweat, and tears for their nation on the battlefields of France expecting that their sacrifice would be recognized by

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 209.

¹²⁰ Rawn, *The Double V*, 79.

the Army and the white majority in the United States; at the end of World War I this was not to be.

In the inter-war years between World War I and World War II, African American soldiers faced a second threat besides racism – demobilization. The 1920s and 1930s for the Army were a period of downsizing and reorganization and more often than not, the black soldiers that had swelled the Army’s size during World War I were the first to be thrown out of the military. One historian has written, “Approximately 404,000 blacks, accounting for 11 percent of all Army personnel, had served during World War I. By 31 August 1939, 3,640 black enlistees – roughly 1.5 percent of the total enlisted force – and five commissioned officers (three of whom were chaplains) were on active duty.”¹²¹ As well, during the inter-war years the Army codified many of their policies that would have a direct effect on African American soldiers during World War II. An example was the findings of a study related to “Negro” artillery units.

The report concluded that “Negro” artillery units should only support “Negro” infantry units because “they should never be employed in close support of white infantry. Any negro batteries in the vicinity would be blamed for all short rounds and the physical damage to the infantry, however slight, would be magnified by rumors and the consequent loss of infantry morale would be entirely disproportionate to the advantages gained by the addition of a few additional artillery units.”¹²² Conclusions such as those in the report on African American artillery units would ultimately be codified in one of several mobilization plans prepared by the War Department and Army.

¹²¹ Sherie Mershon and Steven Schlossman, *Foxholes and Color Lines: Desegregating the U.S. Armed Forces* (Baltimore, Maryland: John Hopkins University Press, 1998), 8.

¹²² Converse, *The Exclusion of Black Soldiers*, 25-26.

As noted in the introduction, the Army also conducted several “studies” through the Army War College that examined the “lessons learned” from the use of black troops in World War I. These studies should be acknowledged for what they were, little more than racial propaganda designed to institutionalize the theory that blacks were not equal to whites in combat. In one study from the Army War College in 1939-1940, a story used to illustrate the common view of black officers (by current white Army officers) was so blatantly racist that it defies comprehension as to how it could end up in an “official” Army study – even one written in 1939. The story began with a (presumably white) staff officer who was stopped at a crossroads. The officer asked which way one of the roads went and the sentry answered, “I don’t know sir.”

“Where does that road go?” the officer inquired.

“I don’t know, sir,” responded the sentry.

“Well, what are you here for?”

“I don’t know, sir.”

“Who put you here?” the officer asked.

“The captain, sir.”

“Where’s the captain?”

“The captain? He’s right over here, sir, but he won’t help you none. He’s a nigger too!”¹²³

A theme common throughout all the inter-war studies was that blacks were inferior soldiers and that the use of segregated units was absolutely necessary in order to avoid damaging the white units in the field. Another theme was that black troops should be used primarily as service components to white units and be led by white officers. The only break from this blueprint that Lee Nichols found in his analysis of the inter-war years was a proposal by an “afar-seeing infantry Colonel, James K. Parsons.” Parsons, perhaps realizing that the lesson of World War I

¹²³ Nichols, *Breakthrough on the Color Front*, 36-37.

was not that black soldiers were inferior to white soldiers but that the institution of segregation created a yoke of inferiority for black troops that was difficult for them to overcome, suggested that “individual Negroes should be assigned in a ratio of about 2000 to a division, 300 to Regiment, 30 to a rifle company and one to a squad.” Nichols noted that Colonel Parsons’ recommendation fit almost verbatim the reorganization plan instituted in Korea in 1952.¹²⁴

World War II

World War II was another pivotal conflict in the history of the African American soldier’s experience. Despite inter-war studies which tended to recommend black soldiers not be used in combat, World War II offered African Americans the opportunity to take on more combat assignments than World War I. The added opportunity to serve in combat meant black soldiers were able to once again demonstrate their ability and in several instances they demonstrated that black soldiers could stand toe-to-toe with white soldiers on the battlefield. However, as was the case in World War I the white officer establishment presented the largest hurdle to blacks being accepted as capable combat troops. For this reason, it is important to have a basic understanding of the experiences of African Americans in the Army during World War II, because in many ways the Korean War was a continuation of World War II prejudicial practices by white Army leadership regarding the use of African American soldiers. World War II is also important because many of the white officers that led black soldiers in World War II continued to lead them (though usually in senior positions) in the Korean War.

Another tradition maintained during World War II that was also repeated again during the Korean War was the assignment of officers to African American units. Due to the massive demobilization of the Army in the interwar years, and especially of black soldiers and officers,

¹²⁴ Ibid., 38.

by the outbreak of hostilities in World War II there was a lack of black officers. As a result African American units were assigned predominantly white officers. Mershon and Schlossman in their study noted; “Senior military officials generally advocated this situation, and the Army gave it an additional twist by informally but regularly specifying that white southerners should lead black units.” The assignment of white southerners rested on the theory that “southerner’s best understood blacks and could thus exercise better leadership than either black or white northerners” and will be explored further in Chapter II.¹²⁵

When the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941 the United States military had already started a program to significantly increase the anemic troop numbers of the interwar years Army – this program included an increase in African American troops as well. Upon inspection of the troop levels of both white and black soldiers at the end of 1941 the first detail that jumped out was the percentage of black soldiers attached to either the Quartermaster or Engineer Corps, what are typically referred to as support and service components of the Army. Ulysses Lee in the official Army history of African American troops in World War II observed that when the Army reached almost 200,000 African American troops in 1941-1942 that; “the proportions of Negroes in the Quartermaster and Engineer Corps increased to the point where it appeared possible that every non-technical unit in those branches would soon be Negro.”¹²⁶ The fact that the Army was attempting to continue the tradition set in World War I of utilizing black soldiers primarily as manual labors did not go unnoticed by the African American community leaders and the press. If the Army was going to change their ways it would do so only because of political pressure.

The disillusionment experienced by William E. DuBois and other black leaders in America at

¹²⁵ Mershon and Schlossman, *Foxholes and Color Lines*, 78.

¹²⁶ Lee, *The Employment of Negro Troops*, 111.

the end of World War I – caused by the failed promise of a change in race relations – was at the forefront of thinking among black leaders and the African American press at the outbreak of World War II. Once again, the African American community was going to have to answer the question of why they should fight for a country that still treated them as second-class citizens.

The African American press and leaders of what would later be termed the civil rights movement made a concerted effort during World War II to persuade the Roosevelt Administration to allow black soldiers to fulfill a greater role in the Armed Forces. Even prior to the war, the military realized that prominent members of the African American press could exert unwelcome pressure. For instance, John Sengstacke, publisher of the *Chicago Defender* and founder of the Negro Newspaper Publishers Association, ran an article that “had encouraged blacks to protest military discrimination by becoming conscientious objectors.”¹²⁷

Worse yet was the thought of outside influences utilizing the issue of racial inequality to weaken the American war effort. Worrying to the government was, when a New York communist publication aimed at the African American audience ran an article titled “Negro Yanks Ain’t coming either – remember 1917.”¹²⁸ For the politicians, including President Roosevelt, the fear was that the black population would try to sit this war out, or as historian Ulysses Lee observed, “unless some assurances were given Negroes that they would have an opportunity to participate in the defense of the nation, subversive influences would find a fertile field for fifth column activities among a disaffected Negro population.”¹²⁹ The “service” that

¹²⁷ Gail Buckley, *American Patriots: The Story of Blacks in the Military from the Revolution to Desert Storm* (New York: Random House, 2001), 273.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 65.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 67. An example cited by Ulysses Lee was a letter written by Stafford King, civilian aid to the Secretary of War for the State of Minnesota to the U.S. War Department, that warned; “I have no hesitancy suggesting to you, sir, that if and when the colored men are so denied the volunteer service which is given to their white, yellow and brown brothers, they become easy prey to the smooth tongue of him who reminds them of their inequalities and

African Americans were looking for was more than just as manual laborers loading and unloading ships, building roads, or cooking meals for other soldiers; they were looking for “service” in combat units.

The Roosevelt Administration made several changes in response to the advocates of greater opportunity for African Americans in the armed services. One of the changes was the promotion of Benjamin Davis Sr., who became the first African American general and had been accidentally “overlooked” during the last round of promotions. The other was the appointment of William H. Hastie as civilian aide to the secretary of war.

The appointment of Davis as a Brigadier General provided some relief to the black community who still had fresh memories of the action by the War Department to medically retire Colonel Charles Young on the eve of World War I. However, the appointment of Judge Hastie in Emmett Scott’s old position was viewed as a more important strategic victory. As James Rawn observed, where “Scott in the decades after the war had come to be viewed by many of his fellow middle-class African Americans as a leader too willing to accommodate institutionalized racism and segregation,” Judge Hastie had a different agenda.¹³⁰ Hastie released a statement upon his appointment; “I have always been consistently opposed to any policy of discrimination and segregation in the armed forces of this country. I am assuming this post in the hope that I will be able to work toward integration of the colored man into the army and to facilitate his placement, training and promotion.”¹³¹ In taking this position, Hastie was setting himself on a collision course with his new boss Secretary of War Henry L. Stimson, and most of the senior

promises that under some new type of government, communist, fascist, or Nazi, such inequalities will be erased.”
Ibid.

¹³⁰ Rawn, *The Double V*, 97.

¹³¹ Ibid., 98-99.

military commanders.¹³²

Judge Hastie's mention of integration was part of a turning point in the African American community. During World War I, the black community desired greater equality in general, but contented themselves with black soldiers getting an equal opportunity to prove themselves in combat; this was not the case in World War II and the Korean War. Integration, the full dispersion of African Americans into all types of military service, standing side-by-side with white soldiers, not as their leaders but as their equals; this was the new goal, and a goal that flew in the face of the accepted protocol of the military at the beginning of World War II. For the Roosevelt Administration and the military establishment there was no equivocation on how they felt about integration.

In a White House press release from 1940, the Roosevelt Administration laid out its stance; "the policy of the War Department is not to intermingle colored and white enlisted personnel in the same regimental organizations. This policy has been proven satisfactory over a long period of years, and to make changes now would produce situations destructive to morale and detrimental to the preparation for national defense."¹³³ The Roosevelt Administration during World War II was willing to significantly expand opportunities for African Americans, but did so, as Mershon and Schlossman observed, "Within the confines of the fundamental policy of racial segregation."¹³⁴

¹³² Judge Hastie wasted no time in getting the Army riled up on the question of integration. The Army's highest ranking officer, General George C. Marshall provided the official Army position in a response to Hastie's request for the formulation of an integrated combat unit. General Marshall wrote in October of 1940; "A solution of many of the issues presented by Judge Hastie would be tantamount to solving a social problem which has perplexed the American people throughout the history of this nation. The Army cannot accomplish such a solution and should not be charged with such an undertaking. The settlement of vexing racial problems cannot be permitted to complicate the tremendous task of the War Department and thereby jeopardize discipline and morale." Stillman, *Integration of the Negro in the U.S. Armed Forces*, 27-28.

¹³³ Lee, *The Employment of Negro Troops*, 76.

¹³⁴ Mershon and Schlossman, *Foxholes and Color Lines*, 60.

There was one instance during World War II where military necessity trumped the War Department's hard-fast rule against the integrating of white and black troops. It occurred in the European Theater around the time of the "Battle of the Bulge" in December 1944. In the fall of 1944 as the German war machine was pushed back towards the boundaries of the "Fatherland," fighting became intense and casualties mounted within the U.S. Army command. The need for replacements became critical. Ulysses Lee reported that the Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force (SHAEF) announced on December 8, 1944 that; "the theater estimated that there would be an overall deficiency of more than 29,000 riflemen by the end of the month."¹³⁵ The situation was desperate for SHAEF and a breaking point that required even the most ardent of Army traditions to be put aside out of military necessity; even the idea of integration.

Lieutenant General John Clifford Hodges Lee (who went by the initials J.C.H. Lee and was sometimes derisively referred to as "Jesus Christ Himself" Lee or John "Court House" Lee because of his egotism), commander of Services of Supply (SOS) for the European Theater of Operations, United States Army (ETOUSA), came up with the idea of filling the deficit in riflemen with African American soldiers. His initial order of December 26, 1944 called for volunteers for immediate assignment to combat infantry units, "without regard to color." Bullet point #2 of the original order read:

The Commanding General makes a special appeal to you. It is planned to assign you without regard to color or race to the units where assistance is most needed, and give you the opportunity of fighting shoulder to shoulder to bring about victory. Your comrades at the front are anxious to share the glory of victory with you. Your relatives and friends everywhere have been urging you to be granted this privilege. The Supreme Commander,

¹³⁵ Lee, *The Employment of Negro Troops*, 688.

your Commanding General, and other veteran officers who have served with you are confident that many of you will take advantage of this opportunity and carry on in keeping with the glorious record of our colored troops in our former wars.¹³⁶

General J.C.H. Lee's order was not well received by the Army command, or at SHAEF.

General Eisenhower's chief of staff, Lieutenant General Walter B. Smith, was the first to warn Eisenhower of possible repercussions to Lee's order. In particular, General Smith believed the promise to assign black troops "without regard to color or race" was "a clear invitation to embarrassment to the War Department."¹³⁷ The order was revised and reissued without the clear promise of integrating black troops with white. Despite the rewording of General Lee's order, the result was the same; for the first time in World War II black soldiers fought with and next to white soldiers in small groups as opposed to the division and regiment strength they were used to under the segregated system. This was a major shift in military race relations and had profound consequences. It also had a dramatic effect on several skeptics, among them General Eisenhower.¹³⁸

General Lee's call to arms for black volunteers was overwhelmingly successful. Ulysses Lee observed that "by February (1945), 4,652 Negro troops had volunteered, many of the

¹³⁶ Ibid., 689.

¹³⁷ Ibid., 690.

¹³⁸ General Eisenhower was by no means a "racist," but he was a prisoner of his times and of the culture of the military. General Eisenhower truly was hesitant to push for integration out of fear of negatively affecting morale. However, General Eisenhower also had a changing of heart after the experiment with African American soldiers in late 1944. During a speech in October 1952 in front of the Benevolent Order of the Elks in New York Eisenhower discussed his "use of 2,600 volunteer negro troops in the fall of 1944." Eisenhower said during the speech the black volunteers had "relatively safe billets. They had nothing in their hearts that had to do with safety when their country was in danger." Eisenhower continued, "The point I want to make is this. I deserve no credit for using these men. They were fighting men and I needed fighting men very badly indeed. But they did this for me: by their coming forward so determinedly, so promptly and operating so effectively, they gave me again a renewed lesson that devotion to America is not determined by any such inconsequential factor as color, religion or origin. If a man is a dedicated American citizen, he is just that and nothing else." From: Speech by Dwight D. Eisenhower at Hotel Theresa, New York, October 25, 1952, Box 44, Papers of Maxwell B. Rabb, 1958-1989, Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library (DDEPL).

noncommissioned officers among them taking reductions in rank to do so.”¹³⁹ More shocking to the “old Guard” of the senior Army leadership was how well the African American soldiers fought and how well they were received by their white compatriots. An officer with the 104th Division who received black troops during a battle on the west bank of the Rhine near Cologne wrote: “Their combat record has been outstanding. They have without exception proven themselves to be good soldiers. Some are being recommended for the Bronze Star Medal.”¹⁴⁰ Ulysses Lee reported that another white commander declared; “the premise that no soldier, will hold black skin against a man if he can shoot his rifle and does not run away proved to be substantially true. Most of the white men of the company soon became highly appreciative of the Negroes’ help and warmly applauded their more colorful individual and combat exploits.”¹⁴¹ Despite the praise of these two officers, the Army leadership remained wary of black troops and considered them inferior troops.

Although there were several examples of biased officers who led African Americans in World War II, the most conspicuous, and because of his position as Tenth Corps Commander in Korea, the most important for the arguments advanced in this dissertation, was Major General Edward Almond. In the official after action report of the 92nd Infantry Division in World War II, Almond was quoted as saying, “I am now convinced that the great majority of Negroes cannot be made into good infantry soldiers or even satisfactory ones.”¹⁴² This was an opinion that Almond would carry with him through Korea and for the rest of his life.

During an interview in 1975 with his grandson, a student at the Army War College who conducted the interview as part of the Senior Officers Debriefing Program, Almond elaborated

¹³⁹ Ibid., 693.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 696.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 702.

¹⁴² Gerald Astor, *The Right to Fight: A History of African Americans in the Military* (Novato, California: Presidio Press, 1998), 309.

on his thoughts about integrating black soldiers; “I would have agreed to the integration of combat units to the extent of utilizing Negro personnel in areas that did not require exposure and decision of individuals and bravery in offensive operations.” Almond continued by expressing his belief that an Army unit in combat would be “jeopardized by integrating Negro elements.” Almond concluded by explaining that he did not want to exclude African Americans from military service, on the contrary; “The Negro is a useful individual; he is an American citizen, he should be employed in the defense of this nation,” just not in combat units because it would “expect him to exercise characteristics that are abnormal to his race.”¹⁴³

As for Almond’s opinion of black officers, he once called all of the African American officers of the 92nd ID together and informed them, “that he did not believe any black officer should be promoted beyond the rank of captain.”¹⁴⁴ One gets the strong opinion when reading statements made by General Almond throughout his life that he would have preferred that the 92nd ID had no African American officers.

General Almond was asked in 1974 why Brigadier General Benjamin O. Davis, acting as Deputy Inspector General of the Army, wrote in his report after a visit to Fort Huachuca in the summer of 1953 to inspect the 92nd ID in training that there was “evidence of decline in morale and a growth of dissatisfaction” as evidenced by among other things the “stoning of officers riding through (an) enlisted area.”¹⁴⁵ Almond responded by blaming the poor morale on the Army’s insistence of replacing the original 700 white officers assigned to the 92nd ID to a mix of black and white officers.

Almond explained that, “from four different stations in the east we received an order form the

¹⁴³ Interview of General Edward M. Almond by Captain Thomas G. Fergusson, Box 1, Edward M. Almond Papers, Military Heritage Institute (MHI).

¹⁴⁴ Edgerton, *Hidden Heroism*, 150.

¹⁴⁵ Interview of General Edward M. Almond by Captain Thomas G. Fergusson, Box 1, Almond Papers, MHI.

War Department that every thirty days, 30 Negro lieutenants would arrive or captains would arrive for replacements and 30 white lieutenants would be released.” This turn-over in officers continued until the 92nd ID went from 700 white officers to roughly 400 white officers and 300 black officers. Almond observed, “When these officers began to settle in their duties in the division, we perceptibly realized a change in the attitude of the enlisted men toward the authority and discipline that was required.” What disturbed Almond the most about these new black officers was their civilian background; accustomed to white officers that had a similar background and training to his, he was appalled that one of the black officers “had grown up as a boot black.”¹⁴⁶ The humble upbringing and limited education of the average black officer (or soldier) disqualified them as competent in the mind of General Almond. He was unable to distinguish between the differences in opportunities for African Americans and the inherent ability of blacks to learn and adapt to military culture.

The greatest obstacle that General Almond seemed incapable of overcoming as the 92nd ID commander was the ability to communicate with black troops. Almond would prove time and again in World War II and in Korea that the words he choose when discussing or talking with black troops were awkward at best and insulting at worst. As related in the introduction to this study, several incidents of miscommunication made it all the way to the White House while the 92nd ID was stationed at Fort Huachuca. Another demonstration of poor communication skills was recorded in his welcoming address to the men of the 92nd ID upon his taking command. Almond declared in no uncertain terms to the African American soldiers standing before him: “I did not send for you. Your Negro newspapers, Negro politicians and white friends have insisted

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

on you seeing combat and I shall see that you get combat and your share of the casualties.”¹⁴⁷

Perhaps Almond meant his words to sound as a type of “pep-talk,” but to the already skeptical black soldiers who heard him speak it came off as an ominous warning about their future.

Once the 92nd ID landed in Italy in 1944, Almond was eager to get the men into combat. In the view of some veterans and observers he was perhaps a little too eager. An Italian partisan, Gino Dinelli, commented about what he observed of the African American soldiers and their white officers in the Italian campaign of World War II; “The Americans were sending their black troops straight into the front of the German lines, instead of to the side. And there was no reason for it. So the Americans sent these soldiers to die.”¹⁴⁸ Almond appeared true to his word to see to it that the African American soldiers under his command got their “share of the casualties” and then some.

A possible motivating factor for the carelessness of Almond’s use of his troops was his desire to make a name for himself with his superiors. Almond recalled that the Cinquale Canal attack of February 7, 1945 was “watched with intense interest by the commander of the 15th Army Group, General Mark Clark and the Fifth Army commander, General Truscott;” an audience that Almond was eager to please.¹⁴⁹ Throughout his career Almond was very protective of his reputation as a field commander, which was possibly one of the reasons that he melded so well with General MacArthur after World War II and during the Korean War.

In analyzing Almond’s leadership of the 92nd ID there appears to be a strange dichotomy in his view of the black troops under his command. On the one hand Almond appeared to have a strong desire for the 92nd ID to succeed, if for no other reason than to improve his leadership

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 151.

¹⁴⁸ Edgerton, *Hidden Heroism*, 151.

¹⁴⁹ Interview of General Edward M. Almond by Captain Thomas G. Fergusson, Box 1, Almond Papers, MHI.

reputation, then later he went out of his way to criticize the black troops. Despite his verbal faux pas' at Fort Huachuca, Almond appeared at first to sincerely want his division to succeed as a combat unit. When the 92nd ID conducted field maneuvers in Louisiana in 1944 prior to deployment overseas General Almond received word that the War Department was considering breaking the 92nd ID up into smaller components. Almond pleaded with General McNair, "General, you can't let me down on this purpose. I promised these officers and I have tried too hard to do a good job and so have they and I promised them if they stood behind me, I would stand behind them."¹⁵⁰ It was only when the 92nd ID did not live up to his expectations during combat in Italy that Almond seemed to turn on his men – and blame their failure on race.

After World War II an independent analysis was prepared for the Army of the 92nd ID's actions. In the after-action review the report noted that the "white senior officers of the Ninety-second Division had made errors of military judgment" and that during the Cinquale Canal attack in particular, the "attack had been poorly planned from that start – and that the shortcomings ... had contributed heavily to the unit's poor performance."¹⁵¹ The key assertion of this report was that the officer's had failed, not the African American soldiers. Almond defended his officers, claiming that his own investigation of the failures of the Cinquale Canal attack showed that the problem was that the black soldiers refused to hold their positions, especially at night. Almond asserted, "We found out that in every case, the excuse of the local commander (platoon, or company commander) was that they put the man in position and couldn't depend on his staying there because they couldn't see him in the dark. When they went to find the place they had put him in, the man wasn't there." Almond claimed to not be surprised by his findings because his time with the 92nd ID had taught him that the problem with black troops was the

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ Mershon and Schlossman, *Foxholes and Color Lines*, 60.

“undependability of the average soldier to operate to his maximum capacity, compared to his lassitude toward his performing a task assigned” and that “the general tendency of the Negro soldier is to avoid as much effort as possible.” For any skeptics of Almond’s assessment he declared; “Those who doubt this have only to serve in the capacity of supervisor to such requirements to determine for themselves what the results will be.”¹⁵²

Although General Almond and several other senior white officers would proclaim the 92nd ID in Italy a failure for the period up to and through the Cinquale Canal attack, and before General Marshall made the Japanese-American Regiment known as the 442 Infantry Regiment available as an attachment to the 92nd ID, an unbiased review of their performance paints a different picture. As Mershon and Schlossman observed, despite the poor leadership they experienced, the men of the 92nd ID “fought well against formidable German positions, taking 3,000 casualties and receiving 12,000 decorations.”¹⁵³ Could the 92nd ID have performed better? Yes they could have, and mostly likely would have had the caliber of their senior officers been more like those of the 369th Infantry Regiment – men such as Colonel Hayward, who instead of seeing “lassitude” when he observed his men saw brave warriors.

The fact of the matter is that General Almond and his views of African American troops during World War II was not an anomaly, his was an opinion shared by most senior officers in the Army and the other branches of the military. Some of the harshest critics of African American’s actually came from the Navy and Marine Corps. During a meeting at the White House on September 27, 1940, Secretary of the Navy Frank Knox told President Roosevelt and the gathered civil-rights activists that African Americans would have to be content to serve in the Navy in the “steward’s position” (glorified butlers to officer’s and as mess cooks), and that “he

¹⁵² Interview of General Edward M. Almond by Captain Thomas G. Fergusson, Box 1, Almond Papers, MHI.

¹⁵³ Edgerton, *Hidden Heroism*, 152.

would resign in protest if he were asked to desegregate his organization.”¹⁵⁴

Marine Corps Commandant Major General Thomas Holcomb was even more blunt in his views regarding African Americans in the Marine Corps: “If it were a question of having a Marine Corps of 5,000 whites or 250,000 Negroes, I would rather have the whites.”¹⁵⁵ General Holcomb could not understand why African Americans were trying “to break into a club that doesn’t want them” and warned of consequences that “would likely be pernicious.”¹⁵⁶ The Navy and Marine Corps senior officers were in lock step with their Army brethren when it came to integrating their services; they would resist.

In a pattern that would be seen again during the post-World War II years and during the first year of the Korean War, senior military and civilian officials offered numerous excuses and roadblocks with regard to any attempt to integrate African American service personnel or even to offer greater opportunities for assignment to combat. In an effort to appease the African American community and to offer recommendations for pro-active measures for integrating black soldiers and sailors into their branches of the armed forces, President Roosevelt created the Fair Employment Practices Commission (FEPC). According to Mershon and Schlossman: “On 15 January 1942, Roosevelt, armed with the FEPC conclusions, told Secretary Knox to ask the General Board, the Navy’s internal policymaking body, for ideas on assigning blacks to duties

¹⁵⁴ Mershon and Schlossman, *Foxholes and Color Lines*, 47. Some historians have claimed that Secretary Knox wasn’t personally opposed to greater opportunities for African Americans, but was inclined to accept the positions of the military commanders in the Navy and Marine Corps for the sake of good order. His personal actions tend to show a different picture. A case in point was the initial handling of the case of African American messman Doris Miller – the hero of Pearl Harbor who ran to the aid of his Captain on the USS West Virginia and manned a .50 caliber machine gun during part of the attack. According to James Rawn, as several politicians began lobbying for a military medal for Miller Secretary Knox resisted “contending that a letter he wrote to Miller commending the young man for his extraordinary courage was sufficient recognition.” Rawn, *The Double V*, 131. The politicians won out and on May 27, 1942 Miller was presented with the Navy Cross by Admiral Chester W. Nimitz.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 51.

outside the Steward's Branch ... The General Board refused to obey the directive."¹⁵⁷ President Roosevelt, afraid of creating turmoil amongst his senior Navy officers during a time of war, in large part deferred to the Navy's argument that further integration of African American sailors into the Navy would seriously impact "military efficiency and morale."¹⁵⁸ It would take a different administration and a different war to force the military to accept integration.

While the history of race relations during World War II was far from ideal for African American servicemen, this should not detract from the reality that World War II offered far more opportunities to African American soldiers than had been the case in World War I. The story of the Tuskegee Army, the 761st Tank Battalion, and the 92nd ID, and other all black fighting units are testimony to strides made during America's "Good War."¹⁵⁹ And, as would also be seen again during the Korean War, in several instances military necessity offered the opportunity for black soldiers to show their mettle and fight alongside white soldiers.

The Gillem Board

Although a number of senior officers in the armed services were antagonistic towards African

¹⁵⁷ Merishon and Schlossman, *Foxholes and Color Lines*, 49. Further, in a report filed by Captain R. B. Ellis to the Equality Committee that was marked "Secret" – the report noted "how many white men would choose, of their own accord, that their crew should be of another race? How many would accept such conditions, if required to do so, without resentment and just as a matter of course? The General Board believes that the answer is 'few, if any,' and further believes that if the use were force, there would be a lowering of contentment, teamwork, and discipline in the service." Chairman General Board to Secretary of the Navy, "Enlistment of men of colored race to other than Messman branch" dated February 3, 1942, RG220 Box 14, Truman Papers, Harry S. Truman Presidential Library (HSTPL).

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ The African American 761st Tank Battalion fought well and was fortunate to have senior officers who appreciated having them under the command. According to Ulysses Lee, when the 761st Tank Battalion landed on Omaha Beach on October 10, 1944, the division commander, Major General Willard S. Paul told the black troops; "I am damned glad to have you with us. We have been expecting you for a long time, and I am sure you are going to give a good account of yourselves. I've got a big hill up there that I want you to take, and I believe that you are going to do a great job of it." Two days after General Paul's speech the men of the 761st were given a welcoming speech by "Old Blood and Guts" himself, General Patton. Patton in his usual blunt style told the men; "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!" Lee, *The Employment of Negro Troops*, 661.

American servicemen, the military establishment as a whole was mindful of race relations, if for no other reason than to avoid racial incidents that could mar the war effort. During World War II, Assistant Secretary of War John J. McCloy was appointed to head up the “Advisory Committee on Negro Troop Policies” in order to follow up on President Roosevelt’s directives to allow equal treatment of African Americans. McCloy was joined in his effort by some senior military commanders, including General Eisenhower at SHAEF.

In the European Theater one of the issues that caused considerable strife between certain white commanders and black troops was the off-duty activities of black soldiers, particularly if that search for entertainment involved white women. According to Lee Nichols, when Eisenhower heard reports that black soldiers were being barred from certain liberty locations in France because of the fear of black soldiers meeting with white women, he quipped, “If Negroes were good enough to die in uniform they were good enough to be entertained in uniform.” Eisenhower went on to order all his subordinate commanders to not “attempt to curtail such association by official order or restriction.”¹⁶⁰ Some of Eisenhower’s subordinate commanders appeared to take the directive from SHAEF to be in the form of a suggestion as opposed to an order. In an episode related by Nichols in *Breakthrough on the Color Front*, he described the reaction from a white commander when he was inspected by General Lee and General Benjamin Davis as to compliance with General Eisenhower’s order.

General Davis explained what he and General Lee found when they questioned the white commander about reports that the commander was giving passes to town on different days to his white and black soldiers. “I asked if he had read Ike’s directive,” said Davis. The white commander said “oh yes, we understand about those directives.” General Lee asked, “You mean

¹⁶⁰ Nichols, *Breakthrough on the Color Front*, 66-67.

you're not taking the directives seriously?" The commander replied knowingly, "we understand you have to issue those directives." Davis recalled, "We asked him how long it would take him to pack his trunk. He was promptly relived, and so were many others who refused to obey."¹⁶¹

At the end of World War II the military had anticipated that the utilization of African American soldiers would become an issue that the military would have to address. From October 1945 to April 1946, Lieutenant General Alvan C. Gillem was the chair of a board that was descriptively titled "Board for Utilization of Negro Manpower" but was more commonly referred to simply as the "Gillem Board." The Gillem Board started their inquiry with testimony from commanders of the 92nd ID.

One of the first witnesses called by the board was Lieutenant General Willis D. Crittenger the corps commander who oversaw Major General Edward Almond and the 92nd ID. General Crittenger praised Almond's leadership and then began citing all the reasons why the black soldiers of the 92nd ID did not measure up to white troops; they used twice as much ammunition and supplies, they would "melt away" at night, the white officer's duties were twice as demanding because they had to "continually urge Negroes forward," and they would abandon their tank support at night, as they reportedly did during the crossing of the Sengali River in Italy. The board summarized General Crittenger's testimony as: "(The) Negro has no sense of responsibility. No sense of pride in making a good fight," but there was the added caveat that "this pride may be instilled in them by passages of years, and understanding treatment."¹⁶² A couple days later the board heard from Major General Edward Almond.

General Almond did not wait for a call from the Gillem Board to start his own assessment of

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

¹⁶² Summary of Testimony by Lt. Gen Willis D. Crittenger, October 2, 1945, Box 9, Alvan Cullom Gillem, Jr., Papers, MHI.

the 92nd ID in Italy. On his own initiative General Almond prepared a report to document the success and failures of the 92nd ID which he then turned over to General Lucien Truscott.

Almond appeared concerned that the reported failures of the 92nd ID might attach themselves to him and tarnish his record. The first thing Almond did when he met with the Gillem Board was to provide them with a copy of the report he had submitted to General Truscott.

General Almond summarized his findings for the board; “They (African American soldiers) seem concerned with racial aspirations to an extent which impedes their military mission.” He also noted, “They do much good work when not in immediate danger, but freeze up under fire.” Almond also agreed with his boss, General Crittenger, that to get at the heart of the problem of why the black soldier was inferior to the white soldier the board should consider the “pride” of the black race. Almond observed, “There are instances of individual heroism, but there is no evidence of pride in making a good racial showing.”¹⁶³ Almond’s testimony was followed up with several other officers from the 92nd ID, including Colonel William J. McCaffrey who was with Almond again in Korea when Almond commanded the Tenth Corps.

During World War II McCaffrey served as a regimental commanding officer and as Almond’s chief of staff. The bond between Almond and McCaffrey was strong and the two men remained friends the rest of their lives. They appeared to see eye-to-eye on the issue of race. McCaffrey informed the board that “Negro troops are deficient in combat” and appearing to almost follow the “official” line, their deficiency in combat was, “owing to lack of leadership ability and sense of personal pride.” McCaffrey explained, “A Negro soldier does not feel disgraced because he slips away from his unit in combat.”¹⁶⁴ Although there were countless examples within the 92nd ID where the men did not leave their fellow soldiers behind in the face of the enemy, both

¹⁶³ Summary of Testimony by Maj. Gen. Edward Almond, October 8, 1945, Box 9, Gillem Papers, MHI.

¹⁶⁴ Summary of Testimony by Colonel William J. McCaffrey, October 4, 1945, Box 9, Gillem Papers, MHI.

General Almond and Colonel McCaffrey were comfortable in painting all black soldiers with the same racist brush.

Another officer selected to testify before the Gillem Board was Colonel Edward L. Rowny who was in charge of the 41st Engineer Corps attached to the 92nd ID in Italy. Colonel Rowny was not as decisive in his analysis of black troops as was Almond and McCaffrey. He began by asserting that the 41st Engineer Corps “was the best outfit he ever served with,” but then went on to chronicle several problems he observed among his black troops. For instance, he recounted that his black troops “did very poorly on pulling up minefields – some wouldn’t do it at all.” Of course, clearing minefields is one of the most important responsibilities of an engineer unit, but it is also one of the most dangerous assignments for a soldier and one that I suspect was not fondly embraced by white soldiers. The most startling revelation by Colonel Rowny was his assertion that “Negroes will try to kill white officers who are hard on them.”¹⁶⁵ Colonel Rowny did not elaborate on why he stated that black soldiers would try to kill white officers or provide any evidence of such an occurrence within his Engineer Corps.

There was at least one white 92nd ID officer who disagreed with the “official” assessment provided by the leadership to the Gillem Board, but he was not called as a witness. Warman Welliver was with the 92nd ID from October 1943 through July 1945 and ended his military career as a captain. Captain Welliver wrote an article titled “Report on the Negro Soldier” that was published in the April 1946 issue of *Harper’s Magazine*. The article reached the attention of Lieutenant General Alvan Gillem on April 16, 1946 attached to a letter from his friend Willard Simpkins. Simpkins warned his friend that the article “will tell its own story” and that he wrote to Fred Allen, the editor of Harpers, drawing attention to the War Departments release of the

¹⁶⁵ Summary of Testimony by Lt. Col. Edward L. Rowny, October 2, 1945, Box 9, Gillem Papers, MHI.

report titled “Utilization of Negro Manpower in the Post-War Army” – the Gillem Board’s official report, as rebuttal to the article.¹⁶⁶

Captain Welliver first blasted society for the segregation and discrimination that denied African Americans “the opportunity to become fully-developed citizens.” Captain Welliver said that American society predisposed the black man “to acceptance of the white man’s arrogance and unfairness and forgetfulness of his professed ideals.” Adding insult to injury, “the discrimination and segregation to which he has been subjected in civilian life are carried over to military life.” Instead of integrating the black soldier with his white counterparts and treating him as an equal member of society; “He is placed in segregated units, his uniform is often no protection against illegal treatment at the hands of civilians, he is commanded by white officers whose dislike of him and of their job is too often obvious, he sometimes is denied pleasures and privileges enjoyed by white soldiers for the very real reason that serious trouble would develop if he were allowed to enjoy them.” Captain Welliver pointed out to his readers that; “Colored soldiers would be more than human if a lot of them didn’t have serious mental reservations about that setup.”¹⁶⁷

Captain Welliver saved most of his invective for the Army leadership. He argued that the leadership of the 92nd ID and other African American units were not selected for their desire to work with black troops. He continued: “this has resulted in the presence in colored divisions of a certain number of officers, often of high rank, with violent and ungovernable prejudices, whose only concern has been to do a poor enough job to get out,” a thinly veiled reference to General Almond and Colonel McCaffrey. The poor leadership selected for the black units was directly the fault of the War Department according to Captain Welliver: “It often seemed in the 92nd that

¹⁶⁶ Willard Simpkins to Lt. Gen. Alvin C. Gillem, April 16, 1946, Box 9, Gillem Papers, MHI.

¹⁶⁷ Warman Welliver, “Report on the Negro Soldier,” *Harper’s Magazine*, April 1946

the war department had chosen exactly the officers who would guarantee the division had the least possible chance for success.” He also observed that “the division commander (Almond), the assistant division commander (McCaffrey), the artillery commander, and the assistant artillery commander were all Southerners with conventional Southern attitudes.”¹⁶⁸ After reading the article by Captain Welliver, Lieutenant General Gillem was probably relieved he had not called the young officer to testify before the board.

Reviewing the list of witnesses called before the board and reading the notes written in the summaries of testimony one gets the perception that Gillem Board had an agenda going in and they wanted to make sure they stayed true to their mission – defend the military’s use of segregated units. One example of the board’s bias was the biographical write-up for witness, Lieutenant Colonel Charles Dollard. Lt. Col. Dollard appeared at first glance to be highly qualified to be called as a witness for the board. His credentials included assignment to the Information and Education Division, former social scientist with the Carnegie Corporation of New York, and member of the American Council for Race Relations. The summary of this testimony noted that the “witness had had no experience with command of troops.” The conclusion to be inferred was that his opinions were inferior to those of commanders who had led black soldiers. It was clear why the Gillem Board wanted to discredit Lt. Col. Dollard. In his testimony he unequivocally asserted; “Efficiency of the Negro in the Army is dependent on some degree of integration. Complete segregation is destructive of morale, self-confidence, and mutual confidence.”¹⁶⁹ Integration was the last thing the board wanted to recommend.

The Gillem Board concluded their investigation in March, 1946 and released their results in a War Department report titled “Utilization of Negro Manpower in the Postwar Army.” That

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

¹⁶⁹ Summary of Testimony of Lt. Col. Charles Dollard, October 10, 1945, Box 9, Gillem Papers, MHI.

report, as noted in the Introduction, also spurred the War Department to release Circular 124 in April, 1946. The Gillem Board recommendations were not radical in any respect. They almost universally followed the recommendations of previous committees, including those of Secretary McCloy. As Steve C. Davis told Army interviewers forty years after the Gillem Board findings during the preparation of the Center of Military History study *Black Soldier White Army*, the Gillem Board recommended that “more should be done in training and that new slots be identified and individuals would be trained for these functions (especially critical MOS’s) and assigned to posts” but the major catch was that while African American soldiers would be encouraged to work with white units, the African American soldiers would still be organized, trained, and housed by their race. The finding of the Gillem Board essentially “did nothing to further integration at all” but “said a lot about equal opportunity.”¹⁷⁰ Also, although nothing was changed, a topic of discussion during the Gillem Board was the utilization and future of the 24th Infantry Regiment “because of its visibility and size and because it was the last all-black regiment.”¹⁷¹ The Gillem Board recommendations were weak and did not move integration any further but rather pushed the issue of integration and the fate of the 24th Infantry Regiment down the road.

President Truman’s Order 9981

In 1946 Sergeant Isaac Woodard had just been discharged from the Army after serving three years, including 15 months in the South Pacific during the war, when he boarded a bus on his way to North Carolina to see his family. Sergeant Woodard was undoubtedly excited to return home and must have planned on making a good impression on his return home since he was wearing his pressed Army uniform, complete with Good Conduct Medal, World War II Victory

¹⁷⁰ Interview Steve C. Davis, September 2, 1988, Box 4, Oral Interview Notes BSWA, CMH.

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

Medal, and Battle Star. Unfortunately, at a stop in South Carolina the bus driver and Sergeant Woodard engaged in an argument about Woodard using the restroom. At the next stop after the argument, in the little town of Batesburg, South Carolina, the bus driver summoned the police and demanded the arrest of the ex-serviceman. The charge was drunkenness, even though Woodard did not drink. In making the arrest, the lawmen beat the prisoner with a blackjack, and someone, either the sheriff or a policeman, thrust the end of a nightstick into Sergeant Woodard's eyes. Several days after the incident at an Army hospital where Sergeant Woodard was treated for amnesia as a result of the beating, doctors also discovered that his corneas were so badly damaged that he was permanently blind.¹⁷²

Eventually after considerable public outrage, even in some parts of the South, and after the South Carolinian authorities refused to take any action, a federal trial was conducted against the lawman that made the arrest of Woodard. The federal prosecution was feeble and did not make a convincing case even though the evidence was clearly in the prosecution's favor. Hindering the case was that the prosecution only called one witness, the bus driver. The jury believed the officers' story that Woodard was resisting arrest. On hearing the news that the officer was acquitted by a jury, President Truman was taken aback. Truman commented to a World War I friend, "when a mayor and a city Marshal can take a Negro sergeant off a bus in South Carolina, beat him and put out one of his eyes, and nothing is done about it by State authorities, then something is radically wrong with the system."¹⁷³

Partially as a result of the righteous indignation over the treatment of Sergeant Woodard, President Truman signed into law Executive Order 9981 on July 26, 1948. The order that would

¹⁷² Bernard C. Nalty, *Strength for the Fight: A History of Black Americans in the Military* (New York: Free Press, 1986), 204.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, 237.

officially desegregate the armed services stated in part, “It is hereby declared to be the policy of the President that there shall be equality of treatment and opportunity for all persons in the armed services without regard to race, color, religion, or national origin.” Or at least, that is how the official version of the story went regarding why President Truman ordered the desegregation of the armed forces. The truth, as is often the case, is a little more complicated. In 1948, President Truman was running for re-election and in the summer of 1948 it didn’t look at all promising for the former artillery officer/farmer/haberdashery owner/Senator. No, in the summer of 1948 President Truman’s chances for re-election were looking quite slim.

The “political” opportunity posed by drawing away the votes of millions of African Americans did not go unnoticed by the Republican Party. Republican Hamilton Fish of New York – a veteran of the 93rd in World War I – noted that African Americans should have “the same right as any other American to train, to serve, and to fight ... in defense of the United States.”¹⁷⁴ An advisor to President Truman, an African American named Truman Gibson, knew exactly what Congressman Fish’s proclamation meant. “The Republicans clearly intended to make black participation in combat an issue in the coming presidential campaign,” he commented.¹⁷⁵ President Truman was further bolstered in his decision to push through Order 9981 when he received a memo from his Special Counsel, Clark M. Clifford that the South was “safely Democratic” and therefore “safely ignored.”¹⁷⁶ This did not mean that President Truman did not take political risks of his own by getting out in front of the issue and ordering desegregation, quite to the contrary President Truman was taking a huge gamble with the already

¹⁷⁴ Bowers, Hammond, MacGarrigle, *Black Soldier White Army*, 21.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁶ Jack Foner in *Blacks and the Military in American History* also pointed out that Clifford’s memo advised the President to “go as far as he feels he possibly could go recommending measures to protect the rights of minority groups” because the consequences of inaction that “the Negro block which ... Does hold the balance of power, will go Republican.” Foner, *Blacks and the Military in American History*, 180.

fractured support of southern Democrats.

To answer the question, how President Truman, a product of a pro-slavery Missouri family could come to be one of the champions of desegregation in the Twentieth Century requires looking into President Truman's upbringing and past. Harry S. Truman was born in Jackson County, Missouri on May 8, 1884 to a family that had ties to the "bushwhackers" of the Civil War era. The Trumans were a family that had memories of the bitter conflict that swept the country and particularly Jackson County in the early 1860s. According to David McCullough in his biography of the 33rd President of the United States, the young Harry Truman grew up in a community where African American residents resided in a section referred to as "Nigger Neck" and where black children went to separate schools (Young School) and black adults were not allowed in certain stores or the town library.¹⁷⁷ McCullough observed that the young Harry Truman also would have heard words like "nigger" and "coon" by even "so-called polite society."¹⁷⁸ At the same time, Harry Truman grew up right alongside African Americans such as Caroline Simpson who lived in the Truman home with her husband and four children.¹⁷⁹

In Harry Truman's time and culture, it was perfectly normal and acceptable for him to write in a letter to Bess Wallace while courting her that "one man was as good as another ... so long as he's honest and decent and not a nigger or Chinaman," and that his Uncle Will Young's theory was that "the Lord made a white man of dust, a nigger from mud, and threw up what was left and it came down a Chinaman."¹⁸⁰ Despite Harry Truman's racial baggage, he also was a fiery independent man who abhorred what he perceived as injustice. Early in his political career after spending countless days on the byways and back roads of Missouri while campaigning, Harry

¹⁷⁷ David McCullough, *Truman* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1992), 53.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 45.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 86.

Truman went out on a limb by Missouri political standards in an address to a nearly all-white audience in Sedalia, Missouri. Harry Truman told the crowd in his somewhat squeaky voice:

I believe in the brotherhood of man; not merely the brotherhood of white men, but the brotherhood of all men before the law. If any class or race can be permanently set apart from, or pushed down below the rest in political and civil rights, so may any other class or race when it shall incur the displeasure of its more powerful associates, and we may say farewell to the principles on which we count our safety ... Negroes have been preyed upon by all types of exploiters, from the installment salesman of clothing, pianos, and furniture to the vendors of vice. The majority of our Negro people find but cold comfort in shanties and tenements. Surely, as freemen, they are entitled to something better than this.¹⁸¹

As President of the United States, Truman continued to express his desire for more equality for African Americans. In 1946 President Truman used his office to appoint a blue-ribbon commission on civil rights. President Truman selected Charles E. Wilson, then head of General Electric to lead the commission. McCullough observed that “It was an unprecedented step” and some of President Truman’s advisors feared that Truman had imperiled his political future and that “his authorization of inquiry into the explosive issue of civil rights was nothing short of political suicide.”¹⁸² President Truman laid the groundwork for tackling the issue of ending segregation in the armed forces with a special message to Congress on Civil Rights that he sent on February 2, 1948. The special message to Congress was focused on equal rights in general – based on his Civil Rights Commission, but included the caveat according to McCullough that President Truman “asked the Secretary of Defense to look into discrimination in the military

¹⁸¹ Ibid., 247.

¹⁸² Ibid., 570.

service and to see it was stopped as soon as possible.”¹⁸³

With regard to the incident involving Sergeant Woodard, President Truman wrote a friend that “his own forebears were Confederates” and he came from a part of Missouri where “Jim Crowism” still prevailed, “but my very stomach turned over when I learned that Negro soldiers, just back from overseas, were being dumped out of army trucks in Mississippi and beaten. Whatever my inclinations as a native of Missouri might have been, as President I know this is bad. I shall fight to end evils like this.”¹⁸⁴ For better or worse, President Truman decided to throw his political weight behind desegregating the armed forces.

The Fahy Committee and Military Backlash

Realizing that there would be significant push-back to his order desegregating the armed forces, President Truman handpicked a panel of men to head a committee called “President’s Committee on Equality and Opportunity in the Armed Service” also often referred to as the “Fahy Committee” after the chair of the committee. When President Truman named Charles Fahy to run the committee he was selecting a hard-nosed attorney and former Solicitor General under President Roosevelt that was accustomed to pushing his goals. Fahy had argued in front of the Supreme Court no less than 18 times. Fahy was also apparently very persuasive in his arguments since the Supreme Court sustained his arguments 16 times and partially upheld the remaining two times. With his record of winning an argument in the courtroom, as head of the President’s Committee it was then up to Fahy to win the desegregation argument with an openly hostile white military hierarchy.

President Truman’s Executive Order desegregating the military was largely ignored by

¹⁸³ Ibid., 586-587.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., 588.

civilian officials and military officers at all levels. Most of the bureaucrats and military leaders seemed to wonder just how far this “experiment” was going to be allowed to progress.

According to Steve C. Davis who observed the activity at the Pentagon first hand during the late 1940s –early 1950s, the “Fahy Committee report did not order racial integrations” and in fact the “thinking at the Army Staff level was how do we comply with this new situation while at the same time maintaining the status quo racially.”¹⁸⁵ The civilian leaders of the Army were the first to get President Truman’s ear as they pushed back against the order. At the time President Truman signed Order 9981, the man responsible for implementing the order in the Army was Secretary of the Army Kenneth Royall. Secretary Royall was a former Secretary of War before that office was done away with by the military reorganization of 1947.

Always the politician, Secretary Royall opened his memorandum to the President with the soothing words, “At the outset I want to make it clear that in my opinion the policies which should be applied to the use of all Army personnel, regardless of race, are those policies which best promote a sound national defense.” Then Secretary Royall moved to attacking President Truman’s Order by stating that “the Army is not an instrument for social evolution,” and quite frankly, “the history of the two wars has demonstrated that in general Negro troops have been less qualified than white troops for the performance of certain types of military service (such as) service with the infantry or with other units requiring troops to close with the enemy.” Royall pointed out that his assessment of African American troops was “the real opinion of nearly all combat officers.” However, as a sop to the President, Secretary Royall asserted rather condescendingly that black soldiers are “exceptionally and peculiarly qualified” for something

¹⁸⁵ Interview Steve C. Davis, September 2, 1988, Box 4, Oral Interview Notes BSWA, CMH.

along the lines of “motor or ship transport service.”¹⁸⁶

Robert Edgerton in *Hidden Heroism* observed that Kenneth Royall “vigorously reasserted the Army’s cherished belief that blacks had proven to be incompetent combat soldiers in both World Wars” to the point that he refused to push forward integration. Edgerton wrote that President Truman reacted swiftly to his secretary’s obstinacy, and “a few weeks later (Royall) was made to see the need to retire.”¹⁸⁷ Royall was replaced as Secretary of the Army by Gordon Gray.¹⁸⁸ Gray’s success in implementing the integration was a slight improvement. Under Secretary Gray’s tenure, the army replaced the quota system with a system that relied on nonracial physical, mental, and psychological standards. Despite the forced changes, the authors of *Black Soldier White Army* remarked that; “even then, however, Secretary Gray could bring himself to bend only to a degree. The Army would give the new system a fair trial, he told the president, but reserved the right to return to procedures based on race” if the new system turned out to be problematic. President Truman told Secretary Gray reassuringly “I am sure that everything will work out as it should.”¹⁸⁹ Getting Secretary Gray to fall in line with his order to desegregate was one thing, getting the military brass to fall in line was quite another for President Truman.

In a memorandum exchanged between Lt. General Edward Brooks and General J. Lawton Collins, the two men discussed what the elimination of the quota system would mean to the Army. They observed “it is not realistic to assume that there should be no limit whatsoever to the percentage of Negroes in the military establishment during peacetime.” The memorandum

¹⁸⁶ Memorandum from Kenneth Royall, Secretary of the Army to President Truman, March 28, 1949; Official File, Student Research file “Desegregating of the Armed Forces,” Truman Papers, HSTPL.

¹⁸⁷ Edgerton, *Hidden Heroism*, 165.

¹⁸⁸ Although Royall appeared to be hesitant to enact President Truman’s Order 9981, Steve Davis, a black officer that worked in the Pentagon as a liaison for race relations stated that Royall was responsible for establishing the Gillem Board – a board with the goal of deciding how best to use black manpower. From: Interview with Steve C. Davis, September 2, 1988, Box 4, Oral Interview Notes BSWA, CMH.

¹⁸⁹ Bowers, Hammond, MacGarrigle, *Black Soldier White Army*, 38.

also noted that if there was no cap to the percentage of African American servicemen allowed into the Army then there would be increasing pressure to assign African American servicemen based strictly on vacancies anywhere in the Army and that would be nothing less than “complete integration.” The memorandum noted, “It is the opinion of the Army that integration of individual Negroes in white organizations should not and cannot be undertaken at this time.”¹⁹⁰ Following Isaac Newton’s first law of motion, “an object at rest tends to stay at rest” and human nature, President Truman and Secretary Gray’s best efforts did little to overcome the military establishment’s resistance to integrate. The modest progress under Secretary Gray’s leadership was also tempered by the fact that he lasted less than a year as Secretary of the Army before deciding to move into a position as director of the newly formed Psychological Study Group.

Gray was succeeded by Frank Pace as Secretary of the Army. When Pace took office as the new Secretary of the Army in April, 1950, just months prior to the opening wave of attacks by the North Koreans, integration in the Army was moving slowly, if at all. After the conflict broke out on the Korean peninsula, Pace received an inquiry from the White House seeking the status of “integration of all white and non-white troops in the Armed Forces” that was part of order 9981. Pace responded (either through ignorance or sophistry) that, “a careful check of all instructions received to date failed to reveal any such instructions from the President.”

Perceiving the need to offer his advice, “in fact, I would strongly advise against the issuance of any instructions to this effect at the present time.”¹⁹¹ Perhaps, Pace should not be criticized too harshly for not being aware of the President’s order, Army Chief of Staff General J. Lawton Collins also made a comment during this period “that he regarded President Truman’s Order

¹⁹⁰ Memorandum notes between Lt. General Edward H. Brooks and General J. Lawton Collins, March 30, 1949, Box 22, Papers of General J. Lawton Collins, DDEPL.

¹⁹¹ Secretary of the Army Frank Pace to David Niles, Administrative Assistant to President Truman, February 12, 1951; Official File, Student Research file “Desegregation of the Armed Forces,” Truman Papers, HSTPL.

banning segregation in the armed services as a suggestion and not a directive.”¹⁹² As part of the inquiry from the White House, Pace was asked if the Army had finally removed the identity of a soldier’s race on assignment orders. Pace responded that the Army still showed a soldier’s race, “not for purposes of discrimination, but in order to ensure that the Army may equitably and expeditiously assign such individuals” - or in other words, so the Army could continue to segregate and deny “equality of treatment and opportunity.”¹⁹³

Among those who wore the nation’s uniform, from the highest ranking officer to recently commissioned lieutenants, most joined in with criticism for Truman’s plan for desegregation. General Omar Bradley, speaking in front of the Fahy Committee, was the most tactful, but he too advised for a cautious approach to integration. Bradley worried that “if we try to force integration on the Army before the country is ready to accept these customs, we may have difficulty attaining high morale.”¹⁹⁴ Although General Bradley was without question a remarkable soldier and officer, he was out of touch in understanding the status of African American troops in his Army. Bradley could not see the proverbial forest because of the trees, namely, that segregation was hurting the African American soldiers in the military forces - and as a result affecting the fighting capability of the armed services as a whole. Bradley testified “I believe the Negro soldier, in general, considers his lot, from his viewpoint, a good one.”¹⁹⁵ Unfortunately for many in the African American community, General Bradley’s testimony would tarnish the otherwise remarkable opinion they had of him.¹⁹⁶

¹⁹² *New York Times*, June 29, 1951, p. 24.

¹⁹³ Secretary of the Army Frank Pace to David Niles.

¹⁹⁴ Statement by General Omar Bradley before the President’s Committee on Equality of Treatment and Opportunity in the Armed Forces, March 28, 1949; White House Central Files, RG220, Box 6, Truman Papers, HSTPL.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁶ In response to General Bradley’s testimony, an editorial in the *Afro-American* commented that “President Truman, in order to make his executive orders calling for an end to discrimination in the armed services and for fair

Another World War II hero to speak out against Truman's Order was General Mark Clark. As late as 1956, General Clark was still publicly arguing that "my World War II experience persuaded me that Negro units in combat tended to be undependable under fire."¹⁹⁷ One of those "undependable" units underneath General Clark in World War II was a platoon within the 92nd ID that was led by African American Lieutenant Vernon Baker, whose Distinguished Service Cross was upgraded to a Medal of Honor in the 1990s.¹⁹⁸

According to historian Richard H. H. Home, even while some of the higher ranking military officers bowed down to pressure from President Truman and slowly proceeded with integration, "the officers at the mid-and lower-level ranks maintained the status quo."¹⁹⁹ Retired African American Army Lieutenant General Julius W. Becton Jr. recalled his experience as a young officer in 1948 when President Truman issued Executive Order 9981. "I remember the post commander assembled all the officers and he read the order to the assembled group. He then said, 'As long as I am commander here, there will be no change.'"²⁰⁰

By late 1949, several branches of the Armed Forces, especially the Navy and Air Force, were beginning to break down the barriers between white and black personnel. The Fahy Committee

employment practices in the government, will have to either whip his top brass in line or clean them out if the program is to be effective." *Afro-American*, July 31, 1948.

¹⁹⁷ *U.S. News and World Report*, May 11, 1956, p. 54.

¹⁹⁸ Lieutenant Vernon Baker's citation for the Congressional Medal of Honor reads: For extraordinary heroism in action on 5 and 6 April 1945, near Viareggio, Italy. Then Second Lieutenant Baker demonstrated outstanding courage and leadership in destroying enemy installations, personnel, and equipment during his company's attack against a strongly entrenched enemy in mountainous terrain. When his company was stopped by the concentration of fire from several machine gun emplacements, he crawled to one position and destroyed it, killing three Germans. Continuing forward, he attacked an enemy observation post and killed two occupants. With the aid of one of his men, Lieutenant Baker attacked two more machine gun nests, killing or wounding the four enemy soldiers occupying these positions. He then covered the evacuation of the wounded personnel of his company by occupying an exposed position and drawing the enemy's fire. On the following night Lieutenant Baker voluntarily led a battalion advance through enemy mine fields and heavy fire toward the division objective. Second Lieutenant Baker's fighting spirit and daring leadership were an inspiration to his men and exemplify the highest traditions of the Armed Forces.

¹⁹⁹ Richard O. Hope, *Racial Strife in the U.S. Military: Toward the Elimination of Discrimination* (New York: Praeger, 1979), 32.

²⁰⁰ Yvonne Latty, *We Were There: Voices of African American Veterans, from World War II to the War in Iraq* (New York: Harpers Collins, 2004), 77.

in large part was responsible for the progress. The Fahy Committee remained committed to confirming the progress being reported to the committee by the various branches of the armed forces. President Truman, after winning his surprise election in November 1948, also was keen on making sure that his pre-election commitment to desegregating the armed forces was followed out. During a White House meeting on January 12, 1949 with members of the Fahy Committee and the Armed Services, President Truman pressed Secretary of the Air Force Stuart Symington for a report on his branches' progress. Secretary Symington responded to President Truman, "Sir, I just want to report to you that our plan is to completely eliminate segregation in the Air Force. For example, we have a fine group of colored boys. Our plan is to take those boys, break up that fine group, and put them with the other units themselves and go right down the line all through those subdivisions one hundred percent."²⁰¹

Of all the services, the Army was the only service to continue to hesitate to desegregate their personnel. In a column published by the British journal *The Economist*, the British noted, "The Army offered the only serious resistance to reform, partly because it has had segregated units since 1866 and partly because of the large number of officers from the South." *The Economist* commended the Fahy committee, noting that the committee "has pointed out insistently that it is impossible to extend equal opportunity to the skilled Negro, or use his abilities to the full, in a segregated unit."²⁰²

In spring 1949, the Army conducted a survey to assess the opinion of its members concerning integration. For the question are you "definitely opposed to complete integration (living and mess areas)" – 61% of the respondents replied in the affirmative. For the question "not

²⁰¹ White House meeting with "Committee of Equality of Treatment and Opportunity in the Armed Services" members and Secretaries of four military branches, January 12, 1949; OF, Student Research File "Desegregation of the Armed Forces"; Truman Papers, HSTPL.

²⁰² *The Economist* London, May 6, 1950 "American Survey: Negroes in Uniform" RG 220 Box 13, Truman Papers, HSTPL.

definitely opposed to complete integration” – 39% of the respondents replied in the affirmative. The question “partially opposed” received 32% and “partial not definitely opposed” received 68%. Not surprisingly, the study found that “men from the South are most opposed; while those from the Northeast are least opposed.” What the military brass focused on in the study – was the sample of expressed opinions. A twenty year old Private First Class (Pfc) with only a grade school education informed the surveyors, “about Negroes, they are human and can’t be taken off the face of the earth. But they shouldn’t be together with white soldiers because some of them, the bestest (sp) percent, are still like head hunters. They have bad blood, some them are like animals ... they just shouldn’t have them live with white men, for sure all the G.I’s will quit the Army or buck like hell to get out.”²⁰³ Opinions like those of the Pfc were used as part of the delaying tactic by the Army. The Army’s leaders argued that they would like to integrate their services, but the rank and file members of the service will not tolerate integration because of the social values of society at large. Secretary Royall in a memorandum reinforced the argument, noting that “the Army is not an instrument for social evolution. It is not the Army’s job either to favor or to impede social doctrines, no matter how progressive they may be – it is not for us to lead or to lag behind the civilian procession except to the extent that the national defense is affected.”²⁰⁴ Even General Eisenhower, when expressing his opinion regarding the question of integration in 1948, commented that one of the hurdles with desegregation was “that there is race prejudice in this country, and when you put in the same organization and make live together under the most intimate circumstances men of different races, we sometimes have trouble.”²⁰⁵

²⁰³ Survey “Morale Attitudes of Enlisted Men May-June 1949”; OF, Student Research File “Desegregation of the Armed Forces”; Truman Papers, HSTPL.

²⁰⁴ Memo by Secretary of the Army Kenneth C. Royall, March 28, 1949; OF, Student Research File “Desegregation of the Armed Forces”; Truman Papers, HSTPL.

²⁰⁵ From the Statement of General of the Army Dwight D. Eisenhower, New York, N.Y., April 2, 1948, pp. 995 to 998, DDE, Papers as President – Campaign Series, Box 8, DDEPL.

The question of intelligence and education posed another obstacle to integration that the Truman Administration had to overcome. Before being accepted into the Armed Services, a prospective recruit was given a battery of written tests that were called the Army General Classification Tests, or AGCT. Results of the AGCT were grouped into various grades ranging from I for the most intelligent to V for the least intelligent. Under the quota system that was utilized throughout World War II and for several years afterward, the Army only allowed a certain percentage of grade V and grade IV recruits, because the Army felt they lacked the basic intelligence and education to operate as combat soldiers and were only suitable for simple, menial jobs, such as truck driver and cook.

President Truman and the Fahy commission were bombarded with memorandums and reports from the military pointing out that integration and increasing African American troop levels was impossible based on the data of African American results on the AGCT. The reports concluded “considering the number of noncommissioned officers and specialists required in modern armies, it is evident that it is difficult to build efficient Negro units where personnel in the higher intelligence brackets is so limited.”²⁰⁶ According to the data put forward by the Army, World War II figures showed that of all African American soldiers tested (prospective officers and enlisted) only 16.6% scored in Grade III or better - and that included those prospective candidates that were looking at the Navy or Air Service.²⁰⁷

1948 Army results of African Americans taking AGCT:

Above 90 (GCT III or better) - 68,475

Between 70 and 90 (GCT IV) - 129,947

²⁰⁶ Memorandum for the Assistant Secretary of War titled “Utilization of Grade V Negro Personnel,” February 17, 1943; Official File, Student Research file “Desegregation of the Armed Forces”; Truman Papers, HSTPL.

²⁰⁷ Memorandum from David Niles to President Truman, February 7, 1950; Official File, Student Research file “Desegregation of the Armed Forces”; Truman Papers, HSTPL.

Thus, the Army concluded that in order to meet the demands of the Truman Administration and make the troop levels of African Americans fall in line with their percentage of the population as a whole (roughly 10% in 1948) - the Army would need approximately 138,600 new troops from both enlistment and selective service. And deducting the African Americans that go into the Navy or Air Force, the Army argued that they would have to rely on massive numbers of Grade IV and Grade V men.²⁰⁸

Part of the question the Truman Administration had to deal with was to what extent was the military complaint regarding African American enlistee education and intelligence accurate and to what extent did that hamper the efficiency of military units. Discerning between an individual's inherent intelligence and education are two different things. Clearly, an individual could have little to no prior education, but is still quite capable of learning. As Robert Edgerton noted in *Hidden Heroism*, "even at the time ... it was obvious that this IQ test was measuring education far more than generic intelligence."²⁰⁹ Edgerton cited several examples of questions in the Army AGCT that showed a distinct bias towards a more "white" oriented education, such as, "whether Scrooge appeared in *Vanity Fair*, *A Christmas Carole*, *Romola*, or *Henry IV*?" When African American proponents of integration pointed out that Northern educated blacks often outscored most Southern educated whites, Southern politicians became enraged.²¹⁰

Although it presented a problem to the goals of the Fahy Committee in moving integration forward, even they had to acknowledge as General Eisenhower had in 1948 that "in general, the Negro is less well educated than his brother citizen that is white." And the consequences for

²⁰⁸ Memorandum from E.W. Kentworthy to Fahy Committee, June 27, 1949; White House Central Files, RG220, Box 8; Truman Papers, HSTPL.

²⁰⁹ Edgerton, *Hidden Heroism*, 72.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 73.

having major discrepancies between the educational level of white and black soldiers was also summarized by General Eisenhower, “in every company the Negro is going to be relegated to the minor jobs, and he is never going to get his promotion to such grades as technical sergeant, master sergeant, and so on, because the competition is too tough.”²¹¹ Fortunately, the Fahy Committee had a solution for this potential roadblock to integration. If the education level of African American personnel were not what they needed to be – then the Army would just have to see to it that their personnel received the education they needed to be effective.

Ultimately, and reluctantly, the Army embarked on an organizational-wide educational program to help the African Americans within their midst to get up to par with most of the other white soldiers. In Los Angeles, Colonel Henry C. Newton who was in charge of one of the Army education centers for these black troops commented that they have “a remarkable talent for grasping knowledge and have shown a high potential for becoming military leaders.”²¹² With the intelligence and education argument removed, the chief resistance to integration and “equality of treatment and opportunity” for African American soldiers would come from the entrenched “old school” white officer corps determined to use their power to continue to denigrate the combat performance of black soldiers in the Korean War. Their hostility might have been manifested in more subtly ways, but it continued to be pervasive.

²¹¹ From the Statement of General of the Army Dwight D. Eisenhower, New York, N.Y., April 2, 1948, pp. 995 to 998, DDE, Papers as President – Campaign Series, Box 8; DDEPL.

²¹² *New York Times*, February 23, 1950, p. 9.

CHAPTER II

White Officers, Black Officers and Black Soldiers: Examples of Leadership in the 24th Infantry Regiment

While the Truman Administration wrestled with the problem of getting the Army to accept desegregation, several thousand miles away on the Korean peninsula the seeds for war were sprouting in the fertile rice paddies of Korea below the 38th parallel. In 1945, Brigadier General George Lincoln had recommended the 38th parallel as the dividing line for North and South Korea because it appeared to be the approximate mid-point on the peninsula. Historian William Stueck later observed: “The thirty-eight parallel was a line in a map, nothing more. It followed no political boundaries or physical features within Korea.”²¹³ The selection of this seemingly innocuous geographical way-point only exacerbated growing tension in Korea between several factions; those who had worked with the Japanese occupying force during World War II and those who had worked against it, those who were aligned with the growing communist ideology flowing out of China (and in some cases had fought in the Chinese Civil War) and those who looked toward the capitalist oriented west; and those who looked for a new Korea to reclaim its identity as an independent Asian empire and those who wished to align Korea with the European powers and the United States. The selection of a random geographical dividing line coupled with the political machinations of foreign states was the starting point for what would become essentially a Korean Civil War.

Most Americans think the Korean War commenced with the invasion by North Korea into South Korea in June, 1950. As Allen Millet chronicled in his *The War for Korea, 1945-1950*, in reality the Korean War (the Korean Civil War) began on April 3, 1948, on the island of Cheju-do

²¹³ William Stueck, *Rethinking The Korean War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 11.

with the “orchestrated attacks by Communist-led partisans against the civil government, the rightist youth associations, and the island’s detachment of the Korean National Police.”²¹⁴ In the two years following the attack on Cheju-do in 1948 and prior to the invasion of South Korea on June 25, 1950, both sides violently lashed out at their opponents. The estimates of Korean dead ranged between 30,000 and 100,000.²¹⁵

As is often the case in any civil war the animosity between the two sides was amplified by the bitterness and cruelty that a war amongst countrymen can foment; brother against brother, father against son, and villager against fellow villager. In *The Korean War: A History*, Bruce Cummings declared that the Korean War was a “dirty” war with “a sordid history of civilian slaughters;” and “here was the Vietnam War we came to know before Vietnam – gooks, napalm, rapes, whores, an unreliable ally, a cunning enemy, fundamentally untrained GIS’s fighting a war their top generals barely understood, fragging of officers.”²¹⁶ Cummings could have added racial strife to his litany of “sordid history;” a racial strife that pitted the mostly white “West” with the oriental “East;” creating condescension towards the Asian population by the white senior officers in Korea that almost became their undoing on several occasions. One example was when General Almond famously quipped to Marine General Oliver P. Smith on the shores of the Chosin Reservoir, “Don’t let a bunch of Goddamn Chinese laundrymen stop you.”²¹⁷

From Civil War to Race War

As American soldiers, both white and black, entered Korea the conflict turned from a civil war to a struggle with global ramifications. Underneath the surface of this civil turned global

²¹⁴ Allen Millet, *The War for Korea, 1945-1950: A House Burning* (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 2006), 142.

²¹⁵ Ibid.

²¹⁶ Bruce Cummings, *The Korean War: A History* (New York: Modern Library Press, 2010), xviii and 5.

²¹⁷ Patrick O’Donnell, *Give Me Tomorrow: The Korean War’s Greatest Untold Story – the Epic Stand of the Marines of George Company* (New York: Da Capo Press, 2010), 135.

war was a second battle; a racial conflict that pitted black soldiers against the white Army leadership. Mershon and Schlossman noted in their monograph that despite the efforts of the Truman Administration and Fahy Committee, when the United States Army entered the Korean peninsula “the Army possessed almost exactly the same racially segregated organizational structure that had existed in World War II.”²¹⁸ African American soldiers were committed to battle alongside others of their race while being led predominantly by white officers.

Instead of viewing the Korean War as an opportunity to breakdown the use of segregated units, the military brass saw the war as yet another card to play in delaying integration of military personnel. Secretary of the Army Frank Pace summed up the position of civilian and military leaders in a memorandum to President Truman’s Administrative Assistant, David Niles, almost a half-year into the war: “The Army is engaged in very severe fighting in Korea under difficult conditions at best. No change in the Army’s basic policies should be made at this time which might have an adverse effect on the fighting efficiency of our troops.”²¹⁹ For the U.S. Army forces engaged in combat in Korea, the unspoken hurdle to any form of integration was the racial biases of members of the officer corps, from “butter bar” lieutenants fresh out of officer training to the Tenth Corps Army Commander, General Edward Almond.

This chapter explores the racial views of both white and black soldiers and officers during the Korean War. We are also going to discuss and analyze several administrative actions by the Army that were critical to the dynamics of race relations within segregated units such as the 24th Infantry Regiment. For instance, was it true that the Army had an unwritten policy of sending white officers with ties to the southern states to act as commanders of segregated black units?

²¹⁸ Mershon and Schlossman, *Foxholes and Color Lines*, 218.

²¹⁹ Secretary of the Army Frank Pace to David K. Niles, Administrative Assistant to President Truman, February 21, 1951; OF, Student Research File “Desegregation of the Armed Forces”; Truman Papers, HSTPL.

How did white officers view an assignment to lead soldiers in a segregated unit? And how were black officers and soldiers assigned to units? Where most studies of the black soldiers in segregated units focus on the negative effects of racism on the soldiers themselves, portraying the black soldiers as merely victims, this chapter looks at the ways that black soldiers resisted racism and dealt with officers with racial bias. Finally, we are going to use examples from the 24th Infantry Regiment that demonstrated several important tenets of military leadership and ways that officers, both white and black, either lived up to or failed to live up these goals.

This chapter pays particular attention to the dynamics of the officer corps, for this is essential to an understanding of how the 24th Infantry Regiment performed as a combat unit. In the introduction to *Social Research and the Desegregation of the U.S. Army: Two Original 1951 Field Reports*, the authors noted:

it might be expected that the performance of Negro troops would be profoundly influenced by the conditions under which they are used ... accordingly, this study is concerned with the views of senior officers, expressed in reports and interviews, not only because they represent military judgments on the subject of Negro manpower, but because they reveal the assumptions and premises which underlie the official handling of Negro personnel and which shape official policy.²²⁰

Leadership matters to a military organization and often success or failure can be traced to the quality of officers in a given unit. The surveys conducted by researchers in 1951 revealed that in Korea the “assumptions” and “premises” under which some white officers handled African American soldiers were little different from the viewpoints of their predecessors in World War I and World War II. Many of the Korean War officers held similar viewpoints as World War II white officer, Captain John Runyon, the CO of company C – the same company that contained African American Second Lieutenant Vernon Baker. Captain Runyon wrote at the end of the

²²⁰ Leo Bogart, *Social Research and the Desegregation of the U.S. Army: Two Original 1951 Field Reports* (Chicago: Markham Publishing, 1969), 53.

war that it was a “foolish officer who leads colored soldiers because invariably he loses half of his men.”²²¹ At the end of World War II, Captain Runyon joined a large segment of the white officer corps who had no desire to ever lead black troops in combat.

Floyd A. Johnson, a veteran of the 24th Infantry Regiment in Korea, recalled his awakening to racial biases in the Army while still at basic training at Fort Riley when his first sergeant pointedly told him “I don’t want any niggers here.” Johnson said that once over in Korea, he observed firsthand other comments and actions by white officers with racial biases. One day while rethreading a cable which had broken on his bulldozer a white captain came up to him and said “you think you have problems, I have to command a bunch of niggers.” Johnson, interviewed forty years later still wondered “how anyone could perform in that kind of situation.”²²² Johnson’s observations were shared by British war correspondent Reginald Thompson who could not avoid noticing and be appalled by the “ubiquitous, casual racism of Americans, from general to soldier.”²²³

The 1951 team of scientists that deployed to Korea was sent to conduct in-depth analysis of the results of desegregation in the military, how fully it was instituted, and where it was successful. The code name given for the classified research operation was *Project Clear*. During the research phase, the scientists interviewed hundreds of soldiers, both white and black, and both enlisted and officer. However, it was the interviews of white officers that most clearly indicated the level of inherent racial bias still present during the Korean War.

The results of those interviews speak volumes to the attitudes of the white officer corps in the Army in the early 1950s and the lengths the Army would need to go if the institution was serious

²²¹ Converse, *The Exclusion of Black Soldiers from the Medal of Honor in World War II*, 117.

²²² Interview with Floyd A. Johnson, February 28, 1990, Box 5, Oral interview Notes BSWA, CMH.

²²³ Cummings, *The Korean War*, 80.

about creating an integrated Army with true “equality of opportunity” for all soldiers. One of the more tame complaints documented by *Project Clear* came from a white Major. The Major said that the officer casualty rates for units with a large contingent of African Americans was very high because “the officer is forced to expose himself unnecessarily in order to try and direct his men, control their erratic fire, and do the duties that are normally taken care of by an NCO.”²²⁴ The unidentified white Major appeared to be repeating the observation of Captain Runyon in World War II that a white officer leading black soldiers was a “foolish officer.”

Another individual identified as a “General Officer” repeated the traditional view of African American troops that “their effectiveness is less in combat” and “they should be in service units” until they prove themselves there - and only then be “reassigned to an infantry unit.”²²⁵ Perhaps the most offensive interview documented by *Project Clear* came from an officer who attempted to interject his own racial humor in describing the black soldiers under his command. Here was how that interview went:

Interviewer: How’s the morale in your squad?

General Officer: Morale’s fine. We’ve got two niggers in our squad and they keep us laughing all the time.

Interviewer: What do you mean?

General Officer: Oh, one day we were laying a mine field and suddenly we were fired upon, and we piled into the jeep. But that colored boy wouldn’t get into the jeep. He just ran on ahead of us down the road, then he sat down and took off his shoes, and said “I can’t go on because my feet are tired.” Well if I assign a squad to do a job I want to be able to count on the whole squad to do that job, whether it’s laying a mine field or jumping into a jeep and taking off. A Negro in that squad will lower efficiency.²²⁶

Although these white officers comprised only one part of the total command hierarchy, their

²²⁴ Bogart, *Social Research and the Desegregation of the U.S. Army*, 54.

²²⁵ *Ibid.*, 60.

²²⁶ *Ibid.*, 61.

biases most certainly influenced how African American soldiers were treated in their command. The officers that African American soldiers interacted with on a daily basis represented to the men the “face” of the Army. These soldiers were dependent on their officers to lead them into combat and all the uncertainties that come into play with battle; and more often than not, the black soldiers were left feeling less than certain that their officers and the Army at large had their best interest in mind.

J.P. Easterling, a radio operator in the 24th Infantry Regiment, upon landing in Korea from the unit’s pre-war encampment on Japan recalled his introduction by a white senior officer who made it clear to him that “blacks were inferior on the battlefield.” The senior officer informed Easterling and the other African American soldiers with him in the 24th, “I’m going to make you guys the fightin’ deuce four instead of the frightened two four.” To further “pep-up” the men, the officer then “told the men that he didn’t remember their outfit accomplishing too much in World War II.”²²⁷ It is hard to imagine that the white officer’s words instilled in Easterling and his fellow black soldiers anything other than loathing for their leader.

The logical question to ask when confronted by case after case of racial bias among white officers assigned to lead black soldiers is how were officers assigned to segregated black units in Korea? Was there a policy in place that purposefully or inadvertently placed these racist officers into black units? Although there were no written instructions per se, from the anecdotal evidence available it would appear that officers for the 24th Infantry Regiment were selected in much the same manner as in previous wars – on their native “understanding” of African Americans as determined by what section of the United States they came from.

²²⁷ *Army Times*, August 21, 1989, Box 1, Oral Interview Notes BSWA, CMH.

Assignment of White Officers to Black units – Southern Men Preferred

When the Army's Center of Military History conducted their research on the 24th Infantry Regiment, one of the first things they discovered was the prevalence of white southerners, from junior to senior officers, in positions of leadership. It was noted that "a number of northerners were present, but many of the regiment's officers appear to have been from the South." Not surprisingly, studies conducted by the Army in the interwar years had demonstrated that African American soldiers actually preferred to be led by other African American officers or short of that, white northern officers. But those studies had apparently been ignored by the senior officers in the Army, and as a result, Steve Davis observed: "Army personnel officers still continued to believe that African Americans performed best under white southerners." So if enough officers were present in the pool to select from when a replacement was needed for the 24th "the southerners tended to be the first chosen."²²⁸ Steve Davis stated that at the Pentagon level it was put in writing, "white southerners as better disposed to command black troops." From Davis' observations first hand at the Pentagon and in the field, "this was the preponderance of thinking on the subject of both junior and senior officers."²²⁹

In many ways, the policy of assigning white southerners to black soldiers can be traced to the history of the 93rd Infantry Division in World War I and the 92nd Infantry Division in World War II. Dale Wilson observed in his scathing article, "Recipe for Failure: Major General Edward M. Almond and Preparation of the U.S. 92nd Infantry Division for Combat in World War II," in *The Journal of Military History* that the 92nd ID had a "Mississippian as division commander, South Carolinian as artillery commander – and assistant division commander Virginian (Edward)

²²⁸ Bowers, Hammond, MacGarrigle, *Black Soldier white Army*, 57-58.

²²⁹ Interview with Steve C. Davis, September 2, 1988, Box 4, Oral Interview Notes BSWA, CMH.

Almond.”²³⁰ In his interview in 1974, General Almond was asked if he was selected for the leadership position of the 92nd ID because he was from the south. Almond stated that it was true that he was selected because he “had an understanding of southern customs and Negro capabilities.”²³¹ General William P. Ennis Jr. commented that besides being southern men, the leaders of the 92nd ID also shared a common bond by being graduates of the Virginia Military Institute. General Ennis stated; “I think the only reason the VMI got picked for this job is that, in theory, they knew more about handling Negroes than anybody else, though I can’t imagine why, because (Almond) just despised the ground they walked on.”²³² Although Almond was not sympathetic to African Americans, this should not suggest that all southern officers were bad officers or racist.

Occasionally a white southern officer would be chosen because he was from the south and the officer would perform exceptionally well and receive the respect of the African American soldiers that he led. This was the case with Colonel Buckner M. Creel – a respected officer with a decorated war record. Besides being from the South, Colonel Creel came from a long line of respected military men. Colonel Creel’s father had commanded black soldiers in the 9th and 10th Cavalry, his grand-father was a major general in World War I, and great-great grandfather had fought in the Civil War. Colonel Creel could also trace ancestors to the War of 1812 and one that fought for General Washington in the Revolutionary War. Yet, when Colonel Creel was asked why he was chosen as a replacement officer in the 24th Infantry Regiment during the

²³⁰ Dale E. Wilson, “Recipe for Failure: Major General Edward M. Almond and Preparation of the U.S. 92nd Infantry Division for Combat in World War II,” *The Journal of Military History*, Vol. 56, No. 3 July 1992. P. 475.

²³¹ General Almond’s full quote was: “I think that General Marshall felt that General Hall, who was in command of the 92rd Division when I was assistant Division Commander and was from Mississippi, understood the characteristic of the Negro and his habits and inclinations. The artilleryman at that time was General William Spence from North Carolina as I recall, who also had that understanding and I being from Virginia had an understanding of southern customs and Negro capabilities; the attitudes of Negroes in relationship thereto. I think that my selection for the 93rd and 92nd Division was of the same character.” Interview of General Edward M. Almond by Captain Thomas G. Fergusson, Box 1, Almond Papers, MHI.

²³² Wilson, “Recipe for Failure,” 476.

Korean War he replied:

I was told that there was an urgent need for combat experienced infantry company commanders in that regiment. I fit the bill; they also noted that I was born in the South. I was told that meant that I probably could better handle black troops than officers hailing from other areas of the USA.” Colonel Creel noted, “It seemed to mean nothing that my father was an RA officer and I that I was an Army brat.”²³³

The Army preferred personnel issues to be clear and concise and once the decision was made that white officers assigned to black units should be from the south the bureaucracy of the Army attempted to make that the reality.

What seems obvious for anyone in the 21st Century is that white officers who grew up in the south with the culture of segregation and second-class status for African Americans would most likely bring their cultural baggage with them when they led black troops, was not apparent to the Army during the Korean War. The fact, as Neil Sheehan noted in the *A Bright Shining Lie*, was that “the Southerners who had dominated the Army officer corps since their return during the Spanish American War had been denigrating black combat units for a half century” and were more often than not the cause of racism in the military.²³⁴ Just as problematic as any pre-conceived notions that white southern officers might have held regarding their black soldiers was what white officers thought leading black soldiers would do to their careers in the military. White officers, not just those from the south, viewed leading black soldiers as punishment.

Assignment of White Officer to Black units – Punishment?

One 24th Infantry Regiment veteran Al Brooks believed that the 24th was a “penal regiment for white officers who had screwed up. This was their last chance.” Brooks said that he had been asked by other white officers why he was in the 24th; the implication, what had he done to

²³³ Interview with Colonel Buckner M. Creel, December 3, 1993, Box 3, Oral Interview Notes BSWA, CMH.

²³⁴ *Army Times*, August 24, 1989, Box 1, Oral Interview Notes BSWA, CMH.

deserve that punishment? Brooks said that in his opinion some of the white officers in the 24th were not very good; “we had guys there in (the regiment) who were bad news” and the “bad guys of the regiment were all white.”²³⁵ Tom Bowers also remembered the reaction he received from his fellow white officers when he found out that he had been assigned to the all-black 159th Field Artillery. Bowers said before he went to his new unit he talked with some other newly arrived white officers “who laughed when they heard of his assignment.” Bowers said that “the majority didn’t think highly of black units and had pity on him for his assignment.” Bowers was from Massachusetts and had limited exposure to African Americans prior to his assignment to the 159th, a variation from the norm, but also a blessing since he went into the assignment with an open mind and was able to gain the respect of his men.²³⁶

The identification of assignment to a black unit as punishment, or at the very least, not a career enhancing assignment can be traced back to the inter-war years. In 1926 one of the white officers selected for command in the 24th Infantry Regiment was a young Army officer named Dwight D. Eisenhower. Eisenhower biographer Jean Smith observed that in 1926 “assignment to the 24th Infantry – the old Deuce Four – was scarcely a career-enhancing move” and “few of whom relished their posting.”²³⁷ Unlike most officers assigned to the 24th Infantry Regiment, Eisenhower was able to escape the placement because of friends in high places. In this particular instance it was his friendship with General Fox Connor. On December 15, 1926, less than five months from his original posting to Fort Benning and the all-black 24th Infantry Regiment

²³⁵ Interview with Al Brooks, August 6, 1988, Box 3, Oral Interview Notes BSWA, CMH.

²³⁶ Interview with Tom Bowers, April 14, 1995, Box 7, Oral Interview Notes BSWA, CMH. Bowers recalling his experience with the 159th forty some years later did note one of the observations he made about his time with the 159th’s officers. Bowers said the officers of the 159th could be divided almost equally into four groups:

(1)Blacks from the south were very subservient to whites.

(2)Blacks from the north were not subservient at all.

(3)Whites from the north believed in equality of all men.

(4)Whites from the south believed that blacks were inferior and not at all equal to whites.

²³⁷ Jean Edward Smith, *Eisenhower: In War and Peace* (New York: Random House, 2012), 89 (note: page numbers taken from Apple I-books and may not exactly correlate to the hard copy of the book).

Eisenhower received orders assigning him to the American Battle Monuments Commission under the direction of General of the Armies John J. Pershing – from his biographer’s viewpoint a significant step up from his previous assignment. Smith remarked; “... to assign the honor graduate of the Command and General Staff School as executive officer of a unit of support troops at Fort Benning made no sense whatever. If not punitive, it was certainly myopic.”²³⁸

Eisenhower wasn’t the only white officer to believe that assignment to an African American unit was viewed by [big-Army] as a punishment. E. T. Hall, a white officer who served with black units observed that: “... although some white officers who had charge of black units were conscientious and treated black soldiers and sailors with respect, many harbored deep racial prejudices. These officers did not want to be where they were, and they regarded assignment to a black (unit) as a career setback.” Hall stated the common belief among white officers was that “such a post in a black unit was widely regarded as an indication that a white officer lacked the competence to command whites.” The resulting resentment “affected officers’ conduct” and that poor unit performance could be traced to “the fact that, almost without exception, white officers did not desire to serve with Negro troops.” In Hall’s experience, “officers transferred to our unit who expressed a definite prejudice against Negroes were never good officers.”²³⁹ Some of these officers with a definite prejudice also did not disguise their racial views.

24th Infantry Regiment veteran Jesse James recalled that at Sasebo, Japan, they had a Lieutenant named Goodwin who transferred to their unit from the 7th Infantry Regiment. James said everyone in his unit knew early on that Lt. Goodwin didn’t want to be there. Goodwin made

²³⁸ Ibid., 90. According to Smith, Eisenhower was assigned to the 24th Infantry Regiment by the chief of infantry under the pretense that Eisenhower “needed more troop duty.” However, Smith observed, “In retrospect, it is evident that the office of the chief of infantry resented Eisenhower’s end run around it to attend the CGSS (Command and General Staff School),” and that played into the Eisenhower’s posting to the 24th. Ibid.

²³⁹ E.T. Hall Jr., “Race Prejudice and Negro-White Relations in the Army,” *American Journal of Sociology* Vol. 52, No. 5, March 1947, P. 408-409.

racist remarks such as “you boys” and “damn niggers; I don’t want to be around them.”²⁴⁰ Not surprisingly, Lt. Goodwin was not well received by his troops and was subsequently shipped off to another unit.

The problem of racist and poor officers was not just an issue with the junior officers; other African American veterans of the 24th noted that senior officers came to the regiment after having been passed up for other prime assignments. Lt. Bussey recalled that “we had drunks. We had whore hoppers. We had the poorest quality of field grade officer that could be found.”²⁴¹ Some of these officers referenced by Lt. Bussey will be discussed further in Chapter IV.

Sometimes, finding a commanding officer for the 24th could prove troublesome. Early in the Korean War, the 24th Infantry Regiment had received such a bad reputation for failure and racial strife that when Commander of the Eighth Army, Lt. Gen. Walton Walker sought a replacement Colonel for the unit, one prospective colonel commented about the meeting with General Walker; “he wanted me to take over the all black 24th regiment. Nobody, including me, wanted command of the 24th!”²⁴²

In his volume of the OCMH history of the Korean War, *Disaster in Korea: The Chinese Confront*, Roy Appleman was one of the few historians to take the opposite view of the white officers assigned to the 24th Infantry Regiment. Appleman claimed that for the 24th Infantry Regiment’s, “officers ... were white and were handpicked from among the top performers in the U.S. Army.”²⁴³ Appleman based this claim on an interview he had with Colonel John Corley, the commanding officer of the 24th Infantry Regiment in Korea during 1950-1951, but did not

²⁴⁰ Interview of Jesse James, January 6, 1990, Box 5, Oral Interview Notes BSWA, CMH.

²⁴¹ *Army Times*, August 21, 1989, Box 1, Oral Interview Notes BSWA, CMH.

²⁴² Bowers, Hammond, MacGarrigle, *Black Soldier White Army*, 123.

²⁴³ Appleman, *Disaster in Korea*, 51.

further elaborate.²⁴⁴ Appleman may have been right that the officers for the 24th Infantry Regiment were “handpicked” but as we will see they were with only a few exceptions “top performers” in the Army.

Another possible interpretation for Appleman’s view that the officers for the 24th Infantry Regiment were “handpicked” would be that some of the officers who either requested or were selected for assignment with the 24th were motivated by ambition. It would appear that General Almond’s selection to lead the 92nd Infantry Division in World War II was partly motivated by his motivation to make a name for himself and to get experience as a Division commander. This leads us to the next question; is it possible for an officer to be too ambitious in war?

Dealing with Ambitious White Officers

To address adequately the question one needs first to define ‘ambition’ within the context of an Army officer’s career. Ambition in this context does not necessarily refer to zealously executing the orders of one’s superior officer or the exhibition of personal bravery. Career ambition by officers in this context can refer to an officer seeking to achieve a certain battlefield reputation which will enhance his chances for further promotion. The profession of arms is one of the unusual careers whereby the risking of life (occasionally one’s own, but for an officer, more often others’) is sometimes the key to further success and promotion. This could occasionally cause problems for a military organization. Max Hastings noted in *The Korean War* that “senior commanders in Korea also faced serious difficulty in checking the ambitions of professional soldiers who came to the country bent upon achieving a battlefield reputation.” According to Hastings, “there were not a few American major generals who arrived to take over divisions for a tour in the line and had to be decisively checked in their determination to mount

²⁴⁴ Colonel Corley will be discussed further in Chapter IV – he was one of the exceptions in command leadership for the 24th Infantry Regiment and was considered by most in the unit, white and black, as a great leader.

an attack in order to further their own reputations.”²⁴⁵ While Hastings was more focused on the senior officers, the junior officer ranks could be just as cut-throat for officers to make a name for themselves.

Many of the junior officers sent to Korea were part of the Army reserve and were vying for a position as a regular Army officer, especially the white junior officers assigned to the 24th Infantry Regiment. The Army during the Korean War decided that to select only the best officers for full-time active duty status they needed a process to “weed out” the less desirable officers. As part of the weeding out process the Army created what was referred to as the “Competitive Tour Program.” Through this program officers would be rotated into combat positions for a set period of time so they could be evaluated regarding their battlefield leadership.²⁴⁶ This created in many instances a sense of urgency by the junior officers to “prove” their leadership ability so that they can move along in the process for a full-time active duty officer billet. For the soldiers of the 24th Infantry Regiment, the ambition of these white officers was seen as especially problematic since the black soldiers were already wary of any racial motives influencing a white officer’s orders.

²⁴⁵ Hastings, *The Korean War*, 277.

²⁴⁶ Bowers, Hammond, MacGarrigle, *Black Soldier White Army*, 47-48. For further information on the Competitive Tour Program see, Col. Henry C. Newton, “The Officer Problem,” *Infantry Journal*, (December 1948), and “General Staff: Personnel & Administration, Competitive Tour,” *Infantry Journal* (June 1948). In *Black Soldier White Army*, on pages 71-72, the CMH authors noted that because of the Competitive Tour Program the 24th Infantry Regiment witnessed “a number of shifts” among the unit’s lieutenants. The assessment made by the CMH authors was that “in combination with the persistent turmoil fostered by the Army’s Competitive Tour program and the desire to maintain racial segregation among company officers, the abrupt imposition of so many unfamiliar officers and the adaptations soldiers had to make to the standards and styles of the new commander intensified problems of leadership and discipline already present within the regiment” (reference P. 75). As anecdotal evidence, the CMH authors referred to the example set by white Captain William A. Hash who was not a participant in the Competitive Tour Program. “As a result, he not only remained with the company for a year before the war but also took it to Korea ... (and he) used the time to earn the respect of his troops.” Hash’s company was cited by the CMH authors as “one of the most stable in the unit” as a result of Hash’s leadership. Several 24th Infantry Regiment veterans commented on the Competitive Tour Program, to include: Gorham L. Black, Don Eunice, Joseph Hilyer, Jasper Johnson, and John Zanin.

White Officers: Fear of Failure

Although many of the white officers in the 24th Infantry Regiment wanted to create a reputation for themselves on the battlefield, they also desired to avoid receiving the blame for any failures within the unit that could mar their careers. Military failure of a unit could be devastating to the career of a military officer, as was demonstrated in the case of Colonel Paul L. Freeman during the initial phase of the Korean War. His actions on the night of November 30, 1950 led to a long and bitter battle between him and other military leaders about his reputation as a leader.

On that fateful night a Chinese Offensive swept down the west side of the Korean peninsula and caught the Army completely off-guard. The ensuing panic as units attempted to retreat from the onslaught created several choke points along roads the Army was using to move men and material south. The 2nd Infantry Division was ordered by General Keiser to move down the Sunchon road and Colonel Freeman's 23rd Infantry Regiment was to be the rearguard for the movement. Although the issue is clouded by different recollections of those involved, the best evidence indicated that Colonel Freeman was provided some leeway as to how he carried out the withdrawal of his troops. Fearing the total destruction of the 23rd Infantry Regiment by the Chinese, Colonel Freeman led his men down an alternate road from the 2nd Infantry Division – thus exposing the 2nd ID to near annihilation by the enemy. Appleman observed in *Disaster in Korea*, that as a result of the separation of the 23rd Infantry Regiment from the 2nd Infantry Division, there was considerable “condemnation of Colonel Freeman for not following the 2nd Division down the Sunchon road as its rear guard.” Colonel Freeman became almost overnight a pariah among the officer corps in the Eight Army and the negative opinion of him as an officer

“was very strong and quite widespread in the 2nd Infantry Division and in Eighth Army.”²⁴⁷

Despite Colonel Freeman’s attempt to rehabilitate his reputation – the actions of November 30, 1950 would follow him throughout his career.²⁴⁸ Ultimately the blame for the destruction of the 2nd Infantry Division was assigned to General Keiser and he was relieved of command.

In the case of an officer leading African American troops, military failure could be blamed on the racial composition of one’s soldier. Perhaps if Colonel Freeman’s 23rd Infantry Regiment had been composed of black troops he might have been able to avert some of the criticism as was the case with General Almond in Italy during World War II. General Almond explained during his interview in 1974 that after the 92nd ID operation at Cinquale Canal the “failure” of the operation was reported all the way up the chain-of-command to General Marshall. According to Almond, because of the “failure” of the black troops at Cinquale Canal (note: not the failure of the division’s leaders) General Marshall decided to reorganize the 92nd ID by introducing an attachment of the famous Japanese-American 442nd Infantry Regiment to the 92nd ID. Almond reconstructed how the conversation went with General Marshall:

When General Marshall arrived at my command post, he looked at me with an eagle eye and said, “You have had a heck of a time in the last two weeks, haven’t you?” I said, “Yes, General, you can rely on that.” He then said, “If you had some re-organization in this division, would it help you if I sent the Japanese-American unit known as the 442nd Infantry Regiment to be attached to this Division?” I said, “Anything you did in that manner would help me ... I understand that this regiment is very reliable in a combat way.” General Marshall said, “Then that will be done. You can expect them to arrive within the next 10 days from the Seventh Army area in France.”²⁴⁹

²⁴⁷ Appleman, *Disaster in Korea*, 271.

²⁴⁸ Appleman noted in an interview with Colonel Freeman after the war that Colonel Freeman was still very much worried about his career. Appleman informed him that he had a letter from General Bradley dated April 2, 1952 where General Bradley admitted that Colonel Freeman had authority to take his unit down the alternate road. Appleman said “I provided Col. Freeman with a copy of the correspondence from Gen. Bradley, and he seemed much relieved at receiving it. Col. Freeman seemed nervous about the continuing criticism of his actions on 30NOV50 and fearful that it might result in some official action that would adversely affect his military career. With a copy of Gen. Bradley’s letter in his possession, he felt more secure. Ibid., 423.

²⁴⁹ Interview of General Edward M. Almond by Captain Thomas G. Fergusson, Box 1, Almond Papers, MHI.

In General Almond's conversation with General Marshall one can almost hear Almond's guffaws when General Marshall remarked that he "had a heck of a time in the last two weeks." What is most remarkable about this conversation was that had the 92nd ID been a white unit then Almond's meeting with General Marshall would have ended with Almond's relief from command – along with most of his senior subordinate commanders. Instead, Almond's failed leadership was rewarded with the addition of one of the most highly decorated fighting units in the European Theater, the 442nd Infantry Regiment.

High Turn-Over of Officers in Black Units

Another condition found in the 24th Infantry Regiment in Korea and other African American units was the high turn-over of white officers within the unit. As with the unwritten policy of assigning white officers from the south to lead black units, the frequency with which white officers were rotated in and out of black units begs the question of whether this was an intentional Army policy at the time. This situation manifesting quick rotation clearly had negative consequences for the unit as a whole.

As white replacement officers were assigned to the 24th Infantry Regiment, each officer would have had to earn the respect of the men. At the same time, the black soldiers would need to learn what their officer expected. Each individual has their own unique twist on leadership; some officers can be micromanagers while others are comfortable delegating assignments to the other junior officers and NCOs. The time it takes for an officer to adjust to a new unit and for the men to adjust to their new officer varies with the personalities of each officer, through the uncertainties and vagaries of combat the "feeling out" process can take even longer. While it is expected that in war there will by necessity of combat casualties be a certain level of turn-over in officer ranks – the 24th Infantry Regiment seemed to have an unusually high turn-over rate

among junior and senior officers. An article in the *Los Angeles Times* in 1989 observed that, “During the first three months the regiment (24th Infantry Regiment) was in Korea, there were 13 changes of battalion commanders – an average of one a month in the three battalions – and even more rapid turnover at the company commander level.” To make matters worse, as was widely noted, the “regiment’s excellent, combat hardened noncommissioned officer corps was decimated in the early fighting and was replaced by less experienced men.”²⁵⁰ This turn-over would negatively affect any combat unit, but with the added pressure placed on the 24th Infantry Regiment through segregation – turn-over created a vacuum of leadership that even the best officers could barely manage.

Part of the problem with officer turn-over was due to the Competitive Tour program already discussed, but the other was due to segregation itself. The authors of *Black Soldier White Army* noted; “The desire to maintain racial segregation among company officers, the abrupt impositions of so many unfamiliar officers and the adaptations soldiers had to make to the standards and styles of the new commander intensified problems of leadership and discipline already present within the regiment.”²⁵¹ One of the units in the 24th Infantry Regiment that struggled under the burden of high officer turn-over was C Company.

C Company early in the Korean War suffered a high ratio of officer and NCO casualties. Soon, men of C Company were demonstrating their distrust of military leadership with their feet – moving to the rear without orders, i.e. “straggling.” The Regiment attempted to staunch the degradation of unit cohesion and discipline with a steady flow of new officers. Stuart G. Force recalled that one of the new officers was Captain Lawrence M. Corcoran. Stuart said “several

²⁵⁰ *Los Angeles Times* “Army: Blacks Look Back at Record in Korea” November 15, 1989, Box 1, Oral Interview Notes BSWA, CMH.

²⁵¹ Bowers, Hammond, MacGarrigle, *Black Soldier White Army*, 75.

officers and men who served under him believed that he tried hard to lead his men, but just didn't know how." Captain Corcoran was also handicapped, according to Force, by having a NCO named Paulfrey "who was superb in garrison, but a coward in combat."²⁵² Force said that "in Korea people came and went so fast I think the soldier never got to know their leaders." Despite Captain Corcoran's best efforts C Company struggled with unit cohesion. As Force noted, in his opinion the problem was that Captain Corcoran just didn't know how to lead the men of C Company. Captain Corcoran had been dealt a difficult hand by receiving command of a company that was already frayed and undisciplined, but had he perhaps known how to handle the "problem" soldiers of C Company it might have turned out differently. As was the case with many of the junior officers in the 24th Infantry Regiment, by the time Captain Corcoran started to "learn the ropes" and establish a relationship with his men, he was rotated out and replaced by another white officer.

Although there was not a paper trail per se indicating a specific policy by the Army to purposefully rotate white officers in and out of black units quickly, there was some foundation in the Army records supporting this as a possible solution to "improve" the capability of black units. During the Gillem Board, one of the witnesses, Colonel William McCaffrey, General Almond's Chief-of-Staff in Korea and regimental CO in Italy with the 92nd ID purposed to the board that the rotation of white officers in black units would benefit the Army and the officers. Colonel McCaffrey said unequivocally: "Rotation of white officers assigned to Negro units is advisable from a morale standpoint and will provide a larger group of white officers with experience of Negro units."²⁵³ His assertion lacked a timeline for these rotations, but the

²⁵² Interview with Major General Oliver Dillard, October 26, 1988, Box 4, Oral Interview Notes BSWA, CMH. Force also noted that Master Sergeant Paulfrey was tried and convicted by a General Courts Martial for his refusal to join Corcoran on the high ridge west of Masan in August.

²⁵³ Summary of Testimony by Colonel William J. McCaffrey, October 4, 1945, Box 9, Gillem Papers, MHI.

implication was that the rotations be of limited duration. The clear problem with this proposal as made evident by the experience of soldiers in the 24th Infantry Regiment was that it limited the ability of an officer to get a sense of close connection with his unit, a dilemma which negatively impacted both the officer and his men.

Common Complaints among White Officers in Black Units

Besides the common belief among white officers in World War II and Korea that assignment to a black unit was looked at as a punishment, or at best not career enhancing, there were other misconceptions by white officers that colored their impression of serving with African American troops. These complaints ranged from the more benign, such as black soldiers recklessly disregard equipment, to the more serious, that white officers are more likely to be killed when leading black troops. Judging by the interviews conducted with numerous 24th Infantry Regiment veterans and Korean War veterans in general, these complaints by white officers were prevalent and were responsible for a number of white officers either attempting to avoid service with black units or causing a change in their leadership when forced to lead black troops.

Black Soldiers Disregard Equipment

The racial stereotype of African American soldiers was not formed overnight as has been previously discussed. It was a stereotype that was developed during two world wars and was in the process of being recycled for the war in Korea. A common complaint among white officers was that black soldiers were reckless and careless with the maintenance of their equipment and would “ditch gear” at the first round of hostile fire. Lieutenant Pidgeon, the 2nd Battalion’s supply officer reported what he believed was a case of recklessly disregarding equipment by a group of black soldiers in July of 1950 – still in the early phase of the North Korean assault on the South.

As Lieutenant Pidgeon related, a machine-gun section from his unit's heavy weapons platoon was ordered to move to the rear. When the group set out, they had two machine-guns. However, according to Lieutenant Pidgeon, when the group reached their destination the machine-guns were gone. Lieutenant Pidgeon reported that the group had not encountered hostile fire, and the only conclusion he could make was "that the men had abandoned both guns rather than endure the inconvenience and discomfort of having to carry them over a distance."²⁵⁴ Over the course of the next month, Lieutenant Pidgeon reported that his battalion lost all seventeen of its assigned heavy and light .30 caliber machine guns and half of its eight .50 caliber machine guns. Lieutenant Pidgeon stated that he only saw one weapon that showed damage consistent with it being hit or destroyed by enemy fire.

Lieutenant Pidgeon's report was striking and at first glance would appear to demonstrate that his men were derelict in their duty to protect their weapons. However, Lieutenant Pidgeon was a white officer with definite racial bias. On one occasion Lieutenant Pidgeon told an inspector general, "Have you ever seen the pictures of 'Step-and-Fetchit' where (the actor's) eyes were sticking out?" – referring to the antics of a popular black actor during the 1940s that played to white prejudices, "That is what they (his black soldiers) reminded me of."²⁵⁵

The question that should have been asked by Army officials if the reports of equipment loss were true: where was Lieutenant Pidgeon and the other officers of the battalion when all of this equipment loss was taking place? It is the officer's responsibility and duty to ensure that the men under their command are following orders and maintaining good discipline and order.

White Officers More Vulnerable to Injury or Death

Another prevalent complaint by white officers was that leading black soldiers made them

²⁵⁴ Bowers, Hammond, MacGarrigle, *Black Soldier White Army*, 105.

²⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 104.

more vulnerable to injury or death than white officers leading white troops. One of the officers interviewed for *Project Clear* opined that the reason the casualty rate for officers in his regiment was so high was because as one of his white officers led black soldiers in combat the officer was “forced to expose himself unnecessarily in order to try and direct his men, control their erratic fire, and do the duties that are normally taken care of by an NCO (Non-Commissioned Officer).”²⁵⁶ The implication of the Major’s statement was that black soldiers were hesitant to engage with the enemy or conduct effective counter-fire in the heat of battle.

The other commonly held view by white officers was that if they were wounded in combat they would be abandoned by black enlisted men to die on the battlefield. This was a viewpoint that had been relayed in several inter-war Army studies and repeated by white officers with experience leading black troops during World War II. General Almond cited a case where he alleged that one of his junior officers in the 92nd ID was left to die on the battlefield by his black troops. According to Almond, during the fall of 1944 one of his best lieutenants, Lieutenant Birdsong (who was actually an African American officer), was deserted by his patrol while leading the men through a precarious position in the Apennine Mountains. The area the patrol was attempting to navigate was controlled by the enemy and the patrol ended up getting cut-off from their own front lines. Almond said, “The people who were with him on this patrol deserted him and left him to his fate, which was death in the immediate future. Those who ran had abandoned their leader in combat.” Almond concluded that Lieutenant Birdsong’s black troops “deserted him because they were afraid of their own future and disregardful of their comrade.”²⁵⁷ Almond implied in his statement that black soldiers may have acted out of fear, but that the soldier’s “cowardice” was a trait characteristic of the African American – one of several

²⁵⁶ Bogart, *Social Research and the Desegregation of the U.S. Army*, 54.

²⁵⁷ Interview of General Edward M. Almond by Captain Thomas G. Fergusson, Box 1, Almond Papers, MHI.

common misconceptions continued throughout the inter-war years and into the Korean War among many of the white officers in the Army. Some white officers felt that they would be abandoned by their black troops in combat as a type of reverse racism.

Colonel Corley, one of the commanding officers for the 24th Infantry Regiment in Korea, reportedly informed one of his white lieutenants, Philip Harper, that he was not “leading white troops” and that if he was “ever wounded, you’re dead. These men will never bring you down the hill.”²⁵⁸ The inference was that either black soldiers’ racial bias was just as strong towards their white officers or that black soldiers were unwilling to risk their life for that of a white officer.

The question that should have been asked was: did hard evidence exist that white officer casualty rates were higher among white officer leading black troops than white officers leading white troops? Casualty rates for the 24th Infantry Regiment’s white officers as compared to other units did appear to be greater. However, the 24th Infantry Regiment also saw more combat in the initial stages of the Korean War than comparable white units. Another factor to be considered was that the appearance of a white officer amongst black soldiers in combat could be problematic for the well-being of that white officer for no other reason than his skin color made him stand out in a group of black soldiers.

Clinton Moorman, a black soldier with the 24th Infantry Regiment realized quickly once in Korea that in combat a black officer on the battlefield directing black soldiers “could blend in.” But the “white guy stood out like a sore thumb.” Moorman observed, “So, you know, they

²⁵⁸ Bowers, Hammond, MacGarrigle, *Black Soldier White Army*, 174. It should be noted, this comment attributed to Colonel Corley would be highly out of character for him. Colonel Corley is one of the few white officers in the 24th Infantry Regiment who was almost universally praised by his men as being “color-blind” and a great leader of men. Colonel Corley will be discussed further in Chapter IV.

(white officers) could get pinpointed a lot easier. That was kind of unfair to them also.”²⁵⁹

Colon R. Britt, another veteran of the 24th observed, “the North Koreans knew that the white soldiers where the leaders. Many white officers became casualties, especially replacements.” Britt recalled that in an attempt to blend in with their men better, some white officers “used camouflage paint on their faces.”²⁶⁰

Another distinct possibility for white officer casualties could be the quality of the officers themselves. A comparison of casualty rates among two different companies of the 24th Infantry Regiment provides evidence that officer proficiency was a key factor in determining casualty rates among officers and NCOs. Company B of the 24th, which was considered to be one of the most reliable units early in the war, also had one of the lowest casualty rates among officers of any company in the regiment. For Company B there were 26 casualties among the officers and NCOs, compared with 80 for Company C, and the other companies ranged from 44 to 60.²⁶¹

The 24th Infantry Regiment as a whole had gotten off to an inauspicious start when their executive officer, Lt. Col James B. Bennett, upon arrival to Korea with the men of the 24th had to be evacuated for medical reasons. According to the authors of *Black Soldier White Army*, this reportedly occurred because he “had faked a heart attack along the way rather than face the rigors ahead.”²⁶²

A third possibility for white officer casualties was the lack of training of African American units like the 24th Infantry Regiment prior to their introduction to combat in Korea. Numerous black soldiers of the 24th Infantry Regiment reported that while they were stationed in Japan prior to the Korean War their time was filled with parade drilling for reviews for visiting

²⁵⁹ Interview of Clinton Moorman, September 5, 1988, Box 9, Oral Interview Notes BSWA, CMH.

²⁶⁰ Interview with Colon R. Britt, August 18, 1988, Box 2, Oral Interview Notes BSWA, CMH.

²⁶¹ Bowers, Hammond, MacGarrigle, *Black Soldier White Army*, 75.

²⁶² Ibid., 84. According to a Captain Hash of the 24th Infantry Regiment, Lt. Col. Bennett had commented openly that he “would never go into combat with a black unit.”

dignitaries and athletic competitions, and they spent little time in training for combat activities.

The white officers in charge of the 24th Infantry Regiment were also woefully unprepared for leading men in combat. 24th Infantry Regiment veteran Wilbur T. Felkey commented that the, “24th definitely didn’t have the officer leadership that they needed and that this caused high casualties.” Felkey observed that what little training they had received in Japan was not combat training. Felkey provided a case in point for how inadequately prepared some of the officers were for real combat. In Korea one of Felkey’s commanders directed that a bonfire be built as a marker for an aerial resupply. Felkey tried to point out to his commanding officer that the placement of the bonfire would give away their position to the enemy, but his commander refused to listen. Felkey said, despite the risk of causing potentially dire consequences for himself and his fellow soldiers, he somehow “was never able to get that bonfire lit.”²⁶³

Over the course of the numerous interviews conducted under *Project Clear* during the Korean War a pattern emerged regarding the opinions of the white officer’s regarding the combat efficacy of black soldiers and especially the soldiers of the 24th Infantry Regiment. The *Project Clear* findings found that in reports “largely from white officers in the regiment (24th)” the common assertion was that:

Negro troops are unreliable in combat, particularly on the defensive and at night ... that they leave positions suddenly, without adequate warning to the troops protecting their flanks; that they are prone to sudden panic and hysteria; that they are frequently malingerers and that, in summary the regiment is a handicap to the United Nations war effort.²⁶⁴

At the beginning of the war in Korea the 24th Infantry Regiment was thrown into combat quickly, and without question the regiment as a whole was ill-prepared. However, the 24th

²⁶³ Interview of Wilbur T. Felkey, September 8, 1988, Box 4, Oral Interview Notes BSWA, CMH.

²⁶⁴ Bogart, *Social Research and the Desegregation of the U.S. Army*, 53.

Regiment was far from the only military unit early in the Korean War to suffer major set-backs at the first contact with enemy units. The story of the Korean War from June, 1950 until at least September, 1950 when the Army finally regained its sense of balance and MacArthur planned his counter-punch with the invasion of Inchon was one of withdrawals, surrender, and defeat on the battlefield. However, the 24th Infantry Regiment appeared to be singled out for particular blame because of its racial composition.

As early as September 9, 1950, General Kean, commander of the 25th Division, wrote to General Walker, commander of Eighth Army, that “it is my opinion that the 24th Infantry has demonstrated in combat that it is untrustworthy and incapable of carrying out missions expected of an infantry regiment.” General Kean noted that, there “are a number of individuals in the 24th Infantry who have been and are performing their duties in a credible manner” but their actions have been “completely nullified by the actions of the majority.”²⁶⁵ General Kean probably felt the need to insert the caveat that some members of the 24th Infantry Regiment were performing in a “credible manner” because he would have been well aware of the actions of men such as Private First Class William H. Thompson – a soldier who died holding his position so other men could withdrawal and who would subsequently be the first African American to receive the Medal of Honor since the Spanish-American War.

Some criticisms of black soldiers’ skills were clearly nothing more than sad attempts to portray anything black soldiers did in a negative light. One such example was Captain Johnson’s story about his men’s attempt to open a safe. According to Captain Johnson, when his men came across a bank in one of the Korean towns they liberated, they discovered a medium to large safe inside the bank. Captain Johnson said that “during the night it couldn’t be readily opened so two

²⁶⁵ Bowers, Hammond, MacGarrigle, *Black Soldier White Army*, 175.

anti-tank mines were placed against it and blown. In the still of the night the safe went through the roof of the bank building.” As if to put his take on the episode into focus, Captain Johnson noted sarcastically, “these guys can’t even rob a safe without messing it up!”²⁶⁶ Despite the patently ridiculous criticisms of the Captain Johnson’s of the time, there was one criticism cited by white officers in Korea about their black troops that had a twinge of credibility. That charge concerned what the military referred to as “straggling.”

Black Soldiers Prone to “Straggle”

The word “Straggle” is defined under the Uniform Code of Military Justice, Article 134, as the “means to wander away, to stray, to become separated from, or to lag or linger behind.”²⁶⁷ Simply defined, straggling is the movement of troops towards the rear and away from their assigned positions without orders. It is differentiated by “desertion” in that the “straggling” is only a temporary action by the troops where desertion implies that the soldier has no intent to ever return to the lines. That some African American soldiers in Korea, and specifically men of the 24th Infantry Regiment, did on occasion straggle is without doubt. According to 2nd Battalion’s adjutant, black 1st Lieutenant Gorham L. Black Jr., “at least one hundred and fifty men deserted their positions” during combat around Sangju, Korea. The problem was so endemic that the 24th set up a “straggler control point on the main road, 1.5 miles west of Sangju” to round up the men that were moving to the rear.²⁶⁸

In some instances, the act of straggling was codified by soldiers in the 24th to nearly a ritual. Charles Green provided his recollection of what was referred to by the men of Company C as “Tam Time.” While the company was being probed by enemy attacks, some men began to move

²⁶⁶ Interview with Colonel Carlton S. Johnson, Box 1, Oral Interview Notes BSWA, CMH.

²⁶⁷ <http://usmilitary.about.com/library/milinfo/mcm/bl134-50.htm>

²⁶⁸ Bowers, Hammond, MacGarrigle, *Black Soldier White Army*, 115.

to the rear, leaving Captain Corcoran and other soldiers behind to fight on their own. Green said this “leaving” without permission was referred to in the regiment as “Tam Time” which meant “time to go.” Green said it occurred mainly when a fight was “in the offing or had begun, or after dark.”²⁶⁹ Colonel Buckner M. Creel described his first encounter with “Tam Time” while he was with the 24th Infantry Regiment:

When I first arrived, some troops left their positions to go down from the hill; they normally did so in ones and twos – no mass “bug-out.” One night I heard a whispered voice say “TT-TL” I was told by a soldier next to me that meant “tam time, travel light!” He said that earlier, the code-word for taking off was “hat time.” On the day I was wounded, about half the company left their positions without permission and went down Battle Mountain. Those around me and which I could control generally stayed. I was told that the partial unauthorized withdrawal actually was a big improvement.²⁷⁰

Straggling was not an issue that was unique to the 24th Infantry Regiment or to black soldiers, for large numbers of white soldiers could be found making their way to the rear without orders to do so, especially in the early days of the Korean War, or when units were overwhelmed by enemy forces as was the case in the winter of 1950 when Chinese forces entered the fray en-mass. The problem of straggling in black units was that some of the white officers interpreted the action of black soldier’s straggling as having to do with the soldier’s race. Major Carson told Eighth Army investigators “I think that when (the men of the 24th) ... become scared they react with an animal instinct which is to run.” Carson, perhaps realizing that he was generalizing about the entire black race provided a caveat to his observation by adding, “I am not saying that

²⁶⁹ Interview with Charles Green, June 16, 1994, Box 5, Oral Interview Notes BSWA, CMH.

²⁷⁰ Interview with Colonel Buckner M. Creel, December 3, 1993, Box 3, Oral Interview Notes BSWA, CMH. Lyle Rishell in *With a Black Platoon in Combat: A Year in Korea* discussed in detail the night battle that Colonel Creel recalled. According to Rishell, “The 24th went into defensive positions near the town of Haman in the sector that included Hill 665, or Battle Mountain, as it would soon be called. It was the focal point on which the army records of the Korean War would indict the regiment for having ‘mass hysteria,’ ‘fleeing before the enemy,’ ‘rampant desertion,’ and ‘failure to obey orders issued by white officers.’ The truth of the matter is that while some men and units did vacate or were forced from defensive positions in August and did indeed prove themselves to be less than trustworthy, the bulk of the men fought well.” (P. 52)

all the men are like that. Five or ten percent are not, but I am saying that there is about 85 or 90 percent that do react this way ... These people are different in instincts.”²⁷¹

Although a large number of white officers throughout the Army in Korea believed that black soldiers were more prone to straggling, in reality the black soldiers of the 24th did not disproportionately straggle as supported by several senior leaders of the 24th. Colonel John B. Zanin, the commander of the 3rd battalion of the 24th, stated “there was certainly some straggling in the 3rd Battalion, but often when he gave the stragglers a forceful command to return to their position, they would comply.” Colonel Zanin also observed after reviewing the War Diary for 3/24 on the night of July 7, 1950 – one of the particular nights in which “straggling” was reported to be exceptionally high – on that particular occasion “it was his feeling that the 3/24 was being sacrificed to cover the pull back of the other units of the regiment.”²⁷² Colonel Zanin implied that if men feel they are being “sacrificed” needlessly by Army commanders it is natural for the soldiers to consider straggling as a means of survival. Further, Colonel Zanin reported that reports of straggling were often exaggerated by officers.

One of those officers that Colonel Zanin thought was “exaggerating” might have been Price Mosher, a platoon leader with the 519th MP. Mosher told interviewers from the Center of Military history that at Chorwan, Korea, “there were about 300-400 24th soldiers many of whom had no helmets, etc. who were breaking and running.” The interviewer from the Center of Military History was not impressed with Mosher’s testimony and next to his quote about mass straggling by men from the 24th the interviewer wrote – “his credibility is zilch!”²⁷³

Unfortunately, the consequences of repeated allegations of straggling can take a toll on the

²⁷¹ Bowers, Hammond, MacGarrigle, *Black Soldier White Army*, 114.

²⁷² Interview with Colonel John B. Zanin, October 27, 1993, Box 1, Oral Interview Notes BSWA, CMH.

²⁷³ Notes on Price Mosher interview, no date, Box 1, Oral Interview Notes BSWA, CMH.

morale of a unit. The men of the 24th were still sensitive fifty years after the fact by these allegations. When asked about what he witnessed in Korea relating to straggling and men “breaking and running,” Gray Johnson, a chaplain with the 24th reacted; “I feel anger. If we took a hill there was no one on it; if we lost it we broke and ran (interviewer note: begins to weep). There were rumors then and it wasn’t true. I saw too many of them stretched out. I saw too many kids die.”²⁷⁴ In Gray Johnson’s memory, straggling was just another way that racist Army officials attempted to denigrate the black soldiers’ war record.

The question that the Army should have asked when reports of straggling by members of the 24th Infantry Regiment arose was; does segregation create an environment where straggling becomes more acceptable by the rank and file soldier? As implied by Colonel Zanin, if troops feel that they are being “sacrificed” does not that negatively affect morale? Does not the institution of segregation encroach on the feeling of self worth of each individual black soldier?

Further, does not the act of segregating replacement troops based on race negatively affect a unit’s effectiveness and increase the possibility of straggling. Historian Bernard Nalty observed; “Racial segregation required that black soldiers replace blacks, and initially, few trained noncommissioned officers, weapons specialists, or even riflemen were available in the Far East or the United States, for that matter.”²⁷⁵ If the Army sent an untrained cook to the front was it really that surprising that when faced with the enemy that soldier might decide “flight” was better than “fight” for his continued survival. The ineffectiveness of the replacement system for soldiers in Korea under a segregated system, discussed later in this chapter, was notorious.

Instead of investigating these reports of straggling and trying to resolve the issue through better leadership, or through an analysis of the replacement system for soldiers to black units, the

²⁷⁴ Interview of Gray Johnson, March 23, 1989, Box 5, Oral Interview Notes BSWA, CMH.

²⁷⁵ Nalty, *Strength for the Fight*, 256.

Army ignored the issue as just another example of the inferiority of black troops. Someone in the Army even decided to have some fun with it and coined a new phrase to describe the activities of members of the 24th that straggled – “Bug-Out.”

“Bug-Out” and “Bug-Out Boogie”

On September 21, 1976, the popular T.V. series *M*A*S*H* featured an hour long special to debut the series’ fifth season. The title of the hour long episode was “Bug Out.” The episode featured members of the fictitious 4077th Medical Detachment having to quickly pack their camp and move towards the rear to avoid the oncoming North Korean forces, Hence the title, “Bug Out.”

The word “Bug-Out” was added to the English lexicon during the Korean War through American media reports that used the term to describe U.S. forces being forced to withdrawal under the pressure of enemy forces. In the United States in the early 1950s the word became a household term. But for the men of the 24th Infantry Regiment the term gained a more significant meaning since “Bug Out” was used as a pejorative to describe the actions of African American soldiers in combat. Appleman in *Disaster in Korea: The Chinese Confront MacArthur* suggested that the term originated in Japan prior to the Korean War and was used frequently by members of the 24th Infantry Regiment to describe someone who had gone Absent Without Leave (AWOL). Appleman stated: “It suggested the way bugs and insects would scurry frantically, seeking cover, when their shelter of a rock or a log was turned over.” In Korea, according to Appleman, the term was used to “mean that soldiers or a unit just simply ran away when confronted by an enemy force. The troops bugged out without fighting.”²⁷⁶ Lyle Rishell who was a white officer with the 24th Infantry Regiment said that from “Bug Out” the term

²⁷⁶ Appleman, *Disaster in Korea*, 384.

evolved to “Bugout fever” and from there to the idea that members of the 24th “sat around campfires signing the Bugout Boogie,” a claim that Rishell argued was ridiculous and one he had never personally observed.²⁷⁷

Bradley Biggs, a member of the 24th Infantry Regiment, wrote in an article titled “Were Blacks Scapegoats for Our Failures in Korea” that “white racists in and out of the military” cited the song “Bugout Boogie” to “denigrate black performance in Korea.”²⁷⁸ The term “Bug-Out” and the song “Bugout Boogie” were embraced by several senior white officers as a way of demonstrating the inferiority of black soldiers. On June 16, 1951 a *Saturday Evening Post* article quoted an anonymous battalion commander – later identified as Colonel Blair – who described the action he reportedly witnessed first-hand of black soldiers from the 24th Infantry Regiment. Blair stated: “All three companies broke at once. The men fled like rabbits across the great open field.” Blair continued that later the black soldiers were signing the “Bugout Boogie.” According to Gerald Astor, the song started with the lyrics; “When them Chinese mortars begins to thud. The old Deuce-four began to bug.”²⁷⁹

Bradley Biggs stated that “there was a bug-out song. But actually it was just another type of black blues song” and that “whites ignored the fact that blacks have long made humor of misery and failure. The joking attitude was misread and misinterpreted as black cowardice.”²⁸⁰

Regrettably for the black soldiers of the 24th, the moniker “Bug-Out” stuck with them. The authors of *Black Soldier White Army* observed that the 24th Regiment’s newspaper *Eagle Flight* had to be renamed *Eagle Forward* after jokers in white units mocked the original name as being

²⁷⁷ Lyle Rishell, *With a Black Platoon in Combat: A Year in Korea* (College Station, Texas: Texas A&M University Press, 1993), 46.

²⁷⁸ Bradley Biggs article, “Were Blacks Scapegoats for Our Failures in Korea?” Box 2, Oral Interview Notes BSWA, CMH.

²⁷⁹ Astor, *The Right to Fight*, 383. Colonel Blair will be discussed further in Chapter III.

²⁸⁰ Bradley Biggs article, “Were Blacks Scapegoats for Our Failures in Korea?” Box 2, Oral Interview Notes BSWA, CMH.

appropriate to the “But-Out” 24th.²⁸¹ The 24th Infantry Regiment veteran Floyd Johnson recalled that “he had heard talk about (not) getting around the 24th because they would bug-out and that niggers were not reliable. Also that they were not to shoot the first wave because that was the 24th coming through.”²⁸²

In the face of such intense criticism it is hard to imagine the African American soldiers being able to press onward and fight effectively. However, the record of the men of the 24th Infantry Regiment and other black units in Korea demonstrated that black soldiers were not helpless in the face of withering criticism and racism. There existed ways and means that black troops could express their dissatisfaction with inadequate white leadership.

Black Soldiers’ Responses to inadequate White Leadership

Black soldiers in Korea, particularly the members of the 24th Infantry Regiment, were exposed to a range of behavior by their white officers. Sometimes, the white officers conducted themselves commendably and the men respected them and followed them without question. Some of these officers will be discussed in detail in Chapter IV. But sometimes the white officers allowed their prejudices to come through or were just simply incompetent as leaders. In these instances, the black soldiers of the 24th could and would demonstrate their lack of respect for authority by several means. This resistance to poor leadership most often came in the form of mild civil disobedience but on occasion went to the other extreme – “fragging” or deliberately killing an officer.

Civil Disobedience by Black Soldiers

Prior to deploying to Korea, the 24th Regiment, First Battalion, was commanded by Lt. Colonel William Thomas McDaniel, a native of Florida in keeping with the assignment of

²⁸¹ Bowers, Hammond, MacGarrigle, *Black Soldier White Army*, 173.

²⁸² Interview with Floyd A. Johnson, February 28, 1990, Box 5, Oral Interview Notes BSWA, CMH.

southern officers. According to Leonard Kushner, Lt. Col. McDaniel “was a bigot” and his bigotry “was contagious among the white officers” under McDaniel’s command.²⁸³ The black soldiers of first Battalion decided that it was time to teach a lesson in leadership and used the opportunity of a special parade in Osaka, Japan, for Secretary of the Army Royall to seek their revenge. One battalion per regiment were to be selected to participate in the parade in honor of Secretary Royall, and the men of the first battalion practiced extra hard to ensure their selection in the parade. Then during the parade, as the battalion was preparing to pass the reviewing stand where Secretary Royall, General MacArthur, and the 25th Division commanding general, Major General William B. Kean, were seated, the men of the first battalion unleashed a surprise. At the order of “Eyes right,” Leonard Kushner recalled, “the battalion fell apart – slouched, out of step, ranks sloppy.” Kushner stated that the plan went even better than expected because “McDaniel in the front didn’t realize what had happened” until after the parade when Major General Kean chewed him out.

Kushner said the battalion received a chewing out by McDaniel back at Gifu, but the frustrated battalion commander was unable to identify any particular person as being responsible. The black soldiers of first battalion through their act of civil disobedience demonstrated that a leader who regarded his men as inferior did so at his own peril. Kushner added ominously the observation that, “fortunately McDaniel left the unit before Korea,” because “he would have been killed in Korea.”²⁸⁴

²⁸³ Interview with Leonard H. Kushner, June 16, 1989, Box 6, Oral Interview Notes BSWA, CMH.

²⁸⁴ Ibid. Lieutenant Colonel William Thomas McDaniel was in fact killed in Korea, but under honorable conditions. McDaniel was awarded the Silver Star for his actions on July 20, 1950 at Taejon, Korea, while serving as the operations officer in the 34th Infantry Regiment, 24th Infantry Division, when McDaniel led a charge to retake an American battery of 155 millimeter howitzers that had fallen into the hands of the North Korean Army. McDaniel was successful in retaking the howitzers and returning them to action with U.S. forces. Later in the battle on July 20, 1950, McDaniel was taken prisoner by North Korean forces. During the period August 27, 1950 to October 19, 1950, Lt. Col. McDaniel was the senior officer in a column of approximately 370 American prisoners of war being

Power of Group

Another tactic the African American soldiers in the 24th Infantry Regiment used to combat racism was the power of group. Similar to the men working together during the parade in an act of civil disobedience, because the black soldiers were concentrated together in segregated units they could use their numbers to change behavior. While one or two black soldiers alone might be intimidated by the racist behavior of white soldiers, it could be any entirely different story when white soldiers were surrounded by an entire battalion or regiment of fellow black soldiers.

Theodore R. Eldridge, a member of the 24th Infantry Regiment, recalled a particular incident in a bath house where having the “power of group” helped him handle a couple of racist white soldiers. Eldridge stated that while he was taking a bath three white soldiers walked in led by a Korean boy. One of the white soldiers said, “We can’t be taking baths with niggers; do you like niggers?” The Korean boy replied “Me no like niggers.” Eldridge said that it was obvious to him that the Korean boy didn’t even know what he was saying. Eldridge said that he pointed out to the white soldiers that “they were near an entire black regiment that would blow them away if they didn’t watch out.” That was enough for one of the white soldiers to apologize and for the

moved north towards the Chinese border. According to his Distinguished Service Cross citation, that was awarded posthumously, McDaniel displayed courage and leadership while the American prisoners “were suffering from wounds, hunger, disease, malnutrition, and the constant brutality of enemy guards.” The citation continued: “At great personal danger, Lieutenant Colonel McDaniel continually interceded with the captors for food, medication, and better treatment of his men. By personal example, and with disregard for retribution which followed his efforts, he organized his fellow prisoners toward assisting the wounded and weak, not allowing them to be left behind. Lieutenant Colonel McDaniel inspired the men and restored the will to live and resist among the soldiers in the column. Additionally, he sanctioned and materially aided the prisoners who planned to escape the enemy-held column. Resisting his own instincts for safety and survival, he declined to participate in several successful escape attempts of others because of his unfailing loyalty to, and compassion for, his fellow prisoners. Lieutenant Colonel McDaniel’s refusal to break under mistreatment by his captors and inspirational leadership at a time when the North Koreans were intent upon breaking the morale and spirit of their captives, finally led to his execution at the hands of the North Koreans at the Sunchon Railway Tunnel. Lieutenant Colonel McDaniel’s courage and unwavering devotion to duty and his men were in keeping with the most cherished traditions and ideals of military service and reflect great credit on him and the United States Army.” Taken from: <http://projects.militarytimes.com/citations-medals-awards/recipient.php?recipientid=7171>

others to shut up, Eldridge recalled.²⁸⁵ No doubt the authors of the 1926 Army study at the War College would have seized this episode as clear evidence of the “crowd psychology” among black troops that they warned could lead to disaster.

Use of Chain-of-Command

Occasionally African American soldiers were able to use effectively the military’s chain-of-command and official channels to redress their grievances. The efficacy of this approach though was heavily dependent on getting through to an official sympathetic to the soldier’s concern or complaint. Lt. William L. Jones, an African American Army officer, found himself in a difficult situation when on October 8, 1953, he received a form letter signed by the Adjutant General stating that he had been board selected for release from the Army. After receiving this letter, Lt. Jones found himself being called into the office of Lt. Col. Smalley, the commanding officer of the 278th RCT, an attachment of Jones’ unit but separate from Jones’ chain-of-command. Smalley recommended that Jones “resign immediately rather than wait for the orders to save himself the disgrace.” Under “duress” Lt. Jones tendered his resignation.

Instead of passively accepting his involuntary dismissal from the service, Lt. Jones availed himself to an inquiry through military channels. Through the subsequent investigation, it was determined that Lt. Col. Smalley, “who was not Lt. Jones’ immediate superior, had rendered an efficiency report on him to the special board contrary to army regulations.”²⁸⁶ Lt. Jones was then allowed to withdraw his resignation papers and the Adjutant General ordered Smalley to correct Jones’s efficiency rating, amending the evaluation to “an excellent rating,” and Lt. Jones was allowed to remain in the Army. Although Lt. Jones was successful in getting his problem

²⁸⁵ Interview with Theodore R. Eldridge, August 26, 1988, Box 4, Oral Interview Notes BSWA, CMH.

²⁸⁶ Letter from Eugene Davidson, President NAACP to Maxwell Rabb, January 21, 1954, Box 52, Rabb Papers, DDEPL.

properly handled by resorting to official military channels, more often than not the fact of being African American caused their complaints to fall on deaf ears. This will be explored further in chapter III concerning courts-martial cases and issuance of medals to African American soldiers.

Self-Wounding

Another way that some black soldiers choose to handle a poor leader was through self-wounding. As early as the American Civil War, the act of self-wounding has been acknowledged as a possibility among combat troops. Under duress and faced with their own mortality, a soldier could become so disillusioned that the idea of purposefully inflicting a wound was seen as the only alternative to death. That was especially operative when faced with immersion in combat situations over a long period of time as was the case with some units in World War I and World War II. The situation becomes murky when trying to ascertain exactly how many injuries of combat soldiers were self-inflicted. Even injuries that clearly show signs of self-infliction can be troublesome to place in the category of an intentional act of self-wounding.

Under combat stress, soldiers routinely shoot themselves or their fellow soldiers without any ill intention. As a result, without self-admission or eye witness corroboration most acts of self-wounding are noted as nothing more than combat casualties. Statistics tend to confirm that some members of the 24th Infantry Regiment would have resorted to self-wounding as a way to deal with a situation they viewed as hopeless. *Project Clear* researchers found that “there are more wounds of the feet than would be expected in normal battle conditions” among black soldiers.²⁸⁷ But there was no analysis of the number of these injuries as compared to white units. In all of the interviews conducted by *Project Clear* and the Center of Military History there were no

²⁸⁷ Bogart, *Social Research and the Desegregation of the U.S. Army*, 54.

reports of self-wounding or even the observation of an incident of self-wounding. Perhaps there was a sense of understanding among these veterans about the desperation caused by combat, and men who intentionally injured themselves were viewed more with pity rather than anger.

“Fragging”

Along the spectrum of possible action black soldiers could take when faced with poor or racist officers, fragging was the extreme. To resort to “fragging” an officer was an admission of complete desperation and opened the soldier(s) to the possibility of a death sentence if caught. Similar to self-wounding, fragging was also a very difficult action to pin-point within the context of the battlefield. War by its very definition is characterized by chaos, violence, and death. These conditions offer a variety of possibilities to a soldier contemplating the death of an officer. Sergeant Waymond Ransom, who did not actually resort to the “fragging” of his lieutenant, acknowledged that he and others in his unit had become so frustrated with the officer’s leadership that they had discussed that course of action before the violence of the battlefield had settled the issue for them with the death of the lieutenant in an ambush.

Charles Gregg told interviewers from the Center of Military History about some of the officers he remembered from the Korean War. Gregg recalled that “P Co. Commander was a strong good leader – always followed orders and called himself the ‘Big Fox’ ... (and) Lt. Teague was a good leader of the I and R platoon.” But then Gregg stated, “Captain Steinberg of E Co was anti-black and was mortally wounded in his own company area.” Gregg didn’t elaborate further on the death of Captain Steinberg, but left the impression that Captain Steinberg was a victim of a “fragging.”²⁸⁸ But was fragging an officer really something that soldiers would turn to out of desperation and how often? Bruce Cummings acknowledged in his research for

²⁸⁸ Interview with Charles Gregg, September 8, 1988, Box 5, Oral Interview Notes BSWA, CMH.

The Korean War: A History that “several veterans have told me that they thought fragging was more common in Korea than in Vietnam. I have no way of judging this matter.”²⁸⁹

Although the interviews of soldiers from the 24th revealed that the majority of black soldiers’ angst was directed at white officers, there was at least one mention of black soldiers becoming so disgusted with a black officer that they considered fragging the black officer. Lyle Rishell was a white officer assigned to lead African American soldiers during the Korean War. Rishell recalled that one day he overheard a group of his men talking about a black lieutenant “who had ordered his platoon recklessly into some action.” Rishell stated that the black soldiers “were venting their anger as they remembered the incident, and one even professed that the lieutenant would be one dead nigger if the officer ever crossed his path.”

Rishell’s take on the exchange was that “the men were willing to go all out for their commander, whether he was black or white, and it was clear that this officer had lost their respect.”²⁹⁰ Rishell stated that contrary to what he expected as a white officer leading black soldiers, many of the black soldiers “expressed surprise that I was white – after all, they had been assigned to a black unit.” But instead of holding it against him Rishell said “there was never a hint of animosity as they faced me that first time.”²⁹¹ While Rishell’s men were surprised that a white officer was assigned to lead them, most men of the 24th Infantry Regiment expected that their officers would be mostly white. After all, this had been the norm going back to the 1800s and the original “Buffalo Soldiers.”

Assignment of Black Officers and Soldiers

This raises the question; how were black officers assigned in the Korean War? How were

²⁸⁹ Cummings, *The Korean War*, 247.

²⁹⁰ Rishell, *With a Black Platoon in Combat*, 60.

²⁹¹ Ibid., 55.

black soldiers assigned as casualties took their toll among black units? For African American officers in the Army at the outset of the Korean War, there was almost no question what type of unit they would be assigned to – a segregated black unit. For the 24th Infantry Regiment, African Americans made up as much as 52 percent in 1947 and 40 percent in 1949. However, as the authors of *Black Soldier White Army* remarked, the black officers “almost never supervised or commanded white officers, even in cases where their dates of rank gave them precedence.” To avoid the conflict of having a black officer oversee a white officer, “the regiment command would reassign officers wholesale within a battalion or in the regiment rather than allow a black to lead anyone but other blacks.”²⁹² This was exactly the situation that Lt. Col. Lofton found himself in at the outbreak of the Korean War. According to 24th Infantry Regiment veteran Emmett J. Allen, because the regiment was “not ready for a black Lieutenant Colonel,” he was left behind in Japan as the rest of the unit departed for combat. Allen said that Lt. Col. Lofton was designated as a “housekeeping officer” in Japan while the rest of the regiment went off to fight the war.²⁹³

Gorham Black Jr., an African American soldier with the 24th, recalled: “It didn’t matter what your specialty was, if you were black you ended up in Gifu (home of the 24th).” Black stated there were a couple of exceptions, but they were few and far between, and “the same was true of enlisted men.”²⁹⁴ What was worse, the Army attempted to provide the illusion of not intentionally segregating black officers to black units. According to *Black Soldier White Army* they discovered after interviewing numerous veterans of the 24th how the Army provided a black officer the illusion of “equality of opportunity” as ordered by President Truman:

²⁹² Bowers, Hammond, MacGarrigle, *Black Soldier White Army*, 56.

²⁹³ Interview with Emmett J. Allen, August 23, 1988, Box 2, Oral Interview Notes BSWA, CMH.

²⁹⁴ Interview with Gorham Black Jr., March 12, 1989, Box 2, Oral Interview Notes BSWA, CMH.

When a black officer arrived in Japan, the U.S. Eighth Army interviewed him as though it had positions matching his training and ability and sent him around the country to speak with various commanders who supposedly also had openings. All concerned nevertheless understood that the procedure was a charade.”²⁹⁵

John “Tommy” Martin reported that “black officers were not assigned to Eighth Army” with the exception of a black officer named Luther McManus who was sent there by mistake because the personnel gurus mistakenly thought McManus was white. Martin reported McManus (to the surprise no doubt of the Army) “was accepted, had white troops serving under him, and won a Silver Star.”²⁹⁶

As Gorham Black Jr. observed, the assignment of black soldiers was essentially the same as black officers. It didn’t matter what the soldiers’ specialty or training had prepared him for – he was destined for a black unit at the outbreak of the Korean War because the Army still refused to place him with white units. The 24th Infantry Regiment was the ultimate destination for most of the early black soldier replacements. The authors of *Black Soldier White Army* acknowledged the 24th Infantry Regiment, “as the last black regiment in the U.S. Army serving overseas, it was in effect a segregated holding unit for the many black soldiers who arrived in the Far East.”²⁹⁷

This method of assigning both black officers and black enlisted men was in direct contrast to the way white officers and white soldiers were assigned to combat units and it created problems for both the officers of the 24th and the individual soldiers who found themselves in positions they were woefully unprepared for. Lindsay Bowers, a black veteran of the 24th, used his own experience to make the same point to the Center of Military History interviewers:

BOWERS: I came out of armored basic, 29th Heavy Construction Signal, went into Japan zeroed in a rifle and went into Korea as an infantryman. Then when you get in there, and I

²⁹⁵ Bowers, Hammond, MacGarrigle, *Black Soldier White Army*, 55.

²⁹⁶ Interview with John “Tommy” Martin, January 12, 1990, Box 6, Oral Interview Notes BSWA, CMH.

²⁹⁷ Bowers, Hammond, MacGarrigle, *Black Soldier White Army*, 47.

didn't go right into the line, I went in HQ Co. but I was in company commo and we strung wire into the front companies. But you take the kid who went there with me at that time with that type of training, what's he going to do?

QUESTION: It's like dropping meat down a meat grinder?

BOWERS: You're doggone right. A lot of them didn't stand for it, they did rebel. They wasn't what you'd call panic or misbehave before the enemy, as much as they were rebelling because they knew they weren't properly trained.²⁹⁸

Because men such as Bowers were assigned to units completely unprepared, and because officers were often assigned because of the region they were born or their race rather than their capability, the effectiveness of the 24th Infantry Regiment and other segregated units entering the Korean War was handicapped at the outset. Only through exceptional leadership could it be expected that these segregated units would function effectively as a fighting force.

Leadership Tenets and the 24th Infantry Regiment

Throughout the annals of warfare, great leaders have inspired their men to military feats thought impossible. We admire military leaders such as Washington, "Stonewall" Jackson, and Patton for their resolve under hardship, their ability to anticipate an opponent's course of action, or for their flare. Military institutions in the United States and throughout the world have tried to identify and synthesize the attributes of great leadership and instill them in their future leaders. In that context, the role of military history has been in large part a tool to prepare future generations of military leaders. But just as we can learn by what past military leaders have done right, we can equally learn by what past military leaders have done wrong. The role of leadership within the 24th Infantry Regiment was especially crucial because of the inclusion of segregation and race. How the officers approached leading men of different races at a time of

²⁹⁸ Interview with Lindsey Bowers, April 20, 1989, Box 2, Oral Interview Notes BSWA, CMH.

heightened racial tension was as much a testament to their success or failure as leaders as the battles won or lost.

Leading men into harm's way has never been an easy task. The human desire of self-preservation is strong and it takes exceptional leadership under the best of circumstances to get men to forego their own survival instinct and work as a single unit for a common goal. The 24th Infantry Regiment in particular has taken a lot of criticism for their battlefield performance in the last sixty years since the end of the Korean War. As noted previously, often these criticisms have focused on the enlisted men of the 24th Infantry Regiment that make up the backbone of all fighting units. The claims are often that the men of the 24th Infantry Regiment were undisciplined and prone to panic and poor judgment. The real question should have been; what were the leadership deficiencies within the 24th Infantry Regiment that allowed men to be undisciplined or to panic and straggle towards the rear lines? More importantly, to what extent did the institution of segregation deserve the blame for the breakdown in esprit de corps among the men of the 24th? On a larger scale, to what extent did a breakdown in leadership at the highest levels of the Army in Korea deserve part of the blame for failures of units composed of both white and black soldiers during the early part of the war?

When the Chinese entered the war in the late fall – early winter of 1950, the Army as a whole panicked and there were numerous instances of both white units and black units displaying undisciplined full scale retreats. Appleman noted of this period in the Korean War that what was lacking in the Army in Korea was “the will to fight, morale to contest the outcome, confidence of the professional leadership.” Appleman observed that “the rank-and-file might have responded had the leadership been up to it. But it was not.”²⁹⁹

²⁹⁹ Appleman, *Disaster in Korea*, 353.

General Mathew Ridgway agreed with Appleman's assessment of the failure in leadership in the Eighth Army in late 1950 – early 1951. Shortly after taking over for General Walker after his tragic death in an automobile accident in December, 1950, General Ridgway wrote to his friend and the Army Chief of Staff, General Joe Lawton Collins, “there continues to be a lack of aggressiveness among some Corps and Division commanders” and that “there is a marked absence of vaunted American resourcefulness.” General Ridgway concluded by telling General Collins: “Let's be ruthless with our general officers if they fail to measure up!”³⁰⁰ Unfortunately for the men of the 24th too many of the officers did not measure up to the standard that General Ridgway spoke of and instead of being relieved of command they remained in place. Any negative criticism of the 24th Infantry Regiment was quickly deflected to the “peculiar” nature of the African American soldiers that made up the ranks instead of to the defective leadership by the primarily white officers.

Issuing Orders to Black Units

Orders are the backbone of any military organization. They provide guidance to soldiers about how they are expected to behave and give the chaotic battlefield some semblance of order and are the means by which officers direct men on critical missions that can make or break the outcome of an engagement with the enemy. The 24th Infantry Regiment was no different from their fellow white units; they were guided by orders as much as any other unit. The only difference was that most of the orders the soldiers of the 24th Infantry Regiment received came from officers of a different race. In some instances this difference between the 24th and other regiments played out in subtle ways. Eugene M. Lynch recalled one particular difference in the way he and others of the 24th Infantry Regiment received orders from that of their fellow white

³⁰⁰ General Matthew B. Ridgway to General Joe Lawton Collins, January 8, 1951, Box 17, Collins Papers, DDEPL.

units through the issuance of “hold at all cost” orders. Lynch noted that “it is a basic tenet that if orders to subordinate commanders might result in destruction of their units, the senior commander must issue them in person.” However, when Lynch and other subordinate units in the 24th received these orders they were sent by “written or telephonic means” and not in person.³⁰¹ The sloppy way in which these orders were delivered to the men of the 24th Infantry Regiment made the men feel they were being “sacrificed” and that senior leaders felt they were expendable.

In Korea, the men of the 24th Infantry Regiment often received these orders when faced with an overwhelming attack by enemy forces. In several instances the 24th Infantry Regiment was told to “hold at all costs” so that other units could withdrawal to a better fighting position. The fact that often the 24th received these orders to “hold at all costs” while other white units withdrew did not escape the attention of the African American soldiers of the 24th. A second tenet that Lynch recalled to these “hold at all cost” orders was that if the orders include optional decisions for subordinate commanders then the orders need to “specify both the authority to exercise the options, and the conditions under which they may be made.”³⁰²

Lynch and other veterans of the 24th noted that most of the time their orders were vague regarding “options” and that when Lynch and other subordinate commanders used their discretion and pulled their men back in the face of overwhelming forces – instead of being lauded for their judicious use of men and resources, Lynch and the soldiers he led were viewed as cowards and the men as stragglers and malingers. Lynch said that he led his men based on the fundamentals of military tactics since he wasn’t provided with clear and specific orders, specifically that “first, when faced by superior enveloping forces, attempts to defend with

³⁰¹ Interview with Eugene M. Lynch, April 22-24, 1992, , Box 6, Oral Interview Notes BSWA, CMH.

³⁰² Ibid.

exposed flanks and minimum reserve will result in destruction of the unit. And second, offensive action by inferior forces against a superior in the attack will cause senseless expenditure of men for no real purpose.”³⁰³

Another crucial facet of orders is that they follow the chain-of-command. For instance, the corps commander will give an order to a division commander who will in turn give the order to the regiment commander and so on. However, in several instances the 24th Infantry Regiment was treated differently in regard to orders following the chain-of-command. Colonel Owen Carter recalled that the Acting Division Commander (ADC) General Verrand Wilson almost never followed the chain-of command when issuing orders to the 24th Infantry Regiment and subordinate battalions in the 24th. Colonel Carter stated that General Wilson, known to most of the men as General “Draw Sabers and Charge” Wilson because of his World War II reputation, often skipped over regiment and would “issue mission orders to battalion commanders of the regiment, perhaps believing that the battalion would report his change to regiment.” Colonel Carter theorized that General Wilson had his reasons for doing this even though it created unnecessary tension and chaos at regiment. Colonel Carter said General Wilson “spent a lot of time with the 24th Infantry” partly to prop up a “shaky Colonel White.”³⁰⁴

Sense of Belonging

For an officer effectively to lead men, it is important that the men feel that they are part of a cohesive unit and that they play a role in the functioning of the unit. In essence – there needs to be a sense of belonging from the leader on down to the lowliest private. Developing a sense of belonging was particularly difficult in a segregated unit. The very nature of a segregated unit

³⁰³ Ibid.

³⁰⁴ Interview with Colonel Owen H. Carter, June 21 and 24, 1994, Box 3, Oral Interview Notes BSWA, CMH. Colonel Wilson thought the other reason General Wilson enjoyed spending time with the 24th was because “of the excellent food served by the regimental mess.”

denotes a set of differences between the men of the unit (African Americans) and the officers of the unit (primarily white). For a leader to overcome the hurdle created by the Army's reinforcement of racial inequality by segregation would require exceptional skill and tact. As we noted earlier, it was also difficult for a white officer to develop this sense of belonging with his men when officers were constantly being rotated in and out of the unit.

Colonel Buckner Creel realized the hurdles he faced as a junior officer in Korea assigned to the 24th, and specifically, his ability to develop rapport with his men. Colonel Creel related to an interviewer with the Center of Military History that "my units in World War II were better disciplined. Every objective we were assigned in those units had to be taken, perhaps not the first time, or maybe occasionally a second try, but nonetheless, eventually we would reach the objective." However, Colonel Creel recalled that when he took over Company K in the 24th Regiment in Korea, "the unit had not achieved any success. Nor did the men of Company K have a sense of belonging."³⁰⁵ It is not surprising that Company K like most of the 24th Infantry Regiment lacked a "sense of belonging" early on in the Korean War. Many of the 24th veterans stated that initially they lacked officers that seemed to care much of one way or the other to the plight of the men.

Al Brooks, another veteran of the 24th Infantry Regiment, observed that they never had a senior officer give them a "Patton-like" speech as they prepared to go to Korea and face combat. Brooks said he half expected to get a speech such as "you're going to Korea and will face an enemy who is going to kill you and you ought to be prepared." Instead, Brooks said "what they got was pack this, pack that, go here and get shots, go there and get shots, line up here, load on

³⁰⁵ Interview with Colonel Buckner M. Creel, December 3, 1993, Box 3, Oral Interview Notes BSWA, CMH.

this train, load that train” and then, finally, “niggers get out there and do it.”³⁰⁶ For even the most capable white officer coming in as a replacement to the 24th Infantry the goal of getting the men to feel a sense of belonging and to respect their leadership was an arduous undertaking. The black soldiers of the 24th were accustomed to getting officers that misunderstood them at best and at worst were blatant racists.

Colonel Joseph Baranowski was a white junior officer in the 24th who realized that he had to get his men to respect him as an officer if they were to survive and succeed as a unit.

Baranowski took over Company A, which prior to his arrival had always been commanded by black officers who had black lieutenants under them. Baranowski was a veteran of World War II, and he had been taught in that conflict the use of “marching fire” in the attack. Baranowski had successfully led men in Europe utilizing marching fire and as a result he decided that his first course of action with Company A would be to teach them how to use the technique. Baranowski taught his officers and his NCOs marching fire and then had the entire company practice it.

Baranowski had the opportunity to put his training with Company A to the test when only a week into his command, on September 19, 1950, “marching fire played a dominant role in overrunning the fortified enemy position” without the loss of any of his men. Baranowski said his ability to demonstrate to his men that he was as much a part of the unit as any other man and that their fate depended on working together had won him his “spurs” and “the confidence of his men.”³⁰⁷ He demonstrated successfully the old military adage that in order to lead men you must first gain their trust.

Although the tactic of “marching fire” was something that Baranowski had learned through training, the understanding of how to demonstrate to the men of Company A that he had their

³⁰⁶ Interview with Al Brooks, August 6, 1988, Box 3, Oral Interview Notes BSWA, CMH.

³⁰⁷ Interview with Colonel Joseph Baranowski, August 24, 1994, Box 2, Oral Interview Notes BSWA, CMH.

best interest in mind was something that was difficult to teach to new leaders. Some would say impossible because it is one of the qualities of leadership that some men have and some men do not. Similarly, knowing that as a leader you need to experience many of the same hardships as your men was a difficult lesson for junior officers to embrace. After all, many of these junior officers were fresh out of Officer Candidate schools where they were taught that as officers they were set-apart from the enlisted men. They were warned about fraternization and taught that as officers they must separate themselves socially from the enlisted men. As a result, it can be difficult for the junior officer to understand that in combat there is a sense of cohesion and camaraderie that is essential for all men to embrace – including the officers. In the segregated 24th Infantry the ability of a white officer to share in the hardships of the black enlisted personnel was essential if he wanted to demonstrate that he was a part of the unit.

Bernard Abrams, a junior officer in the 24th recalled one particular instance where he and his fellow officers demonstrated to their men that they were all part of one unit that shared hardships equally. Abrams stated that during a turn-over of command a list of material shortages was recorded and put forward to Battalion as “combat loss.” Abrams related that the Division G-4 disapproved the report of “combat loss” and “bucked it back with a nasty letter indicating that the responsible people should punish the guilty ones and pay statements of charges.” Abrams said that “after a massive effort to make up the losses through trades and the like, the senior NCO’s of the unit banded together and with the supply officer arranged for everyone in the company to sign statements of charges to cover the cost of the remaining losses.” Included among those who agreed to have their pay docked were all of Abrams officers “both black and white officers” and Abrams himself.³⁰⁸ Abrams had demonstrated to his men they were all in it

³⁰⁸ Interview with Bernard W. Abrams, April 11, 1995, Box 2, Oral Interview Notes BSWA, CMH.

together.

Abrams did not stop with sharing an economic burden with his men. He endeavored continually to reinforce the conviction that he would be with his men through thick and thin. According to Abrams, during the summer of 1951, as the war turned into a stationary fight with truce talks ongoing, there was a subtle change in his unit. Abrams said that “during this time the black-white issue became more visible” and “at times black soldiers complained that the 3rd Battalion had harder missions to accomplish than those, for example, of the white Battalions.” Abrams said to counteract the rising racial tensions and to “emphasis a one army concept,” Abrams and his fellow white officers made sure to stay close to the men. Abrams said that they constantly “reminded them that they were with them” and were quick to point out a white a FO (forward observer) that was operating with the company, along with other white crews that were in supporting tanks and quad fifties.³⁰⁹ But perhaps the most convincing part of Abrams attempt to instill in his men that he was one of them and they were all in it together was Abrams willingness to demonstrate that he would take the same risks as everyone else and that he wasn’t going to risk anyone’s life more than his own.

Abrams stated that after an engagement in which he was seriously injured and evacuated to Japan he received a letter signed by all the men in his company – Company L. Abrams said that the letter in essence said “thank you.” Abrams said there was one particularly poignant line that read, “We trusted you because we knew that you would not waste our lives.”³¹⁰ They could have added as well, because you were right there with us at every point of the battle.

Many of the soldiers in the 24th did not feel as confidently as did Abrams’ men that their lives would not be wasted. They realized that they were part of a segregated unit that the Army often

³⁰⁹ Ibid.

³¹⁰ Ibid.

considered unreliable, but yet was still chosen to take on many of the most difficult tasks.

Lindsey Bowers told interviews with the Center of Military History “for some reason – perhaps this is personal but – I felt the 24th was perhaps sacrificed so other units could get out up there.”³¹¹

Officers Accepting Responsibility/Setting the Standard

President Truman was fond of using the expression “the buck stops here” to show that he was ultimately responsible for what happened in his administration and the government in general. As the top executive “officer” – President Truman said that he would be the one to accept the responsibility of problems created by subordinates – whether he had any direct knowledge of them or not. For military officers the responsibility for the acts of subordinates falls on them as well.

Colonel Carter learned first-hand during World War II the burden of responsibility. In World War II Carter was the commander of the 5th Ranger Battalion. Colonel Carter related how on one particular occasion his Rangers got into a fight with a black engineer service company comprised of stevedores that resulted in many casualties. Although Colonel Carter was not even physically present for the brawl he was still none-the-less relieved of command and reduced in rank from Lt. Colonel to 1st Lieutenant.³¹² He did not complain about his demotion because he accepted responsibility for the actions of his men. Carter was ultimately vindicated for his willingness to take responsibility for his men by being quickly promoted through combat to his former rank.

Although the 24th received much criticism throughout the early months of the Korean War, the responsibility for any shortcomings were not placed on the officers themselves, but instead

³¹¹ Interview with Lindsey Bowers, April 20, 1989, Box 2, Oral Interview Notes BSWA, CMH.

³¹² Interview with Colonel Owen H. Carter, June 21, 1994, Box 3, Oral Interview Notes BSWA, CMH.

were placed on the African American soldiers. Had the officers of the 24th Infantry Regiment followed President Truman dictum – they would have stood up and accepted responsibility for any performance issues on the part of the regiment.

Besides taking command responsibility for the failures of subordinates, it is also crucial for the good order of the unit that officers set the standard for their men. Any discrepancy between what was considered appropriate for enlisted men and for officers was a sure way of undermining the good order of a unit as a whole. In the 24th Infantry Regiment this usually related to white officers setting an appropriate standard for the black soldiers of the unit, although there were several black officers who also had to be mindful to set an appropriate standard for the men. However, in a segregated unit such as the 24th Infantry Regiment with tension already running high between white officers and black soldiers, any hypocrisy on the part of white officers would instantly destroy their credibility. For a black officer in 1950 there was a dual battle; the successful black officer had to be mindful of both the impression he made on his troops and his image to the white officers who served with him.

Lieutenant General Emmett Paige learned as a junior officer how difficult it could be for a black officer to set the standard in a predominantly white Army. As a junior officer, Paige was sent to a leadership course which he was the first black officer to ever attend. Paige stated that from his first day he seemed to be singled out by the commanding officer for harassment above and beyond any of his fellow (white) classmates. Paige recalled that the training was designed to be especially difficult and that officers that did not pass muster were summarily kicked out of the course. Paige said that “over the intercom system, they called the names of the people who were going to be kicked out to report to the commandant.” Despite all the harassment he endured, Paige remained in the course and actually excelled. However, during the final week – on a

Saturday afternoon – his name was called over the intercom. Paige remembered telling his fellow officers, “ok fellas, I guess today’s the day for me.” Paige said he was dejected because he was going to be kicked out and his fellow officers told him that he should go see the Inspector General because they thought he was being singled out because of his race.

Paige went to see the commandant, Captain Prentiss. Captain Prentiss looked at the dejected Paige and said “student Paige, guess you suppose I’ve been giving you a hard time since you’ve been here.” Without waiting for a reply Captain Prentiss continued “Well, you’re right. You’re the first Negro to go through the course, and I wanted to see just how much you could take. You set the example for the others who will follow you.” Captain Prentiss told Paige it wasn’t fair, but for him to succeed as a black officer he would have to be twice as good as the white officers. Paige would have to set the example both as an officer and as a black man in a white man’s Army.³¹³

Another important role for the successful officer was making sure that the orders you give to your subordinates are carried out. As was noted earlier, the 24th was accused of straggling by enlisted soldiers on a scale supposedly greater than other white units. Part of the fault for straggling by enlisted soldiers rested with the officers who were supposed to oversee those men. Where were the officers as these men moved to the rear? Where were the NCO’s that were entrusted by the officers to ensure that all orders to remain in position were adhered to by the unit’s soldiers?

Colonel Creel recalled during his formative years as a junior officer that he had the opportunity to serve with General Charles D. Palmer who made the often quoted remark, “nothing gets done except that which is checked.” Creel said that he took the saying to heart

³¹³ Interview with Lieutenant General Emmett Paige, June 7, 1988, Box 7, Oral Interview Notes BSWA, CMH.

himself as an officer:

I firmly believe that and insisted that my officers and NCOs practice that rule and often checked just to be sure that they were doing their job of checking. Furthermore, I was with the company “on-line” all the time. My “CP” was my foxhole just behind the crest of the ridge; the rest of the units had theirs forward of the ridge.³¹⁴

Creel wanted to be there with the men when they needed the calming presence of an officer during the height of battle. He knew that by leading from the front he would ensure that his men were doing their duty.

The true test of leadership does not come when leading a unit of highly trained, disciplined, combat tested soldiers. Rather, the true test of leadership comes when leading difficult, undisciplined, frightened, dispirited soldiers. Major General Oliver Dillard was an African American junior officer, who in 1950 was assigned to command a company of the 24th Infantry Regiment in Korea. Early on in his command he had a problem with an unknown member of his unit sneaking away from the unit to shoot chickens belonging to nearby Koreans. Despite his best efforts to make sure that all of his men knew that this was unacceptable behavior, night after night he kept hearing the report of a gun firing as another chicken was being killed. Dillard explained what happened one night when he went to investigate the sound of gunfire:

I had firmly come to the conclusion that it was a member of my platoon shooting chickens. And indeed, I walked around a hut, and, indeed, it was one of my men. I walked face to face with one of my guys, whose M1 rifle was almost literally smoking. He threw a round into the chamber, pulled it right up, and pointed it squarely at my forehead. And, of course, I didn’t know what to do. And just, I guess, from normal reaction, I put a round in my chamber in my carbine and pointed it squarely at him and said, “okay, what are you doing down here shooting chickens?” And it seemed to me that we stood there for about 15 hours, but it was probably about 15 seconds. And he said, finally, “Oh, I just down here. I know you told us not to shoot chickens, but I came on down.” (Dillard said that he was aware at this point that the rest of the men of the company were watching him – and he realized why) They (the other soldiers) knew he was down there. This guy was a renegade. He was the platoon renegade ... and everybody knew he

³¹⁴ Interview with Colonel Buckner M. Creel, December 3, 1993, Box 3, Oral Interview Notes BSWA, CMH.

was down there, and he was one of these loudmouths, boisterous, don't follow orders, any orders individuals ... but I took him and I said, "Okay, let's go," and took his weapon, brought him on up, put him in a jeep and went over to the company CP.³¹⁵

What Dillard did next was what defined him as a leader – to the renegade soldier and to the rest of the men of the company. Dillard sought and received permission to handle the soldier in his own way – knowing full well that under the circumstances of the soldier pointing a weapon at a superior officer that the soldier would at the very least receive several years in federal prison as a result of a general courts martial. Instead, Dillard used the possibility of courts martial to get the soldier to become a fully functioning member of the unit. And in so doing, Dillard solidified his reputation with the other men of the unit as an officer that could be fair and understanding while at the same time making sure the men did their duty.

Bernard Abrams, a white junior officer in the 24th Infantry Regiment was another officer who knew that sometimes an officer has to be creative when dealing with a difficult soldier. Abrams had a soldier that was so frightened during an attack up a hill that he refused to attack. Abrams ordered a sergeant to take the rifle away from the disobedient soldier and make him go up the hill without the rifle. Abrams said "furthermore, that night the disobedient soldier was placed in his own single fox hole without his weapon." Abrams recalled that throughout the night the disobedient soldier begged for his weapon out of fear that he would be overrun by the enemy and killed. Abrams informed the disobedient soldier that if he took off during the night the sergeant next to him would shoot him. Abrams said the next morning the disobedient soldier received his rifle back. According to Abrams, "the man regained control over his fear and henceforth performed as a good soldier."³¹⁶ While certainly not the most orthodox way of dealing with

³¹⁵ Interview with Major General Oliver Dillard, October 26, 1988, Box 4, Oral Interview Notes BSWA, CMH.

³¹⁶ Interview with Bernard W. Abrams, April 11, 1995, Box 2, Oral Interview Notes BSWA, CMH.

straggling, Abrams' method was effective in demonstrating to the soldier that his life was dependent on his fighting.

A good leader not only looks for solutions to difficult soldiers through innovative ways, but also attempts to use the strengths of the men to help them. Colonel Creel recalled that one of the things that impressed him the most during his time leading African American soldiers in Korea was their ability to bounce back after adversity. Creel talked of his men's ability to come out of a particularly brutal combat situation and be able to brush it off and move on. Creel said "that was their strength" and it impressed him. "After adversity, perhaps even after defeat, my troops from Companies K and L" seemed to recuperate quickly "more so than white troops in the companies I had led during World War II."³¹⁷ Perhaps, some of the ability to bounce back from adversity by the African American soldiers in Korea was part of a lifetime of dealing with segregation and second-class citizen status. Whatever the cause, Creel realized that it was a strength inherent in his men that could be drawn on to lead them through difficult battles.

Racism Destroys Ability to Lead

When attempting to establish a reputation as a leader in a segregated unit, nothing could destroy the respect African American soldiers had for an officer more than the display either overtly or covertly of racist attitudes towards black soldiers. Dillard remembered that some of the white officers he was with in the 24th proved to be "effective and capable" officers while others were "far from superior leaders." The more glaring problem from Dillard's perspective was the officers who came to the 24th Infantry Regiment with racist attitudes. Dillard noted "it was obvious to anyone who opened his eyes and ears that some came to the 24th Regiment

³¹⁷ Interview with Colonel Buckner M. Creel, December 3, 1993, Box 3, Oral Interview Notes BSWA, CMH.

believing that blacks were congenitally inferior and that blacks would not fight.”³¹⁸

The men of the 24th Infantry Regiment quickly realized that a racist white officer would not hesitate to blame any failure by the unit on the men instead of his leadership, further undermining any chance the officer may have had to be an effective leader. According to Dillard, racist officers “knew that there were many others at every level of command throughout the Army who shared their belief.” Thus, “they knew that any failure involving the 24th Regiment, notwithstanding its real cause or origin, could safely be attributed to this shared belief.”³¹⁹ The attitudes and actions of some of these officers will be discussed further in Chapter IV.

Dillard wasn’t the only African American member of the 24th who knew that racist officers were already anticipating any failings on their part to land squarely on the black soldiers. Mershon and Schlossman observed, “Black enlisted personnel believed that they had been systematically blamed for the leadership failures of white officers who disliked black troops.”³²⁰ The race blame game was not new to the Korean War; white officers in the 92nd during World War II used it to propel their careers, such as General Edward Almond.

During World War II one of the white officers in the 92nd ID who served under Almond had been so blatantly racist that during an investigation launched after numerous complaints that the white officer ordered the NCOs “to strike their subordinates,” the white officer acknowledged that he ordered the beatings “although he knew it was wrong.” In response to the accusation of nagging and swearing the same officer responded, “You know how Niggers are, if you don’t keep after them they simply lie down on the job. If I ever cussed any of them at any time it was

³¹⁸ Statement by Major General Oliver Dillard, May 20, 1987, Box 4, Oral Interview Notes BSWA, CMH.

³¹⁹ Ibid.

³²⁰ Mershon and Schlossman, *Foxholes and Color Lines*, 222.

done unconsciously.”³²¹ While some officers were blatant in their expression of racial dislike for the men, others could be more subtle in displaying their bias. For these types of racist white officers, it was not so much a question of what they did to their men, but what they did not do for their men that showed their inherent bias.

This subtle type of racism on the part of white officers was described by Mershon and Schlossman as “oppositional leadership.” Oppositional leadership was defined by the way “military officials acted deliberately to uphold racial discrimination against proposals to reduce it.”³²² Officers who displayed oppositional leadership might not stand up for their men when they were denied access to on-base recreational facilities for instance, or allowed white soldiers to disparage their men with racial epithets. Gaston Bergeron, a white 2nd lieutenant assigned as a forward observer attached to Company B of the 24th noted one example when white officers failed to stand up for the African American soldiers. While the black soldiers of the 24th moved up the line to replace a white unit, the men of the white unit “hurled terrible insults and racial slurs at the blacks without interference from their officers, who were present.” Bergeron realized the debilitating effect this could have on the morale of the black soldiers and wondered how “could any soldier, subjected to such abuse time after time, develop a good opinion of himself or summon up a resolve to fight for the country that permitted it to occur?”³²³ Certainly, for the officer who refused to stand up for his own men his ability to lead was severely crippled.

Officer Utilization of NCOs

Any officer who has served in the armed forces for any length of time quickly learns that his or her effectiveness was often dependent on strong NCOs who are there to back-up the officer’s

³²¹ Wilson, “Recipe for Failure.”

³²² Mershon and Schlossman, *Foxholes and Color Lines*, 314.

³²³ Bowers, Hammond, MacGarrigle, *Black Soldier White Army*, 258.

orders. While many of the officer positions in the 24th were assigned to white officers, all of the NCO positions in the 24th were assigned to black soldiers. There was one exception during the Korean War. When the 24th was getting pummeled with combat losses – especially within the ranks of the NCOs – the Army experimented with a program by which combat tested NCOs from the 29th could volunteer for duty with the 24th with the understanding that if they succeeded with the 24th than they would receive a battlefield commission.³²⁴ These black NCOs were responsible for providing the connection between the officer and the average enlisted soldier trying to stay alive in a chaotic environment. For the white officer, these black NCOs were often the men who ensured their own survival.

While a bad officer ran the risk of being killed, “fraggd,” by his own men, a good officer would have men willing to risk their own life to save the life of their officer. Philip Harper was a white lieutenant who owed his life to a black NCO in the 24th. Harper had been wounded and the enemy was closing in on their position when Harper ordered his men to move out. Harper was slowly staggering towards the rear. Harper detailed what happened next:

At that point, a black sergeant, whose name I regret to this day I do not know, was in a dry irrigation ditch and saw that I was wounded and about to be overrun by the enemy. By this time the Chinese had taken the US soldier to my front prisoner and were dragging him to the rear. The lead elements of the enemy assault force were only about 20 yards from me when the black Sergeant, who had neither a weapon nor a helmet, grabbed me by the arm and yelled “Come on Lt, - you can make it!” The Sergeant and I locked an arm around the other’s waist and, as though running a three-legged race, made a mad 50 yard dash to the irrigation ditch. With the adrenaline pumping harder and faster with the sound of each enemy bullet whistling past our heads, and without either of us saying a word to the other, at a point about 10 from the edge of the ditch, we both did a flying somersault through the air and rolled in the bottom of the ditch.³²⁵

³²⁴ Interview with Colonel Joseph Baranowski, August 24, 1994, Box 2, Oral Interview Notes BSWA, CMH. Colonel Baranowski said that he had a mortarman named Sergeant Snell that was a white NCO that joined the unit for a time. Baranowski said besides Sergeant Snell there were maybe two or three other white NCOs that came over to the 24th to help “beef up” the NCO leadership in the battalion. Otherwise, all NCOs were black.

³²⁵ Interview with Philip Harper, unknown date, Box 5, Oral Interview Notes BSWA, CMH.

Harper was not the only white officer who had black NCOs willing to look out for him. Leonard Kushner said that his platoon sergeant was “Big Boy” Williams, a heavy weight champion boxer who always took care of him and was a very reliable platoon sergeant. Kushner said that Williams once told him, “he (Kushner) had to stay alive; if he goes, we all go.”³²⁶ Harper and Kushner were officers who knew that the strength and leadership qualities of black NCOs like Williams were absolutely necessary if they were to be effective at leading their men.

The 24th Infantry Regiment in many respects was similar to any other combat regiment on paper. Its members comprised a fighting force that had multiple responsibilities, from intelligence to logistics, and when properly led would work as a unified team towards achieving a military goal. The 24th Infantry Regiment had the same cohort of officers, technicians, cooks, infantrymen as any other regiment. The men of the 24th Infantry Regiment wore the same uniforms and carried the same weapons as did, for example, the soldiers of the 29th Infantry Regiment – or any other regiment in Korea. Yet, despite the similarities on paper, the 24th Infantry Regiment was still the only African American regiment in Korea; the only regiment where soldiers were separated out for no other reason than the color of their skin. Because of this difference and this difference alone, so much of the success or failure of the 24th rested with the officers that led the Regiment.

³²⁶ Interview with Leonard H. Kushner, June 16, 1989, Box 6, Oral Interview Notes BSWA, CMH.

CHAPTER III

Trials, Drugs, Venereal Disease, and Medals: The Fight for Equal Treatment in Korea

When North Korean troops stormed across the border into South Korea on June 25, 1950, one of the first Army components sent into action was the 25th Infantry Division, comprised of several subordinate units including the all-black 24th Infantry Regiment. As the front lines shifted with each assault and counter-assault, several units were singled out for praise. The 24th Infantry Regiment was praised for its heroic efforts in slowing down the North Korean advance into the southern reaches of the peninsula. In an article titled “U.S. Hails Tan Warriors: 24th Infantry Victory May Turn Tide of Battle” in *The Chicago Defender*, the newspaper declared: “Never before, not even during the smashing victories in World War II, had Negro fighters been hailed as were the men of the 24th when the flash came that Yechon was captured.”³²⁷ The editors of this African American newspaper believed the news from the Korean battlefield was proof that black men could fight as well as their white counterparts. “It squelched any doubt that colored Americans were not first class soldiers on the field of combat,” the *Defender* proclaimed.³²⁸

Praise for the all-black 24th Infantry Regiment was not restricted to the African American press in the United States. Other newspapers ran articles about the successful exploits of the 24th Infantry Regiment outside Yechon, Korea, including the *Norfolk Virginian-Pilot*, *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, *Chicago Daily News*, *Chicago Herald American*, *Chicago Tribune*, *New York Daily News*, *New York Times*, *New York Herald-Tribune*, *Louisville Courier Journal*, and the

³²⁷ *The Chicago Defender*, July 29, 1950, p. 1.

³²⁸ *Ibid.*

North Carolinian *Charlotte Observer*.³²⁹ Although at the time of the battle for Yechon the news media praised the action as one of the first “victories” for American forces in Korea, high ranking officers such as General Almond would later declare that there was no battle at Yechon, Korea, and the men of the 24th Infantry Regiment accomplished nothing more than securing an abandoned village.³³⁰ This revisionist narrative of the battle of Yechon by senior officers might have partially been due to the reported exploits of an African American Engineer, Lieutenant Charles Bussey, who claimed that he had killed scores of enemy soldiers and was deserving of the nation’s highest medal – the Congressional Medal of Honor. Lieutenant Bussey reported that during a conversation between him and his commanding officer (CO), Colonel John T. Corley, his CO said, “I cannot allow you to become a hero, no matter how worthy. I reduced the size of the battalion that you saved to a group, and I reduced the number of men you killed so that finally the job was only worth the Silver Star.”³³¹

In this chapter we are going to explore Lieutenant Bussey’s account of events outside Yechon, Korea, along with other accounts of feats of bravery by African American servicemen in the 24th Infantry Regiment that may not have received the attention they were due because of racism by the Army officer corps. In order to understand how Lieutenant Bussey or another black soldier could be denied recognition for an award of valor it is important that one has an understanding of the award system in the Army during the Korean War. What were the

³²⁹ Ibid., The *Chicago Defender* cited these newspapers as examples that other press organizations in both the North and South were highlighting the fighting exploits of African American servicemen in the 24th Infantry Regiment.

³³⁰ In a letter to Vice Chief of Staff, U.S. Army, General Bruce Palmer in July 1971, General Almond wrote regarding the “capture” of Yechon, Korea, “the facts involved indicate that there was no ‘capture’ of this city but there was a ‘failure’ by the 24th Infantry to capture this city and this was verified through Appleman’s Korean War study *South to the Naktong, North to the Yalu*.” Almond also asserted “there was no important city of YECH’ON in Korea. YECH’ON is a barrio type of village and the location was of minor tactical value.” Attachment of letter from General Edward M. Almond to General Bruce Palmer, Vice Chief of Staff, U.S. Army, July 29, 1971, Box 132, Almond Papers, MHI.

³³¹ Buckley, *American Patriots*, 353-354. The evidence for this exchange comes from Bussey’s own account. There were no other witnesses to this exchange and Colonel Corley never commented about or discussed having such an exchange with Bussey.

requirements to receive an award of valor and who could nominate someone for the award?

How did the Army bureaucracy come into play once a recommendation was made, and most importantly, who ultimately decided on whether an award of valor was approved?

This chapter also examines several inconsistencies with the way the Army handled black troops as opposed to white troops. Specifically, as it pertains to discipline issues, there were obvious differences both with regard to the formal courts-martial proceedings and the less formal handling of issues pertaining to venereal disease and drugs. Were African Americans singled out because of their race for a disproportionate number of courts-martial proceedings? Were black troops treated differently than white troops in reference to venereal disease and drug abuse? As was discussed in the previous chapter, the answer to these questions depended on the type of leadership present in a given African American unit – a leadership that primarily consisted of white officers who may have had ulterior motives when deciding how to handle black soldiers.

From Praise to Courts-Martial

The accolades for the fighting spirit of the men of the 24th Infantry Regiment continued through July, 1950 and into August, 1950 as the American and South Korean forces were forced to retreat to the Pusan Perimeter. This was a period of the war where the American forces faced the real possibility that they could be forced to withdrawal from the Korean peninsula in what was already being referred to in the media as potentially “America’s Dunkirk” – a reference to the British withdrawal of forces from France at the beginning of World War II. Again, *The Chicago Defender* picked up accounts of the action outside Pusan and wrote an article titled “Tan Yanks Hit Counter Drive” that was published on August 5, 1950. According to the editors, “As the savage Korean battle entered the ‘do or die’ phase, Tan Yanks of the 24th Infantry Regiment met continuous Red drives with smashing counter attacks and gave little ground under

withering fire of swarming enemy troops.”³³² The newspaper quoted a member of the 24th Infantry Regiment, Lieutenant Jasper R. Jackson of Durham, North Carolina, who said the men under his command refused to withdraw until ordered to do so. White Lieutenant Jackson commented to reporters, “Our boys did fine. There were just too many of them and we had to withdraw. But I can tell you one thing; there a lot fewer North Koreans today than there were yesterday.”³³³

The praise provided by Lieutenant Jackson and the American media in the early days of the Korean War for the men of the 24th Infantry Regiment gave the false impression that the corner had been turned as to the use of black soldiers in combat. There was a hopefulness expressed in the black press in the early days of the Korean War that perhaps this would be the first war in which the color of one’s skin was not considered an instant indication of combat effectiveness. However, within weeks of the August headline in *The Chicago Defender* a new and more troubling narrative began to leak out about the “Tan Yanks” of the 24th Infantry Regiment. Slowly at first, but with growing frequency, reports about scores of African American soldiers being held for trial on charges of “Misbehaving before the Enemy” and “Straggling” made their way to the United States. These troubling reports grew severe and common enough to be noticed by the NAACP.

Once again *The Chicago Defender* was at the forefront in alerting their readers to the reported problems in Korea. An article in the paper on November 18, 1950, under the headline “NAACP Alarmed by Smears on Negro Troops” provided some of the underlying reports coming out of Korea. The paper observed that James L. Hicks, a war correspondent, “reported from Tokyo that he had seen on a train in Japan 11 members of the 24th Infantry who had been convicted by

³³² *The Chicago Defender*, August 5, 1950, p. 1.

³³³ Ibid.

general courts martial of ‘misconduct before the enemy’ and had been sentenced to long terms of imprisonment at hard labor.”³³⁴ Another war correspondent, Frank Whisonant, made an even more serious revelation to *The Chicago Defender* when he proclaimed that “ninety-nine and nine-tenths per cent of the men tried before courts martial boards were Negro troops from the 24th Infantry.”³³⁵ According to the newspaper, based on these allegations and other similar reports coming out of Korea, the NAACP Special Counsel, Thurgood Marshall, asked Frank Reeves, the NAACP’s Washington attorney to make inquiries with the Department of the Army.³³⁶

The initial inquiries with the Department of the Army proved troubling, the NAACP requested and received permission from the Truman Administration to have Thurgood Marshall travel to MacArthur’s Far Eastern Command and to Korea to get a first-hand look at the situation on the ground. Marshall’s findings were dire and confirmed the NAACP’s worst fears. Marshall reported that “without exception the Negro soldiers were given an unbelievably dirty deal, solely because of their race.”³³⁷ *The Chicago Defender*, in an article titled “Marshall Says Korean Army Trials Unfair,” quoted the attorney as saying that the courts martial of black soldiers in Korea were “carried on in an atmosphere making justice impossible.”³³⁸

The Chicago Defender went on to note that in the flurry of courts martial trials conducted after the initial invasion by North Korea, only two white soldiers were convicted out of 8 tried, while over 23 African American soldiers were convicted of 60 tried. And there were major discrepancies in sentences imposed on white soldiers and black soldiers. The two white soldiers convicted were given three and five years while one of the African American soldiers was given

³³⁴ *The Chicago Defender*, November 18, 1950, p. 12.

³³⁵ *Ibid.*

³³⁶ *Ibid.*

³³⁷ *New York Times*, June 29, 1951, p. 24.

³³⁸ *The Chicago Defender*, February 24, 1951, p. 2.

the death penalty and the others similarly disproportionate long sentences.³³⁹ According to Bernard Nalty in *Strength for the Fight*, ultimately “twice as many blacks as whites faced military tribunals in the Far East Command even though fewer than one soldier in six was black.”³⁴⁰

Justice came swiftly for the African American soldiers tried in the “field” in Korea. One black defendant was accused, tried, and sentenced to life in prison in less than 42 minutes. Marshall noted about that particular incident, “even in Mississippi a Negro will get a trial longer than 42 minutes, if he is fortunate enough to be brought to trial.”³⁴¹ For those in the African American community in the States, the actions of the Army on the heels of so much public praise for the 24th Infantry Regiment appeared to be simple jealousy on the part of the white officer corps. “It was partly because of this resentment against Negroes stopping the enemy when numerous white units broke under fire and fled that a number of Courts-Martial of Negroes occurred for the obvious purpose of negating the laudatory publicity Negro troops had received,” proclaimed an editorial in *The Chicago Defender*.³⁴²

It only could be taken as a sign of guilt, immediately after Thurgood Marshall’s report was made known to the world, the Army attempted to remedy some of their earlier mistakes. *The Chicago Defender* noted with some satisfaction that four black servicemen who had been convicted in courts martial cases in Korea were freed by acting Judge Advocate General Franklin P. Shaw. The newspaper reported: “Cpl. Vernon S. White, Pvts. Willie Martin, Jr., Hardy Sanders and Bernell Gorden were given one year suspended sentences for being without leave.

³³⁹ Ibid.

³⁴⁰ Nalty, *Strength for the Fight*, 258.

³⁴¹ Ibid.

³⁴² *The Chicago Defender*, February 3, 1951, p. 1.

They were previously sentenced to 10 years and dishonorable discharge.”³⁴³

One of the questions that must be asked regarding the flood of courts martial cases in Korea is; were there African American soldiers who displayed cowardice in the face of the enemy? The answer was unquestionably yes. But just as important, many white soldiers fled in the face of danger as well. The true testament to the double-standard employed in Korea by the white leadership was the difference in treatment received by accused white soldiers and accused black soldiers. One example involved 24th Infantry Regiment veteran Ivory Perry. Perry recalled that when he was brought up on charges the white soldiers investigating his case “kept emphasizing that I was a troublemaker” and constantly referred to him as “boy.” Perry said they were clearly being “hostile” towards him and he said it was because of his race.³⁴⁴ A more troubling case of purposefully “railroading” of an African American soldier for “misbehavior before the enemy” occurred during the courts martial of Pfc. Jesse James.

On November 11, 1950, James was convicted by general courts martial for “Misbehaving Before the Enemy” and sentenced to twenty years. Upon closer examination of the facts of the case it was clear that this was not a normal or fair trial. For one James was not allowed to call defense witnesses and the defense counsel appointed to him was white. More troubling, according to James, his attorney was “ordered” not to defend him because the Army already knew the outcome of the courts martial before it began.

Early on in the proceedings, James had been told by a white officer named Captain Mays that it would be all right if he were tried with two others because a deal had been worked out with the

³⁴³ *The Chicago Defender*, February 24, 1951, p.2.

³⁴⁴ Interview with Ivory Perry, September 8, 1988, Box 9, Oral Interview Notes BSWA, CMH. Perry was dishonorably discharged from the Army after being convicted of a narcotics violation and disobeying a direct order. The officer who had given the order that Perry supposedly disobeyed testified during the trial that he had not given any order. Despite this Perry was still found guilty. Perry being condescendingly referred to as “boy” by the white soldiers investigating his offense was common with the majority of African American defendants during the Korean War.

prosecutor to get him off. Instead, the government moved for a trial against James. Serious questions surfaced early on during the trial when James was not allowed to call Doctor Booker, who would have testified that James had been wounded at the time of the incident. Further, James stated a non-commissioned officer, “Sergeant O’Neil,” testified that he was James’ Section Chief when he was not. The most damning evidence presented by the Army raised even more questions. As “eye witnesses” the Army called two soldiers who had also left their positions only to be found “drinking in the rear,” but were allowed to have their sentences reduced by ten years for testifying against James.

As for the jurors for the trial, “twelve were called for the jury but six were excused. The remaining six were white and from the infantry.” The make-up of the jury of white infantry men was crucial in understanding the flaw in the juror selection because James was part of an artillery unit. He was responsible for maintaining over 12 miles of communication wire, which helped explain his location and injury during the battle. Unfortunately, a jury made up of infantrymen would probably not understand the actions of someone assigned to an artillery unit. Also, having a jury made up entirely of white soldiers during a time when the Army still segregated black soldiers probably did not do James any justice. James was ultimately found guilty and served 18 months in prison before he was then allowed to go back to Korea as part of the 8th Field Artillery as a private. James retired from the Army in 1969 as an E-6 and throughout his career he tried to have his conviction removed but failed.³⁴⁵

From the Korean War stories of those such as Private Jesse James who faced courts martial trials for “Misbehaving Before the Enemy,” it would appear that the white leadership in the Army had already made up their mind that black soldiers were prone to “cowardice” – just as the

³⁴⁵ Interview of Jesse James, January 6, 1990, Box 5, Oral Interview Notes BSWA, CMH.

inter-war Army studies had predicted – and that the only effective way to deal with them was to make an example out of as many black soldiers as possible. A white soldier who might have drifted away from the front might be gently reprimanded and led back to the front, but in contrast the black soldier was immediately brought up on serious charges – charges that technically could include the death penalty. Lyle Rishell was one of the wise officers in Korea that realized that there were better ways to deal with straggling instead of courts martial proceedings. Rishell recounted what happened on one particular occasion during his time leading black soldiers in combat when the men began to move to rear in response to heavy “friendly fire” shelling that came in on their position:

I turned and looked down the hill behind me, which had required such an effort to climb, and saw a dozen men already down the steep side about fifty yards, going hell-for-leather. “hey there, you bastards,” I yelled, “Where do you think you’re going? Get the hell back here or I’m shooting!” When I first screamed, the men stopped shagging and turned around, waiting to hear what I wanted them to do. They looked at me as if they were seeing a ghost. They could not escape seeing the weapon I pointed at them ... the men sheepishly started to hike back to the top. When they got back, I reamed them out again and cussed their mothers and their friends and anyone else I could think of.³⁴⁶

Although Lyle Rishell’s methods were unorthodox, they were effective and less costly to the Army than attempting to courts martial all of the offenders. The quality of discretion is one of the most important attributes to being an effective leader and one that many white officers ignored when dealing with potential courts martial cases among black troops. Had Rishell decided that his men should receive some type of official punishment he and his immediate supervisor had several types of punishment they could have chosen from that were far less severe than the general courts martial. One option was non-judicial punishment.

Morris MacGregor, in the Army Center of Military History study *Integration of the Armed Forces*, noted that “in general, unit commanders had a great deal of discretion in framing the

³⁴⁶ Rishell, *With a Black Platoon in Combat*, 90.

charges brought against an alleged offender” and on the less serious offenses the officer could “conclude that a given infraction was not a serious matter at all and simply dismiss the soldier with a verbal reprimand” as was the case with Rishell.³⁴⁷ This discretion unfortunately could act as a double-edged sword, with one officer displaying judicious use of his discretion and another blowing a seemingly insignificant infraction into a full scale courts martial. MacGregor observed, “Whereas one commander might decide that a case called for a charge of aggravated assault, another, faced with the same set of facts, might settle for a charge of simple assault.”

MacGregor went one step further and declared that since white officers used their discretion to punish black soldiers and because so many white officers were biased towards black soldiers; the entirety of the argument that black soldiers statistically faced more discipline had to be reassessed. MacGregor reasoned, “If it is reasonable to assume that, as part of the pattern of discrimination, Negroes accused of offenses like misconduct toward superiors, AWOL, and assault often received less generous treatment from their officers than white servicemen, then it is reasonable to suspect that statistics on Negroes involved in crime may reflect such discriminatory treatment.”³⁴⁸ The record in Korea definitely supported MacGregor’s assertion that a number of reported incidents of misconduct by black soldiers were due to bias among officers. Another question that MacGregor might have asked; why did so many troops, both white and black, display a tendency to withdrawal in the face of the enemy? The answer to that also comes back to leadership and the lack of preparedness by the Army prior to the Korean War.

When American troops retreated pell-mell in the early days of the Korean War, a major problem was that the soldiers were completely unprepared for combat. Months of garrison and occupation duty in Japan after World War II had made units, such as the 24th Infantry Regiment,

³⁴⁷ MacGregor, *Integration of the Armed Forces 1940-1965*, 207.

³⁴⁸ Ibid.

complacent. Combat drills were replaced with sporting activities and military parades. This lack of preparation was directly attributable to the senior leadership of the Army in the Far East. It was after all their duty to see to it that the men of their command were prepared for all possible contingencies, such as a major invasion by North Korean forces into South Korea, and across the board, the Far East Command was not prepared for the events of June 25, 1950.

Thurgood Marshall was correct when he observed that General MacArthur “was responsible for maintaining the conditions which brought about the courts-martial and made them inevitable.”³⁴⁹ Marshall also leveled criticism at MacArthur for the prevailing segregation of African Americans in the U.S. Army forces committed to battle in Korea, a policy which only added to the hardships faced by black soldiers. After going on a tour with MacArthur, Marshall commented that “the rule of segregation was most glaringly apparent at the headquarters of the Far East Command, to which no Negroes are assigned.”³⁵⁰ It is clear that discipline problems in a military unit are only exacerbated when the average soldier realizes that his commanders do not have their best interests in mind and treat the men as second-class citizens.

Discipline Problems in the 24th – Drugs and Venereal Disease

One of the problems that plagued African American units at the beginning of the Korean War was the use of illicit drugs. While the number of black soldiers implicated in the use of drugs before and during the Korean War represented a relatively small percentage of the troops at large, it still posed a problem for the officers of these units. While marijuana occasionally was the culprit, the drug of choice and the one that created the most problems for military discipline was heroin. In a foreshadowing of the problems of Vietnam heroin entered the ranks of the military due to close proximity to the production sites in various Asian countries, and because of

³⁴⁹ *New York Times*, June 29, 1951, p. 24.

³⁵⁰ *New York Times*, April 6, 1951, p. 27.

the prevalence of prostitutes that acted as pushers for the drug by their pimps. Houston McMurray recalled that prior to his time in Japan with the 24th, he had never even heard of heroin. McMurray stated that he soon witnessed his fellow soldiers consuming the drug, first by injecting the drug into a cigarette and smoking it, and later by injecting it directly.³⁵¹

Although the use of heroin also occurred within the ranks of white soldiers as well, during the Korean War it appeared to be predominantly associated with African American soldiers.³⁵² The reason for this would appear to trace back to the 24th Infantry's assignment to Japan prior to the war. While on garrison duty in Japan, the men of the 24th were allowed fairly open access to parts of Japan that were rampant with prostitution. And in some instances, prostitutes would provide free services to American servicemen provided that the servicemen would use and purchase heroin. This access to prostitutes and pimps that also doubled as drug pushers was a dangerous combination.

One of the lingering questions about the prevalence of drug use by African American soldiers in the 24th Infantry Regiment is whether the institution of segregation had anything to do with the increase. This question is especially important when paired with the problem of prostitution among troops in the 24th Infantry Regiment. There are numerous examples from World War I and World War II when black troops were forbidden to visit the same locations as white soldiers when on temporary R&R, and this included areas where prostitution was active. Although as was discussed earlier, General Eisenhower had policies in effect during World War II in the European Theater that prohibited such segregation, most white officers had a hard time swallowing the possibility that their white soldiers might be engaged with the same prostitutes

³⁵¹ Interview of Houston McMurray, no date given, Box 9, Oral Interview Notes BSWA, CMH.

³⁵² This conclusion is based on the number of prosecutions in the military for drug related offense. Prosecution of drug related offenses, such as in the case of Ivory Perry – tended to be among African American soldiers. There is of course always the possibility that the high rate of prosecution of black soldiers over white soldiers for drug related offenses could have also been tied to racial bias, but this is difficult to prove based on the limited evidence.

that black soldiers were frequenting. This segregation of prostitutes usually had the effect of pushing black soldiers away from the “sanctioned” prostitutes and deeper into the unregulated areas where venereal disease, and in the case of Japan/Korea, drugs were more prevalent. Unfortunately, the data regarding this possible trend is only anecdotal and hard statistics are not available.

While the Eighth Army in Japan did prosecute and investigate drug related offenses during the time the 24th spent in Japan, the main concern by regiment and division commands was a rising rate of venereal disease (VD) among the troops. The 24th Infantry Regiment in particular attempted to curb the rate of VD among the African American troops in the years preceding the outbreak of the Korean War. According to Houston McMurray, during the time he spent with the 24th at Camp Gifu, the VD rate became so prevalent among the soldiers that the command went to extraordinary lengths to attempt to curb the problem. McMurray recalled that a special station was set up outside the main gate to Camp Gifu and as soldiers came on base after leave “everybody had to take what they called a penicillin cocktail.” At the camp gate there was a log book where soldiers would have to put down whether or not they had intercourse while off base. McMurray stated this was a poorly thought out idea since it “was almost a matter of honor” among the soldiers to sign that they had intercourse; “if you put down no, why everybody would laugh you out of the place so everybody checked off yes as though big deal.”³⁵³ The situation involving VD rates among the African American soldiers in the 24th was serious enough to gain the attention of the senior most officers in Japan.

In a letter from Lieutenant General George Eichelberger to Dwight Eisenhower in February, 1947 the two discussed the VD rate in Japan. General Eichelberger noted, “The VD rate while

³⁵³ Interview of Houston McMurray, no date given, Box 9, Oral Interview Notes BSWA, CMH.

too high is improving ... our over-all rate in the Eighth Army a week ago was 125 per thousand annum with 74 for white and 584 for negro troops.” General Eichelberger attempted to explain the significant discrepancy between VD rates between white soldiers and black soldiers by telling Eisenhower; “When one considers that the Negro troops are living in a Mohammedan heaven over here one can realize our difficulties.”³⁵⁴ The problem of managing VD rates became severe enough that it affected officers’ careers and forced officers to go to great lengths to thwart the rate of VD among their troops.

Colonel John Zanin recalled a battalion commander who was replaced because “instead of falsifying the total number of (VD) cases (as Zanin alleged some officers would do), he reported the actual number.”³⁵⁵ Colonel Halloran, the Regimental commander of the 24th while it was stationed in Korea, took the issue of VD rates among his men quite personal. According to the authors of *Black Soldier White Army*, soldiers who came down with VD “were called to Halloran’s office with their commanding officers, where all concerned were chastised.” After this experience, Colonel Halloran ordered that “first time offenders received thirty days of medical attention and underwent a punishing regime of physical conditioning.” If that did not get the attention of the offending soldier, Colonel Halloran improvised a method guaranteed to get the soldiers attention: “Halloran warned his troops that he would send a letter to the parents or wives of those who contracted the disease more than once to explain the problem and the course of therapy.”³⁵⁶

This hodge-podge response to venereal disease by white officers in black units showed the relative lack of understanding the officers had of their men and their backgrounds. The issue of

³⁵⁴ Letter from General Robert Eichelberger to Dwight Eisenhower, February 18, 1947, Box 38, Pre-Presidential Principle File, DDEPL.

³⁵⁵ Interview with Colonel John Zanin, October 22, 1993, Box 1, Oral Interview Notes BSWA, CMH.

³⁵⁶ Bowers, Hammond, MacGarrigle, *Black Soldier White Army*, 52-53.

“sexual relations” concerning black soldiers had been mired in stereotypes and racial innuendo since the beginning of the 20th Century. Senior officers at the beginning of the Korean War had been inculcated throughout their military careers with the premise that black soldiers were sexual deviants prone to interaction with prostitutes or even rape. The 1926 Army War College Study under a section titled “Morals” argued: “As judged by white standards, the Negro is unmoral. His ideas with relation to honor and sex relations are not on the same plane as those of our white population.” To reinforce this point, the study proclaimed, “petty thieving, lying, promiscuity are much more common among Negroes than among whites,” and the white officer should never forget that “atrocities connected with white women have been the cause of considerable trouble among Negroes.”³⁵⁷ Although this crude, racist perspective of African American men was leavened with a more realistic approach to black male sexual issues by World War II, the Army still struggled to understand how best to deal with black soldiers and with issues related to venereal disease.

The 1944 Army Forces Manual used to teach white officers how to lead black soldiers included an entire chapter dedicated to the “Health of the Negro Soldier,” and of that chapter three-fourths was dedicated to venereal disease and prevention. The manual accurately acknowledged that there were significant discrepancies between the VD rate among white soldiers and black soldiers. The Army’s analysis in 1944 for the discrepancy was far more even-handed and realistic than the 1926 theory that blacks lacked morals when it came to sexual relations. The 1944 Forces Manual said that the cause for a higher VD rate among black troops was due to two factors:

1. Because of a lower average level of education, many Negroes have not yet come to realize the gravity of this situation as it affects them as individuals.

³⁵⁷ Fulmer, *The Use of Negro Manpower in War*, 6.

2. Law enforcement officers and public health officials have failed to apply the same educational and clean-up policies and pressures to Negro communities that they have applied in the past few years to white communities.³⁵⁸

The analysis was telling because when read between the lines it appeared to acknowledge the inequalities of segregation in the lack of education for blacks and the admission that black communities had not received the same attention from public health officials as had white communities. Realizing that the solution to part of the problem was a lack of education among black soldiers, the Army wanted their officers to tackle the VD problem among black troops with a special emphasis on education, a laudable and sensible approach to take and the same approach used by the Army to handle VD issues with white soldiers. Perhaps the only difference between this educational approach for white and black soldiers was the Army stressed to the officers of black troops that “since many of your troops may be slow learners” they would have to devote particular attention to ensure black soldiers understood the message. To further that end, the manual suggested “demonstrations of the use of mechanical or chemical kits and of station prophylaxis will be helpful both from an instructional point of view and to overcome the fear of pain which often prevents full use of prophylaxis.”³⁵⁹

The Army also implored white officers to incorporate the use of Non-Commissioned Officers (NCOs), which in African American units were always black soldiers themselves. The manual warned that “some adjacent civilian Negro communities, because of long years of poverty and neglect, may have a higher venereal disease rate than that of the general community,” and NCOs were crucial to fighting VD because the NCOs could go into the communities into which a white officer could and should not venture.³⁶⁰

³⁵⁸ *Leadership and the Negro Soldier: Army Service Forces Manual*, 48.

³⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 51.

³⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 48-49. The Manual was emphatic in warning the white officers from attempting to push the bounds between enlisted and officer. “No officer who takes his commission seriously will associate intimately with his

The Army continued to struggle with reducing the number of VD cases in black soldiers as well as white soldiers, but the increase in educational programs that stressed preventive measures and the use of prophylaxis were effective in bringing down the number of cases of VD in both races during the Korean War. The gradual integration of black and white soldiers during the Korean War no doubt also helped to bring the cases of VD in black troops down to levels more closely aligned to their white brethren.

Medals and Race

The early twentieth century was in many ways a period of regression when it came to the awarding of medals of valor to African American soldiers. Prior to World War I, African American soldiers had been recognized on the battlefield for their acts of courage and valor, from the Civil War, and that was also true for the period through the Indian Wars and the Spanish American War. Notably, as historian Allen Mikaelian has pointed out; “Not a single African American who fought in the First World War received the Medal of Honor until 1991 ... Not a single African American who fought in the Second World War received the Medal of Honor until 1997, 52 years after the end of the war.”³⁶¹ One of the cases in a study directed by Congress during the 1990s about the Medal of Honor and African American soldiers during World War II focused on the actions of Second Lieutenant Vernon Baker.

Lt. Baker was a member of Almond’s 92nd Infantry Division in Italy during World War II. Baker led his men on an assault of a fortified position and personally engaged and killed enemy personnel during the attack. Baker and his white commanding officer, Captain John F. Runyon, were both put in for the Medal of Honor, but both awards were downgraded to the Distinguished

enlisted men off duty. Their private and personal lives do not include his active participation if he is to hold their respect. Therefore no officer may expect to be present when temptation presents itself to the enlisted man.”

³⁶¹ Allen Mikaelian and Mike Wallace, *Medal of Honor: Profiles of America’s Heroes from the Civil War to the Present* (New York: Hyperion, 2002), 163.

Service Medal. The study concluded in the case of Baker:

Both officers had indisputably demonstrated great courage under fire. Both had also shown superior leadership in combat – Runyon as a company commander, Baker as a platoon leader. The principle and telling difference between the two, however, was that Lieutenant Baker had repeatedly engaged in close combat with the enemy, whereas Runyon had not.³⁶²

While the study did not explicitly find that racial bias was a factor in the downgrading of Baker's medal, they did determine that Baker's action when compared to other comparable actions by white soldiers would have resulted in the issuance of a Medal of Honor. As a result, Baker's Distinguished Service Medal was upgraded to the Medal of Honor in 1997.

Combat during the Korean War was just as chaotic and violent as the preceding wars of the twentieth century, and African American soldiers again displayed incredible acts of valor and courage. Black soldiers, such as 2nd Lieutenant William M. Benefield – a platoon leader in the 77th Engineer Combat Company literally put their lives on the line, and in the case of Lieutenant Benefield, paid the ultimate price. According to the authors of *Black Soldier White Army*, on July 29, 1950, Lieutenant Benefield faced leading his men through a mine field in view of a North Korean force. "Concerned that enemy fire was too intense and that many of his men would be killed in the effort to clear the mines, he assumed the task himself but was cut down within 200 yards of enemy positions before he could complete it."³⁶³ The claims made by some white officers during *Project Clear* interviews that asserted black soldiers would not unduly risk themselves to clear mine fields was put to lie by the actions of Lieutenant Benefield.

African American soldiers in Korea demonstrated that they had the drive and determination to engage with and fight the enemy. Despite the already well disproven belief by some white

³⁶² Converse, *The Exclusion of Black Soldiers from the Medal of Honor in World War II*, 118.

³⁶³ Bowers, Hammond, MacGarrigle, *Black Soldier White Army*, 116. Lieutenant Benefield received a posthumous Distinguished Service Medal for his sacrifice.

officers that black soldiers lacked the “will” to engage in combat, African American soldiers in the 24th proved again through their actions that they were quite willing to engage the enemy. As was sometimes the case in World War I and II, the fighting in Korea could be up-close and personal. Clarence Willis recalled how on one occasion he watched “Black Daddy” Williams engage with an enemy soldier after they came under attack near the village of Haman. Willis witnessed Captain Williams as “he went up and pulled the enemy out of his hole and choked him to death.”³⁶⁴ Captain Williams was clearly ready and willing to “engage” with the enemy.

Even some of the most “problematic” black soldiers in the 24th could under good leadership demonstrate amazing courage and determination under fire. Philip Harper was an officer in the 24th Infantry Regiment who had several “troublemakers” assigned to him. Harper stated that one of these was Pfc. Boyd. Boyd was one of several members of the 24th that were in confinement in the Eighth Army Stockade at Gifu, Japan, when the Korean War broke out. He and number of his fellow inmates were given the option of completing their prison sentences or volunteering to fight in Korea. Pfc. Boyd chose to fight in Korea.

Harper noted that “in the short time that I had been able to observe the men in my platoon, Pfc. Boyd had impressed me as being a highly self-confident, level-headed, and forceful young soldier” despite his early run-ins with military discipline. Harper stated that during one particularly tense battle, he ordered Pfc. Boyd to “hold what you’ve got” and to report over radio when he and his men started to run low on ammunition. Harper recalled that after a dense fog rolled in the enemy reinstated their attack on Boyd’s position. Boyd called on the phone to report that he and his men were out of machine gun ammunition and grenades, and had only between two and three clips of M1 ammunition per man. Harper ordered Pfc. Boyd to “bring the

³⁶⁴ Interview with Clarence Willis, August 23, 1989, Box 5, Oral Interview Notes BSWA, CMH.

troops home” and issued orders for all available firepower to be used to support Boyd and his men’s withdrawal. Harper recalled with pride, “Pfc. Boyd led his men back into the main platoon perimeter without losing a man!”³⁶⁵ Forty years later, Harper was visibly impressed with Pfc. Boyd’s courage and presence of mind under circumstances in which a lesser man would have panicked and brought ruin to himself and his men.

There are times in a conflict, as with the Korean War, when doing ones duty in the face of danger and chaos is of itself an act of courage. The cruelty of war was made apparent to the men of the 24th Infantry Regiment as much as any other unit engaged in combat in Korea. One 24th Infantry regiment veteran Jerry Johnson, encountered the cruelty of war personally while out on a 21 man reconnaissance patrol. During the nighttime patrol, Johnson and the other members of his patrol observed a North Korean detachment near a large bonfire about 500 yards away from them. Johnson watched through field glasses as “captured white and black wounded soldiers were being dragged to the fire and thrown in.”³⁶⁶ Johnson said at the time they were about five miles in front of friendly lines, and the North Korean soldiers were about a thousand strong. Johnson said there was nothing he and his fellow soldiers on patrol could do but head back to their lines and report what they had witnessed. Johnson and his men carried those horrific images with them the rest of their lives, a burden shared by countless veterans of Korea, both white and black.

Theodore Eldridge recalled a similar situation when Roosevelt Dixon and the rest of his squad were found burned to death with their hands tied behind their backs. Eldridge said he remembered Dixon because “he had volunteered to go the front because he wanted to be a 90 day wonder” (referring to soldiers who were assigned to positions in the rear but volunteered to

³⁶⁵ Interview with Philip Harper, unknown date, Box 5, Oral Interview Notes BSWA, CMH.

³⁶⁶ Interview of Jerry Johnson, September 23, 1988, Box 5, Oral Interview Notes BSWA, CMH.

go to the front for 90 days to “get a taste” of combat).³⁶⁷

The cruelty of North Korean and Chinese forces as witnessed by Johnson and Eldridge sometimes left American soldiers numb to violence. As with other wars of the 20th century, the morals and rules of combat can become foggy under sustained immersion in war. Ralph Davis recalled a situation involving a lone enemy soldier and his entire company. Davis said that as his company approached a terrain finger where an enemy soldier was holed up, the soldier decided to make a run for the next adjacent terrain finger – through at least a foot of snow. Davis explained what happened:

If it wasn't tragic it was almost comical. The configuration of the finger permitted the entire company a view and a shot at the running soldier. It was like rapid fire on a rifle range. Rifles and automatic rifles were blazing away while this man ran down the slope through the snow then up the slippery opposite slope to sanctuary. He made it down and was about halfway up the opposite slope when he was hit, staggered and fell. His body jerked a few more times as more bullets hit his stationary body. Over one hundred marksmen took minutes to down this doomed man!³⁶⁸

The men of Davis' company had become desensitized to the violence of war and to the destruction of a human life. For Davis and his company the enemy had become nothing more than a moving target at a firing range. It is under these harsh and chaotic circumstances created in the cauldron of war that medals of valor can play a critical role for the soldier. Medals of valor recognize those traits that militaries rely on in individuals in time of war: honor, self-sacrifice, compassion, and courage. The recognition of these worthy traits acted as a salve for the unseen wounds that accumulate on the soldier's psyche during combat.

This recognition was even more important for African American soldiers fighting in the Korean War, since they struggled on a day-to-day basis with the ongoing racism of a segregated

³⁶⁷ Interview of Theodore R. Eldridge, August 26, 1988, Box 4, Oral Interview Notes BSWA, CMH.

³⁶⁸ Letter from Ralph J. Davis, December 12, 1994, Box 4, Oral Interview Notes BSWA, CMH.

Army. Even the smallest token of appreciation by a military bureaucracy that seemed distant to the average black soldier went a long way toward improving the morale of the soldier and his comrades. Also, the desire to be recognized for the sacrifices made on the battlefield did not end with the war. For some men who went through the crucible of war the desire to have their sacrifices recognized became almost a life-long quest.

Yvonne Latty in *We Were There: Voices of African American Veterans, from World War II to the War in Iraq*, related the story of black Korean War veteran Charles Armstrong, an infantry platoon leader in charge of leading his men in the capture of a hill. Lt. Armstrong later described the event as a particularly nasty endeavor. He noted, “We attached bayonets to our rifles, and as we marched, we stabbed every dead body we walked by to make sure it wasn’t the enemy pretending to be dead.” Despite the gruesome ordeal, Armstrong and his men successfully captured the enemy held hill. Impressed by his leadership, Armstrong’s captain went up to Armstrong and told him: “I’m putting you in for a medal.” It was a promise that was never fulfilled. Armstrong noted dejectedly forty years later, “I still make calls and try to get the Army to recognize what I have done. I’ll always keep hoping for a medal or something, but so far it’s not happened.”³⁶⁹ The next few pages explore the process for awarding medals of valor during the Korean War, examining circumstances in which race and the bias of white officers could have played a deciding role as to whether a medal was awarded to black soldiers.

Bureaucracy and Medals

For the African American soldiers of the 24th Infantry Regiment and other black soldiers serving in Korea in the first couple years of the Korean War, the recognition for acts of valor and courage amidst the carnage and cruelty of war were slow in coming. To claim that the majority

³⁶⁹ Latty, *We Were There*, 59-61.

of African American soldiers were denied recognition for their acts of bravery solely due to their race – as was the case in the previous two wars – was not borne out by the evidence. Indeed, two African American soldiers received the Congressional Medal of Honor during the Korean War. However, racism still played a role in the issuance of medals to some extent during the Korean War – as was the case in Captain Forest Walker’s Silver Star recommendation that General Almond denied for no other reason than Captain Walker was an African American.³⁷⁰ One element of the problem in making a determination whether the issuance (or lack thereof) of medals of valor to African Americans was due to race was the dominant assumptions of the military bureaucracy that oversaw the medal process.

Clinton Moorman served as the Awards and Decorations Officer for the 24th Infantry Regiment for part of the Korean War. Moorman explained that when he initially took over as the Awards and Decorations officer one of the biggest hurdles was getting the officers to put their men in for an award. Moorman said he went to the regimental commander, Colonel Roberts, and told him “we need to push the guys on getting these awards and decorations ... The guys are doing some things and they aren’t putting them in.”³⁷¹ Part of the problem, as Moorman saw it, was that the officers were hesitant to write up their men for awards because of a lack of understanding of the process and because of time constraints during a situation of ongoing combat. However, as noted previously, the majority of officers in the 24th Infantry Regiment and other African American units were white. Moorman commented: “I think it was very, very difficult to get decorations for a lot of the black kids that did things.” Moorman cited the example of Levi Jackson. Moorman said Jackson’s commanding officer “didn’t want to do anything for him” despite the fact that “this kid (Levi Jackson) protected – gave up his life to

³⁷⁰ This will be discussed further in Chapter IV.

³⁷¹ Interview with Clinton Moorman, September 5, 1988, Box 5, Oral Interview Notes BSWA, CMH.

protect one of the other guys.”³⁷²

The official citation to Corporal Levi Jackson’s Distinguished Service Cross (posthumous) stated that on August 13, 1950:

Corporal Jackson was serving as medical aid man with Company G when two men were seriously wounded. Moving across the exposed terrain through the withering enemy small arms and automatic-weapons fire, he reached the men and was administering first aid when the enemy laid a devastating barrage on the area. Heedless of his personal safety, he shielded the two wounded men with his own body in an effort to protect them from further wounds. While in this exposed position he was mortally wounded. Corporal Jackson performed his duties as medical corpsman in a heroic manner. His primary concern at all times was the welfare and prompt treatment of the many wounded. On numerous occasions he evacuated men under the most adverse conditions over treacherous terrain while subjected to constant hostile fire.³⁷³

Moorman was asked in an interview if he thought that because soldiers such as Jackson were black they were treated differently than had they been white. Moorman responded, “I think so ... It’s hard to say something like that,” but in the case of Corporal Jackson “.... probably, if he’d have been white, [he] would have gotten the Congressional Medal of Honor for what he did.”³⁷⁴ Other Medal of Honor citations awarded to white personnel add credence to Moorman’s claim. Specifically, medical personnel who risked their own life to protect and shield others from danger have received the Congressional Medal of Honor – as was the case of Hospital Corpsman Second Class Donald Ballard during the Vietnam War.³⁷⁵

Augustus Gillert recalled that some years later another attempt was made to get Jackson the Congressional Medal of Honor. He remembered that when Jackson’s body was recovered they found him covering the man he had saved who was wounded but still alive. Gillert said they

³⁷² Ibid.

³⁷³ Taken from U.S. Army website: ameddregiment.amedd.army.mil/dsc/Korean/Korean_ak.html

³⁷⁴ Interview with Clinton Moorman, September 5, 1988, Box 5, Oral Interview Notes BSWA, CMH.

³⁷⁵ Ballard received the Congressional Medal of Honor for his actions on May 16, 1968 when he threw himself onto a hand grenade in order to protect the life of an injured soldier nearby. In Ballard’s case the grenade did not detonate and Ballard continued to risk his life in getting the injured to safety.

ended up getting an account of Jackson's actions "from the wounded guy that happened to make it through the fight." Gillert said he knew that the Army did eventually recognize two other members of the 24th Infantry Regiment with the Congressional Medal of Honor, "but not Levi."³⁷⁶

The 24th Infantry Regiment was not the only unit that witnessed first-hand the problems with military bureaucracy regarding medals. After Task Force Faith was decimated on the eastern shores of the Chosin Reservoir, the Army under the direction of Major Jones attempted to identify individuals whose actions warranted recommendations for medals of valor. Captain Edward P. Stamford of the 1st Battalion, 32nd Infantry, was one of the individuals whose exploits were identified as being worthy of a recommendation for the Congressional Medal of Honor. Major General Field Harris of the United States Marine Corps – commander of the 1st Marine Air Wing, wrote to Fleet Marine Headquarters that Captain Stamford's actions "rated a top notch decoration and that it looked to me that it was pretty close to a Medal of Honor." Unfortunately, the award became entangled in the bureaucracy of the Navy and Army. Appleman recorded the outcome, "the problem of getting action on it one way or another by two different services, the Army and the Navy, after being proposed by an Air Wing of the Marine Corps, apparently was too much for the mechanics of the award system" and as a result – Captain Stamford's award was eventually downgraded to a Silver Star.³⁷⁷

Major Jones also reported that to his "surprise" the other hurdle he had difficulty overcoming was getting survivors to provide statements of actions they witnessed or could corroborate. According to Major Jones, "in some instances, lack of education, or limited capability to express themselves in writing, might have had an influence on this reluctance." Yet, even when Major

³⁷⁶ Interview with Augustus Gillert, March 25, 1989, Box 4, Oral Interview Notes BSWA, CMH.

³⁷⁷ Appleman, *East of Chosin*, 331.

Jones offered assistance in drafting the witness reports – soldiers were still reluctant to come forth with accounts of actions they witnessed. Major Jones felt that because of the chaos of combat, the participants felt “heroic acts were happening continuously, concurrently, endlessly and were in fact somewhat commonplace.” Also, Major Jones thought that some might have been reluctant because the participant who committed the act of bravery was deceased and they questioned “the necessity of submitting a recommendation for an award for someone who would never know about it.”³⁷⁸

Ironically, the only medals that Major Jones recalled as being pushed through with ease were the three Silver Star awards made by General Almond during his brief visit with Lieutenant Colonel Don Faith and his surrounded men on the east bank of the Chosin. When Major Jones found out those awards had not been published at X Corps Headquarters, he “filled out three forms on the spot, and stated that they had been awarded by the Corps Commander on 28 November 1950. No corroborating statements from witnesses were provided. These were the only recommendation that were not returned for rewrite or for additional information.”³⁷⁹

Another problem with the issuance of medals for valor was that each act was rated by senior officers with little to no guidance regarding what constituted an award for the Silver Star as opposed to the Distinguished Service Cross or Medal of Honor. While there is some

³⁷⁸ Ibid., 332.

³⁷⁹ Ibid., 333. The presentation of the Silver Stars by Lieutenant General Almond to the surrounded men of Task Force Faith did not go over well. Appleman in *East of Chosin* related that “later there was considerable comment in the 7th Division that, after General Almond left to return to Hagaru-ri, Lieutenant Colonel Faith and Lieutenant Smalley ripped their Silver Stars off their jackets and threw them into the snow.” Appleman had several witnesses to the incident. One of the witnesses, Lieutenant Hugh R. May wrote: “When Lt. Col. Faith was presented the Silver Star I was about 4 to 5 feet from him. Col. Faith did protest to Gen. Almond that there were others more deserving of the decoration but the General would not hear of this and pinned the Star to Col. Faith’s jacket. During this time General Almond told Col. Faith not to worry as the Chinese we saw were only the stragglers fleeing north. After Gen. Almond departed Col. Faith ripped off the Silver Star and threw it on the ground at the same time muttering ‘What a damned (something)’ but as his voice was lowered I could not be sure what he said.” Ibid., 107-108. Unfortunately, Colonel Faith and most of his men were slaughtered by the Chinese when they attempted to punch threw the encircled enemy who vastly outnumbered the Americans.

classification for each award, such as “gallantry in action against an enemy of the United States” in the case of the Silver Star; each medal is open to wide latitude in interpretation. For example, the difference between the Silver Star and the Distinguished Service Cross is the addition of the word “extreme” right before “gallantry” or in some write-ups the recipient displayed “extraordinary heroism” as opposed to just “heroism.” Essentially, an officer reviewing a write-up for an award would have to decide whether the action was “gallant” or “extremely gallant.” This type of subjective analysis lends itself to differences in opinion – and in particular with regard to African Americans ultimately differences in the manner of award forwarded for recognition.

Augustus Gillert recalled an encounter he had with Colonel Corley regarding a medal that Colonel Corley was putting in on Gillert’s behalf. Gillert said he was called in to meet with Colonel Corley and Corley asked, “Gus, I’ve got this recommendation. How many North Koreans did you kill? You personally?” Gillert said that out of modesty he reduced the number he thought he had killed by one or two and said “I think it might have been six or eight, something like that.” Corley responded “That’s what I thought. I want the word to get out in this regiment that you’ve got to kill North Koreans to get a decoration.” Corley then turned to his clerk and said “this is only a Silver Star action” referring to the write-up for Augustus Gillert.³⁸⁰

Gillert said that years later he had a conversation with Corley and the topic of medals came up. Gillert said that Corley told him that he was “trying to set a standard” for medals. Corley told him that when “they plot decorations from the 35th and 27th against the 24th, the 24th is way down low.” Gillert said that Corley took responsibility for that because he was trying to set a

³⁸⁰ Interview with Augustus Gillert, March 25, 1989, Box 4, Oral Interview Notes BSWA, CMH.

standard. Corley told Gillert that during World War II a friend of his ended up getting a Distinguished Service Cross, “but he was killed getting it, so that was his criteria. If you didn’t get killed getting it, you didn’t deserve it.”³⁸¹

Some members of the 24th would claim that Colonel Corley’s decisions on awards were based on the race of the soldier. One unidentified member of the 24th claimed, “this unit ain’t got the medals due it. Some of the boys have been put in for the DSC and we ain’t heard nothing from them. We get damn tired of doing all of the dirty work and these white officers get all of the credit.”³⁸² Beverly Scott agreed with the unidentified soldier and admitted that it was a “disservice” to the soldiers that were killed in the 24th who were not recognized for their acts of valor. Scott said, “There were a lot of black kids there in our regiment, just like other regiments who had no understanding of what they were there for. Doing what they were told to do” who were killed doing their duty to the utmost.³⁸³

Distinguished Service Crosses in the 24th

The record of Colonel Corley’s tenure as commander of the 24th Infantry Regiment does include several recommendations for the Distinguished Service Cross. As noted earlier, the actions of Levi Jackson in sacrificing his life for the men he was caring for ultimately resulted in the issuance of a DSC (posthumously). Another Distinguished Service Cross was awarded to 2nd Lieutenant Chestor Lenon, an African American junior officer with the 24th Infantry Regiment.

Lieutenant Lenon tried to eliminate an enemy’s machine gun placement with grenades but

³⁸¹ Ibid. Corley’s comment about the Distinguished Service Cross being only for those “killed” in battle gets at the heart of the problem with medals of valor. The criteria for whether an award, and what award should be issued is highly dependent on the interpretation of individuals who approach each recommendation with their own biases and experiences. In the case of Colonel Corley, from his experience of losing a close friend in World War II, he decided that no one is worthy of the DSC unless they were killed in the process of earning that decoration. A criteria that is clearly beyond the intent of the creators of the medal, but one that in the case of the 24th IR, meant that there were no living recipients of the DSC under Corley’s tenure as CO.

³⁸² Bogart, *Social Research and the Desegregation of the U.S. Army*, 96.

³⁸³ Interview with Beverly Scott, April 12, 1984, Box 7, Oral Interview Notes BSWA, CMH.

was wounded in the attempt. Lieutenant Lenon stayed behind with his men and hid for five days along with six wounded enlisted men. According to the authors of *Black Soldier White Army*, while Lieutenant Lenon stayed behind with the wounded, one of his soldiers went for help. According to the account, “Pfc. Edward Sanders, sometimes crawling, sometimes walking, eluded enemy patrols to make his way eight miles to the rear to seek help. Bitten by a poisonous snake during the journey and terribly swollen as a result” he was eventually found by American soldiers.³⁸⁴ Private Sanders described to his rescuers the location of Lieutenant Lenon and the others before he succumbed to his wounds.

For his command leadership under the most grueling of circumstances Lieutenant Lenon received the DSC. According to Lieutenant Lenon and other members of the 24th Infantry Regiment, Sanders was put in for a Congressional Medal of Honor, but he never received it. The authors of *Black Soldier White Army* acknowledged that, “since many unit award files from the Korean War period are missing, it is unclear whether he (Pfc. Sanders) received some alternate decoration.”³⁸⁵

The inspirational story of Private First Class Sanders, with its similarity to the ancient Greek account of Pheidippides’ brave run from the battle of Marathon to Athens to announce to the city leaders “we have won” before collapsing and dying, was a remarkable story to begin with; but that only scratches the surface of Sanders’ remarkable journey. According to Lieutenant Lenon, who spoke with members of Sanders’ rescuing party prior to being located by American troops, Sanders had been briefly captured by the North Koreans and “beaten and left for dead.”³⁸⁶ The

³⁸⁴ Bowers, Hammond, MacGarrigle, *Black Soldier White Army*, 132.

³⁸⁵ Ibid. If Sanders did receive a military decoration for his sacrifice it was most certainly not the Congressional Medal of Honor or Distinguished Service Cross since records of those awards are closely supervised. Whether Sanders was submitted for one of those two records but was denied it in lieu of a lesser awards, such as a Silver Star or Bronze Star, is a question that cannot be answered at this time.

³⁸⁶ Interview with Chester Lenon, December 7, 1988, Box 6, Oral Interview Notes BSWA, CMH.

journey Sanders made through enemy territory, while being subjected to the elements and at least one poisonous snake, and then captured, beaten, and left for dead, yet still able to push-on further is a testament to the human spirit. In an ironic twist that will become evident later in this chapter, the man to whom Sanders told his story before he died of his wounds was an African American officer in charge of an engineer unit, named Lieutenant Charles Bussey. Sanders and Lieutenant Bussey became inextricably linked because one of the medals of valor denied Lieutenant Bussey was due to his actions after hearing Private Sanders's story and his efforts to rescue Lieutenant Lenon and the other soldiers left behind enemy lines.

Another member of the 24th that received a Distinguished Service Cross was Corporal Earl Phoenix. According to *Black Soldier White Army*, Corporal Phoenix, "although badly wounded twice, stayed at his machine gun until his ammunition was expended to keep his squad from being cut off and overrun."³⁸⁷ The award file for Phoenix, indicated that he initially was nominated for the Congressional Medal of Honor, but the award was reduced to the DSC. The award file does not provide a reason for the downgrade which begs the question; did Corporal Phoenix's race have anything to do with the change in awards? Although Corporal Phoenix's race would not have been required to be reported in the medal write-up, because the Army was still operating segregated units, Corporal Phoenix's unit would have been a sufficient indication of his race. This leads to the question; was there a white officer in Corporal Phoenix's chain-of-command who realized that Phoenix was from the 24th Infantry Regiment and therefore an African American and as a result of that information down-graded the medal?

These questions are difficult to answer because the Army was careful to not leave behind a "smoking gun" as it were to make obvious the prevalence of this type of racism. The problem is

³⁸⁷ Bowers, Hammond, MacGarrigle, *Black Soldier White Army*, 207.

further obfuscated because the record in Korea clearly indicates that African American soldiers were being recognized for their acts of bravery in some circumstances. But were the medals issued for acts of bravery equal in precedence to the soldier's actions: were Distinguished Service Crosses being issued in lieu of the Congressional Medal of Honor? To answer this question, it is necessary to look at the two Congressional Medal of Honor's that were issued to African American soldiers during the Korean War, both of whom were members of the 24th Infantry Regiment.

Congressional Medal of Honor and the 24th

Of all the honors that the United States government can bestow on a citizen, all fall short in reverence and prestige to the Medal of Honor. It ranks as the highest military medal and one that entitles the wearer to a military salute from all members of the military hierarchy (including the President of the United States) regardless of the rank of the bearer of the Medal of Honor. Yet, despite the prestige of the medal, many of the recipients of the Congressional Medal of Honor carry with them a burden for being chosen for the honor. More than one living Medal of Honor recipient has questioned why they have been selected for this honor when many others around them sacrificed their lives and still did not receive the Medal of Honor.

During World War I, Edouard Victor Michel Izac, a recent immigrant to the United States, wondered to himself and to his superiors why he “was getting a medal when all he did was to get captured” by the Germans.³⁸⁸ Or William Charette – a corpsmen during the Korean War who commented “I’ve often wondered why ... you’ve got four dead corpsmen, and if I don’t get the medal, there’d be no live corpsmen out of the Korean War ... I don’t know. It’s just a

³⁸⁸ Mikaelian, *Medal of Honor*, 66.

thought.”³⁸⁹ Many of the survivors that are awarded the Medal of Honor wear this medal reluctantly. In his study, *Medal of Honor*, Allen Mikaelian observed that “those who hold the Medal of Honor often wince at the phrases Medal of Honor winner; or won the Medal of Honor.” Those warriors do not view the carnage of war as a “contest that delivered the award.”³⁹⁰ Instead, they view it as a distinction they grudgingly receive as a remembrance to their comrades who did not live to wear the award themselves.

During the Korean War, the first Medal of Honor was issued to Major General William Dean who personally led men in an attempt to counteract an assault by an armored unit of the North Koreans. The issuance of the Congressional Medal of Honor was taken very seriously by the military. Major General Dean’s Medal of Honor in September 1950 elicited a memorandum from Secretary of the Army Frank Pace to President Truman. Pace wrote to President Truman and suggested: “I feel that it would be appropriate, and I can assure you it would be greatly appreciated, if the White House were to issue a press release and statement” regarding the issuance of the Congressional Medal of Honor for General Dean.³⁹¹

After the issuance of the first Congressional Medal of Honor, many more followed for actions performed during the Korean War, 136 to be exact; yet it would not be until the summer of 1951 before the first Congressional Medal of Honor was issued to an African American. The honor to be the first African American awarded the Medal of Honor went to Pfc. William Thompson of the 24th Infantry Regiment for his actions on August 6, 1950, near the village of Haman, Korea. Unfortunately, the award for Thompson was issued posthumously because he was killed during his heroic actions.

³⁸⁹ Ibid., 237.

³⁹⁰ Ibid., 33.

³⁹¹ Memorandum from Secretary of the Army Frank Pace to President Truman, September 15, 1950, WHCF, 375, Truman Papers, HSTPL.

The significance of Pfc. Thompson's Congressional Medal of Honor was not lost on the African American community. Harry McAlpin, who had been the first accredited African American White House correspondent, was a practicing attorney when he wrote a telegram to President Truman on June 14, 1951. In the telegram McAlpin asked that President Truman make the presentation of the Medal of Honor personally to Thompson's family. McAlpin wrote, "[I] am aware congressional medal of honor is outside realm of politics, but frequent practice is for President of United States to make the award, failure of President to make this award in case of first negro to receive it after so long a period will be made political capital of opponents. Why make it hard for us?"³⁹² What McAlpin was referring to when he said "after so long a period" was the fact that the last African American to receive the Congressional Medal of Honor served during the Spanish-American War of 1898.

McAlpin received a reply to his telegram to President Truman from Major General Harry Vaughan, the Military Aide to the President. Major General Vaughan said "it has been the President's policy to personally award this medal only when the person receiving it is alive to accept it. The President made an exception several months ago when he personally awarded four posthumous Congressional Medals." However, "the posthumous awarding of medals is emotionally very hard on the President and in view of the fact that he is under considerable strain at all times it has been recommended that he make no further exceptions to his original policy."³⁹³ Instead of having the award presented by President Truman, the Thompson family received Pfc. William Thompson's Congressional Medal of Honor from General Omar Bradley during a ceremony conducted at the Pentagon on June 21, 1951.

³⁹² Wire date June 14, 1951 to White House by Harry McAlpin, WHCF, Truman Papers, HSTPL.

³⁹³ Letter from Major General Harry Vaughan to Mr. Harry McAlpin, June 19, 1951, WHCF, Truman Papers, HSTPL.

The next African American to receive the Congressional Medal of Honor during the Korean War was Sergeant Cornelius Charlton, also of the 24th Infantry Regiment. Sergeant Charlton was recognized for his actions near Chipori, Korea, on June 2, 1951. As was the case with Pfc. Thompson, Sergeant Charlton's medal was also posthumous since he died as a result of his heroic actions. Sergeant Charlton's family received the medal on March 19, 1952. Sergeant Charlton was the 41st soldier to receive the Congressional Medal of Honor during the Korean War. When his 58 year old father, Van Charlton, learned that his son would receive the medal he remarked; "My boy's action in combat and his death make a liar out of Paul Robeson, who said the Negroes would never fight for their country against the Communists!"³⁹⁴

The issuance of the Congressional Medal of Honor to Pfc. Thompson and Sergeant Charlton would seem to make clear that Sergeant Charlton's father was right: the argument that African Americans did not make for courageous soldiers was a lie. Yet ironically, in October of 1951, just several months after Sergeant Charlton's sacrifice, Gail Buckley noted that the 24th Infantry Regiment was still being "accused of wholesale cowardice" and it was this condemnation of the 24th that eventually led to the unit's deactivation in 1951 – a decision that will be discussed further in Chapter V.³⁹⁵

The History and Process of Awarding the Congressional Medal of Honor

Because of the prestige of the Congressional Medal of Honor the means by which the award was processed was complex and labor intensive. The United States military went to significant ends to ensure that the reputation of the medal remained high and that each and every recipient of the medal was truly deserving of the nation's highest honor. This was not always the case.

³⁹⁴ News Article Titled "Bronx Sergeant Get Honor Medal; Second Negro to Receive the Award," remainder of citation is missing, WHCF, Truman Papers, HSTPL.

³⁹⁵ Gail Buckley, *American Patriots: The Story of Blacks in the Military from the Revolution to Desert Storm* (New York: Random House, 2001), xx.

According to Allen Mikaelian, when the Medal of Honor was created in 1862 the initial problem was “this medal wasn’t just the highest honor a soldier or sailor could receive, it was practically the only one.”³⁹⁶ As a result, when the entire 864 men of the 27th Maine received the Medal of Honor as a way of encouraging them to stay on a couple weeks past their enlistment - even though only 300 of the 864 actually stayed - this was because the Medal of Honor was the only military medal that Secretary of War Edwin Stanton had to offer. However, by 1890 with the creation of the Medal of Honor Legion, headed by Major General John Schofield (also a Medal of Honor recipient), the foundations were in place for making the Medal of Honor into a prestigious award worthy of the name “Congressional Medal of Honor.”

Drawing on the work already done by the Medal of Honor Legion in the late 1800s and early 1900s, in January 1917 a military board reviewed the 2,625 Medal of Honor’s that had been issued to that point and ordered the withdrawal of 911 of the Medal of Honors that did not meet the new requirements of “distinguished bravery in action.” The rearrangement of priorities for issuing the Medal of Honor along with the creation of the Distinguished Service Crosses and Silver Star on July 9, 1918, meant that World War I was the first major conflict where the Medal of Honor would stand out as a truly significant military medal. In some regards the standard set for the Medal of Honor during World War I was set almost too high. At the end of the war, General John J. Pershing realized that only four Congressional Medal of Honor medals had been issued. General Pershing ordered a review of Distinguished Service Cross recipients and as a result 78 DSCs were upgraded to the Congressional Medal of Honor.”³⁹⁷

³⁹⁶ Mikaelian, *Medal of Honor*, xvii.

³⁹⁷ Converse, *The Exclusion of Black Soldiers from the Medal of Honor in World War II*, 14. General Eisenhower conducted a similar study at the end of the conflict in Europe during World War II. Eisenhower wrote: “The number of Medals of Honor awarded to date to individuals of this theater seems unreasonably low in proportion to the total number of such award.” As a result of the military study, the War Department awarded 4 more Medals of Honor out of the 6 Distinguished Service Cross in the European theater.

According to the congressionally mandated study, *The Exclusion of Black Soldiers from the Medal of Honor in World War II*, with the onset of World War II and in an effort to protect the reputation of the Congressional Medal of Honor the “War Department reserved for itself final authority to award the Medal of Honor and disapprove a nomination” while the other lesser medals to include the Distinguished Service Cross and Silver Star were allowed to be authorized by theater or subordinate commanders.³⁹⁸ Despite their efforts to allow for an unbiased outcome in the awarding of the Congressional Medal of Honor, internal studies after World War II noted that “differentiating the acts meriting the Medal of Honor from those deserving the next two highest valor awards was extremely difficult.”³⁹⁹

The main unanswered question regarding the Medal of Honor during World War II and the one that the congressional study attempted to answer in the 1990s was; was submitting and processing of Medal of Honor awards based on race? The study ultimately concluded that “no explicit, written evidence in official documents proving that African Americans were discriminated against in the awarding of medals in general or the Medal of Honor in particular.”⁴⁰⁰ On face value such a claim would seem to be contradictory given the fact that there were no Congressional Medal of Honor medals awarded to African Americans. The key factor in this statement is “explicit, written evidence in official documents.” Even among the most racially biased officers, they would have been very leery of putting in writing their reasons for disapproving or not forwarding a medal based on race. This act would have been tantamount to career suicide even in the Army of World War II. Perhaps more illustrative was the study’s finding that “in one case, circumstantial evidence indicates the nomination may have been

³⁹⁸ Ibid., 8-9.

³⁹⁹ Ibid., 13.

⁴⁰⁰ Ibid., 10.

stopped by the acting battalion commander for reasons of racial prejudice.”⁴⁰¹

Unfortunately, in both World War II and in the Korean War, to find examples of racial bias in the issuance of medals the only real source of information was circumstantial evidence. One potential clue regarding circumstantial evidence was to identify officers who showed racial bias and extrapolate from that they could very well have discriminated against African American soldiers under their command in the issuance and support for medals based on the soldiers’ race. Another possible method would be to identify the actions of an African American soldier who displayed similar actions to a white soldier and then compare the corresponding medals issued to the white soldier and black soldier. This was the primary basis of analysis of the congressional study in the 1990s that looked into the procedures for medals awarded to African Americans in World War II.

The process of submitting a soldier for the Congressional Medal of Honor began in much the same way as any other medal of valor. After an act of bravery by a soldier in the face of the enemy, members of the unit, usually but not necessarily at the direction of the soldier’s commanding officer, would write an account of what they witnessed the soldier do in battle. These first hand witness reports were the first crucial step in the process. These eye-witness accounts also demonstrated one of the drawbacks of medals of valor; if eye-witness reports were not written in a timely manner, or the soldiers who witnessed an act worthy of an award of valor were themselves killed in combat, or wounded, or transferred to another unit, or to the States, then there was no first-hand corroboration of the act of valor to be used in beginning the process.

In the case of Pfc. Thompson, the ongoing conflict around the time of Thompson’s selfless sacrifice and death meant that eye-witness reports were not initially completed. (Thompson was

⁴⁰¹ Ibid., 11.

killed on August 6, 1950). When Lieutenant Colonel Melvin Blair first forwarded the reports on Pfc. Thompson's acts without all of the corroborating statements, the recommendation was returned awarding Thompson the Silver Star. According to Lt. Col. Blair, the reports were submitted a second time and this time the recommendation came back for a Distinguished Service Star. Then in November, 1950, Lt. Col. Blair stated that he "personally interviewed many of the witnesses to Thompson's valorous actions" and specifically, he determined that when they found Pfc. Thompson's body "it had been riddled with gunfire and repeatedly stabbed." In his write-up, Lt. Col. Blair attributed the state of Thompson's body as "an indication that surviving enemy soldiers sought vengeance for the damage Thompson had done" prior to his death.⁴⁰² Lt. Col. Blair stated that based on all the evidence he was convinced Thompson was clearly deserving of the Congressional Medal of Honor, so he resubmitted the request a third time with all the required paperwork, including a certificate (dated November 25, 1950) summarizing his investigation and his recommendation.

According to Lt. Col. Blair, with additional administrative delays it took until June 3, 1951, for the Army to finally approve Pfc. Thompson's Congressional Medal of Honor. Lt. Col. Blair was insistent that the long delay in processing Thompson's Medal of Honor had nothing to do with Thompson's race, but was due to the administrative hurdles that were already in place regarding the submission of medals.

The Case for Private First Class Edward Sanders

From Lt. Col. Blair's account of the process it would appear that had it not been for his persistence in resubmitting the paperwork several times, Thompson may have never received the Congressional Medal of Honor. Unfortunately for Pfc. Edward Sanders, the soldier who crawled

⁴⁰² Interview with Melvin R. Blair, February 15, 1995, Oral Interview Notes for *Black Soldier White Army: The 24th Infantry Regiment in Korea*, Box 2, Center of Military History.

for help through enemy territory even after being bitten by a venomous snake and being beaten by the North Koreans and left for dead, there was no officer to painstakingly guide his award submission through the laborious process. Despite the testimony of Chester Lenon, who received the Distinguished Service Cross for his actions with Pfc. Sanders, and First Lieutenant (later Captain) Charles M. Bussey, who found Pfc. Sanders and led the rescue of Lenon and the other soldiers; Sanders did not receive the Congressional Medal of Honor. Sanders did not even receive a Distinguished Service Cross. There is no record that Sanders received any medal for his actions that led to the rescue of five soldiers and cost him his life.

The War Diary for the 65th Engineer Battalion for August, 1950 (prepared in November 1950) did mention a recommendation for Pfc. Sanders to receive (posthumously) the Congressional Medal of Honor. Major General (then first Lieutenant) Carroll N. LeTellier, who replaced First Lieutenant Benefield after he was killed clearing a mine field in Korea, remembered that Chester Lenon received the Distinguished Service Cross for his actions on August 6, 1950, Bussey the Bronze Medal Star for leading the rescue of Lenon and four others, but Pfc. Sanders did not appear to ever receive a medal.⁴⁰³ Pfc. Sanders' medal recommendation either fell through the administrative cracks or was shelved by an unsympathetic officer. We will probably never know the actual case. Whatever the reason for Pfc. Sanders' medal recommendation to not make it through the system, his actions were one of the truly heroic stories of the 24th Infantry Regiment, and he and his comrades deserve to have his memory recognized with an appropriate medal of valor – if not the Congressional Medal of Honor.

The Case for Captain Charles Bussey

Besides Pfc. Edwards Sanders, there is one other African American associated with the 24th

⁴⁰³ Interview with Major General Carroll N. LeTellier, July 27, 1995, Box 6, Oral Interview Notes BSWA, CMH.

Infantry Regiment (with the 65th Engineer Battalion) who probably deserved the Congressional Medal of Honor – Captain Edward Bussey. On October 13, 1989, near Yechon, Korea, Charles M. Bussey (Lieutenant Colonel – retired) spoke with Colonel Thomas M. Ryan, the Command Historian, U.S. Forces, Korea, 8th U.S. Army. Bussey described his actions on July 20-22, 1950, a story that he had relayed several other times and regarding which has at least several corroborating witnesses. The subsequent controversy regarding Bussey's tale was that if it was to be believed then Captain Bussey was responsible for an act of military bravery that rivaled any other during the Korean War and would essentially have made Bussey the African American equivalent of Alvin York and Audie Murphy. According to Charles Bussey, at the exact spot where he spoke with Colonel Ryan, almost forty years earlier, he had killed close to 250 North Korean soldiers!

On July 20, 1950, First Lieutenant Bussey came upon a group of six or seven soldiers of the 24th Infantry Regiment, 2nd Battalion, who were with a truck on the outskirts of Yechon, Korea. Bussey drove up in a jeep to survey the town, which at this point was on fire because of American artillery shelling. Bussey said, "I climbed here and I got a pretty good view of this thing. And I see men coming from what appears to be out of the ground. And so I said that must be a river bed. And with a mountain over here, it's natural that there would be a river here."⁴⁰⁴

As Bussey retold the chain-of-events from that summer day in July, 1950, he pointed to the terrain features he remembered, his memory of that day coming back to him as he described the action and his thoughts. Bussey continued: "I watched a while, and they (North Korean soldiers) were coming. At a point in time I saw 15 or 20 men." Bussey said that he then had the men with him that were still with his truck bring ammunition boxes to him as he set up a .50 caliber

⁴⁰⁴ Interview with Charles Bussey, October 13, 1989, Box 1, Oral Interview Notes BSWA, CMH.

machine gun at the top of the hill. Bussey also set up a .30 caliber machine gun that he had in his jeep. Bussey detailed what happened next:

We set these guns up, and by then these guys have moved in here, and I am looking at, maybe, 50 to 100 men. And I said, well, (inaudible) as you can be. This is too many men, as far as I was concerned, to be moving purposefully in this direction. And I said, now, if I put a burst over their heads, if they are soldiers they are going to flatten out and wait for somebody to take charge. If they are civilian they are going to start running in all directions. So I fired a burst out of here. And these guys went down ... By now these guys are maybe, what 300, 250 yards away, which for a fifty is nothing. But I said, gee, with all these guys here, if I commit myself to killing them, I (am) committed 100 percent. There ain't no leaving, no breaking off, there no (inaudible), and I am not feeling very loose about this damn thing because this is a lot of men now.⁴⁰⁵

Bussey directed one of the other men to fire the .30 caliber machine gun once the enemy was within 100 yards. Meanwhile, Bussey fired the .50 caliber, "... I shot, shot, and shot until this gun overheated." And then the enemy responded, "Somewhere from back in here a mortar went to work and they saturated this hill pretty well." The mortar fire was effective and exploded on Bussey's position – Bussey himself being struck by several pieces of shrapnel. He continued:

I got beaten a couple times. This kid down here got killed. Meanwhile this gun is overheating now, it is very erratic in its firing. So I said to hell with that. I went down and took this gun down here (.30 caliber machine gun – and moved the gunner over) and started firing from here. By now I've got a whole bunch of people in close. And they are firing, of course. But firing up hill with a gun or something is sort of a waste of time. Hardly as effective. So as these guys (enemy soldiers) moved in, finally I think I saw the end of this thing here. And these guys were in here. There was no place for them to go. Once they were committed, they were committed as well.⁴⁰⁶

At this point, Bussey went back to the .50 caliber machine gun and "poured fire on these guys until there wasn't anymore." According to Bussey, "as the evening wore on, and as this thing just became a mess down here, we went down later, and we killed one or two who were chopped

⁴⁰⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁶ Ibid.

up down there, and still alive. And then we did a body count.” Bussey estimated there was at least a total of 250 men on the ground in what he described as a “blood puddle.” Bussey then led his men back to their units and reported back to the commander for that sector – Lieutenant Colonel Pierce about the action near Yechon.⁴⁰⁷ Bussey stated that after hearing his report Colonel Pierce told him, “thanks a million for saving my bacon!” Colonel Pierce was aware that but for Bussey’s action near Yechon, he and his men could have been ambushed by the North Korean soldiers and annihilated.

Two or three days after the initial action at Yechon, Korea, around the 22nd or 23rd of July 1950, Bussey recalled that his Engineer unit received word that they were to deliver a bulldozer to Hank Fisher’s men (another Engineer unit). Bussey and several of his the engineers that were with him took the same road that Bussey had been on when he engaged the North Korean soldiers near Yechon. When Bussey approached the battle site he saw the “townspeople were digging graves, and were dragging bodies up” from the rice paddies where they had been killed by Bussey and the other soldiers. Bussey ordered his truck to stop and had one of the soldiers man the .50 caliber machine gun that was on a ring mount on the truck while another soldier unloaded the bulldozer from the truck. Bussey then described in detail how he and his men made a trench so the dead North Korean soldiers could be buried by the villagers in a mass grave. After the trench was dug, about 30 to 40 villagers worked to carry the enemy dead to the trench, after which Bussey filled in the trench using the bulldozer. They then loaded the bulldozer back up and continued to their destination.

The above narrative is the version of the story that Charles Bussey has consistently relayed for over forty years. Bussey was interviewed by the Center of Military History researchers on at

⁴⁰⁷ Ibid.

least two occasions and told the story in exactly the same terms. At one point, Bussey even pointed out to his interviewer a scar from a mortar wound that he stated occurred during the action.⁴⁰⁸ One of the earliest accounts of the firefight Bussey recounted occurred in an article entitled, “How Bussey’s Engineers Destroyed Entire City,” in the *Washington Afro-American* that was printed on August 26, 1950. The author of the article, James L. Hicks, said that he recalled hearing about the firefight that Bussey was involved in with the North Korean soldiers around Yechon, Korea, when he was assigned as a reporter in Korea. Hicks claimed, however, that he did not have any first-hand knowledge because he did not join the 24th until July 22, 1950, two days after the firefight.⁴⁰⁹

Other clues that point to the veracity of Bussey’s claim included a journal entry made at 0825 hours in Colonel Pierce’s journal that noted “... on the outskirts of Yechon unable to enter due to heavy def. fire. Col Pierce requests tanks or and ½ track multiple 50 caliber weapons.”⁴¹⁰ Carlton Johnson, who was with Pierce on the outskirts of town also recalled that they called in artillery fire on the town of Yechon. “A batter of 105 mm Artillery had been and was firing into the town (over 800 rounds)” which set the town on fire – as was Bussey’s recollection. Johnson said that when they entered the town they didn’t encounter any enemy dead “not even a dead dog.”⁴¹¹ Of course, Bussey’s account was that he was near but definitely not in the town of Yechon when he encountered the enemy soldiers.

Chester Lenon, who was subsequently wounded and then rescued by Lieutenant Bussey less than a month after the Yechon battle, also recalled receiving enemy fire as they approached Yechon on July 20, 1950. Lenon said the North Koreans waited “until they were at the edge of

⁴⁰⁸ Interview with David Carlisle and Charles Bussey, June 14, 1989, Box 1, Oral Interview Notes BSWA, CMH.

⁴⁰⁹ Miscellaneous Notes, Box 1, Oral Interview Notes BSWA, CMH.

⁴¹⁰ Interview with Colonel Carlton S. Johnson, Box 1, Oral Interview Notes BSWA, CMH.

⁴¹¹ Ibid.

town then they opened fire. There was some artillery fire and then small arms fire.” Lenon also reported that he saw enemy soldiers in uniform, but no civilians. Lenon was ordered to “burn the town down” because the enemy would return if they left and that later in the day he met with Lieutenant Bussey who “said that he had been on the other side of town fighting.”⁴¹² John French, who was also not present with Bussey during the firefight at Yechon recalled that the very “next day” (July 21, 1950), Bussey “talked about a big battle and the enemy that he had killed.”⁴¹³

Word of Bussey’s exploits eventually reached Colonel Henry Fisher, who was the commanding officer of the 35th Infantry Regiment. On July 20, 1950, Colonel Fisher had operational command of the 24th Infantry Regiment forces at Yechon. Clinton Moorman said that Colonel Fisher on hearing of Bussey’s exploits “immediately jumped in his jeep with his driver and drove over there.” According to Moorman, Colonel Fisher “got over there and didn’t see any action. He saw one dead Korean lying in street and that’s it ... (and) the town burning,” but didn’t investigate any further and returned to his regiment.⁴¹⁴ Clearly, from the testimony of multiple individuals, the story of Bussey’s action near Yechon was being repeated among several soldiers immediately after the fighting was supposed to have taken place. If Bussey was making the story up, he made it up from the outset.

If nothing more had occurred to support the story it would be difficult to argue for further reconsideration of Bussey and an award: however, the story continued with a write-up for a medal containing sworn depositions and eye witness testimony. 1st Sergeant Roscoe C. Dudley was one of the soldiers in the 24th who heard about Lieutenant Bussey’s action on July 20, 1950,

⁴¹² Interview with Chester Lenon, December 7, 1988, Box 6, Oral Interview Notes BSWA, CMH.

⁴¹³ Interview with John French, July 21, 1989, Box 4, Oral Interview Notes BSWA, CMH.

⁴¹⁴ Interview with Clinton Moorman, September 5, 1988, Box 9, Oral Interview Notes BSWA, CMH.

from several of his men who were with Bussey outside Yechon during the firefight. Gerald Astor in *The Right to Fight* noted: “On the basis of their statements he prepared a formal recommendation for the award of a Medal of Honor for Bussey. In accord with the rules for the nomination, he secured sworn corroboration from two eyewitnesses.”⁴¹⁵

Major General Carroll LeTellier commented in a letter written in March, 1992 to the Center of Military History that “the story of Lieutenant Bussey killing many North Koreans at Yechon with 50 cal. and 30 cal. machine guns was recounted many times. I can say unequivocally that action as described today is unchanging from the way the incident was discussed in 1950.” LeTellier also stated: “I recall seeing a beautifully documented recommendation (including marked-up-map) for the award of the Distinguished Service Cross to Captain Bussey submitted by First Sergeant Roscoe Dudley of the 77th ECC.” According to LeTellier, the recommendation included “correspondence supporting this award” and that the package was forwarded to Headquarters, 65th Engineer Combat Battalion which oversaw the 77th Engineer Combat Company.⁴¹⁶

Unfortunately, the Army has no record of a recommendation for the Congressional Medal of Honor or the Distinguished Service Cross for Bussey. The lone recommendation for an award around this time for Bussey was a recommendation dated August 31, 1950, for a Bronze Star Medal. The “BSM” was crossed out and upgraded to a Silver Star for “demolition of stores, ect. At Sangju on 2-3 August 1950.” The recommendation mentioned statements by a Lieutenant Peebles and Sergeant First Class Dudley. Of course, the action at Sangju was completely separate from the exploit Bussey reported at Yechon.

According to Bussey, the reason that the award for a Congressional Medal of Honor or

⁴¹⁵ Astor, *The Right to Fight*, 356.

⁴¹⁶ Letter from Major General Carroll N. LeTellier, March 20, 1992, Box 6, Oral Interview Notes BSWA, CMH.

Distinguished Service Cross was not pushed through was because of opposition by Lieutenant Colonel John Corley. Bussey stated that during a conversation with Colonel Corley, the latter explained:

I only recommended you for the Silver Star for the job you did at Yechon, and I only recommended a Bronze Star for your rescue of Lieutenant Lenon and his people. The Distinguished Service Cross was appropriate for the Lenon rescue ... so was the Congressional Medal of Honor for Yechon. If you were white, you'd have gotten them both.⁴¹⁷

Bussey said Corley continued and told him, "I cannot allow you to become a hero, no matter how worthy. I reduced the size of the battalion that you saved to a group, and I reduced the number of men you killed so that finally the job was only worth the Silver Star."⁴¹⁸ There were no corroborating witnesses to the conversation between Corley and Bussey and the statement would appear to be completely out of character for Colonel Corley. But the question remains: did something happen to the paperwork submitted by Sergeant Roscoe for Bussey's actions near Yechon, and if so what? Was the paperwork purposefully lost because of Bussey's race?

The Center of Military History in conducting the research for the history of the 24th Infantry Regiment spent considerable time attempting to verify or refute Bussey's claim of a firefight at Yechon. Colonel Thomas Ryan interviewed Korean residents who lived near the location of the firefight Bussey described and discovered that these villagers "specifically remember the black soldiers, specifically remember the black bodies. And they talk about Inmingun, North Korean dead, being located on the hills" near where Bussey reported them.⁴¹⁹ However, they could not find any evidence that Bussey had been recommended for either a Congressional Medal of Honor or Distinguished Service Cross, all they could locate was the Silver Star medal that

⁴¹⁷ Buckley, *American Patriots*, 353-354.

⁴¹⁸ Ibid.

⁴¹⁹ Interviews with Korean civilians in area of Yechon, by Colonel Thomas Ryan, October 17, 1989, Box 1, Oral Interview Notes BSWA, CMH.

appeared to cover Bussey's actions near Sangju. Charles Bussey has continued to fight for recognition of his actions on July 20, 1950, and in 2002 he published his own account titled *Firefight At Yechon: Courage and Racism in the Korean War*.⁴²⁰ As did Charles Armstrong who continued to try "to get the Army to recognize what I have done," Charles Bussey continued to wage his battle against what he perceived as an Army still unwilling to admit that racism might have clouded the award system during the Korean War until his death in October 2003.

Although white soldiers were just as keen to see to it that their exploits were recognized by the Army when appropriate, the men of the 24th Infantry Regiment, who struggled against an Army that still segregated them because of their race, were particularly sensitive to this type of racial sting. As was the case with regard to issues of race discussed in chapter two, the perception of reality is just as important as reality. Indeed, the two sometimes are inseparable.

Sensitivity toward being recognized for one's actions was particularly important for the relationship between black soldiers and white officers in a segregated Army. Peter Nelson's *A More Unbending Battle* effectively demonstrated how critical this relationship could be between the men and their officers. Charles W. Fillmore was a black officer in the 369th Infantry Regiment who believed that his white superior officer, Major Arthur Little, had overlooked him for an award because of his race. This broke down the relationship between the two men. Fillmore was eventually awarded with the French Croix de Guerre, the highest honor the French government bestowed on a soldier. At a camp in Le Mans, France, prior to disembarking for the United States, Fillmore found out that Major Little was also in the camp. Nelson described what happened next:

There Fillmore sought Little out to ask if he'd been the one to recommend him for the

⁴²⁰ Charles M. Bussey, *Firefight at Yechon: Courage and Racism in the Korean War* (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 2002)

Croix de Guerre. When Little admitted he had, citing Fillmore's courage leading his men through the gassed swamps on the Marson Road, Fillmore extended his hand, and the two men shook.⁴²¹

The strained relationship between Fillmore and Little evaporated through Little's recognition of Fillmore's actions. The separation created by a segregated Army, segregated society, and the racial tensions of the early twentieth century all came crashing down in Fillmore's world through the simple act of recognition; Little acknowledged Fillmore as a fellow soldier, fellow American, and a hero. Had Major Little's act of kindness and consideration been repeated more often by white officers in World War II and the early days of the Korean War, perhaps the walls of segregation in the Army and in the larger society would have come down sooner.

⁴²¹ Nelson, *A More Unbending Battle*, 230.

CHAPTER IV

The Officers: the Good, the Bad, and the Ugly

The role of competent leadership in military campaigns is one of the most decisive factors for victory. Competent leadership is also often taken for granted. While leadership on the battlefield can be displayed at all levels of the chain-of-command, from the Non-Commissioned Officer through the ranks of junior officers and up to senior leadership; leadership for a major battle, campaign, or war is best exemplified by the senior officers in any unit. For the purposes of this analysis, senior leadership comprised the officers in charge at the battalion, regimental, division, and corps levels.

The senior officers of any military organization are the guiding force for actions taken, establishing what is expected of all personnel and making the decisions that can determine success or failure on the battlefield. Although a host of factors come into play during battle, many of which are out of the hand of military leaders, such as weather complications, terrain features, and civilian/political support for fighting forces, the most significant factor is adequate and effective leadership. Just as success on the battlefield is usually traced to leadership, failure on the battlefield can also often be traced to poor leadership. Quite often, however, inadequate performance in combat is blamed upon the rank and file and not their commanders. During the Korean War, the senior officers of the U.S. Army played a crucial role in determining the role and reputation of African Americans, especially the African Americans assigned to the 24th Infantry Regiment.

The reputation of the 24th Infantry Regiment in the Korean War, as noted previously has been a source of contention among historians and veterans. The consensus of historians, including those from the U.S. Army's Center of Military History, has been that the 24th Infantry Regiment

as a whole was sub-par in its battlefield performance as compared to other units. During the Korean War, the majority of white officers attributed the unsatisfactory performance to the soldiers, either because of their race alone or perhaps to the perception that they were less educated and therefore unable to adapt quickly to the circumstances of combat. Some white officers during the Korean War espoused a more enlightened viewpoint and wondered if the performance issues might be due to the inequality of segregating men because of their race. Among this group of officers was General Mathew Ridgway, who was ultimately responsible for the full integration of soldiers in Korea and whose views and actions will be discussed further in Chapter V. What was not questioned by Army leadership was whether the performance issues among African American units such as the 24th Infantry Regiment was due to inadequate leadership. Was the reputation of units such as the 24th Infantry Regiment unnecessarily tainted because of racial animosity by key senior white officers in Korea?

This chapter explores the question of leadership in the 24th Infantry Regiment by analyzing several different officers that led men in the 24th either just prior to or during the Korean War. Each of these officers approached their leadership positions very differently and was either successful or not successful as a result of their leadership style and abilities. Some of these officers lived up to the highest standards of leadership in the Army, while others completely failed the test of combat and were the cause of some of the reported “failures” among the soldiers of the 24th Infantry Regiment.

To answer the question of whether the reputation of African American units such as the 24th was unnecessarily tainted because of racial animosity by key senior white officers requires, first, looking outside the immediate chain-of-command of the 24th to the second most powerful officer in Korea in late 1950 and early 1951, X Corps Commander and Chief-of-Staff to General

Douglas McArthur, Lieutenant General Edward Almond. Just as one single officer can make a significant difference for positive change in an army, as witnessed by the turn-around of United Nations forces in the spring of 1951 under the leadership of General Ridgway, the negative influence of one officer can determine the reputation of an entire infantry regiment.

Colonel Halloran

During most of the 24th Infantry Regiment's posting in Japan, the regiment was led by Colonel Halloran. Colonel Halloran was in the twilight of his career when he was assigned to command the 24th Infantry Regiment. During Colonel Halloran's tenure, the 24th was in a garrison state with little expected of its soldiers other than to stay out of trouble. Colonel Halloran's leadership therefore can only be viewed from the perspective of a caretaker. Despite not having much in the way of demands placed on his men, Colonel Halloran's tenure was one of little trouble or tension – even racial tension. Of all the commanding officers of the 24th Infantry Regiment around the time of the Korean War, Colonel Halloran was the one most often referred to in affectionate detail by the African American veterans. Colonel Halloran's favorable reputation by the 24th's black soldier was not without justification.

One of the often repeated stories about Colonel Halloran recorded in *Black Soldier White Army* had, 24th Infantry Regiment veterans discussing an episode when the Eighth Army command staff (which included Lieutenant General Edward Almond) failed to invite the 24th to a July 4th parade in Tokyo. The veterans recalled that Colonel Halloran sent them to Tokyo anyway despite the obvious snub, directing them to report directly to General Douglas MacArthur to receive their assigned place in the parade. Another story by the authors of *Black Soldier White Army* related that during an inspection Colonel Halloran came across a soldier whose footwear was nearly worn out. Colonel Halloran asked the soldier's commanding officer

why this soldier's footwear was not replaced and after having received "unsatisfactory explanations" forced the officer to exchange his own footwear with the soldier in full view of a company formation.⁴²²

Long time black Captain William A. Bobo stated that Colonel Halloran "had his faults," but he agreed that Colonel Halloran was typically quite fair and had become so identified with the 24th "that some said he could have been born black."⁴²³ Al Brooks, another officer in the 24th Infantry Regiment, put it this way, "Halloran was totally colorblind."⁴²⁴ Of course, as Bobo noted, Colonel Halloran had his faults, the most significant of which was that he did not properly prepare the men for combat. Of all Colonel Halloran's responsibilities to the men of the 24th Infantry Regiment, preparing them to go to war was the most crucial.

A military unit by its very nature must be ready at any moment to take up arms at the call of the nation. The training the 24th Infantry Regiment received in Japan prior to the Korean War was minimal. What little training they did receive consisted of maneuvers whereby the men had to simulate the use of weapons because of shortages in weapons and ammunition. Some of the blame for the 24th Infantry Regiment's unpreparedness rested with the senior leadership of the Eighth Army and the military as a whole. Unfortunately for Colonel Halloran and the men of the 24th Infantry Regiment, the period just prior to the Korean War were rife with massive cut-backs in military spending which led to a shortage of military weapons and supplies and funds for training operations.

Despite the Army-wide cut backs however, Colonel Halloran could have done more to prepare his men. He was after all a veteran officer of World War II, who knew ways of

⁴²² Bowers, Hammond, MacGarrigle, *Black Soldier White Army*, 46.

⁴²³ Ibid.

⁴²⁴ Interview with Al Brooks, August 6, 1988, Box 7, Oral Interview Notes BSWA, CMH.

preparing men on the “cheap” as had been the case in the Army prior to Pearl Harbor and in the early days of World War II. Halloran could have devoted much more attention and time to ensure that the men of the 24th were prepared for a future war and less time having the men practice parade drill and participate in athletic competitions, two occupations in which the 24th Infantry Regiment was known to excel during garrison time in Japan.

Ultimately, it is difficult to appraise Colonel Halloran fully as an executive officer because he was not able to demonstrate his leadership abilities under fire with the men of the 24th Infantry Regiment. Shortly before the outbreak of the Korean War, Colonel Halloran was assigned to Fort McPherson to be the 3d Army Special Services Officer. Unfortunately for the men of the 24th Infantry Regiment, Colonel Halloran’s transfer created a window of several months whereby the senior leadership of the 24th Infantry Regiment was continually changing with officers coming and going so frequently that the men they led barely had time to learn the names of their officers. After a period of rapid turn-over, the next Regiment commander to establish himself with the 24th Infantry Regiment for any length of time a quite different individual in comparison with Colonel Halloran.

Colonel Corley

Colonel John T. Corley came to the 24th Infantry Regiment with a reputation for courage and exceptional leadership that would have made any military officer envious. A graduate of the West Point class of 1938, at the time of the Korean War Colonel John Corley was only 35 years old but had already received two Distinguished Service Crosses, eight Silver Stars, and battlefield promotion to the rank of colonel. OCMH historian Roy Appleman noted Colonel Corley was “one of the most highly decorated battalion or regimental officers in the U.S.

Army.”⁴²⁵ Appleman’s assessment was seconded by Major General Al Smith, who stated “Corley was one of the best battalion commanders anywhere in the world during World War II.”⁴²⁶ According to Smith, Corley was among twenty or so officers selected by name by MacArthur and his staff to be brought over to Korea after the outbreak of hostilities.

Even with all of his combat experience from World War II, the regiment that Colonel Corley inherited in the early days of the Korean War was one of the biggest challenges he had ever faced. Morale was at a record low with men reportedly “straggling” to the rear at every opportunity. As noted before, the vacuum created by the constant rotation of senior officers in and out of the 24th left the men feeling rudderless and adrift in an Army that continued to segregate them because of their race. Charles Gregg said that prior to Colonel Corley’s assignment “white commanders remained in the rear too much, especially at night when much of the fighting took place.”⁴²⁷ According to Gregg, this left the black NCOs responsible for trying to maintain some semblance of order, a difficult assignment given the state of morale of most of the men. According to Gregg, it was the assignment of Colonel Corley that began the facelift of the 24th “partly through seeking out good leadership.”⁴²⁸ Colonel Corley did not waste any time beginning the work of cleaning up the 24th’s leadership vacuum and he did not suffer the officers who were not doing their jobs.

One part of Colonel Corley’s push to improve leadership in the 24th was to promote competent African American officers in the 24th Infantry Regiment. Although Colonel Corley did not say as much, he seemed to instinctively know that part of the racial tension was due to the prevalence of white officers instead of black officers in the mid-to-upper levels of leadership

⁴²⁵ Appleman, *Disaster in Korea*, 137.

⁴²⁶ Interview with Major General Al Smith, June 26, 1989, Box 7, Oral Interview Notes BSWA, CMH.

⁴²⁷ Interview of Charles Gregg, September 8, 1988, Box 5, Oral Interview Notes BSWA, CMH.

⁴²⁸ Ibid.

in the 24th. Prior to Colonel Corley's taking command, most of the black officers were very junior. Some of Colonel Corley's first acts were to recognize the African American officers that were doing their duty and provide them with increasing responsibility.

Colonel Corley's action in promoting black officers instantly created enemies among the white officers. Joe Davis recalled that "Corley was badmouthed by other white officers," who complained about Colonel Corley's attention to what the white officers referred to as "those coon officers." Davis said he would hear some white officers complain "the boss wants to promote another coon: the boss wants to do so and so for so and so and the coon doesn't even have platoon time." Davis said he was a "fly on the wall" as he listened to these white officers disparage Colonel Corley.⁴²⁹ The problem for the disgruntled white officers was that Colonel Corley was achieving some measure of success with his changes. The 24th Infantry Regiment's reputation improved with Colonel Corley's tenure, and Colonel Corley was cementing his respect by the men of the 24th through his actions. Colonel Corley was one of those few officers who wore the cloak of leadership with ease and was able to engender the respect of the average soldier. He did this the way all great leaders do – through his actions.

One of the reports about Colonel Corley's near legendary exploits came from Augustus Gillert, an African American officer in the 24th who was the S-3 at the time. Gillert stated on one particular occasion Colonel Corley approached him outside of Chorwan, Korea, and asked, "Well, have you run into any opposition?" Gillert responded "Not yet, but I've got reconnaissance out." According to Gillert, Colonel Corley then hopped into a jeep and proceeded to drive down the road and into the town ahead of the main body of troops with nothing more than his jeep driver and a shotgun sitting in the back seat. Gillert said about an

⁴²⁹ Interview with Joe Davis, August 18, 1988, Box 3, Oral Interview Notes BSWA, CMH.

hour and half later the first troops entered the town with him and Gillert went looking for Colonel Corley because nobody knew where he was. Gillert said he eventually found Colonel Corley in the only Catholic Church in Chorwan kneeling at the altar. Gillert said “whether this was brave, smart, foolish, or whatever; he (Corley) made an assessment of the situation” and made his decision. Gillert said that was one of the characteristics that people admired about Colonel Corley – he was a man who could make a decision.⁴³⁰

Three days later Colonel Corley again impressed Gillert with his command presence and courage. On this occasion Colonel Corley displayed his courage during a fierce firefight. Gillert described the situation:

I was lying in a ditch trying to talk on a radio, the old SCR300, I looked up and Corley was standing above me – standing. There was so much stuff flying you could hear it, literally hear it. I think that guy went through World War II and Korea without getting a scratch, and he was always up where the action was – it wasn’t because he wasn’t where the action was.⁴³¹

Colonel Corley was the first senior officer in the 24th Infantry Regiment during the war that the men had seen near the front. Colonel Corley was able to bolster the confidence of the men of the 24th by demonstrating that he was willing to take risks along with them.

Gustav H. Franke recalled from his experience serving alongside Colonel Corley in Korea that Colonel Corley was the type of battle hardened soldier who knew how to remain calm under fire and close with the enemy. Franke explained that one example of Colonel Corley’s battlefield decisiveness occurred during an incident at the regimental command post (CP) that was located in a school house at Kunu-ri, Korea. The CP came under automatic fire from a nearby enemy soldier. Without hesitation Colonel Corley drew his pistol and “figured out where

⁴³⁰ Interview with Augustus Gillert, March 25, 1989, Box 4, Oral Interview Notes BSWA, CMH.

⁴³¹ Ibid.

the enemy soldier who had fired was located, and gunned him down.”⁴³² Word of Colonel Corley’s action worked its way through the 24th quickly and acted as a tonic to the men’s morale. Here was a leader who knew how to fight.

One of Colonel Corley’s leadership qualities, according to 24th Infantry Regiment veteran Ralph Davis, was his commitment to providing leadership throughout a battle. Davis said that Colonel Corley was always the last man to leave the battlefield. Davis recalled “one of my fondest memories of the man who earned two DSCs and eight Silver Stars was when we reached Yongdungpo and were turning to start south. Colonel Corley and his staff were standing by a fire greeting us as we passed. He stayed until he was literally the last man to leave.”⁴³³

Many of the men of the 24th Infantry Regiment also stated that Colonel Corley knew how to relate to the enlisted men and he treated them no differently than any other soldier, black or white. William M. Factory was an African American enlisted soldier who often rode “shotgun” with Colonel Corley in his jeep. According to Factory, Colonel Corley was one of the “finest men” he ever saw in Korea who did not forget how the average soldier experienced war. As an example, Factory stated that on one occasion Colonel Corley busted him for drinking whiskey one day but then promoted him the very next day.⁴³⁴

As Charles Gregg noted, Colonel Corley truly was responsible for the facelift of the 24th. Unfortunately, even with a turn-around in morale among the men of the 24th and improved competency on the battlefield, the 24th Infantry Regiment was still a “Negro” unit in a predominantly white Army. Whatever successes made by the 24th were downplayed and the failures overblown. This pressure eventually led to what many believe was the premature

⁴³² Interview with Gustav H. Franke, July 14, 1994, Box 4, Oral Interview Notes BSWA, CMH.

⁴³³ Letter from Ralph J. Davis, December 12, 1994, Box 4, Oral Interview Notes BSWA, CMH.

⁴³⁴ Interview of William M. Factory, November 2, 1988, Box 4, Oral Interview Notes BSWA, CMH.

implosion of Colonel Corley's career. Sandro A. Barone was one of several members of the 24th who felt that "the bad reputation of the 24th Infantry unfairly limited Corley's advance to higher rank."⁴³⁵

Colonel Corley retired from the Army in 1967 at the rank of Brigadier General, a seemingly low rank considering the numerous military honors bestowed on him throughout his career and his reputation as a military leader. After the war, even Colonel Corley seemed to realize that assignment to lead the men of the 24th Infantry Regiment might have dimmed his career prospects. His wife, Mary, noted in an interview for the *Army Times* that Colonel Corley was "reprimanded by then General Mark Clark for giving an interview to a black publication in which he detailed some acts of heroism by members of the 24th."⁴³⁶ The attention Colonel Corley received by senior Army officers such as General Mark Clark for his defense of the African American soldiers of the 24th certainly did not earn him any points for promotion.

Despite the nearly universal praise Colonel Corley received from his men there were several critics of Corley as a leader, especially among some of his subordinate officers.⁴³⁷ However, even one of his critics, Oliver Dillard, noted: "Corley had the best interests of the regiment as a priority at all times ... the medal he got for Kunu-ri was probably undeserved – yet Corley was one of the bravest men he has ever known."⁴³⁸ What was undisputable was that Colonel Corley did more for the image and fighting morale of the 24th Infantry Regiment than any of his predecessors or successors – and perhaps in an ironic twist of fate – by breathing new life into the 24th Infantry Regiment he may well have pushed back the eventual desegregation of the 24th

⁴³⁵ Interview with Sandro A. Barone, April 14, 1994, Box 2, Oral Interview Notes BSWA, CMH.

⁴³⁶ *Army Times*, August 21, 1989, Box 1, Oral Interview Notes BSWA, CMH.

⁴³⁷ As noted in Chapter III, one of Corley's harshest critics was Lieutenant Charles Bussey. Most of Bussey's criticism boiled down to just one episode where Corley reputedly told Bussey he would not get the Congressional Medal of Honor because he was black. Despite that situation, Bussey still acknowledged that as a fighting man and a leader Corley was exceptionally gifted.

⁴³⁸ Interview with Oliver Dillard, June 3-4, 1989, Box 4, Oral Interview Notes BSWA, CMH.

by a year.

Lieutenant Colonel Melvin Blair

For most of Colonel Corley's time with the 24th Infantry Regiment, the executive officer (XO) was another World War II veteran named Melvin Russell Blair. According to Blair, Colonel Corley personally sought him out to assist with the 24th Infantry Regiment. Blair stated that Corley "told him about the unreliability of the troops of the 24th Infantry and their inability to remain in position and fight." Blair stated that Colonel Corley told him that he wanted a commander who was "low keyed, never excited, one who had experience in combat, and who would work hard." Blair reported that Colonel Corley told him that morale was poor with the 24th and that the men were "tired and scared" but that together, Colonel Corley and Lt. Col. Blair were going to "rebuild the regiment."⁴³⁹ Thus entered Lt. Col. Blair – one of the more unusual and controversial officers of the 24th Infantry Regiment.

While Colonel Corley typically let his actions speak louder than his words, Lt. Col. Blair was not shy about expressing his opinions and in particular to praise himself. In the June 23, 1951 issue of the *Saturday Evening Post*, Lt. Col. Blair authorized an article about his exploits and his difficulty in leading the African American soldiers of the 24th Infantry Regiment, titled not-so-modestly "I send your Son into Battle". There was no question about who was the star of the article. The editors of the *Saturday Evening Post* ran this biography of Melvin Russell Blair:

Among Americans who follow the profession of arms few have been so thoroughly blooded in so short a span of time as Lt. Col. Melvin Russell Blair, Inf. This Kansas son of a railroad engineer remembers that from the earliest childhood he always wanted to be a soldier. He tried for West Point twice and failed. He enlisted in the Army as a private no-class and won his commission when World War II came. He immediately volunteered for Merrill's Marauders and fought through the worst of the Burma campaign. More jungle fighting followed. When Korea popped, he again volunteered for combat and led a Negro battalion there in some of the toughest holding operations. Score to date: four slugs still in

⁴³⁹ Interview with Melvin R. Blair, February 15, 1995, Box 2, Oral Interview Notes BSWA, CMH.

his leg, shrapnel in his side, two Distinguished Service Crosses, two Silver Stars, three Purple Hearts.⁴⁴⁰

In actuality, Lt. Col. Blair's article for *The Saturday Evening Post* was not his first foray into publicity with that magazine. In the June 16, 1951, issue Blair was interviewed by correspondent Harold H. Martin. In this interview Blair complained that the enemy had caused soldiers protecting his command-post to flee without firing a shot and that "the men fled like rabbits across the great open field." Blair explained to Martin that at the end of the engagement he encountered several African American soldiers sitting around a campfire singing what they called "the official song of the 24th Infantry – the Bugout Boogie." *The Saturday Evening Post* then quoted Blair as he told the national magazine the lyrics for the Bugout Boogie which was reportedly sung to the tune of Hank Snow's "Movin' On" – *when them Chinese mortars begins to thud, the old Deuce-four begin to bug.*⁴⁴¹ According to Mrs. John Corley, "Colonel Corley was furious at Blair's article in *The Saturday Evening Post*" and that "the pot should not call the kettle black."⁴⁴² Colonel Corley eventually relieved Lt. Col. Blair of command after a particularly horrendous battle the evening of November 30, 1950. According to *Black Soldier White Army*, Colonel Corley tried to protect Lt. Col. Blair's career by classifying his relief of duty as being due to "combat fatigue" when in actuality it was for gross incompetence, or worse, cowardice. During that momentous evening, as a fierce battle raged, Lt. Col. Blair made no attempt to seek out and direct his battalion when the U.S. soldiers were being annihilated by the enemy.⁴⁴³

Besides his failure to command on the evening of November 30, 1950, Lt. Col. Blair had

⁴⁴⁰ Melvin Russell Blair, "I send your Son into Battle," *The Saturday Evening Post*, June 23, 1951, Box 2, Oral Interview Notes BSWA, CMH.

⁴⁴¹ Bowers, Hammond, MacGarrigle, *Black Soldier White Army*, 216.

⁴⁴² Interview with Mrs. John Corley, November 2, 1989, Box 3, Oral Interview Notes BSWA, CMH.

⁴⁴³ Bowers, Hammond, MacGarrigle, *Black Soldier White Army*, 214-216.

displayed behavior during his tenure with the 24th Infantry Regiment that called into question his integrity. Colonel Owen H. Carter recalled one episode in Korea when he went out to visit three rifle companies in the field under the direction of Lt. Col. Blair. Carter stated he was approached by one of the company commanders, Captain Pirowski – who was later KIA. Captain Pirowski reported to Carter that “Blair had asked him to put him in for a decoration ... should he be so inclined, Pirowski would be rewarded.” Carter said Pirowski wanted to put in a formal complaint, but was killed before he had a chance to do so.⁴⁴⁴

Blair left the Army shortly after the Korean War and in an incident that can only be described as bizarre – in 1958 Blair was arrested during an attempt to commit armed robbery of \$40,000 in proceeds of the Bing Crosby Golf Tournament in California. Blair was ultimately sentenced to a term between 5-20 years in federal prison. Even forty-five years after the Korean War, Melvin Blair refused to believe that his tenure with the 24th was anything but exceptional. When shown the interviews with other members of the 24th who described his removal of command by Colonel Corley he stated “that the blacks had lied to make their white commander look bad – falsely blaming everything that happened to the battalion on him.” Blair said “this was a black conspiracy!”⁴⁴⁵ Lt. Col. Blair was one of the white officers that had become all too familiar to the African American soldiers in the 24th – an officer that thought only of his career and what would make him look good in the eyes of his superiors and who at the first sign of problems was quick to blame the race of his men for any failures.

Major Richard “Black Daddy” Williams

Of the African American officers in the 24th Infantry Regiment, none represented the “soul” of the unit more than Captain (later Major) Richard Williams – known to the men admiringly as

⁴⁴⁴ Interview with Colonel Owen H. Carter, July 20, 1994, Box 3, Oral Interview Notes BSWA, CMH.

⁴⁴⁵ Interview with Melvin Blair, September 5, 1995, Box 2, Oral Interview Notes BSWA, CMH.

“Black Daddy.” At the outbreak of the Korean War, Oliver Dillard observed that there “weren’t more than 100 black officers in the entire United States Army.”⁴⁴⁶ They all knew one another – and they especially knew Captain Williams, known as a consummate professional and an officer who took care of his men. Al Brooks said that Captain Williams acted like the Inspector General (IG) for the unit. “If a black officer was having a problem with his white commander, he would go to Williams and Williams would talk to the white officer.” Brooks said that Williams experienced the racist attitudes of some of the white officers but he would maintain his professionalism in order to help his fellow black officers. Brooks noted that “these things ate him up,” but he did not complain. According to Brooks, the grief that Williams took for his fellow black officers and men should have entitled him to “emerge from Korea a general and not a major.”⁴⁴⁷

Williams represented more to the men of the 24th Infantry Regiment than most officers because first and foremost he was an African American who understood the way the Army treated black soldiers. Secondly, he was crucial for the well-being of the 24th because he was an exemplary officer. Stuart G. Force worked for (then) Captain Williams when he was the battalion S-3. Force stated that Williams was “an excellent soldier, well-versed in military matters – he stood near the top of his class at the Advanced Infantry Course.”⁴⁴⁸ Williams would serve in several positions during his time with the 24th Infantry Regiment from S-3 to S-2. Williams was also not the type of officer who lingered at the rear. He displayed leadership on the battlefield as well.

Albert Griffin recalled one episode during which he watched “Black Daddy” Williams

⁴⁴⁶ Interview with Major General Oliver Dillard, June 3, 1989, Box 4, Oral Interview Notes BSWA, CMH.

⁴⁴⁷ Interview with Al Brooks, August 6, 1988, Box 3, Oral Interview Notes BSWA, CMH.

⁴⁴⁸ Interview with Stuart G. Force, August 8, 1994, Box 4, Oral Interview Notes BSWA, CMH.

running across a rice paddy in a soft cap screaming and cursing trying to get the troops up and fighting. Griffin said the whole battalion responded. Griffin said on another occasion he observed Williams on the horizon yelling “don’t you niggers know you are under attack? Move out!”⁴⁴⁹ According to numerous African American soldiers who served with “Black Daddy” – there was one word that Captain Williams used more than any other to “motivate” the men. Willie Griffin recalled that “Black Daddy called us all motherfuckers ... (usually) during a particularly bad time.”⁴⁵⁰ Griffin and others remarked that the word “motherfucker” was a word that for whatever reason was particularly aligned with African American soldiers and was used in a myriad of ways. Not surprisingly, one of the officers who found the word particularly offensive was Lt. Col. Blair who many years later commented that one of his particular “pet-peeves” was to eliminate the use of the word “motherfucker.” Lt. Col. Blair said the word would be used sometimes two or three times in a sentence, and while he and Colonel Corley tried to “stop the utterance” they were left with “little or no success.”⁴⁵¹ Williams most likely used it because he knew it was a word that meant something to the soldiers – it was a part of their collective racial identity – and it probably didn’t hurt that white officers like Lt. Col. Blair despised the use of the word.

According to the testimony of various soldiers in the 24th Infantry Regiment, if Major Williams had one fault it was that he “drank too much Japanese gin.”⁴⁵² Major Williams’ drinking was serious enough that in October, 1950 he had to be evacuated for a time for treatment related to his liver, but there was never any sign that he allowed drinking to affect his ability to function as an officer. Many of the men, who served with and under Williams,

⁴⁴⁹ Interview with Albert Griffin, October 5, 1988, Box 5, Oral Interview Notes BSWA, CMH.

⁴⁵⁰ Interview with Willie Griffin, November 10, 1988, Box 5, Oral Interview Notes BSWA, CMH.

⁴⁵¹ Interview with Melvin Blair, February 27, 1995, Box 2, Oral Interview Notes BSWA, CMH.

⁴⁵² Interview with Stuart G. Force, August 8, 1994, Box 4, Oral Interview Notes BSWA, CMH.

believed that alcohol was a necessary tool that Williams used to deal with the problems he faced as a black officer in a white army. Ultimately, Major Williams demonstrated the potential of an African American officer when given the opportunity and probably would have gone further in the ranks had he served in the Army during a post-segregationist period. During the Korean War, Williams was not promoted beyond the rank of Major.

Lieutenant General Edward (Ned) Almond

At the time of the outbreak of hostilities in June 1950, (then) Major General Edward M. Almond was the “Chief of Staff, GHQ” for General Douglas MacArthur – commander of all forces in the Far East.⁴⁵³ Even before Almond was handpicked by General MacArthur to lead the forces under the newly created Tenth (X) Corps during the invasion of Inchon, Almond cut a controversial swath through the senior officer ranks. Max Hastings in his monograph *The Korean War* observed that “MacArthur liked and trusted Almond, for reasons unclear to some of his staff, who did not.” The members of MacArthur’s staff said “they respected the Southerner’s energy and dedication, but they disliked his fierce temper and arrogance.”⁴⁵⁴ What was not mentioned by MacArthur’s staff was Almond’s intolerance towards blacks and Asians, a critical distinction in Almond’s style that will be the focus of the rest of this chapter.

As mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, Almond was not in the direct chain-of-command for the 24th Infantry Regiment, although one could make the argument that since the Eighth Army fell under General MacArthur’s command and Almond was the Chief of Staff he did have some influence on decisions that would affect the 24th Infantry Regiment. When Almond commanded the X Corps he oversaw the 9th Infantry Regiment which had an African American Battalion within its ranks. So why is General Almond of importance to our focus in

⁴⁵³ Almond was promoted to Lieutenant General on February 15, 1951.

⁴⁵⁴ Max Hastings, *The Korean War* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987), 66.

this study? Almond is important for two reasons: one is because he held such a senior position of authority during the Korean War and held very strong opinions about African American soldiers, and the other is because Almond represents racist sentiments prevalent among senior officers in the U.S. Army at the time of the Korean War.

Among the senior officers during the Korean War Almond was the exception for his outspoken approach to race relations. Most of the senior white officers might occasionally allude to their racial sentiments: Almond, on the other hand, stated his opinions verbally and on paper both during the war and throughout the rest of his life. From Almond's written communication with other senior Army officers, we are offered a rare glimpse into the racial sentiments of military leaders who let down their guard during communication with a fellow like-minded Southern race-obsessed sympathizer.

Almond's Early Military Career

Edward Mallory Almond was born in Luray, Virginia, on December 12, 1892 and his formative years were spent in segregated Virginia. According to Almond in an interview with his grandson in 1974, he thought about a "military career at a very early age" despite the fact that his family was not a "military" family per se.⁴⁵⁵ Almond stated that while still in high school he joined a local military unit made up of classmates called the Culpeper Minutemen. As Almond reached maturity and the end of high school he sought an appointment to West Point but was encouraged by Virginia Representative George Browning to attend the Virginia Military Institute (VMI) instead.

VMI has a long history and a strong connection to the South. Nestled in the Shenandoah Valley in the shadow of the Blue Ridge Mountains in Lexington, Virginia, the school was central

⁴⁵⁵ Interview of General Edward M. Almond by Captain Thomas G. Fergusson, Box 1, Almond Papers, MHI.

to the Southern cause during the Civil War through the military training provided to their cadets, which almost universally went to war on the side of the south. VMI was also known for its star artillery instructor, General Thomas “Stonewall” Jackson, who personally led the first batch of cadets to war. After the Civil War, the school continued to provide the U.S. Army with first-rate officers through their alumni, which included men such as General George C. Marshall. Almond started his education at VMI in 1912 and graduated 3rd in his class of 65 pupils in 1915. Unfortunately for the young graduate, there were no vacancies for new Army officers at the time and he took a job with the Marion Institute in Marion, Alabama, as an instructor of physics and foreign languages.⁴⁵⁶

As the war raging in Europe moved closer to ensnaring the United States in late 1916, the Army opened up new officer positions. Almond traveled back to Virginia in order to take the commissioning exams, passed, and on November 30, 1916, Almond received a commission in the Army as a second lieutenant. Upon commissioning, Almond was sent to Fort Leavenworth for three months of Officer Candidate School and then was assigned to Fort Brown in Brownsville, Texas, in April, 1917. At Fort Brown Almond was assigned to the 4th Infantry Regiment and was put into command of Company F. During the senior officer debriefing in the 1970s, Almond did not discuss in detail his days in Brownsville, Texas, or whether the topic of the Brownsville Affair of 1906 ever came up during conversation.

In June, 1917, the 4th Infantry Regiment was moved to Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, just two months before the African American soldiers of the 24th Infantry Regiment at Camp Logan in Houston, Texas, were pulled into a deadly riot after a race incident between Houston police

⁴⁵⁶ While in Marion, Alabama, Almond also met and courted his future wife, Margaret Crook, who was a student at a nearby women’s college. They married in Anniston, Alabama on August 4th, 1917, and despite repeated moves around the world during Almond’s career, the couple considered Anniston, Alabama, their home and the Almond’s moved back to Anniston when Almond retired from the Army.

officers and a soldier from the 24th. While in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, the 4th Infantry Regiment was expanded into a full division and then moved a second time in December, 1917 to Camp Green in North Carolina. Had the 4th remained in Gettysburg for another couple months, Almond might have crossed paths with another young Army officer who was sent to build Camp Colt outside Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, in March 1918, Captain Dwight D. Eisenhower.⁴⁵⁷

In May, 1918, the 4th Infantry Division left for France. Almond was now a Captain and was in charge of Company A of the 12th Machine Gun Battalion. Remarkably for someone who would be profuse in discussing his career and his exploits later in life, Almond provided a very brief synopsis of his time in France. From his account, we know that he participated in the July 1918 Aisne-Marne offensive and that he was wounded during an operation on the Vesle River on August 4, 1918. Almond stated that he later received a Silver Star for his heroic actions just prior to his wounding. Almond spent several months in a hospital in France before he was returned to duty with the 12th Machine Gun Battalion. Almond again led the unit during the Meuse-Argonne offensive and during the occupation of the Rhineland after the Armistice in November 1918. Almond returned to the United States in the fall of 1919 and resumed his position as Professor of Military Science and Tactics at the Marion Institute in Alabama, presumably while still employed by the United States Army since his next move was to Fort Benning, Georgia, to attend further training in an infantry course for company officers.

Almond's career in the inter-war years Army was similar to other officers who would become prominent in World War II and the Korean War. Almond went to several of the required military schools; the Command and General Staff Course in Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, the

⁴⁵⁷ Almond stated during one of his interviews that he met with General Eisenhower after the close of World War II and said of the occasion that he had "known (Eisenhower) for many years, since we served together at Fort Benning in 1924." If this is true, this would have been during the five month window where Eisenhower was assigned to the 24th Infantry Regiment at Fort Benning, just prior to his getting out of that assignment and transferring to France to serve with the Battle Monuments Commission under General Pershing.

Army War College that was at Fort McNair in 1933, the Army Air Corps Tactical School at Maxwell Field, Alabama in 1938-1939, and the Naval War College at Newport, Rhode Island in 1939-1940. When Almond finished at the Naval War College he was at the rank of Lieutenant Colonel. In January of 1941 Almond was the G-3 of IV Corps at Providence, Rhode Island, and on the eve of American involvement in World War II, Almond was promoted to the rank of colonel.

On paper, Almond appeared to be a perfect selection for higher command. His knowledge of military tactics and theory were honed through the best schools the military had to offer, yet his time actually spent leading troops was primarily relegated to his time in World War I and a stint leading “native” troops in the Philippines in the early 1930s.⁴⁵⁸ As Captain Fergusson noted in his biographical introduction to General Almond's debriefing, “the rapid rise in rank continued for Colonel Almond in the spring of 1942 when he was promoted to Brigadier General and appointed Assistant Division Commander of the 93rd Division at Fort Huachuca, Arizona.”⁴⁵⁹ The 93rd Division was an African American division similar to the 92nd Infantry Division. Also in 1942, Almond was promoted from Assistant Division Commander of the 93rd Division to Division Commander of the 92nd Infantry Division. Promotion from Brigadier General to Major General followed shortly after his appointment to lead the 92nd Infantry Division. As was the case with several Army officers during World War II, Almond went from a Lieutenant Colonel to a Major General in the short span of two years. The Army obviously felt that Edward Almond was destined and ready for greater responsibility during World War II.

⁴⁵⁸ As a newly minted Major, Almond was appointed to command a battalion of the 45th Infantry at Fort McKinley in the Philippines where he oversaw the “native” troops of the 45th. While it would at first glance appear that Almond might have met his future advocate General MacArthur while in the Philippines, MacArthur did not receive assignment to the Philippines until 1934. In actuality, Almond most likely became acquainted with General MacArthur upon his return to the United States in 1933 where he was assigned to administrative duties in Washington D.C., where General MacArthur was stationed as the Army Chief of Staff.

⁴⁵⁹ Ibid.

Almond the Division Commander

Prior to his assignment as Assistant Division Commander for the 93rd Division there is no record of Almond having much association with African American soldiers. If he came across black soldiers in one of his previous postings he made no mention of it in his interviews or writings. According to Almond, he approached command of African American troops with an open mind and did not try to get out of the assignment.⁴⁶⁰ Almond stated that although there was a reputation of failure attached to the 93rd and 92nd from their service in World War I, he attempted to research the topic himself and; “I was unable to find in any library a description of the type of failure, the nature of the exercise that were being criticized or the result thereof.” Almond said that instead of written documentation of the actions of the 93rd and 92nd in World War I, “I found lots of opinion by people who wrote off hand reports of the 92nd’s World War I exploits but nothing was definite enough,” so as a result of his research, “I decided not to make my mind up in any direction until I saw for my own satisfaction the capabilities of the components of the 92nd Division and I advised my officers to do likewise.”⁴⁶¹ The proclamation by Almond of an open mind to his assignment to lead black soldiers has a tinny ring to it in light of his later actions and words.

As was discussed in Chapter I, there were complaints about Almond’s racial insensitivity during the training phase with the 92nd Infantry Division while it was stationed in Fort Huachuca, Arizona. Almond dismissed these complaints as being nothing more than the usual complaints of trouble-makers and rabble-rousers. Almond insisted that during this period he still maintained an open mind to the capability of the average African American. Almond’s one complaint

⁴⁶⁰ Captain Fergusson asked Almond; “Did you make any attempt at that time of your assignment as Commander of the 92nd to get another assignment?” Almond responded, “No, I did not.” Ibid.

⁴⁶¹ Ibid.

during this period was that it took black soldiers longer to learn than white soldiers. According to Almond, “we took longer than the average division for the training period prior to entry into combat because it took longer for the instructor to secure a sink-in result in any instruction that we offered.” As an example, Almond cited his observation that to train black soldiers rifle marksmanship, it “required three to four times as much ammunition.”⁴⁶² Almond reserved his harshest criticism of African Americans as soldiers for Italy when the men of the 92nd Infantry Division faced the crucible of combat.

Almond stated that he and his officers personally selected the men to make up the 370th Infantry Regiment, one of three regiments in his division, to be the first unit sent over to Italy. Almond hoped that the by sending the best trained unit of his division into combat first they would set the standard for the following regiments. The 370th Combat Team arrived in Italy in late August 1944 and was immediately attached by IV Corps of the Fifth United States Army to the 1st Armored Division that was along the Arno River in the Pontedera area. Captain Fergusson noted that during this time the 370th Combat Team “advanced about 30 miles against relatively light resistance,” but when confronted with determined German resistance the combat team “netted a gain of only 8,000 yard in 6 days and failed to seize its objectives while sustaining over 400 casualties.”⁴⁶³ This slow progress in the face of stiff resistance was seen by Almond as a failure by the 370th “on the offensive.” Considering the stalemated nature of much of the fighting in Italy during World War II by all units, the debacle on the beaches of Anzio for instance where American forces were almost pushed back into the sea, it seems rather unfair for Almond to criticize too harshly the actions of the 370th in their first test of true combat. Almond

⁴⁶² Ibid. Almond did not seem to consider, at least in the case of marksmanship, that the average black recruit was even less likely than his white counterpart to have had any prior experience with firearms, particularly if that black recruit was from the South.

⁴⁶³ Ibid.

did consider that one possible explanation for the failure by the 370th was due to their “attacking against the high ground of the Apennine Mountain” and that the enemy was “in a stronger position to repel in advance.”

According to Almond, his concern about the fighting capability of African Americans was solidified during the failed offensive along the Cinquale Canal in February 1945. The details of this attack are discussed in greater detail in Chapter I, but suffice it to say, from Almond’s and much of the senior Army command perspective; the operation was a complete failure. Almond appeared to be more concerned with the outcome of this operation than any previous operation, in part because “it was watched with intense interest by the commander of the 15th Army Group, General Mark Clark and the Fifth Army commander, General Truscott.”⁴⁶⁴ If there is one particular event or time period where Almond’s opinion of black soldiers was set in stone, it was at the end of the Cinquale Canal attack.

Almond claimed that after the failed offensive he personally conducted an inquiry to determine the cause(s) for the failure. Almond said that “we found out that in every case, the excuse of the local commander (platoon, or company commander) was that they put the man in position and couldn’t depend on his staying there because they couldn’t see him in the dark. When they went to find the place they had put him in, the man wasn’t there.”⁴⁶⁵ Almond felt that African American soldiers were incapable of maintaining their position in the face of enemy opposition, with the implication that this was due to the race of the soldiers. Almond accepted this explanation and from this point forward until his death in 1979, he believed that African

⁴⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁵ It is worth noting, this response from Almond came by way of a response to the following question by Captain Fergusson; “Sir, did you put any of the blame for this, the loss of these positions on the company grade officers, the officers who were actually commanding the men out there? Did you see any failure of leadership, as well as the men’s unwillingness to stay on a position?” Captain Fergusson was asking the right question; however, Almond felt the officers were not liable because of the soldiers, an unusual upending of the usual chain of responsibility that moves up the chain instead of down. Ibid.

Americans could not be relied on in combat because they could not control their fear.

Part of the explanation for Almond's stance regarding black soldiers has to do with Almond's personality. Almond in many ways was very similar to his champion, General MacArthur; that is, if he perceived that someone had let him down or made him to look bad to his peers and superiors, he would spend the rest of his days attacking them. In Almond's mind, there was no room for failure. His overweening egotism played out in full view of the Army and Marine Corps during the Korean War with Almond's very public spat with Marine General Oliver P. Smith which will be discussed later in this chapter. In the case of the men of the 92nd Infantry Division, Almond appeared to take the unit's problems as a personal affront after all the effort he put into training the black soldiers. From his perspective, Almond has risked his career as it were to ensure that the 92nd was given the opportunity to see combat only to find that the black soldiers failed him at a critical moment and when his superiors were watching over his shoulder. This was a betrayal of confidence in his opinion and one he never forgave. Almond never again spoke about African American troops without condescension.

As detailed in Chapter I, after the failure of the attack at Cinquale Canal, the 92nd Infantry Division was reorganized and received a complement of Japanese-American soldiers of the 442nd Infantry Regiment that had proven themselves as fierce fighters. Because these new soldiers did not let Almond down in the attack, they were the subject of profuse praise as he recounted his time in Italy after the reorganization. Almond said the 442nd was such a success because of a "determined attitude of courage and fortitude by the Japanese soldier in the attack, defense, or any other military mission assigned him."⁴⁶⁶ For an officer who would later pronounce that the Chinese in the Korean War amounted to little more than "laundry men," to Almond the

⁴⁶⁶ Ibid.

Japanese-American soldiers could do no harm.

General Almond's success after receiving the 442nd was only tempered by the tragic loss of his son, Edward M. Almond Jr., who was killed in action in the 167th Regiment, 45th Division fighting with the Seventh Army in France. Almond had already lost a son-in-law, Major Thomas Galloway, earlier in the war when Galloway was shot down over St. Lo, France, on June 25, 1944.⁴⁶⁷

As World War II came to a close Almond stated that his prime concern was discipline and venereal disease. Almond stated "our principal objective during this period was to keep the men of the 92nd Division, all Negro units, again, so occupied as to keep them out of personal trouble and diversion, until they could be moved home" and in Almond's opinion, then removed from military service.⁴⁶⁸ Almond stated that he had reasonable success in controlling the men with the exception of preventing "contacts made with lewd women and AWOL experiences." The venereal rate according to Almond rose 30%, a statistic which warranted the unwanted attention of General Truscott who decided to send Almond over to the 10th Mountain Division area so he could learn from their experiences in controlling the spread of VD, an assignment Almond most assuredly viewed as a rebuke of his leadership.

At the end of World War II Almond began to worry about possible ramifications of his time leading the 92nd ID having a negative effect on his career. As discussed in Chapter I, to head-off any negative criticism Almond had a report prepared to summarize the actions of the 92nd ID in World War II. Although the report was meant to be viewed as "lessons learned" guide for future handling of African American soldiers, it ultimately was more of a "CYA" for Almond and his

⁴⁶⁷ Major Thomas Galloway was Captain Fergusson's father – a father he never met since he was killed in action before Captain Fergusson was born.

⁴⁶⁸ Ibid.

career. Almond also attempted to veil his most ardent racial opinions in his post-action report on the 92nd ID in order to avoid further damage to his career. Almond explained to his subordinate and confidant Colonel William J. McCaffrey why tempering his views was the better part of valor when discussing black soldiers. In a letter dated November 13, 1945, Almond wrote to McCaffrey in reference to a request McCaffrey had received about assisting with writing an article for the *Saturday Evening Post* on the 92nd ID. Almond wrote:

You asked me for my opinion on *Saturday Evening Post* article on the 92d. I don't know how such an article would be received, but I do know that everything else that has been written for publication has been misconstrued by somebody. Furthermore, I don't believe anyone except those who have actually served as we did is in a position to understand the problems presented and the solution thereto. Even in the War Department there is such a dearth of information on the subject of the employment of our special types of personnel that I doubt their ability to interpret an unbiased story ... All I can say is that I personally wouldn't attempt to discuss the subject for the public.⁴⁶⁹

The formation of a board to review the actions of a given military unit at the end of a conflict is not unusual or uncommon. Many military units prepare a “unit history” to celebrate their achievements and to document the “lessons learned” for the use of future military commanders. What was unique was the caveat provided by Almond to the board members. One of the questions he wanted them to address specifically was: “To consider the combat effectiveness of

⁴⁶⁹ Letter from Lt. Gen Edward M. Almond to Colonel William J. McCaffrey, November 13, 1945, Box 11, Almond Papers, MHI. Almond would maintain his stance on speaking out publicly about African American soldiers the rest of his military career. In January 1953, around the time of his retirement, but while still acting as Commandant of the Army War College in Carlisle, Pennsylvania, Almond had several correspondences with Lee Nichols, the author of *Breakthrough on the Color Front*. In a letter dated January 17, 1953, Nichols stressed to Almond the importance of his being completely forthright in his opinion of black soldiers. Nichols wrote: “I would urge you not to ‘tone down’ statements of opinion, or to eliminate colorful phrases of which you are a good maker. The reason is that in all and any of the material I use, I will either so mask the source – such as ‘one prominent General who commanded Negro troops in Italy in World War II’ or something even vaguer if you think that would identify you – or I will ask your permission to use it.” Almond did not maintain his response to Nichols request for frankness in his records, but his response can be gleaned from another letter from Nichols on January 23, 1953. Nichols wrote: “As you requested, I deleted your name from any quotes you gave me in frankness, while trying to retain something of the point of view.” However, the author did note “In other places where your activities were described by others ‘on the record’ I felt free to write as I was given the information.” Letters from Lee Nichols to Lt. Gen Edward Almond, January 17, 1953, and January 23, 1953, Box 132, Almond Papers, MHI.

negro officers and enlisted men.”⁴⁷⁰ Almond issued a letter of Instruction forming the board on June 23, 1945, and provided the board with the directive to “give special attention to the combat performance of men and units of the Division during the period: 18 August 1944 to 2 May 1945.”⁴⁷¹ The board was given till July 1, 1945, to complete its review.

Although Almond’s official report blamed some of the problems faced by the 92nd ID in Italy on the race of the soldiers serving in the unit, it was not nearly as critical as was the personal assessment that Almond wrote after the board concluded its review. Almond’s personal view as expressed in 1945 after reviewing the board’s conclusions was:

- A. The Negro Officer: The negro officer, in general, fails to meet minimum infantry combat standards. He lacks pride, aggressiveness, and a sense of responsibility and has practically no command capacity above the grade of captain. His race consciousness seriously affects his general efficiency. He does not comprehend the merit system of promotion. The negro officer does have utility in the artillery and the services.
- B. The Noncommissioned officer: The negro noncommissioned officer cannot be developed in self-confidence and consequent leadership within reasonable time for emergency infantry combat use. He lacks pride, is careless and undependable, and cannot induce enlisted men under his command to follow him in danger – principally because he himself is afraid of infantry combat.
- C. The Negro Solder: The negro soldier, like the noncommissioned officer, lacks pride and trust in his fellow solder. He distorts facts, is unreliable and fears the ‘unseen’ such as the enemy at night and enemy artillery or mortar fire. Constant supervision fails to insure his care and maintenance of equipment. His regard for health, especially contraction of venereal disease and foot ailments, is very low.⁴⁷²

Almond provided further clarification for his thoughts on African American officers, a topic that he was keenly interested in as his subsequent actions during the Korean War would demonstrate. Almond wrote concerning African American officers:

⁴⁷⁰ Document titled “Notes on Evaluation of the Efficiency of the Negro in Military Operations Involving Combat” not dated, Box 132, Almond Papers, MHI. Although the document is not dated, based on statements made in the document it was mostly likely created by Almond in late 1945. The board members consisted of: Brig. Gen. John E. Wood, Colonel Ray G. Sherman, Colonel James Notestein, Colonel John D. Armstrong, Colonel William J. McCaffrey, Major A. D. Wilder, Jr., Lt. and Col. D. M. MacWillie.

⁴⁷¹ Ibid.

⁴⁷² Ibid.

- A. The negro officer is a by-product of his race and as such perpetuates the same characteristics in the Army to a large extent that he did in civilian life. Because of a low economic level he lacks pride in himself and pride of accomplishment.
- B. Servility has been bred in him for generations, therefore, he does not develop into an aggressive troop leader; his aggressiveness, if any, usually manifests itself in the rear areas or along race-conscious lines.
- C. His capacity for high command is limited by his lack of intelligence, background, and by his inability to criticize other negroes for fear of holding down the 'race.'⁴⁷³

From 1945 to the end of his life, Almond maintained that African Americans had no business as combat soldiers or officers. His views on blacks would significantly affect his actions in the Korean War and how he used black units and how he evaluated black units, such as the 24th Infantry Regiment. Almond's influence on black soldiers during the Korean War was also significant because of the relationship he formed with General MacArthur during the years between World War II and the Korean War.

Almond and MacArthur: The Interwar Years 1945-1950

Almond left the 92nd Infantry Division on July 5, 1945, and after taking thirty days leave he reported to Camp Swift, Texas, to take command of the 2nd Infantry Division. At the time the men of the 2nd Infantry Division were being prepared for a scheduled invasion of the Japanese homelands in the fall of 1945. Almond recalled "my feelings were very pleasant and I was anxious to command a white division in another war zone in the Pacific."⁴⁷⁴ Clearly, the fact that the 2nd ID was a white division was a motivating factor in his "pleasant" feelings. Almond did not get the opportunity to lead the men of the 2nd ID into combat since the war in Japan came to a quick close on September 2, 1945, after the dropping of atomic weapons on August 6 and 9, 1945.

⁴⁷³ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁴ Interview of General Edward M. Almond by Captain Thomas G. Fergusson, Box 1, Almond Papers, MHI

Instead of battle ready soldiers Almond inherited a group of weary longtime soldiers and recent draftees who wanted nothing more to do with the Army once the war came to a close. For a general who was vociferous in his complaints of black soldier discipline problems, he was about to learn that white soldiers could be equally if not more unmanageable. Part of the problem was that the 2nd ID with the close of World War II had been designated by the War Department as a “Discharged Area of Separation” that meant the men about to be discharged from service from eight other divisions were corralled into Almond’s 2nd ID pending their separation from service. Almond lamented, “These men had no intention of submitting to any discipline, even to the proper wearing of the uniform,” and worse yet the men “went on pass whether approved or not” to the nearby city of Austin, Texas.⁴⁷⁵ Almond recounted that the white soldiers would go into a restaurant in Austin, eat a meal, then get up and tell the owner “Charge it to the US Government” before walking out without paying. Needless to say, the people of Austin and, more importantly to Almond, city officials and newspaper editors of Austin, Texas, demanded action – and they quickly placed most of the blame on the commanding officer, General Edward Almond.

According to his own later admission, Almond was flabbergasted. Why were the town officials and press blaming him instead of the soldiers committing the disorderly conduct? Further, Almond could not blame the actions of the soldiers on their race as he had done in Italy. Almond was faced with a situation that would require him to display his unique leadership style. Indeed, what he did next was vintage Almond. Almond recalled:

I called the mayor of Austin, to tell him that I didn’t like the attitude of the press and radio descriptions of me as a camp commander, he said “What can I do about it?” And I replied,

⁴⁷⁵ Ibid.

“That if any more of it takes place, the troops of the 2nd Division, as long as I was in command, wouldn’t participate in any of the ceremonies in Austin.” This brought him to his senses, and the castigation that I had been receiving over the television and radio ceased. What I did was to block out the city of Austin and make a checkerboard and put an officer and detachment with a truck or two in each of these checkerboard areas with instructions that if any soldier appeared undisciplined in disorder, or out of uniform from Camp Swift area, that he was to be placed in the truck with others who did likewise and returned to Camp Swift immediately and confined to the Post including confinement to the stockade if necessary. This broke up the disgraceful attitude of the American soldier coming home from war and acting like a renegade.⁴⁷⁶

Almond, like his future boss in the Far East, General MacArthur, knew how to manipulate potentially awkward problems to his benefit. If the press refused to present an image to his liking they would be punished. If his troops embarrassed him they would be punished. Almond clearly believed that nothing should be allowed to impair his reputation.

In early 1946 Almond found himself in a situation that would significantly impact his future military career. Because a number of general officers were returning from theaters of war who had spent most of the war in overseas postings, the War Department realized that many general officers with less overseas time would be needed. Almond was one of the general officers who had spent a relatively short time overseas during World War II – only one year. He was given an option between service in Moscow as the Military Attaché or assignment to the Pacific/Far East Command under General MacArthur, who was then in the process of governing Japan in the wake of the war. Both positions held the promise of furthering his military career.

⁴⁷⁶ Ibid.

While Almond debated the pros and cons, he was also approached about another opportunity, one outside the Army. After consultation with General Marshall (and presumably after he turned down the position) the governing board at the Virginia Military Institute approached Almond to inquire if he would consider accepting the vacant position of Superintendent. Almond was not ready to leave the Army and turned down the position.⁴⁷⁷ Almond decided that his best career move was to accept the position with Pacific/Far East Command. For better or worse, Almond was casting his lot with General MacArthur – the hero of the Philippines and now the “pseudo-Emperor of Japan.”

On June 6, 1946, Almond was among twelve other general officers who reported to duty with Pacific/Far East Command in Tokyo, Japan. Before any of the twelve received an audience with General MacArthur, they had to first go through an interview with MacArthur’s Chief of Staff, General Paul Mueller. For Almond, the interview with General Mueller was fortuitous since General Mueller knew Almond from past assignments. General Mueller informed Almond that he would receive one of the staff positions at General Headquarter (GHQ) – Tokyo instead of one of the field commands. In other words, Almond was selected to be one of the chosen officers allowed into MacArthur’s inner sanctum of power. This kind recommendation by General Mueller had significant implications for Almond’s future career. As Almond recalled about his early days in Tokyo, “I knew General MacArthur by sight and he knew me not at all.”⁴⁷⁸ With his assignment to GHQ this changed.

⁴⁷⁷ Almond explained that he still felt he could progress further in the Army and that his turning down the position had nothing to do with the position itself. Almond said, “Later when I retired from the Army, I became extremely interested in VMI’s activities because I had the time to consider them and later became a member of the Board of Visitors and served for two terms in a limited occupancy.” Almond also became very vocal in the issue of integration at VMI and started a letter campaign to denounce several faculty members who had the gall to take a pro-integrationist stance on school integration. This will be discussed further later in the chapter.

⁴⁷⁸ Ibid.

General Mueller informed Almond that he would become the G-1 (officer in charge of personnel issues) for the Far East Command. In this position, Almond would oversee the transfer, promotions, and equipping of military personnel in Japan, Okinawa, Korea, and the Philippines. His position also put him in charge of personnel issues for the 24th Infantry Regiment, then assigned to Japan – which included the transfer of white officers into and out of the Regiment. More importantly for Almond and his career, General Mueller brought Almond to the attention of General MacArthur. Almond recalled that Mueller “took me immediately to present me to General MacArthur.”⁴⁷⁹ Almond must have made a good impression on the old warrior because in November 1946 Almond was promoted from G-1 to Deputy Chief of Staff over the Far East Command.

In the Pacific/Far East Command structure in 1946 there were two Deputy Chief of Staffs under Chief of Staff General Mueller. One deputy for Japanese affairs and the other for American military personnel, Almond received the more prestigious position of overseeing the American forces in the Far East Command. Almond was moving up the chain-of-command quickly in Japan, a circumstance that did not go unnoticed by the MacArthur lackeys who had been with the General during World War II. The other officers who were bypassed in favor of Almond questioned why this outsider from the MacArthur sanctum should be elevated above them. The answer was simple enough. If Almond thought someone could further his career he could become the most fiercely loyal subordinate in an Army characterized more by bitter rivalries and a lack of loyalty among fellow officers.

In early 1949, General Mueller decided that he had spent enough time in the Far East and was ready for a position stateside. General Mueller recommended to General MacArthur that he

⁴⁷⁹ Ibid.

appoint Almond as his successor as Chief of Staff. Almond was again moving quickly up the ranks and with his appointment as Chief of Staff he was the second most powerful officer in the Far East.

By all accounts Almond and MacArthur appeared to meld well into a unified commander/subordinate relationship. Besides the careful garnishing of their reputations the two men held similar opinions regarding African American service members. While discussing MacArthur's unusual work schedule, Almond provided a story that provided insight into Almond and MacArthur's opinion of black soldiers. MacArthur told Almond, "You understand that I have unusual hours; don't let that bother you. Just leave a staff officer in each section and go home at any time you desire in the evening." Almond commented, "He knew, I think, by his association with me, that I would never do anything like that, but he gave me the opportunity." Almond said that MacArthur continued, "Don't be disturbed by my unusual hours in the office." Almond recounted that he said in a frank and friendly manner which MacArthur recognized and smiled at, "General MacArthur nothing you could do would disturb me emotionally." MacArthur intrigued asked Almond "why is that?" Almond unloaded the punchline, "Because once I commanded the 92nd Infantry Division." Almond said that MacArthur smiled at the joke and went on his way. The two men realized just how alike they were.

The Korean War

The invasion of South Korea by North Korean forces in June 1950 changed everything for the Far East Command. No longer was this a command of occupation; it was now a combatant command. Almond accompanied General MacArthur within hours of the invasion and both men realized that the war would end poorly for the South Korean people without a massive influx of

support from the U.S. Army. Almond recalled that MacArthur sat silent in a car as he was driven close to the front on the outskirts of Seoul, Korea. After the ride, MacArthur commented to Almond and his other staffers “I’ve seen many retreating Korean soldiers during this trip, all with guns and ammunition at their side and all smiling and I’ve not seen a single wounded man. Nobody is fighting.”⁴⁸⁰ Almond said that General MacArthur that night in a conference call with General Collins of the Joint Chief of Staff made known to General Collins and to those in Washington that the situation was dire.

General Collins told General MacArthur, “You are authorized to send one regiment” Almond recalled that MacArthur showed no emotion and deadpanned, “that is not enough.” General Collins asked how many troops MacArthur needed. Without hesitation MacArthur declared: “Four divisions or the engagement in Pusan will be terminated within ten days.” General Collins demurred and reported “that is impossible.” MacArthur said, “Please tell the President that.” General MacArthur received his four divisions and the men of the 24th and 25th Division were among those immediately sent into the fray. Among the soldiers of the 25th Division were the African American soldiers of the 24th Infantry Regiment.

The 24th Infantry Regiment received the attention of General Almond almost immediately. He singled out the 24th by name when describing the failure of American forces in defending the Pusan perimeter. As the only available troops close to the theater of action, the 24th and 25th Infantry Divisions were shipped from Japan to Korea with little more than the shirts on their backs. The lack of preparedness of the occupation forces in Japan prior to the Korean War was the most significant factor to their lackluster performance in Korea and this was true for both white and black units. Almond stated that the plan that ultimately developed into the invasion of

⁴⁸⁰ Ibid.

Inchon had its roots in the poor performance of American troops thrown haphazardly into combat. Almond said, “We had problems with the 24th Division, then the 25th Division, the Marine brigade, and the 24th Infantry Regiment (Negro).” Speaking for both himself and General MacArthur, Almond continued, “We felt that the situation was going to continue to be very tenuous and doubtful along the line that we were trying to hold and protect along the Naktong River.”⁴⁸¹ What was telling in Almond’s statement was that he felt the need to name the black 24th in the same sentence that he discussed the much larger Divisions and a Marine Brigade. His attention was naturally drawn to criticizing African American soldiers.

Almond offered harsh critiques of the actions of American forces during the early phase of the Korean War. Regarding the battle of Masan-ni Almond recalled, “The 25th Division, under General Kean, and the Marines were responsible for stopping this flank attack, but had great difficulty.” Almond again made a point to note what he felt was part of the reason for the difficulty. He said, “It was there that the separate regiment of the 24th Infantry, had some discouraging combat operations which were similar of the performance of Negro troops in Italy during the War where we had just finished several years before.”⁴⁸²

General MacArthur, General Almond, and the other military planners of the Far East Command formulated the plan to relieve pressure on the beleaguered troops in the Pusan Perimeter; a plan that would result in the successful amphibious landing at Inchon, Korea, Almond’s career prospects moved up even further than being the Chief of Staff to one of the iconic military commanders of the Twentieth Century. Almond was selected to lead the invasion of Inchon while still maintaining his position as Chief of Staff to General MacArthur, a dual-hat

⁴⁸¹ Ibid.

⁴⁸² Ibid.

position unheard of in military affairs at the time. Almond described how he found out about General MacArthur's decision to have him lead the assault:

So I went into General MacArthur and said, "that this force was larger than a division and, therefore, it should be designated as a corps. What shall we name it?" He said, "You make the recommendation." I hadn't thought very much about the name of it and so, since the staff operating in the motor pool was called "Force X," the right thing that I thought of was ten. So I said, "Why not call it the X Corps." Whereupon he said, "That's a good idea. The X Corps fought in the Pacific Campaign and I will approve that." Then I said, "General MacArthur, to have a corps you have to have a commander. And the thing that you have to do is to ask the War Department or use one of your officers here for such purposes. Who will it be? If he could be put in charge of this plan and this development, he would be more familiar with the situation that would be demanded of him." It didn't cross my mind that he had me in mind in anyway. He said, "I will let you know this afternoon." So that afternoon I went in to get the person whom he designated as corps commander and I said, "I came in for the name of the person that you selected to command this force for the Inchon Landing." And he said, "It's you." And I said, "But I can't execute two jobs. I'm the Chief of Staff." He said, "Well, we'll all be home by Christmas and, therefore, it is only a short operation and the Eighth Army will become the controlling factor as soon as we capture the point of entry."⁴⁸³

Almond's claim that he was caught off guard upon hearing that General MacArthur selected him as the Tenth Corps commander is difficult to believe given Almond's persistence in pushing forward his career ambitions. Almond had never been a passive observer regarding his career, and it would be out of character for him to not solicit the position.

⁴⁸³ Ibid.

As X Corps commander and Chief of Staff to General MacArthur, Almond was in a position to have considerable influence on a whole host of military decisions in the Korean Theater, and that included personnel and integration issues. Although President Truman's Presidential Order 9981 was two years old by the beginning of the Korean War, Almond was among senior Army commanders who felt that integration was unwise. During his correspondence with the Center of Military History in the early 1970s, Almond explained his opinion of integration; an opinion that had not changed from his days as X Corps commander. Almond wrote to Brigadier General James L. Collins, Chief of Military History, on April 1, 1972:

I do not agree that integration improves military efficiency; I believe that it weakens it. I believe that integration was and is a political solution for the composition of our military forces because those responsible for the procedures either do not understand the characteristics of the two human elements concerned, the white man and the Negro as individuals. The basic characteristics of Negro and White are fundamentally different and these basic differences must be recognized by those responsible for integration ... These persons who promulgate and enforce such policies either have not the understanding of the problem or they do not have the intestinal fortitude to do what they think if they do understand it. There is no question in my mind of the inherent differences in races. This is not racism – it is common sense and understanding. Those who ignore these differences merely interfere with the combat effectiveness of battle units ...⁴⁸⁴

General Almond believed that integration was a mistake and he was willing to use his broad powers to address integration and race issues in his own favor. According to Gail Buckley in

⁴⁸⁴ Document titled "Response by Lt. General Edward M. Almond, USA (RET'D) To Questions Posed in Letter Dated 16 February 1972 by Brigadier General James L. Collins, Jr., Chief of Military History, Department of the Army," April 1, 1972, Box 100, Almond Papers, MHI. This response was in answer to the following question posed by the CMH authors: "Returning to the question of military efficiency again, segregation was retained by the Army until 1951 in the name of military efficiency; after 1951 the Army used efficiency as its justification for adopting integration. How do you assess the problem of raising military efficiency?" As evidenced by Almond's response, he was vehemently opposed to the entire premise of the question.

American Patriots, “Almond would act out his racism in Korea, resegregating successfully integrated units and refusing to approve medals for black soldiers.”⁴⁸⁵ Almond again provided insight into his thinking on race issues and the performance of black soldiers during his interviews with the Center of Military History. Almond was asked by the authors of *Black Soldier White Army* how he would compare the performance of black troops in the 92nd Division and the smaller segregated units in Korea. Almond immediately pounced on the “segregated” 24th Infantry Regiment to make his point, ignoring other smaller segregated units under his direct command in X Corps. Almond stated “The general performance of the 24th Infantry Regiment in Korea presents a striking resemblance to that of the 266th Infantry, and in many ways many elements of the 369th, 370th, and 371st Regiments of the 92nd Division during combat operations in Italy; especially in offensive combat efforts.”⁴⁸⁶ Almond’s conclusion, which he solidified after the failed offensive at Cinquale Canal in Italy, was that black soldiers could not be relied on in combat. There was nothing in his mind that could change his opinion.

The CMH historians probed further, attempting to get some acknowledgement out of Almond that there were aspects of integration that made sense from a military standpoint. They asked Almond about the integration of the 24th Infantry Regiment into other white units in the fall of 1951 and whether that didn’t make sense militarily? Almond quipped, “I think that General Ridgway made a political decision.”⁴⁸⁷ Still not giving up on getting Almond to ease up on his

⁴⁸⁵ Gail Buckley, *American Patriots: The Story of Blacks in the Military from the Revolution to Desert Storm* (New York: Random House, 2001), 349-350.

⁴⁸⁶ Document titled “Response by Lt. General Edward M. Almond, USA (RET’D) To Questions Posed in Letter Dated 16 February 1972 by Brigadier General James L. Collins, Jr., Chief of Military History, Department of the Army,” April 1, 1972, Box 100, Almond Papers, MHI.

⁴⁸⁷ Ibid. The full question was: “In September 1950 General Kean recommended to Eighth Army that the 24th Infantry be removed from combat and that its members be integrated throughout the Army’s units in Korea. General Walker refused, in Colonel Appleman’s words, ‘since many considerations seemed to make such action impossible at the time,’ Later in 1951 General Ridgway, now CINCFE, recommended to Washington that all black units in

ridged racial stance the CMH historians pointed out to Almond, “Many observers have reported that even before CINFE was ordered to integrate his forces in 1951 there was much de facto integration as Negro replacement troops flowed into Korea,” and they asked, “Was there an appreciable amount of unofficial integration in the X Corps’ combat units, and if so how would you assess the performance of these individuals?” Almond’s response was a simple, “No.” No further explanation was provided.

What the CMH historians seemed unable to grasp, what is difficult for anyone to grasp in the post-civil rights era, was that Almond was not ashamed of his racial views; on the contrary, he wore them as a badge of honor. If Almond was anything, he was very consistent in his views throughout his career and into his retirement. For some reason, perhaps to refresh Almond’s memory, or to try to embarrass Almond into backing away from his racial views, the CMH authors sent with their questionnaire a document titled “A Verbatim Transcript of Lee Nichols’ Notes on His Conversation with LTG Edward M. Almond, 16 January 1953.” The interview was reported to have taken place at Fort Myer, Virginia, and the date indicated it was right before he officially retired from the Army.

In the interview with Nichols, Almond was unabashed about his views, declaring, “My approach is what is good for the Army. Not interested in the Negro aspect – the country has to work that out on an overall basis.”⁴⁸⁸ According to Almond, he “resent(ed) bitterly having the Army or other services having integration forced on them for political reasons. I know the Negro.” Almond explained that it was his policy in Korea to use black soldiers as engineers and in truck companies, “but couldn’t depend upon them in the front line for offensive action.”

FECOM be broken up and their members integrated throughout the command. This time the recommendation was approved. Would you comment on this solution to the problem of black units?”

⁴⁸⁸ Ibid. This document was attached to the correspondence cited previously.

Ultimately what it came down to for Almond was what he perceived as the black soldiers' fear and lack of patriotism. Almond stated, "The white man – although we don't want men killed if we can help it – is willing to die for patriotic reasons, the Negro is not." Anticipating the follow-up question, that Almond did in fact have integrated units under his command in X Corps, Almond said, "(I) had the 9th Infantry under me when they had them mixed. Three regiments – the one that was mixed was less efficient, I employed it in a defensive line as a reserve."

In most cases, General Almond would use his influence on race matters in subtle ways. For instance, he could direct how and where African American units, such as the 24th Infantry Regiment, would be assigned in battle. Almond could use these units as holding forces so other white units could withdraw or be reassigned; something that a number of black soldiers suspected was being done by General Almond and other white senior officers. This type of military strategic and tactical decision can be difficult to analyze for racial overtones because they may appear to have a perfectly reasonable reason underlying the action. If required to justify the actions General Almond could fall back on the premise that these were decisions based on military necessity and were not racially motivated. If the individual questioning Almond's decisions was also of the same mind-frame as Almond on the use of black soldiers, Almond's military necessity argument would be accepted with a wink and a nod – just as Almond's joke to MacArthur about leading the 92nd Infantry Division was accepted without question.

Others who have analyzed General Almond's command decisions have also noted that Almond misused internal corps assets that were racially integrated. Shelby L. Stanton in reviewing the retreat by X Corps in the fall of 1950 assessed that "Almond's lack of confidence in his subordinate units, which were largely racially mixed" was due to his "Southern

convictions about the inferiority of non-white races” and that because of his convictions this led Almond “to misuse corps assets on the battlefield.”⁴⁸⁹ While some of these actions on the part of General Almond are open to debate as to intention, there are several occasions where General Almond’s actions are obviously racially motivated.

In January 1951, the Second Division which included an integrated Regiment (the Ninth Regiment) was assigned to X Corps and General Almond. According to the authors of *Foxholes and Color Lines*, General Almond instructed the commander of Second Division, Major General Clark L. Ruffner, “to halt the process (of integration) and even to reverse it where possible.”⁴⁹⁰ Almond’s excuse for this action was that he was concerned for the well-being of the Ninth as a combat unit and that integration would somehow degrade their combat performance. This is ironic, since at the same time General Almond was criticizing the performance of the 24th – a non-integrated combat unit. Fortunately for the Ninth, General Ruffner was not in agreement with Almond or his intentions and he fought the order quietly and continued desegregation. Almond did not hide his decision to reverse integration in the 9th and explained on several occasions why he felt he was justified in his action.

In a report titled “The Utilization of Negro Manpower in the Army” prepared by the Operations Research Office of John Hopkins University, dated June 11, 1959, Almond added his own notes to the report, arguing with the authors conclusions. The report concluded: “It has been pointed out earlier that integration has been affected in Korea as a result of the interpretation made by Headquarters, 8th Army of SR600-629-1 except in a notable instance where the Corps Commander intervened.” Almond’s typed note to this statement was “This was

⁴⁸⁹ Dale E. Wilson, “Recipe for Failure.”

⁴⁹⁰ Mershon and Schlossman, *Foxholes and Color Lines*, 227.

myself. EMA.”⁴⁹¹

The authors of the John Hopkins University study attempted to not overtly name the “Corps” or “Corps Commander” in the report, naturally assuming that their analysis might be embarrassing for the Corps Commander. The study noted, “when the Division (not named) was in _____ Corps there was a definite directive from the next higher Headquarters – although nothing was ever put in writing – to the effect that they (African American soldiers) were to be placed only in service units or in segregated units.” The authors of the John Hopkins study went on to observe “the Division Command and Staff knew that this was contrary to Army Department policy and that the people responsible were sticking their necks out” and that besides being Army policy, integration was also “in accordance with public opinion.”⁴⁹² Almond’s response to this accusation was shocking not only for its bluntness but also for his vituperation towards his subordinate commander. Again, Almond displayed characteristic anger towards those he perceived had failed or embarrassed him.

Almond’s typed note read:

This was the X Corps that Division Commander 7th Division namely, General Ferenbaugh, referred to. I had numerous conversations with him and his statement that it was Army policy at the time that I issued him these instructions verbally is not a fact. No Army policy had been adopted except to send replacements to units and that most of the time these replacements were Negroes and the Unit Commander was told to use them to the best advantage. I felt that having had three years experience in training and in World War II in Italy that I had more information on the subject of how to employ the replacement Negro than General Ferenbaugh who was a Staff Officer in an inconsequential capacity during most of World War II. For these reasons I gave him instructions based on my experience and these instructions involved placing them in service units or in units that were already predominantly Negroes. I did not want to water down the capabilities of the few good white troops that I had with undependable Negroes whose characteristics are

⁴⁹¹ Notes on “The Utilization of Negro Manpower in the Army” prepared by Operations Research Office John Hopkins University – notes by Lt. Gen. Edward M. Almond, June 11, 1959, Box 133, Almond Papers, MHI.

⁴⁹² Ibid.

amply testified to in many of the questions heretofore. EMA.⁴⁹³

General Almond also used his position to ensure that his X Corps headquarters component remained free of African American officers. Korean War veteran John “Tommy” Martin recalled that “Almond was not keen on having black officers assigned to X Corps” but, strangely, “Almond had no problem with NCOs.” Perhaps this had to do with his days with the 92nd where Almond felt a sense of paternalism towards regular black troops. They were soldiers that Almond could still command and not feel threatened by, whereas a black officer was more of a threat to his established order.

The most egregious racially motivated action by General Almond occurred in February 1951. As David Halberstam observed in *The Coldest Winter*, in mid-January 1951, an African American captain named Forest Walker displayed exceptional leadership and courage during a

⁴⁹³ Ibid. At the end of the document, Almond provided what he titled his General Comment. It is insightful not only for its blatant racism but also because it clearly demonstrates the air of superiority through which Almond viewed many junior officers, professors, and social scientists. Almond wrote:

I have reviewed this volume “The Utilization of Negro manpower In the Army” by the Operations Research Office of the John Hopkins University, from the viewpoint of testing its reliability and application. My experience in World War II and in Korea with Negro troops, individuals and units, is amply testified to by the supposedly documentary evidence that these researchers have acquired.

My chief contention in opposition to the analysis and conclusions brought out by this study are that discrimination between personal knowledge and comments by immature authorities are given equal weight. There appears to be no effort to weight the statements of responsible and mature military commanders compared to many junior statements for the most part based on willingness to accept the Negro as a breathing body to take some of the burden of the white soldier out of the war effort. It is absurd to contend that with the characteristics demonstrated by Negroes in general, in the view of those who know them and had an opportunity to observe them, to consider that such characteristics will not undermine and deteriorate the white army unit into which the Negro is integrated.

The Department of the Army appears to have accepted this view of a group of professors based on indiscriminate testimony principally of junior officers in the stress of fatigue, rather on a mature consideration of how best to utilize the Negro manpower. No one in his right mind has any idea of not utilizing the Negro both in training and in combat areas where danger is involved but where the question of the battle result is at hand, it is very questionable whether people of the traits exhibited by Negroes should be entrusted in key combat units in any degree. It merely means that those white members of the squad have to carry the load of courage, reliable leadership, development of capabilities in the employment of weapons to the best advantage, and most important of all, that character of resolution which inspires the infantry soldier to carry out his mission even in the face of extreme danger and possibly with the known result of self-extermination. It is this caliber of a resoluteness that makes a combat unit dependable and not testimony of Negroes performance in battle is valid where it is not certain that the individual Negro soldier, alone or with others, can be relied upon to maintain his attitude before an enemy to the degree of possibly the loss of his own life.

Almond hand signed the bottom of the document and wrote in pencil, “Note: Once the Commander of 17000 Negro troops for 3 years.”

battle around Wonju while leading men in an integrated infantry unit. Walker “successfully led a bayonet and hand grenade charge against some well-dug-in North Koreans.”⁴⁹⁴ Walker’s exploits did not go unnoticed. His battalion commander Lieutenant Colonel Butch Barberis, told General Ridgway about Walker’s action and General Ridgway was “visibly impressed” and ordered the Silver Star for Captain Walker. However, General Almond “found out about the medal, stopped it, and had Walker relieved of his company command.”⁴⁹⁵ Almond never discussed this incident in his post-military years either verbally or in writing: perhaps, one might speculate that he realized that this incident crossed a line that even he regretted.

Racism Clouding Judgment of Enemy Forces

While the main focus of this chapter is on the racial views of General Almond and other officers surrounding the 24th Infantry Regiment regarding African Americans, it is important to realize that the racial bias exhibited towards African American soldiers in Korea by white officers was also equally applied to Asians, both South Korean allies and North Korean and Chinese enemies. This had a profoundly negative effect on military capabilities.

On October 30, 1950, General Almond personally went to the ROK I Corps prisoner compound to question several Chinese prisoners through an interpreter. These were some of the first Chinese prisoners to be captured in Korea.⁴⁹⁶ Of the 16 Chinese prisoners at the ROK I Corps compound – all were former members of Chiang Kai-shek’s Chinese Nationalist Army and would therefore hardly be classified as “Volunteers” as General MacArthur and X Corps were trying to argue. General Almond dutifully sent the report to General MacArthur in his Far East Command Headquarters despite his own skepticism. According to Roy Appleman, “The

⁴⁹⁴ David Halberstam, *The Coldest Winter: American and the Korean War* (New York: Hyperion, 2007), 547.

⁴⁹⁵ Ibid. According to Gail Buckley in *American Patriots*, Almond had Walker assigned to an all-black unit as well as relieve him of his company command position. Buckley, *American Patriots*, 349-350.

⁴⁹⁶ One of the first Chinese prisoners captured in the Korean War was taken by members of the 24th Infantry Regiment approximately a week prior to the Chinese offensive in the fall of 1950.

Far East Command took the news in stride and showed no great surprise or concern.”⁴⁹⁷ General Walker, commander of Eighth Army in Korea, commented on the news that Chinese were among North Korean soldiers. Walker said that this was insignificant, for, “after all, a lot of Mexicans live in Texas.”⁴⁹⁸ This was a comment that most assuredly was supported by Almond and General MacArthur.

The prevalent attitude among all ranks of white officers in Korea was that their enemy and their South Korean allies were no more than “gooks.” Max Hastings observed that “all those officers, those generals: they really thought that they were going to go over there (Korea) and stop the gooks” and there would be nothing to it. The officers also showed a distinct lack of curiosity in whom their allies were and who the enemy was. Hastings observed, “You could have asked any American senior officer in Korea: who commands the Korean 42nd division – ROK or Communist – and what’s his background? He wouldn’t have known what you were talking about. A gook is a gook. But if the Germans had been the enemy, he’d have known.”⁴⁹⁹

General Almond was no different. Three and half days after the Chinese swept down from the North and smashed into United Nation forces all along the allied front. According to Patrick O’Donnell, General Almond still refused to “acknowledge the full catastrophe falling on the American troops in North Korea.” Almond actually had the temerity to declare “we are still attacking and going all the way to the Yalu. Don’t let a bunch of Goddamn Chinese laundrymen stop you.”⁵⁰⁰ Almond had allowed his racial bias of the enemy to completely cloud his judgment of the battlefield reality. By the time he recovered his senses, he nearly panicked. According to

⁴⁹⁷ Roy E. Appleman, *East of Chosin: Entrapment and Breakout in Korea, 1950*, (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1987), 4.

⁴⁹⁸ Hastings, *The Korean War*, 130.

⁴⁹⁹ Ibid., 69-70.

⁵⁰⁰ Patrick O’Donnell, *Give Me Tomorrow: The Korean War’s Greatest Untold Story – the Epic Stand of the Marines of George Company* (New York: Da Capo Press, 2010), 135.

General Ridgway in his account *The Korean War*, finally realizing that his X Corps was surrounded by nine Chinese divisions just waiting to pounce on the Marines near the Chosin Reservoir, General Almond urged Marine General O.P. Smith to “speed his withdrawal” and authorized Smith to “abandon any equipment that might slow him down.”⁵⁰¹ Fortunately, General Smith had not underappreciated the enemy and had purposely slowed down his push north despite General Almond’s earlier orders and so had not over-stretched his command. Philip D. Chinnery noted in his study that General Smith was determined to conduct “an orderly and honorable withdrawal” which would mean that he would bring with him “all of his vehicles and guns as well.”⁵⁰²

Unfortunately for the U.S. Army, soldiers on the east side of the Chosin Reservoir under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Don Faith had been placed in an untenable situation by General Almond’s reckless orders to push north. On November 28th General Almond flew in to Lt. Col Faith’s position via helicopter. Appleman recorded that General Almond’s observation of the meeting with Lt. Col. Faith was that Faith seemed to be “on edge and resentful of the situation,” especially in light of the numerous casualties that Task Force Faith had already sustained. In an

⁵⁰¹ Matthew B. Ridgway, *The Korean War* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1967), 71. The criticism that Almond has received for his leadership during the Chosin Reservoir battle did not go uncontested by Almond. During the senior officer debriefing Almond went out of his way to argue that he was right to push General Smith forward on the west banks of the Chosin Reservoir. Almond remarked: “My general comment is that General Smith, ever since the beginning of the Inchon landing and the preparation phase, was overly cautious of executing any order that he ever received. While he never refused to obey an order in the final analysis, he many times was over cautious and in that way, delayed the execution of some orders. The case that you mentioned, the Chosin Reservoir, is one of them. My orders from GHQ were to press forward and determine what if any, and how much Chinese force there was in my front that might threaten the Eighth Army’s right flank. This I was doing and my instructions to the 7th Division and the Marine Division were based on my opinion that offensive action was the best way to determine the threat that existed in that situation.” Asked whether Almond gave the order to leave behind his equipment during the retreat south from the Chosin Reservoir, Almond stated, “No, not at all. I ordered him to withdraw his division and bring out such equipment as he could but not to sacrifice manpower for the sake of equipment. I ordered him to withdraw such equipment as the enemy would permit but if necessary to destroy it rather than trying to protect it at the cost of further casualties.” Interview of General Edward M. Almond by Captain Thomas G. Fergusson, Box 1, Almond Papers, MHI

⁵⁰² Philip D. Chinnery, *Korean Atrocity: Forgotten War Crimes 1950-1953* (Annapolis, Maryland: Naval Institute Press, 2000), 97.

attempt to cheer up Lt. Col. Faith and the men of the Task Force, General Almond presented a Silver Star to Lt. Col. Faith and a Lieutenant Smalley. Both men reportedly “ripped their Silver Stars off their jackets and threw them into the snow” after General Almond left, manifesting fury at Almond’s ignorance of their situation. General Almond reportedly tried to tell Lt. Col. Faith “not to worry as the Chinese (he) saw were only the stragglers fleeing north.”⁵⁰³ Those Chinese “stragglers” ended up completely annihilating Task Force Faith in one of the greatest defeats of an American unit in the Korean War. Lt. Col. Faith paid for General Almond’s reckless disregard for the enemy with his life – dying alongside the men he courageously led. Lt. Col. Faith was awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor posthumously for his leadership on the east banks of the Chosin Reservoir.

General Almond’s racial bias towards Asians extended to the Republic of Korea (ROK) troops that fought alongside American soldiers during the Korean War. General Almond was distrustful of ROK troops in the same way he was distrustful of African American troops. During a conference between General Ridgway and General Guthrie as reported by Appleman in *Ridgway Duels for Korea*, General Ridgway explained that ROK commanders of the 8th, 3rd, and 5th Divisions which fell under General Almond’s command and the X Corps “were very resentful of the way they are treated in the Corps.”⁵⁰⁴ General Ridgway made sure to impress upon General Guthrie how valuable the ROK commands were to the greater goals of the United Nation forces in Korea. Ridgway explained that “their loss of cooperation would be a serious and critical disaffection, and their feeling must be corrected at once.” General Ridgway continued that it was the responsibility of all commanders to “foresee and eliminate causes of

⁵⁰³ Appleman, *East of Chosin*, 106-108.

⁵⁰⁴ Roy E. Appleman, *Ridgway Duels for Korea* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1990), 301.

friction and to absorb it and prevent its spread.” To this end, General Ridgway told General Guthrie, “this is a heart to heart talk which I want conveyed to General Almond, and a situation I want promptly corrected.”⁵⁰⁵ What results if any became of the “heart to heart” with Almond about his relationship to the ROK commanders are unknown. If General Almond’s relationships with other American commanders were any indication – General Almond probably continued to alienate his ROK force commanders.

General Almond and his Leadership in Korea

While it is evident by General Almond’s own admission that he was biased against African American soldiers and thought very little of his Asian allies and enemies, to what extent did General Almond’s leadership create problems for his subordinate commands – including the 24th Infantry Regiment? General Almond eventually was promoted to the rank of Lieutenant General – no small feat in and of itself. And he did so by gaining the respect of men such as General Eisenhower – who rated Almond as “one of the half dozen ablest men in the Army.” Other generals who knew Almond well held contrasting views. One, General John Chiles, commented that Almond was “very proud, very intolerant ... he could precipitate a crisis on a desert island with nobody else around.”⁵⁰⁶ When it came to alienating himself with fellow officers, General Almond lived up to his irascible reputation. For example, Almond placed his relationship with Marine General O.P. Smith on a rocky footing even prior to the invasion of Inchon. On one occasion General Almond explained to Smith that “this amphibious stuff is just a mechanical option,” and not worth worrying about. General Smith would recall later in life that he tried to tell Almond “a few facts of life,” but Almond “was rather supercilious and called me son, which

⁵⁰⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁰⁶ Gerald Astor, *The Right to Fight: A History of African Americans in the Military* (Novato, California: Presidio Press, 1998), 196.

kind of annoyed me.”⁵⁰⁷

The relationship between Almond and his Marine contingent under General Smith grew even more strained as the Marines fought to secure Seoul. On September 25, 1950, General Almond issued an order to Smith, “you will push your attack now, to the limit of your objective ... in order to ensure maximum destruction of enemy forces.”⁵⁰⁸ In reality, General Almond’s order was less designed to ensure the destruction of enemy forces than to meet the goal of capturing Seoul in time for MacArthur’s manufactured deadline of September 25, which was the three month anniversary of the North Korean invasion. Patrick O’Donnell has written that it was around this time that the Marines under General Smith began to condescendingly refer to Almond as “Ned the Dread,” a reference to his egotistical “power, brusque manner, and sometimes arbitrary actions.”⁵⁰⁹ Smith himself realized that all Almond was concerned with at Seoul was getting his “communique” out on time.⁵¹⁰ General Smith finally responded to Almond with the sage words, “I said I couldn’t guarantee anything – that’s up to the enemy.”⁵¹¹ Almond throughout his time as leader of the X Corps seemed to forget that in all military operations the enemy always has a say.

As discussed earlier, the relationship became even more strained during the push north to the

⁵⁰⁷ Hastings, *The Korean War*, 104.

⁵⁰⁸ O’Donnell, *Give Me Tomorrow*, 68.

⁵⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 68-69.

⁵¹⁰ Almond gleefully recounted the special conference and lunch he was able to put together for General MacArthur and Syngman Rhee to celebrate the capture of Seoul on their self-imposed deadline. Almond said there was an elaborate presentation by General MacArthur officially turning over the city of Seoul to Syngman Rhee and “we also were able to provide all present at the conference which included the staff of the Eighth Army and the Commander, General Walker, as well as my X Corps staff and myself and other dignitaries that Syngman Rhee and General MacArthur had brought ashore, with a first class lunch before they departed. This to me was quite an accomplishment and so was it considered by General MacArthur I learned later.” It is worth noting who was not invited to the luncheon, General Smith, who was responsible for the conquest of Seoul. It was at the luncheon that General MacArthur presented General Almond and General Walker with a Distinguished Service Cross, General Smith was not favored with a DSC. Interview of General Edward M. Almond by Captain Thomas G. Fergusson, Box 1, Almond Papers, MHI

⁵¹¹ Hastings, *The Korean War*, 113.

Chosin Reservoir. General Smith tried to get Almond to avoid the mistake that would lead to the destruction of Lt. Col. Faith and his Task Force. According to Smith, “I told Almond we couldn’t make two big efforts, I said, either we go to the Yalu by Chosin, or by the northwest route (east side of Chosin), but not both.”⁵¹² By the time the Marines were fighting their way back south (with their equipment) – the relationship between Almond and Smith had become an outright feud. General Ridgway, who replaced General Walker after his death in December, 1950, realized the relationship between the Marines and General Almond was irreparable. According to William Bowers, upon taking command, General Ridgway acknowledged that “Almond’s aggressiveness verged on recklessness, and the Marines were especially insistent that they not serve under him in the future.”⁵¹³ General Ridgway was not the only senior officer disillusioned by General Almond’s battle performance. Lieutenant Colonel G. Patrick explained to General Hodges in a letter July 25, 1956, discussing a project he was working on about the Korean War, “I would like to write an account of the Inchon landings and X Corps campaign, but don’t know how to do it honestly without risking a libel suit from General Almond, who we used to refer to as the tactical illiterate.”⁵¹⁴

Despite his mistakes at the Chosin Reservoir, General Almond continued to lead the X Corps primarily because of his close association to General MacArthur. Hastings observed, “MacArthur liked and trusted Almond, for reasons unclear to some of his staff, who did not.” According to MacArthur’s staff in Japan, “they respected the Southerner’s energy and dedication, but they disliked his fierce temper and arrogance.”⁵¹⁵ As noted previously,

⁵¹² Ibid., 147.

⁵¹³ William Bowers, *The Line: Combat in Korea January –February 1951* (Lexington, Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 2008), 38.

⁵¹⁴ Lieutenant Colonel G. Patrick to General Courtney H. Hodges, July 25, 1956, Box 21, Papers of Courtney H. Hodges, DDEPL.

⁵¹⁵ Ibid., 66.

MacArthur was impressed enough by Almond that even after assigning General Almond to be the X Corps commander, he continued on paper Almond's position as Chief of Staff, GHQ. It took General Ridgway's replacement of General Walker as Eighth Army commander to finally change Almond's co-positioning.⁵¹⁶

General Almond's tenure as X Corps commander came to an end on July 15, 1951, when he was selected to be the next commandant of the Army War College. It is perhaps ironic that the officer that created more tension between the Army and Marines, American forces and ROK forces, and white soldiers and black soldiers would be selected to lead a future generation of senior officers training at the War College. General Gruenther wrote to General Almond in August, 1951 to congratulate him. Gruenther wrote "I know you will do a wonderful job in training people who will be extremely important to the defense of the free world in this era of tension."⁵¹⁷ Even more surprising than Almond's selection to lead the Army War College was that during his tenure he oversaw a special study about the African American 92nd ID during World War II. General Almond explained to General Gruenther that the study, titled "A Fragment of Victory" would be about the 92nd and the principal attachments to the 92nd which included the 473rd and 442nd (Japanese-American) Infantry Regiments. Almond told General Gruenther:

I was prompted to initiate this project because when I assumed command of the 92nd Division in 1942, I immediately began a search for information concerning the history of Negro units in World War I so that I might profit from the experience of commanders of such units during that conflict. My search was unrewarded because there were only a few meager documents. As a result, I determined then and there that if it was ever possible, I would see to it that the aspect of the employment of Negro troops in World War II with which I was most familiar would be recorded for future commanders and staff officers of

⁵¹⁶ Ridgway, *The Korean War*, 170.

⁵¹⁷ General Alfred M. Gruenther to Lieutenant General Edward M. Almond, August 13, 1951, Box 1, Papers of Alfred M. Gruenther, DDEPL.

the Army.⁵¹⁸

Thus, the general who denigrated the fighting capabilities of African American soldiers and felt that black officers should never be promoted beyond the rank of Captain, if that, was allowed to oversee the documenting of the 92nd actions in World War II as a guide to future use of African American soldiers.

General Almond's record in Korea is and has been one of controversy, primarily focused on his leadership surrounding the fight near Chosin Reservoir in the fall/winter of 1950. However, General Almond also left an indelible mark on the use of African American soldiers during the first year of the Korean War. In many respects, it was General Almond who personally attempted to halt and reverse any progress towards integration of black and white soldiers. It was General Almond who personally intervened to block a well-deserved Silver Star medal for Captain Forest Walker – and then had him reassigned away from an integrated unit and placed in a segregated unit. General Almond's reputation for racial bias was well known to the majority of military officers and rank-and-file soldiers in 1950. The placement of a bigoted officer in charge of almost half the forces in Korea was a major set-back to race relations in the early part of the Korean War and most certainly had to negatively affect the reputation of black units such as the 24th Infantry Regiment.

Would the assignment of a different officer to lead X Corps have made a difference? It is difficult to answer since General Almond did not differ radically in his racial views from many other senior officers. However, General Almond stands out because he was very vocal about his opinions and prominent in his actions. Had an officer such as General Ridgway been assigned to

⁵¹⁸ Lieutenant General Edward M. Almond to General Alfred M. Gruenther, November 25, 1952, Box 1, Gruenther Papers, DDEPL.

the X Corps position at the outset of the Korean War the situation may have very well been different.

Although General Almond left the battlefields of Korea in the summer of 1951, his one man vendetta against the black man as a soldier was far from over. He would use his time at the War College and then in retirement to continue his ultimately futile crusade to turn back the tide of integration in the U.S. Army. Through his correspondence with other like-minded senior officers during this time, Almond provides a rare glimpse into the true racial sentiments of many other senior military officers of the early and mid-1950s.

Almond's Letter Campaign – 1950s

On July 27, 1953, a little over three years from the invasion by North Korea, a cease-fire was signed that finally brought an end to the fighting on the Korean peninsula, although both sides would continue to cautiously eye one another over the demilitarized zone up to the present day. In early 1953, Lieutenant General Edward M. Almond retired from active duty with the United States Army, after a career that spanned close to four decades. Despite his departure from the Army, Almond maintained a wary eye on the integration of the Army in the post-Korean War era. Although he was no longer in a position to counteract the integration of the Army Almond conducted a vigorous letter writing campaign with both active and retired senior officers in an effort to continue to argue his point that black soldiers had no business in combat units.

On June 26, 1950, Almond wrote to his friend and recently retired Army General, Mark W. Clark, to offer support for Clark's public statements regarding black soldiers and black officers. Almond wrote, "I have no desire to enter into controversy in defense of my views or yours either, except I see in this article published in the *Army Times*, June 23, 1956, under Letter to the Editor, an insidious campaign to discredit all honest officers who have to do with rendering

efficiency reports on negroes, particularly negro officers, in the future.”⁵¹⁹ Surprisingly up to this point, Almond had maintained a rather low-key image in print regarding his racial views. But just as General Clark felt it was time to speak out on what he perceived were problems within the Army regarding the rating of black soldiers and officers because of pressure by groups such as the NAACP, Almond seemed to take a cue from his old friend and began to speak out on race issues.

A *Life* magazine article titled “The Eagle and the Rock: The Bayonets in Arkansas affirm our nation’s basic foundation in the law” published on October 7, 1957, was just the catalyst that Almond needed to spark his ire as a proud product of the South. The article was about President Eisenhower’s use of the 101st Airborne in Little Rock, Arkansas, to enforce the integration of a public school after threats of violence by the local population and the complete lack of response from the Governor of Arkansas to see to it that law and order was maintained. Most Americans applauded the President for his resolve in the matter and the professional action by the soldiers from the 101st sent to maintain law and order, but not Almond. To the President of Time-Life Magazine, Roy E. Larson, Almond unleashed his pent-up frustration with integrationists, “I must pronounce it a masterpiece of a dishonest intellectual!” Almond continued “How it is expected that intelligent Americans will accept such specious and half factual arguments is difficult to understand. My deep indignation requires a somewhat lengthy and specific refutation of the many sided theme of your long, laborious and partisan editorial.”⁵²⁰

Besides making the preposterous argument that there was no need for integration of schools because “Negro schools in many Southern localities are the newest and many time the most

⁵¹⁹ Lt. Gen. Edward M. Almond to General Mark W. Clark, President at The Citadel, June 26, 1956, Box 100, Almond Papers, MHI.

⁵²⁰ General Edward M. Almond to Roy E. Larson (President of Time-Life Magazines) October 14, 1957, Box 10, Almond Papers, MHI.

modern when compared with those for whites.” Almond also argued that the real agenda with integrationists was “infusing Negro blood in the white race of the nation.” Almond lamented “This is the first time in recorded history of modern democracy that virile, intelligent majority of race or creed misguided by dishonest intellectuals and unprincipled politicians has advocated its mass intermingling with a race totally differing in racial characteristics and the ultimate destruction of the superior race by infusion into its physical structure an inferiority of moral and mental qualities.”⁵²¹ It does not appear that the President of Time-Life, Roy Larson, responded to Almond’s letter. If Larson had responded, would he have regretted placing Almond on *Time*’s October 23, 1950 cover? That issue featured an article on the war titled “War in Asia” and featured a segment titled “Sic ‘Em, Ned,” praising the general for his command leadership – hence why his image graced the cover of the magazine.⁵²²

Almond provided a copy of his response to the *Life* magazine article in his correspondence to his fellow members of the General John H. Forney Historical Society, which was formed to preserve the memory of a Confederate general from Alabama. Several of the society members were also former senior Army officers including Major General Alexander G. Paxton, who had also led troops in World War II and Korea.⁵²³ Almond also sent along his opinions of race issues to several officers still serving in active duty with the U.S. Army. One of these officers was Colonel John H. Chiles, stationed in Spain as part of the U.S. Military Assistance Advisory

⁵²¹ Ibid.

⁵²² “War in Asia,” *Time*, October 23, 1950. The article was profuse in its praise for Almond, stating that “Under MacArthur, few commanders played a more important role than ‘Ned’ Almond in saving Korea from Red aggression.” The article went on to observe that Almond “is a whip-cracking officer” and that “he never compromises with discipline, drives himself hard and his subordinates only a shade less hard.” Tellingly, the article failed to make any mention of Almond’s views of black soldiers although it did discuss his time leading the 92nd ID. The magazine actually went out of its way to praise the sacrifices of some of the black soldiers in the 92nd ID, including African American Lieutenant John Fox, who called in an artillery strike on his own position in order to stop a German infantry attack.

⁵²³ Almond had a photograph from an unsourced newspaper dated April 14, 1958 that showed Major General Alexander G. Paxton and Lieutenant General Edward Almond under the caption “Historical society supports segregation, states’ rights” written by Trudy Cargile. Box 10, Almond Papers, MHI.

Group (MAAG).

Colonel Chiles had formerly worked under Almond as the G-3 for X Corps in Korea before receiving a battlefield command position as the CO for the 23rd Infantry Regiment under the 2nd Infantry Division.⁵²⁴ Almond told Colonel Chiles that he was glad that Chiles shared his viewpoint “of the situation which not only confronts the South but the entire United States on the subject of integration,” and that Chiles understood that integration was “debasing the integrity of the white race.”⁵²⁵ Almond concluded his letter by asking the rhetorical question, why would anyone propose to integrate into the white race “20 million Negroes whose moral caliber and racial potentials are of such a low degree?” Almond confided to Colonel Chiles, “but without hesitation those who do not know the Negro as you and I do, recommend without hesitation the absorption of this worthless element in the very body of our social economic structure, to say nothing of its infusion in our Armed Forces.”⁵²⁶

Almond’s letter writing gained momentum with the burgeoning civil-rights movement. In 1959, the topic that sent Almond into a frenzy of letter writing was the act by several faculty at Almond’s alma mater, the Virginia Military Institute, signing a petition in favor of school desegregation in the public school systems in Virginia. This act was tantamount to treason to Edward Almond. He sent off letters to fellow VMI alums, Lieutenant General Sumter Lowry, Brigadier General E.P. Conquest, Brigadier General O.B. Bucher, and Major General William M. Stokes, among others. Some of the senior Army officers, such as General Bucher agreed

⁵²⁴ Chiles also recalled his fortune of running into Almond after his tour in Korea. Chiles recounted, “I became a student at the Army War College, and who should show up but Ned Almond as the Commandant at the Army War College. So my service with him was inadvertent, although he rewarded me richly, I must say.” Almond kept Chiles on at the Army War College after completing his studies, making him a member of the faculty. Colonel Chiles remained in the Army through the 1960s, retiring as a Major General. Quote taken from interview conducted at Truman Presidential Library on July 27, 1977, by D. Clayton James, <http://www.trumanlibrary.org/oralhist/chilesj.htm>

⁵²⁵ Letter from Lieutenant General Edward M. Almond to Colonel John H. Chiles, U.S. Army MAAG, Spain, February 11, 1958, Box 100, Almond Papers, MHI.

⁵²⁶ Ibid.

with Almond, “Any Virginian, and certainly any VMI Alumnus, who shows himself as favoring integration should not be associated with the institute!” roared Bucher.⁵²⁷

Fortunately for VMI and the involved faculty, cooler heads prevailed. Brigadier General Conquest pointed out to Almond that he did not condone the faculty’s action, but “their act has acquired little public notice as yet, and further public action of any kind with regard to it is likely to make matters worse rather than better for VMI.”⁵²⁸ Conquest was seconded by C.E. Kilbourne who wrote Almond to tell him essentially to mind his own business. Kilbourne informed Almond, “When I was Superintendent an alumnus took the liberty of writing me what I should do. After the second letter I wrote him that it was my duty and not his, or words to that effect. It silenced him. My action was crude but I do not regret it.”⁵²⁹ Almond eventually backed off from the VMI faculty petition, but his attention was still clearly focused on fighting the integrationist movement.

Almond’s Letter Campaign – 1960s

Leafing through the newspapers clippings and letters Almond wrote during the late 1950s into the early 1960s permits one literally to trace the history of the civil-rights movement. In a letter to Alabama Attorney General McDonald Gallion, in 1961, about the visit to Montgomery by the “Freedom Riders,” Almond provided the top law enforcement officer for the State of Alabama this advice, “most of them seem to be from Yale University and I believe that their backgrounds and previous connections could be very profitably looked into from a standpoint of any communistic influence that might dictate their movements.”⁵³⁰ For good measure, that same day, Almond sent a telegram to Alabama Governor Patterson. “I congratulate you and State

⁵²⁷ Letter from Oliver B. Bucher to Lt. Gen. Edward M. Almond, March 22, 1959, Box 146, Almond Papers, MHI.

⁵²⁸ Letter from Edwin P. Conquest to Lt. Gen. Edward M. Almond, March 31, 1959, Box 146, Almond Papers, MHI.

⁵²⁹ Letter from K.E. Kilbourne to Lt. Gen. Edward M. Almond, February 26, 1959, Box 146, Almond Papers, MHI.

⁵³⁰ Letter from Lt. Gen. Edward M. Almond to Mr. McDonald Gallion, May 25, 1961, Box 106, Almond Papers, MHI.

Guardsmen on the emphasis with which the Freedom Riders were escorted yesterday to the Mississippi State line. It accentuated the bizarre attitude of the invaders. Suggest you utilize commie connections, especially those of Peck. Also that you develop connections of other freedom riders by state legal officers.”⁵³¹

Other correspondence maintained in a file that Almond labeled “Integration File” contained newspaper clippings about the 16th Street Baptist Church bombing in Birmingham that killed four little African American girls, an article published by the Editor of *The Summit Sun* in Summit, Mississippi, that quoted PFC Richard Barnett in his accusation that “this integration cancer is destroying our fine Army and our great nation,” and a newspaper article titled “States Rights Party Head Charges JFK Frame-Up,” among others.⁵³² Almond maintained his vigil on every event reported in the media about the push for equality for African Americans: however, a report released in the summer of 1963 moved Almond to push his letter writing campaign into overdrive. This was the July, 1963 release of the “President’s Committee on Equal Opportunity in the Armed Forces,” better known as the Gesell Report, after the committee’s chairman, Gerhard A. Gesell.

In many ways, the committee headed by Gesell was meant as a follow-up to President Truman’s earlier committee, referred to as the Fahy Committee, that had been established by Truman’s Order 9981. The Fahy Committee disbanded in July 1950 and over the next decade little had been done to ensure that the gains made by the Fahy Committee remained in place, or to inquire whether further action was necessary to ensure that the goals of Order 9981 were met. President Kennedy’s goals for the Gesell Committee as noted in the memorandum dated June 24,

⁵³¹ Telegram from Lt. Gen. Edward M. Almond to Governor Patterson of Alabama, May 25, 1961, Box 106, Almond Papers, MHI.

⁵³² Miscellaneous Documents, Box 106, Almond Papers, MHI.

1962, were straight-forward:

1. What measures should be taken to improve the effectiveness of current policies and procedures in the Armed Forces with regard to equality of treatment and opportunity for persons in the Armed Forces?
2. What measures should be employed to improve equality of opportunity for members of the Armed Forces and their dependents in the civilian community, particularly with respect to housing, education, transportation, recreational facilities, community events, programs and activities?⁵³³

Although the Gesell Committee's recommendations called for, among other things, more accountability among promotion boards to ensure that qualified African American applicants received fair selection, and that base commanders attempt to ensure equal opportunities for African American soldiers and dependents off-base as well as on base, the recommendations as a whole were far from radical. However, for Almond the recommendations appeared revolutionary, and he feared for the integrity of the United States Army and its leadership. Almond reasoned that the removal of photos in promotion board packets would lead to a higher percentage of "negro promotions," which was actually one of the goals of the recommendation. Further, that by forcing integration in the Armed Forces this would be viewed as the U.S. Government attempting to force "the amalgamation of the races" and had nothing to do with the stated goal of securing "equal opportunity and use of skills." As for the recommendations designed to push for greater equality off-base, Almond feared that the measures would force commanders to use "coercive methods" to force integration on civilian communities by "threats and blackmail" and thus pit the military against American civilians.⁵³⁴

Almond wasted no time in attempting to refute the committee recommendations. He wrote a lengthy statement labeled "Analysis and Comments on the Initial Report of the President's

⁵³³ Taken from the website for the Kennedy Library. Document located at: <http://www.jfklibrary.org/Asset-Viewer/Archives/JFKWHSFLCW-023-013.aspx>

⁵³⁴ Memorandum titled "Analysis and Comments on the Initial Report of the President's Committee on Equal Opportunity in the Armed Forces" by Edward M. Almond, July 25, 1963, Box 10, Almond Papers, MHI.

Committee on Equal Opportunity in the Armed Forces.” Almond claimed that his perspective should carry weight because he had an intimate knowledge of the “Negro” issue from his time leading the 92nd. Almond wrote:

This whole report is reminiscent of the experiences of the undersigned when he was the commander of the 92nd Division and had so many problems confront him in various phases of training and in combat from the period of September 1942 to August 1945. One of the most notable problems was that of promotion. Negro advocates of rapid promotion had no hesitancy in recommending that a percentage of negroes comparable to the negro population strength of the United States should obtain in all promotions in the 92nd Division.⁵³⁵

After drafting his rebuttal to the Gesell Committee recommendations, Almond then started a letter campaign that dwarfed all of his previous endeavors. Almond sent his “Analysis” to literally every member of the House Committee on Rules.⁵³⁶ This impressive letter writing campaign to elected officials was only the beginning, for Almond also turned to active duty and retired military peers.⁵³⁷

A number of Almond’s military friends wrote back to offer their support. MacArthur replied, “Dear Ned, Your letter of the fifth has filled me with great anxiety. Its scholarly and wise conclusions are incontrovertible. I am glad that you are so active in combating a growing

⁵³⁵ Ibid.

⁵³⁶ The list included: Kansas Congressman William H. Avery, Mississippi Congressman William M. Colmer, Congressman Howard W. Smith – the chairman for the House Committee on Rules, Indiana Congressman Ray J. Malden, New York Congressman James J. Delaney, Arkansas Congressman James W. Trimble, Texas Congressman Homer Thornberry, Missouri Congressman Richard Billing, Massachusetts Congressman Thomas T. O’Neill, Alabama Congressman Carl Elliott, Ohio Congressman Clarence J. Brown, New York Congresswoman Katherine St. George, California Congressman H. Allen Smith, and Illinois Congressman Elmer J. Hoffman.

⁵³⁷ Almond sent his analysis to the following active duty and retired military officers: Major General Paul M. Booth, Major General Ed Rowny, Brigadier General W.J. McCaffrey, Brigadier General Lynn Smith, Colonel Lon Smith, Colonel John Palmer, Colonel A.A. Goodwyn, Colonel William A. McKean, Colonel H.H. Jorden, Colonel C.W. Daugette, Colonel Paul Goodman, Major General George R.E. Shell, Major General Carl Sutherland, General Sumter L. Lowry, General A.B. Paxton, Major General Paul J. Mueller, Major General T.A. Lane, Lieutenant General George E. Stratemeyer, and at the top of the list General Douglas MacArthur.

peril.”⁵³⁸ To his old friend and mentor, General Paul Mueller, Almond sent not only his analysis statement but a copy of MacArthur’s response. Almond assured Mueller that after reviewing the Gesell Report “you will come to the same conclusion.”⁵³⁹

To his military buddies still on active duty with the Army, Almond confided that he was glad that he was retired from active service. “I may be selfish but I must say that I am happy that I do not have to implement such orders as are emanating now from the DOD,” Almond told Colonel Paul Goodman in a letter on September 6, 1963.⁵⁴⁰ Of course, when Almond had been on active duty the issuance of DOD directives to integrate his troops did not seem to stop him from coming up with ways to thwart the directives – as was the case with X Corps during the Korean War.

In his correspondence with General Sumter Lowry, Almond provided what he defined as further proof of his assertion that the actions of the Gesell Report were meant to do more than correct inequalities in the Armed Forces, but were, indeed “directed at amalgamation of the races.” Almond informed Lowry that just the previous day he had read in the *Birmingham Post-Herald* that Roy Wilkins, the Executive Director of the NAACP had proposed that legislation “be enacted to set aside all State bars to inter-marriages.”⁵⁴¹ This was the irrefutable proof to Almond that the only logical outcome of integration was miscegenation.

Almond and many of his closest personal friends and peers from the Army, perplexed that

⁵³⁸ Letter from General Douglas MacArthur to Lt. Gen. Edward M. Almond, September 10, 1963, Box 150, Almond Papers, MHI. Again, Almond and MacArthur were of like mind on race relations among other issues. In a letter earlier in 1963, MacArthur told Almond, “I think of you often, Ned, and of the splendid way you handled a most difficult assignment in Korea. What a pity they did not let us see it through. The world would be a different place today.” Letter from General Douglas MacArthur to Lt. Gen. Edward M. Almond, February 15, 1963, Box 150, Almond Papers, MHI.

⁵³⁹ Letter from Lt. Gen. Edward M. Almond to Major General Paul J. Mueller, September 17, 1963, Box 106, Almond Papers, MHI.

⁵⁴⁰ Letter from Lt. Gen. Edward M. Almond to Colonel Paul Goodman, September 6, 1963, Box 106, Almond Papers, MHI.

⁵⁴¹ Letter from Lt. Gen. Edward M. Almond to General Sumter Lowry, August 20, 1963, Box 106, Almond Papers, MHI.

some of their colleagues were actually willing to go along with the integrationist recommendations made by the Gesell Committee. “I wanted to believe that our commanders would be impervious to any such political interference with their command responsibilities,” wrote Major General Thomas A. Lane to Almond on November 13, 1963. Lane continued, “After all, the judgment on all promotions is in their hands. Unhappily it appears that senior commanders are embracing these ill-conceived ideas out of a false sense of loyalty to their superiors. Every man comes to the day when he must stand and be counted. Some are not doing it.”⁵⁴² Almond and his peers were among the senior military officers, retired and active, that tried to push back against the Gesell Committee recommendations.

Another of Almond’s friends, Lieutenant General A.G. Paxton told reporters from the Greenville, Mississippi’s *The Commercial Appeal* that the Kennedy Administration was attempting to “make every other soldier a Negro,” or in other words, to bring the white soldier down to what Almond and Paxton perceived to be the black soldier’s level. Paxton went further to equate the checks-and-balances recommended by the Gesell Report to a “political commissar system” similar to and just as nefarious as the Soviet models whereby the “system” would be “monitoring the conduct of every commander” to ensure promotions based on “racial activity and not efficient performances of military duty.”⁵⁴³

In a personal letter to Almond, Paxton explained his frustration with the integration agenda. “Certainly the Negro should serve his country and be given fair treatment in his assignment,” Paxton wrote, but then he added the caveat, “*which he is capable of holding.*” Paxton agreed with Almond that the Kennedy Administration and some senior military officers were failing to

⁵⁴² Maj. Gen. Thomas A. Lane to Lt. Gen. Edward M. Almond, November 13, 1963, Box 106, Almond Papers, MHI.

⁵⁴³ From *The Commercial Appeal* in Greenville, Mississippi titled “Paxton Blasts Racial Report: Equal Opportunities Plan Called ‘Tragic Order,’ Harmful to Military,” Box 114, Almond Papers, MHI.

realize this mistake and as such, Paxton warned “when we sacrifice the efficiency of our armed forces, such a plan would eventually be very destructive to our capability of defending this nation.”⁵⁴⁴

For a brief moment in the late summer of 1963, Almond and his military friends and associates thought that perhaps the Kennedy Administration and the integrationists had pushed too far. Several congressman and Southern politicians were very vocal in their opposition to the Gesell Committee recommendations and with an election in just over a year, other politicians who remained in the shadows seemed ready to speak out. Congressman Carl Vinson, Chairman of Committee on Armed Services was one of the politicians who wrote to Almond with encouraging words. Vinson proclaimed, “I found the Gesell Report to be most vicious in nature and have, of course, expressed my views to the Secretary of Defense in this regard.” He continued, “I am pleased to have my own views corroborated by your excellent analysis, and I am grateful to you for sending it to me.”⁵⁴⁵ In one hand written note of encouragement, Charles F. Crisp, the President of the Bank of Commerce, wrote, “Dear Ned, Somehow I believe the ultra-liberals and niggers are over playing their hand. If this is so maybe we will live to see change in government. Ours cannot last as it is for 10 years or more.”⁵⁴⁶

Despite Almond and his friends’ optimism, 1963 did not turn out to be the year that the integration movement in the armed forces was defeated. The Gesell Committee’s recommendations were not overruled. Almond realized as much soon after his letter writing campaign when he confided in his friend Crisp that, although he sent his analysis to over 30

⁵⁴⁴ Letter from Lieutenant General A.G. Paxton to Lieutenant General Edward M. Almond, September 26, 1963, Box 115, Almond Papers, MHI.

⁵⁴⁵ Congressman Carl Vinson, Chairman of Committee on Armed Services to Lt. Gen. Edward M. Almond, August 5, 1963, Box 100, Almond Papers, MHI.

⁵⁴⁶ Handwritten note from Charles F. Crisp to Lt. Gen. Edward M. Almond, August 23, 1963, Box 100, Almond Papers, MHI.

congressmen, fewer than four responded in favor by placing the analysis in the congressional record, and only congressman, Armistead Selden of Alabama, actually took action by offering a resolution to force the Kennedy Administration to remove the recommendations.⁵⁴⁷ Selden's resolution failed to make it out of committee. A new era was dawning on race relations and Almond and his fellow sympathetic military friends were on the wrong side of history.

Almond never did give up the fight. In the 1970's Almond continued his letter campaign. In 1971 it was the Army's release of an educational film titled "The Black Soldier" that sparked his attention. The film was designed as a teaching tool to inspire greater cooperation between white and black soldiers by providing a history of African American servicemen in the Army and refuting the "myths" related to the performance of blacks as soldiers.⁵⁴⁸ Almond wrote to General Bruce Palmer, Vice-Chief of Staff for the Army, and threatened to return his Distinguished Service Medal if the film was not pulled. Almond's threat was rebuffed by Palmer with the somewhat paternalistic and sarcastic response, "Needless to say, I assume that you are joking in discussing the return of your DSM. Your magnificent performance, so well chronicled in the citation and documented in our official histories, is well known both within and outside the Army."⁵⁴⁹ Almond kept his DSM. Almond's letter campaign finally came to an end on June 11, 1979, when at the age of 86, he passed away at his home in Anniston, Alabama. He was buried in Arlington Cemetery near his son Captain Edward Mallory Almond Jr.

At the time of his passing, Almond was remembered for his military career and achievements

⁵⁴⁷ Almond reported the disheartening facts to Crisp in a letter dated August 23, 1963. Lt. Gen. Edward M. Almond to Charles F. Crisp, President Bank of Commerce, August 23, 1963, Box 100, Almond Papers, MHI.

⁵⁴⁸ The synopsis for the movie read: "The myths that perpetuate prejudice against black people in our society and the subtle ways that hate is learned are explored in this film. Specific examples of overt and unconscious declarations of prejudice are shown. Robert Culp narrates, as each of these prejudices are shown to be based on false assumptions or to be just plain nonsense." Although the initial synopsis stated Robert Culp would narrate, in the end the Army used Bill Cosby as the narrator for the film. Department of the Army Memorandum dated April 1971, Box 115, Almond Papers, MHI.

⁵⁴⁹ Letter from General Bruce Palmer to Lt. Gen. Edward M. Almond, May 5, 1971, Box 132, Almond Papers, MHI.

in three wars. His career was remarkable, but it was also overshadowed by deep-seated anger towards his fellow African American soldiers that defies understanding. We may never fully appreciate the negative effects Almond had on race relations in the Army in World War II and in Korea, but his openness in discussing his racial beliefs have provided us a glimpse into how entrenched those beliefs were among some of the senior Army officers in the 1940s and 1950s. These were men, unfortunately, who allowed their biases to color military decisions that should have never been about black or white, but only about Army green.

CHAPTER V

War Leads to Integration

When the Korean War started in June, 1950 the military force fielded in Korea by the United States was still largely segregated. Yet by the end of the Korean War the 24th Infantry Regiment had been disbanded, and African American soldiers were incorporated into white units all the way down to the squad and platoon level. Three years of a war that had not been planned for by the Department of Defense, and a war that had rapidly expanded with the introduction of large numbers of Chinese troops in the winter of 1950, accomplished more for desegregation than the nearly two years of peace prior to the Korean War.

Without question the heavy demand for personnel in an ever changing and dynamic conflict that did not align with the pre-packaged war plans of post-World War II ultimately produced the strongest argument for integration of African American soldiers. Wartime necessity called for the inclusion of soldiers as replacements not based on race, but on need – something that even ardent segregationist Army officers, such as Edward Almond and Mark Clark, could not easily argue against. Johnny Butler in *Unsanctioned Institutional Racism in the U.S. Army* concluded that “Korea proved to be the *Coup de grace* for sanctioned institutional racism in the Army.” African American soldiers were pulled out of “support units, where they had been concentrated in two world wars for the most part” and reassigned to combat units – alongside white soldiers.⁵⁵⁰

While the need for replacements was great among white units, the response by military leaders to institute greater integration of African American soldiers into white units did not happen overnight. In fact, the military seemed to turn towards integration in desperation as a

⁵⁵⁰ Johnny Butler, *Unsanctioned Institutional Racism in the U.S. Army* (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1974), 37-38.

response to manpower shortages and the perceived discipline problems among some African American units – specifically, the 24th Infantry Regiment and the all-black battalion in the 9th Infantry Regiment under Almond’s X Corps.⁵⁵¹ This chapter explores the factors that pushed reluctant military commanders to embrace integration. Those factors included the removal of quotas on the recruitment of African American soldiers and the subsequent influx of greater numbers of black troops, the greater attention paid to perceived discipline issues and combat inefficiencies of segregated units, such as the 24th Infantry Regiment, and the appointment of General Ridgway as 8th Army Commander and subsequently Commander of the Far East Theater. General Ridgway was particularly influential, because he first analyzed the inherent flaws in a segregated Army, and, secondly, because he had the positional authority and command presence to force opponents to integration, such as General Almond, to step aside for the greater good of the Army in Korea.

Straggling – Integration a Response

As was discussed in Chapter II, while some of the problems with straggling among African American troops were blown out of proportion by white officers with a bias towards black soldiers in combat, there clearly existed a straggling problem among some African American units early in the war. The authors of *Black Soldier White Army* pointed to a report by the Provost Marshall for the month of August 1950 that showed that 116 men from the 24th Infantry had been collected at rear check-points while only 15 soldiers were collected from the 27th (white Regiment) and 12 from the 35th (white Regiment). Similarly, the Provost Marshall noted that the African American 159th Field Artillery Battalion had 32 stragglers collected at rear check-points

⁵⁵¹ Initially the 9th Infantry Regiment was “integrated” by the mere fact that one battalion out of three was composed of African American soldiers while the other two battalions were all white. While technically a step closer to integration as opposed to the segregated 24th Infantry Regiment – this was still for all intents and purposes still a segregated unit – at least at the beginning of the War. By the end of the war the 9th was integrated down to the platoon and squad level.

during August 1950 while the white 90th had only 5, the white 8th had only 6, and the white 64th had only 3.⁵⁵² Clearly, the proportion of stragglers among the African American units was higher than was the case with white units. From evidence presented in the CMH study, in response to this problem, the 25th Division collected volunteers among white NCOs in the Division for reassignment to African American units experiencing problems with straggling. The volunteers were promised promotion to officer status in return for their duty with African American units. As was noted in *Black Soldier White Army*, although the number of white NCOs first sent in to assist with African American units was few in number, the response by the 25th Division to integrate select white NCOs was a development “signaling the breakdown of segregation under the pressure of combat in Korea,” albeit on a very limited basis.⁵⁵³

According to the CMH study, one of the officers who realized that the solution to improved combat efficiency among African American soldiers might be the introduction of white troops was Colonel Corley, the 24th Infantry Regiment CO. Corley was reported to have suggested early in his tenure as 24th Infantry Regiment CO that “blacks as a group might hold their ground better if they were integrated into white units.” However, Corley “either out of prejudice or for practical reasons ... declined to suggest that whites, except in isolated cases, should ever be assigned to formerly all black units.”⁵⁵⁴ Corley did not act on this belief and push for further integration, even as he was making his observations on integrating blacks with white units “the Army was having so much difficulty finding trained replacements that, at the very moment when he was stating his reservations a number of white sergeants were serving with the 24th Infantry, and blacks were beginning to be assigned to all-white units in the 25th Division.”⁵⁵⁵

⁵⁵² Bowers, Hammond, MacGarrigle, *Black Soldier White Army*, 149.

⁵⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁵⁴ Ibid., 172.

⁵⁵⁵ Ibid.

It should be noted, that some of the white officers and soldiers who decried the performance of the 24th Infantry Regiment as a whole and had at the beginning of the war been viscerally opposed to integration slowly changed course during the war and eventually moved to support integration as a solution. One of these converts was a young officer in the 24th Infantry Regiment named Daniel Randall Beirne. In a letter written on September 9, 1950, he observed that “the 24th Regiment never seems to be able to hold its position and there always seems to be a breakthrough.” Beirne’s response to the problem was not that African Americans be pulled from combat duty, as General Almond and some other white senior officers believed, but rather that they be integrated with white units. Beirne reasoned that “Negroes alone are good but afraid as a unit they are not.” As if to highlight his argument for integration Beirne noted that he “saw a Negro tank sergeant (Platoon Commander) who commanded whites. The men under him said he was absolutely fearless and he held the highest respect of all.”⁵⁵⁶

Beirne’s observation that greater integration was a cure for military deficiencies among segregated black units was also noted by several senior officers in Korea and back in the United States. Brigadier General Carter W. Clarke wrote in a letter to General Henry S. Aurand, the Commanding General, United States Army, Pacific, in November, 1950; “I have been told some of the most amazing stories about the misconduct of troops of the 24th Infantry, 25th Division. Since these stories are all of a pattern and since I have heard them from men of all ranks from Corporal to Major General I feel that they are reasonably accurate. My own personal opinion is that integration on a ratio of about 1:6 is the answer.”⁵⁵⁷ Although General Clarke’s opinion of the performance of the 24th Infantry Regiment was probably skewed by the exaggerations by

⁵⁵⁶ Letter from Daniel Randall Beirne, September 9, 1950, Box 2, Oral Interview Notes BSWA, CMH.

⁵⁵⁷ Brigadier General Carter W. Clarke to General Henry S. Aurand, November 25, 1950, Box 43, Aurand Papers, DDEPL.

racially biased officers, his conclusion that integration was a most helpful proposal to address the issue.

Clarke and many other military leaders pushed for integration because of a belief that African American soldiers needed the guidance of white soldiers in order to become effective combat soldiers. The realization that segregation in and of itself placed the African American soldier in a difficult position from the standpoint of morale and motivation was something that the military leaders would not or could not understand.

As the Korean War continued, military leaders who had begun to question the continued segregation of troops as being counter-productive to combat readiness soon were using any failure of segregated units as an excuse to push integration even quicker. One such situation that gained the attention of even General MacArthur occurred on February 13, 1951, and was detailed in Appleman's *Ridgway Duels for Korea*. Members of L Company of the 3rd Battalion, 9th Infantry (an all-black unit) were assigned to the 2nd Reconnaissance Company to act as a blocking unit. Both units ended up being overwhelmed by Chinese forces between the towns of Chaum-ni and Kudun. A Toronto newspaper correspondent was one of the first on the scene of L Company and 2nd Reconnaissance Companies position after United Nation forces regained the lost positions. The journalist reported that he "counted 68 bodies of US soldiers there" and that the soldiers "went to sleep with only one sentry and that some of the bodies were found naked and some lay where they had been trying to get out of their sleeping bags. They had not dug any foxholes or other defense positions."⁵⁵⁸ The implication of the article was that the African American soldiers had failed to take even the most rudimentary precautions to properly defend their position. The fact that a white unit accompanying the black soldiers of L Company had

⁵⁵⁸ Appleman, *Ridgway Duels for Korea*, 291.

also failed to take precautions was not addressed, or that the lack of defense preparations was as much a failure in leadership as it was in the failure of the individual soldiers.⁵⁵⁹ Tragic situations such as the one experienced by the members of the 3rd Battalion, 9th Infantry Regiment were predictably seen as clear signs that all-black units were not capable of effective military action, but since the Army could ill-afford to remove entire battalions from combat duty, the only logic solution left to military leaders was to integrate the black soldiers at smaller unit levels.

The Need for Replacements – a Call for Integration

Senior Army military leaders reluctantly acknowledged that the continuation of segregated units was not the most efficient method of utilizing existing manpower. This was a conclusion that took time to develop and ultimately did not reach fruition until General Matthew Ridgway took control of Eighth Army in Korea in December 1950 and slowly began to implement a more aggressive integration policy. Perhaps not surprising was the fact that the average soldier in the 24th Infantry Regiment, even prior to the Korean War, could have told the military brass that segregation was inherently wasteful of manpower resources.

One of those 24th Infantry Regiment veterans who realized the futility of segregated units was Steve Davis, and the reason was directly tied to the Army replacement system. Davis did not require an Army study to come to the conclusion that continued use of segregated units was absurd and wasteful of resources. Davis saw firsthand that several African American companies were “continuously over strength with white units understrength because of racial policies.” Further, even on the same base, Davis observed some white understrength units were “much

⁵⁵⁹ There were other occasions involving African American units also being caught unprepared that might have also played into the focus on the actions of L Company instead of on the 2nd Reconnaissance Company. A War diary for the 5th RCT noted in one of the entries that Company C “reached the top (of a hill) and came on the bodies of two companies of Negroes of the 24th RCT who slept one night and were overrun” apparently without taking the precautions to have posted sentries and men ready to react in the event of attack. Miscellaneous notes from war diaries, Box 1, Oral Interview Notes BSWA, CMH.

more efficient, passed all of its tests, etc., while the other black units, even with two or three first sergeants, and troops filling the same slots, etc., continued to do poorly.” Davis concluded “this was the segregated Army prevalent throughout.”⁵⁶⁰ Any system that assessed manpower resources based first on the race of a replacement instead of the replacements training, experience, or specialization, was bound to fail.

Exacerbating the problem with replacements was the fact that African American replacements coming to the Korean Theater of Operations were outpacing losses among African American units. This created a backlog of African American replacements that could not be assigned given lack of openings in African American units and policies prohibiting integration of black soldiers into white units. Davis said that while the Army waited on loosening restrictions on integration, “Korea was becoming a problem (with) large groups of blacks behind the lines almost enjoying a vacation while whites on the front lines were being decimated.” According to Davis, the tragedy of the situation was that he had witnessed the same problem during World War II when his artillery battalion sat out the war back in the United States at Fort Custer, Michigan. However, unlike World War II, Davis said in Korea the Army brass finally realized that due to segregation “the overall implication was that there were too many soldiers sitting around doing nothing.” As Davis saw it, in Korea “it was simply a pragmatic solution commanders on their own volition had begun integrating when they went to the rear asking for volunteers and had a quite a response.”⁵⁶¹

The other problem with the replacement system was that because segregated units could only accept black soldiers the majority of black replacements sent to Korea early in the war were immediately assigned to infantry units such as the 24th whether they had been trained as

⁵⁶⁰ Interview with Steve C. Davis, September 2, 1988, Box 4, Oral Interview Notes BSWA, CMH.

⁵⁶¹ Ibid.

infantryman or not. Colonel Corley was one of the white officers who immediately grasped how ridiculous this system was for filling the ranks of a combat unit. Gerald Astor in *The Right to Fight* addressed the manpower issue when the author acknowledged that “part of his (Corley’s) problem lay in a flood of replacements” which ultimately made up “more than two-thirds of the regiment’s 3,663 GI enlisted” personnel. The worst part for Colonel Corley was that the replacements were made up of “former truck drivers, heavy equipment operators, cooks, engineers, and communications specialists” and not the trained infantrymen he required.⁵⁶² Despite the wide assortment of non-combat trained personnel assigned to the 24th Infantry Regiment in the initial months of the war, Corley and his regiment were expected to meet the same battlefield performance expectations as white regiments that were not handicapped to the extent of the 24th with non-combat personnel.

A change in Army policy that preceded the war in Korea proved to be one of the larger influences on the pressure of replacement pools during the war; the removal of quotas on black recruitment in the Army. Since the beginning of the twentieth century, the Army had maintained a strict quota on the number of African American servicemen in the Army at any given time. Those quotas were usually meant to mirror the percentage of African Americans in the United States population and thus ensure the Army at least on paper had a military that resembled the larger American public. The quota system allowed the Army to ensure that black soldiers never increased beyond what was perceived as acceptable levels while at the same time allowing the Army to declare to the African American community that they were allowing blacks the same opportunities to serve their country as any other segment of the American population.

In reality, during periods of demobilization, such as after World War I and World War II, the

⁵⁶² Gerald Astor, *The Right to Fight*, 374.

quotas on African American servicemen could also be used to ensure that large numbers of black soldiers were removed from the service. It is also worth noting that African Americans were the only minority group that was singled out for “quota” treatment. Prominent members of the African American community as well as representatives from the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) were aware of the myriad ways that the Army manipulated the quota system to advance their own race controls. Flexing their muscles, those same advocates were able to use the Fahy Committee and President Truman’s Presidential Order 9981 to push the military, and specifically the Army, into removing the quota system for recruitment.

Despite fierce opposition from senior military officers and civilian officials the quota system was abolished in early 1950. Richard Dalfuime documented the dramatic results of the removal of quotas in *Desegregation of the U.S. Armed Forces*. Dalfuime observed that “Negro enlistments had been 8.2 percent of the total in March, 1950; without the quota they shot up to 22 percent of the total in April.”⁵⁶³ With the addition of more and more black soldiers into a military system still designed around segregated units, the Army had only the choice to cram as many black soldiers as possible into existing African American units, whether they needed the manpower or not. As Dalfuime recorded, the extra personnel resources were placed in black units even if the table of organization for those units could not account for the extra resources. When the Korean War broke out in the summer of 1950 this allocation of extra manpower to fully filled units was wasteful, and as Dalfuime observed, “Hard to justify when many white units were actually short of personnel.”⁵⁶⁴ The segregated system was beginning to show cracks at the seams.

⁵⁶³ Dalfuime, *Desegregation of the U.S. Armed Forces*, 202-203.

⁵⁶⁴ Ibid.

Although the 24th Infantry Regiment only saw a limited number of white soldiers integrated into their ranks, other all-black units in Korea experienced a more rapid and dynamic integration. Julius Becton was a platoon leader in the 3rd Battalion, 9th Infantry, a unit made up initially of only African American soldiers when his company received their first non-black replacement. Becton recalled that the replacement was a sergeant of Hispanic origin. Apparently his introduction into the 3/9 was received with some trepidation since about all that Becton recalled initially being said about the assignment was that the other men of the unit decided the Hispanic NCO was “to survive” – with the implication being that his presence would be tolerated. Despite the lukewarm reception, Becton stated that apparently the Hispanic NCO was ultimately accepted by the black soldiers of the unit and felt comfortable enough being assigned to a black unit that “when offered the chance to transfer to a white battalion in the regiment, he declined, indicating he was well satisfied with the 3/9.”⁵⁶⁵

According to Becton, in mid-September of 1950 the 3/9 rejoined the rest of the regiment near the Naktong River. Becton learned that its two white battalions had incurred very heavy casualties during their “first battles” and, thus, when replacements arrived, “color played no part of assigning them to battalions.” Becton said that “black as well as white soldiers were welcomed and were integrated into the depleted white units. Black soldiers pulled their load and remained with those units indefinitely. Later, when asked if they wanted to transfer to the 3/9, they declined, a decision that pleased both their officers and white comrades.”⁵⁶⁶

Although Becton’s examples related to white replacements being incorporated into black units, the opposite also was true as the war progressed and the pool of black soldiers exceeded the openings in all-black units. In some instances, officers who had previously been hostile to

⁵⁶⁵ Interview with Julius W. Becton Jr., June 1, 1995, Box 2, Oral Interview Notes BSWA, CMH.

⁵⁶⁶ Ibid.

the idea of integration, faced with growing manpower shortages, actually facilitated the transition of black replacements into white units, as was the case with the commanding officer of the 9th Infantry Regiment. According to Richard DalFuime, the commanding officer of the Ninth Infantry Regiment justified his reversal on integration by explaining, “We would have been doing ourselves a disservice to permit Negro soldiers to lie around in rear areas at the expense of still further weakening our white rifle companies.”⁵⁶⁷ Whether replacements were white soldiers being incorporated into all-black units or black soldiers being incorporated into white units, one of the persistent outcomes of this slow integration was that as men of either race fought alongside soldiers of a different race, racial barriers eroded.

Combat Breaks Down Racial Barriers

One of the principles employed in all military basic training was that shared experiences, especially stressful experiences such as those simulated by military basic training, created bonds between the individuals and were crucial in unit cohesion. The greater the hardship and conflict shared amongst a group of individuals the greater the bond. Of all the hardships and physical stressors in the human experience, certainly combat was among the greatest. Because combat created such strong bonds among the men who experienced it together, it should not come as a surprise that combat often broke down even the most strident racial biases among black and white soldiers.

The mere act of survival in a combat situation can break down barriers. During the chaos of the early months of the war, a group of 80 white Army soldiers were able to overpower their North Korean captors when they realized that they were going to end up being killed (as many captives were early in the war by North Korean soldiers): they then made a mad dash towards

⁵⁶⁷ DalFuime, *Desegregation of the U.S. Armed Forces*, 204.

American lines still fearing that they would fall back into North Korean hands. When they saw an American tank come down a road they did not pause one moment when they realized the tank commander was an African American soldier. According to Philip D. Chinnery, one of the survivors recalled, “We saw the most beautiful big black sergeant on top of the tank, manning the fifty caliber machine gun. He came down from the tank and we mobbed him, hugging him, shaking his hands, crying on his shoulder and thanking him. I don’t think there was a dry eye in all that group.”⁵⁶⁸ The race of that tank commander was inconsequential to the white soldiers who had just avoided their own deaths.

Even after being captured by the enemy, the struggle for survival united American soldiers, both white and black, and created bonds that would remain for a lifetime. Colonel William Richardson, a white junior officer who wrote *Valleys of Death: A Memoir of the Korean War*, discussed his experiences in captivity. Richardson recounted several instances during which fellow African American prisoners saved his life. During one such episode, Richardson was emaciated, suffering from malnutrition and dysentery and near the point of physical collapse. Richardson was making one of his many trips to the trench that acted as a latrine for the inmates of his prison camp. Richardson lost his balance and fell into the trench. Too weak to pull himself out, he began to scream for help. Richardson recalled that, “two black prisoners on the other side heard me. They crawled through the barbed wire (separating the white prisoners from black prisoners), grabbed me by my arms and pulled me out.” Richardson said that if his rescuers had not acted, “a second later, and I would have slipped under the surface” and drowned in the stream of sewage.⁵⁶⁹

⁵⁶⁸ Philip D. Chinnery, *Korean Atrocity: Forgotten War Crimes 1950-1953* (Annapolis, Maryland: Naval Institute Press, 2000), 36.

⁵⁶⁹ William Richardson, *Valleys of Death: A Memoir of the Korean War* (New York: Berkley Publishing, 2010), 174. Black and white soldiers were separated by race in Chinese prison camps not because of race issues, but

According to Richardson, his physical condition deteriorated to the point that he had to be moved to the “sick camp” where prisoners were sent to die. Few prisoners were ever heard from after being moved to that facility. Richardson was placed in a room with other desperately ill prisoners, most of which according to Richardson seemed to have little or no desire to live. However, one of the sick prisoners in the room caught Richardson’s eye. Richardson recounted what happened next; “After a while, I made it around the room and set up next to him. He was a massive black man with a barrel chest and thick arms. I learned that he was a boxer. He’d been the heavyweight champ for the Army in Europe and later the all-Army champion.”⁵⁷⁰ Richardson learned that his name was King and he had pneumonia – which had landed him in the “sick camp.”

Unlike the other occupants, King had a desire to live beyond the war. Richardson drew strength from King’s strength and the two men grew close. Richardson was the first to recover sufficiently to be removed from sick camp. As the guards escorted him out, Richardson turned to his friend and said “King, get off your ass and get out of here.” King responded, “Good luck, Rich.” Richardson said that he didn’t think he would ever see King again, but four years later at Fort Dix, New Jersey, Richardson was riding along in a jeep when he saw King directing traffic as a military police officer. “Pull over, I told the driver and hopped out as soon as he stopped.

because of propaganda issues. James Thompson, a black soldier captured during the Korean war remarked: During the early stages of our imprisonment, the Chinese had quartered all black POWs together, regardless of rank. Racism had absolutely nothing to do with it. It had everything to do with propaganda ... and we blacks knew it.” Thompson elaborated on the Chinese tactic of dividing black American from white American. He stated that upon arrival to the Camp they were greeted politely by a Chinese officer who attempted to gain their allegiance by telling them, “as long as you have been in the United States Army, you blacks have never been recognized as first in anything. You people always number two or three, but never number one. Here, with us, your Chinese comrades, you now number one.” James Thompson, *True Colors: 1004 Days as a Prisoner of War* (Port Washington, N.Y.: Ashley Books, 1989), 14, and 27-28. For further information see also Thomas J. Ward, “Detachment Number 1: African-American Prisoners at Camp 4 during the Korean Conflict” published online at:

http://www.vmi.edu/uploadedFiles/Archives/Adams_Center/EssayContest/20072008/AdamsCenterEssay_WardTJ.pdf.

⁵⁷⁰ Ibid., 175.

Walking into the intersection, I called out King's name. Rich? King said. King and I had a reunion right in the middle of the intersection as cars looked on. Both of us had actually made it.”⁵⁷¹

As men such as Richardson and King bonded together under the harshest of circumstances the color barrier that had separated them previously grew less and less important. Even the physical barrier that their Chinese captors attempted to emplace between the white and black soldiers was not sufficient to prevent a bond among Americans of both races. Richardson and King's story was also repeated in multiple ways throughout the Korean War as integration slowly moved men of different races into closer cooperation. The previous fears held by some senior white Army officers that the integration of forces would cause a break-down in morale and the eventual degradation of combat effectiveness of white units did not materialize.

In a letter from General Joseph M. Swing to Lieutenant General Anthony McAuliffe written on September 10, 1951, General Swing sought to assuage General McAuliffe's concerns about backlash by the press for the U.S. Army's integration policies. Swing wrote, “I realize that the press reaction you worry about is probably one which compares Army areas and might force untimely action in the Southern (Southern United States) Army areas ... however, the concern by you over the press reaction to integrating these men into white units causes me to guess that your people may not realize the extent to which integration has already progressed – at least in the Sixth Army.”⁵⁷² To highlight his point that he has not had issues with integration in Sixth Army, General Swing provided an example. “Indeed, in the 369th Engineer Regiment, a white unit, I found a colored first sergeant who, according to the regimental commander, is doing a splendid

⁵⁷¹ Ibid., 177-178.

⁵⁷² Lieutenant General Joseph M. Swing to Lieutenant General Anthony C. McAuliffe, September 10, 1951, Box 22, Collins Papers, DDEPL.

job without repercussion because of his color.”⁵⁷³

Brigadier General John H. Michaelis also went on the record to assert that as integration progressed the feared repercussions and “white back-lash” were not happening among his men. As documented in *Foxholes and Color Lines*, Michaelis stated in an interview in May, 1951, that he had approximately 250 black soldiers under his command – making up approximately 10 percent of his unit. “These Negroes,” he said, “were integrated down to the lowest tactical unit, the squad, and in this capacity have proven satisfactory.” Further, Michaelis made a comment that became the title of Mershon and Schlossman’s work: “Some have been promoted, others have been decorated. I mention this to point out that there is *no color line in a foxhole*. Apparently, the white soldier has no objection of serving under a Negro NCO, if the NCO has proven himself in battle.”⁵⁷⁴ According to Major Otis M. Darden, “by March 1951, nineteen percent of black soldiers served in integrated units,” and as much as “sixty percent of the infantry companies had some partial integration by May 1951.”⁵⁷⁵

Besides the strides made in Korea towards integrating Army units, another area of integration which only aided the rapid integration of units in Korea was the gradual removal of racial barriers among white and black troops in training depots in the United States. In the training system of the pre-war period and post-World War II, the training of white Army recruits and black Army recruits were separate. Although the activity might take place on the same military installation, a physical barrier was maintained between the two races, especially in their berthing accommodations. The first senior officer to buck the old system of segregated training was Brigadier General Frank McConnell at Fort Jackson, South Carolina. Realizing that it was a

⁵⁷³ Ibid.

⁵⁷⁴ Mershon and Schlossman, *Foxholes and Color Lines*, 225. Italics added by dissertation author.

⁵⁷⁵ Otis M. Darden, *The Integration of Afro-Americans in the Army Mainstream (1948-1954)* (Fort Leavenworth, Kansas: U.S. Army Command and General Staff College – thesis, 1993), 86.

waste of manpower and resources to have black recruits remain idle while they waited for a large enough aggregation of black soldiers to create a class, the general decided it was time to integrate the black soldiers with the white soldiers. Richard Stillman reported in his account, *Integration of the Negro in the U.S. Armed Forces*, that several members of McConnell's staff thought the general was "going off the deep end."⁵⁷⁶ But General McConnell persisted and he recalled later, "I pulled out the Army announcement on non-segregation ... It was all the authority I needed. I said that if we didn't ask permission, they couldn't stop us." According to McConnell, he provided the verbal order to integrate recruits "and that was the end of segregation at Fort Jackson."⁵⁷⁷

The growth of integration in the Army and the assessments of General Swing, General Michaelis, and actions of General McConnell were all positive steps in the greater movement for equality and desegregation, but should not leave the impression that once integration started there were no problems or push-back among senior Army officers. A century of racial segregation in the armed forces was not going to disappear overnight and the biases of countless number of soldiers and officers was going to take time to change.

The Army knew that old ideas and biases would die hard. To support their argument for integration, the Department of Defense in 1951 ordered an overall assessment of attitudes of white soldiers towards black soldiers. The study, known as *Project Clear*, showed only a slight majority of those polled responded positively when asked "how would you rate U.S. Colored soldiers as fighters, compared with white U.S. Soldiers?" Fifty-one percent (51%) of the white soldiers responded with "Just as Good," while forty-seven percent (47%) responded "Not as

⁵⁷⁶ Stillman, *Integration of the Negro in the U.S. Armed Forces*, 50.

⁵⁷⁷ Ibid.

Good.”⁵⁷⁸ However, when compared to assessments made during and just after World War II, a 51% response of “Just as Good” was a marked improvement in attitudes among white soldiers. The simplest and most logical conclusion from the survey results was that integration under combat conditions was having a positive impact on race relations, and continued integration would only further the changes already beginning to show results. Sherie Mershon and Steven Schlossman offered a similar assessment when they concluded, “Project Clear did not influence the desegregation process that was already underway in the Far East in 1951, but the research findings did assist Army officials in planning for worldwide desegregation of the Army and persuading reluctant commanders to cooperate.”⁵⁷⁹ To overcome the resistance of some of the senior Army commanders, the leaders at the Pentagon and in the Department of the Army would need all the tools at their disposal.

Full Integration Still Faced Resistance

As noted in the last chapter, one of the most vocal opponents to integration in the Army in Korea was General Almond, who attempted to stop and even reverse integration among his subordinate units in the X Corps. General Almond was not alone in his resistance to change and integration. Another senior officer who attempted to place restrictions on integration was General Thomas T. Handy (European Commander during the Korean War). Initially, General Handy followed the Almond model of resistance and denied there were any instructions to integrate black soldiers with white soldiers. Colonel Raymond B. Ansel – in his thesis, *From Segregation to Desegregation: Blacks in The U.S. Army 1703-1954*, recounted that according to Dr. Eli Ginzberg of Columbia University after a visit to Europe and General Handy’s command

⁵⁷⁸ Leo Bogart, *Social Research and the Desegregation of the U.S. Army: Two Original 1951 Field Reports* (Chicago: Markham Publishing, 1969), 67.

⁵⁷⁹ Mershon and Schlossman, *Foxholes and Color Lines*, 245.

in the summer of 1951, observed that if the Army wanted integration in Europe then General Handy was going to need a “push.”⁵⁸⁰ According to Ansel, “Ginzberg found that the officers refused to believe that the Pentagon wanted Europe to integrate.”⁵⁸¹

After General J. Lawton Collins, the Army Chief of Staff, made a visit in the fall of 1951 to Germany to meet with General Handy, General Handy realized that refusing to integrate would be career suicide. General Handy decided he would integrate his forces per the orders of the Pentagon and General Collins, but he and his staff would also attempt to place certain restrictions on which African American officers and Non-Commissioned Officers (NCOs) would be allowed to integrate into white units and which would be forced to remain segregated, or even removed from military service altogether. General Handy called for “screening boards” made up of white officers who would evaluate black officers and NCOs on an individual basis and then decide which officers and NCOs would be allowed to integrate and which ones would remain in all-back units or be separated completely from armed service.⁵⁸²

It was suggested to General Collins in a memorandum by his chief of staff, Colonel H.L. Sanders, that it would be best for General Collins to handle General Handy’s request in a confidential letter, “which will be known only by the fewest possible individuals here.”⁵⁸³ Colonel Sanders was clearly concerned about the political fallout if General Handy’s request for “screening boards” focused solely on “weeding out” undesirable African American officers and

⁵⁸⁰ Raymond B. Ansel, *From Segregation to Desegregation: Blacks in The U.S. Army 1703-1954* (Carlisle, Pennsylvania: U.S. Army War College – thesis, 1990), 40.

⁵⁸¹ Ibid.

⁵⁸² General Handy’s request contained the following: “To ensure that qualified Negro officers, and non-commissioned officers in grades E-7, E-6, and E-5 are selected for integration into combat units, screening boards will be established. These boards will consist of field grade officers of combat arms. They will personally interview and test each Negro officer and non-commissioned officer to determine his fitness for retention in a combat unit assignment.” From Memorandum from European Command to Chief of Staff, General J. Lawton Collins, December 14, 1951, Box 22, Collins Papers, DDEPL.

⁵⁸³ Memorandum from Colonel H.L. Sanders to General J. Lawton Collins – attached to letter to General Handy, February 4, 1952, Box 22, Collins Papers, DDEPL.

NCOs was leaked to the press.⁵⁸⁴ General Collins agreed with Colonel Sanders's recommendation and ordered that all information regarding General Handy's request be handled on a "need-to-know basis" with correspondence to be "hand-carried."⁵⁸⁵

In a personal letter from General Collins to General Handy dated February 15, 1952, General Collins laid out his decision concerning "screening boards" for African American personnel. Collins started soothingly enough, "Your plan for the integration of White and Negro personnel in combat units is in general agreement with our present thinking on integration." Then General Collins addressed the main issue, "I am afraid, however, that I cannot accept your proposal to establish 'screening boards' to test and evaluate the fitness of Negro officers and certain noncommissioned officers for retention in combat units." General Collins went on to explain his reasoning:

I realize the need for assuring continued effectiveness of integrated units; however, the appearance of selected Negroes before boards prior to integration will undoubtedly be the source of many legitimate complaints of discrimination. It does not appear that such screening will assure effective operation of integration since the bulk of Negroes in combat units will be assigned without selectivity ... it is therefore believed that all Negro enlisted personnel in existing combat units, regardless of grade, should be assigned initially to integrated units without preliminary board screening procedures.⁵⁸⁶

General Handy was representative of senior Army officers in the early 1950s who required constant pressure by their superiors to force their cooperation on integration. Had General Collins not made a point of meeting with General Handy face-to-face to impress upon him the

⁵⁸⁴ Colonel Sanders commented in his memorandum that "public information aspects of this policy are most important. If properly presented, both to the public at large and to the Negro soldiers involved, the discontinuance of Negro combat units will be accepted as a logical, reasonable action. However, if an incorrect impression of the motive behind this action is given to the troops, the public, or to the press, the European Command and the Department of the Army could be subject to severe criticism and even to considerable Congressional pressure." Colonel Sanders concluded by recommending press releases and "orientation lecture to be given to troops on the same subject." From Memorandum by Colonel Sanders cited above.

⁵⁸⁵ Hand typed note attached to General Collins' response to Memorandum from European Command, December 14, 1951, Box 22, Collins Papers, DDEPL.

⁵⁸⁶ Letter from General J. Lawton Collins to General Thomas T. Handy (European Commander), February 15, 1952, Box 22, Collins Papers, DDEPL.

need to comply with Pentagon directives, or taken the time to outline in detail his concerns through personal correspondence, the integration of Army forces in Europe might have been delayed for several years, or worse, General Handy might have been able to implement the racially biased “screening boards” which would have severely damaged relations between white and black officers and NCOs in Europe.

Racial Undertones in Some Motives for Integration

Besides senior officers such as General Handy who sought to block integrating their commands, some officers who encouraged integration did so partly for ulterior motives. Brigadier General Carter W. Clarke was an officer who early in the Korean War looked towards integration of African American soldiers into white units as a response to poor performance among all-black units and as a solution to a growing need for replacement troops in white units. General Clarke was convinced that integration would improve the performance of African American troops and likened it to the response he received from integrating South Korean soldiers into U.S. Army units. General Clarke wrote, “the experience we have had with the ROK’s (Republic of Korea soldiers) leads me to believe that if integrated, and under white officers who themselves have had proper training the negroes may make fairly good fighters.”⁵⁸⁷ General Clarke noted that “In the beginning the ROK soldier was not worth a damn” but “after he had fought alongside our men he developed a certain pride and there was stimulated a friendly rivalry which greatly enhanced the fighting qualities of the ROK soldier.”

General Clarke was among a cadre of officers who felt that the African American soldiers in units such as the 24th Infantry Regiment were proving themselves incapable of combat

⁵⁸⁷ From Brigadier General Carter W. Clarke to General Henry S. Aurand, November 25, 1950, Box 43, Aurand Papers, DDEPL.

effectiveness, and, thus, the reason integration had to be pushed forward was that the black soldier like his ROK brethren could be “worth a damn” as soldiers.⁵⁸⁸ General Clarke’s next sentences in a letter to General Henry S. Aurand struck to the heart of the racial undertones behind his philosophy regarding integration. Clarke wrote: “We now have about 20,000,000 negroes in the United States. We simply cannot just let these people breed in security at home and behind the lines while our white boys are being killed. The negroes must take their share of casualties.”⁵⁸⁹ Just as General Almond had promised the black soldiers of the 92nd in Italy that they had received their wish to see more combat and now would also receive their share of the casualties, General Clarke also pushed for more rapid integration so that black soldiers would receive a greater share of casualties.

General A.C. McAuliffe viewed integration as a solution to a different problem, the problem of a growing population of African Americans on bases in the United States. General McAuliffe wrote to Lieutenant General Joseph Swing, “We have already had complaints from the Fort Lewis area on the size of the Negro population.”⁵⁹⁰ General McAuliffe continued that “the whole problem is a very touchy one; the solution of which I must agree is integration.” General McAuliffe was referring to complaints by military commanders and civilian authorities around Fort Lewis, Washington, who feared that the increasing number of African American troops would create social problems. These complaints had been common for many years near bases in the South where African American troops were stationed, but with the ever growing number of

⁵⁸⁸ Brigadier General Carter W. Clarke did not stop with recommending the integration of the 24th – he also strongly felt that all black units as small as platoons should be integrated in order to avoid the “performance” problems he felt were linked with all-black units. Clarke wrote in another letter to General Aurand “I firmly believe that the time is at hand to break up all negro tactical units and to integrate, totally, our manpower, irrespective of race or color. You should not have even negro platoons, for if you had these you would encounter the same difficulty on a small scale as we now encounter on a large scale. I believe that it must be all-out integration.” Ibid.

⁵⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁹⁰ Lieutenant General A.C. McAuliffe to Lieutenant General Joseph M. Swing, September 17, 1951, Box 22, Collins Papers, DDEPL.

black soldiers at Fort Lewis the white community in the far northwest of the U.S. was beginning to become concerned as well. By integrating black soldiers into white units, this would prevent the build-up of sizeable populations of black soldiers at any one military base in the States. For General McAuliffe, the choice between maintaining segregation at the risk of sparking a potential race issue in the U.S. between large masses of black soldiers and white citizens was far more risky than integrating black and white soldiers.

General McAuliffe also shared General Clarke's concern that segregation of soldiers by race was creating a backlog of qualified African American soldiers back in the United States. He stated in September, 1951: "I am familiar with the present status of integration which, as you point out, is fairly widespread and has been accomplished without the dire results that were predicted by its opponents. The important fact to me is that we have over strengths in colored units totaling 34,000 approximately – to me a costly and needless waste of manpower." General McAuliffe and General Clarke were both realists that knew they needed the extra manpower available in African American soldiers during a war that was proving to be costlier than expected in human lives. Had the Korean War not happened, the response by senior white officers such as McAuliffe and Clarke likely would have been quite different.

Army "Studies" Desegregation

The United States Army, besides being one of the nation's main lines of defense, was first and foremost a government bureaucracy. Inherent in all bureaucracies is a tendency to remain in a state of stasis. Change only came at the direction of leaders intent on making the proposed changes and even then it was a slow and arduous process. Also, prior to most changes going into effect in a major bureaucracy, such as the Army, there was inevitably a "study" into the possible ramifications of any and all changes. Even though President Truman ordered desegregation in

1948, this did not mean the Army was going to enact the change without ample opportunities to “study” the effect of desegregation.

As discussed in chapter I, the military in the years between World War I and World War II had looked into issues related to the “use” of African Americans in the armed forces, but had only paid minimal attention to the question of integration of African American soldiers into white units. For the racially skewed interwar period the idea of black and white soldiers fighting side-by-side was too radical to even consider. After World War II, however, the armed forces, including the Army, were aware that change was on the horizon regarding desegregation. Countless thousands of African American soldiers had already proven themselves on the field of combat and the idea that African American soldiers would not make effective fighting men was proven false, even if it was still loudly contested by men such as General Edward Almond. The next logical step was to decide when and how black soldiers would be integrated with white units. As Johnny Butler observed, in the post-World War II era, prior to the onset of the Korean War, studies conducted by the military had already concluded that “the more contact white soldiers had with blacks, the more favorable was their reaction toward racial integration.”⁵⁹¹

In a report to the Chief of Staff of the Army entitled “Evaluation of ORO-R-11 on Utilization of Negro Manpower in the Army” dated January 5, 1952, the report had seven key findings. The principle findings were as follows:

- a. The problem is primarily one of utilizing low-level personnel.
- b. The best use of such personnel is achieved through integration with whites in

⁵⁹¹ Butler, *Unsanctioned Institutional Racism in the U.S. Army*, 55. For further information on the post-World War II studies on race relations and use of African American soldiers see Samuel A. Stouffer et. Al., *The American Soldier* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1949); Harold Martin, “How Do Our Negro Troops Measure Up?” *Saturday Evening Post*, June 16, 1951, pp. 30-31 and 139-141; Charles C. Moskos and John S. Butler, *All That We Can Be: Black Leadership and Racial Integration the Army Way* (Basic Books, 1996); Henry Deitz, Jerrold Elkin, and Andrew Riteze, *Ethnicity, Integration, and the Military* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1991).

approximately a 15-85 ratio.

- c. The efficiency and morale of Negroes are increased through integration; while those of the affected whites are not impaired.
- d. Attitudes toward integration become more favorable with increasing experience of it.
- e. Good leadership is accepted as such regardless of the race of leader or follower.
- f. Operational integration is conducive to social integration.
- g. Social integration depends on a number of variables and is amenable to firm policy and detailed local control.⁵⁹²

This report was one of several conducted during the Korean War and reflected a synthesis of prior findings as well as the most recent data available at the time it was issued. The seven findings would ultimately guide the Army as the rate of integration increased in Korea and at Army bases around the world. The first two findings dealt with the issue of placement and ratio of African American soldiers to white soldiers, while the next group made up the core of the seven findings; namely, that integration improves with time and that “good leadership” is crucial to the process. The last two findings dealt with the issue of “social integration,” which revolved around mostly “off-duty” activities such as official dances, use of swimming pools, and other recreational facilities. For soldiers in Korea, the problems associated with “social integration” were probably the least important, since they didn’t have many opportunities for “recreation” in a war zone. At bases in Japan, Europe, or the United States, however, the “social integration” problem was more difficult to deal with than the integration of black and white soldiers in combat since this issue involved the soldier’s families. Further exacerbating the “social integration” issue was the location of some of the Army bases in the United States. When bases

⁵⁹² Report to Chief of Staff entitled “Evaluation of ORO-R-11 on Utilization of Negro Manpower in the Army,” January 5, 1952, Box 22, Collins Papers, DDEPL.

were located south of the Mason-Dixon line, the societal norms of the rigidly segregated southern United States further complicated integration of troops and their families.⁵⁹³

Lt. General A. C. McAuliffe summarized the findings of the ORO study by emphasizing two categories: “1) integration has been working in sufficiently varied circumstances to justify expansion to entire Army; 2) performance of unit in combat or garrison is not adversely affected when integration is carried out so that Negroes are in the minority.”⁵⁹⁴ General McAuliffe accepted the findings of the ORO that integration was not going to cause sufficient problems to warrant stalling any further. However, once integration was accepted, the next problem that General McAuliffe referred to was the appropriate proportion of black to white soldiers. Obviously, General McAuliffe and other senior white officers worried that the presence of African American soldiers in too great of numbers would negatively affect the performance of units as whole. This was a throw-back to the idea that African American soldiers in significant numbers did not perform as well as white soldiers and would drag the entire unit down to sub-par performance levels. As noted by the ORO report, the ideal for Army integration was reportedly in a proportion of 15 black soldiers for every 85 white soldiers. This proportion was further reduced by senior Army officers to a percentage of 10-90 black to white.

In a letter by Brigadier General John D. Murphy dated September 24, 1952, General Murphy summarized what General Collins provided as guidance on integration:

Collins gave us directive that Negro strength in any infantry unit must not exceed 10%.

⁵⁹³ A Letter included in the ORO-R-11 addressed the issue of social integration specifically. The letter noted that the “report says that social acceptance of Negroes in on-post activities varies with the degree of personal contact. Dance and swimming least acceptable. Local customs vary through nation and cannot be properly ignored ... military integration is conducive to satisfactory biracial relationship in off-duty activities on post. Less applicable to the more intimate type of activities on post. Less applicable to the more intimate type of activities where women are involved regardless of the geographical area. No immediate sound solution to the social problem is apparent. Max latitude to local commanders and close surveillance to determine the most feasible arrangement permitting off duty integration to keep pace with on duty integration with minimization of friction and frustration.” From Letter of Evaluation ORO-R-11, January 5, 1952, Box 22, Collins Papers, DDEPL.

⁵⁹⁴ Summary Sheet referencing Lt. Gen A.C. McAuliffe, December 29, 1951, Box 22, Collins Papers, DDEPL.

Going to have a real problem in integrating service, which started after beginning the combat units, find that (we) have got to drag our feet because in some services ... our Negro strength will be close to 50% which is entirely too heavy.⁵⁹⁵

Although the concern by senior white officers was that an influx of too great of a number of African American soldiers would bring down the performance of a white unit, some African American officers agreed with limiting the percentage of black soldiers in any white unit, but for very different reasons. The concern of some black officers towards integration of a large percentage of black soldiers into a white unit was one of overwhelming white soldiers that were not accustomed to fighting alongside black soldiers and perhaps unwittingly unleashing a racial backlash against black troops.

During one of the interviews conducting by the Inspector General during the Korean War, Lt. Col. Arthur Harris interviewed Captain Charles Ellis, a black officer in the 24th Infantry Regiment about his thoughts on integration. Captain Ellis explained what he thought the Army could do to improve combat performance of black soldiers and specifically, how integration of black soldiers in small numbers with white units would improve combat effectiveness. Ellis explained:

If you take 20 men to a Company of whites, integrate them; let him get what he earns. Let him compete on equal terms. It would require some time no doubt. One of two solutions is, to send well trained infantrymen into an all colored unit as replacements (which had already been done by the Army on a limited basis at the time of Captain Ellis' interview). Two, integrate the colored troops within white units. Integrate them in small proportions, that way they could get accustomed to the white and the white to the Negro. Each race has its own traits. It would be unfair to cram the traits of a white person down the throat of a Negro all at one time. Or the other way around.⁵⁹⁶

With the Army embracing the integration of African American soldiers into white units in

⁵⁹⁵ Summary of letter from Brigadier General John D. Murphy, September 24, 1952, Box 22, Collins Papers, DDEPL.

⁵⁹⁶ IGD Lt. Col. Arthur C. Harris interview of Captain Charles Ellis, E Company, 24th Infantry Regiment, September 15, 1950, at Haman, Korea, Box 4, Oral Interview Notes BSWA, CMH.

percentages under 10% of total strength, the next question the Army had to deal with was what to do with all black units such as the 24th Infantry Regiment. Clearly, if the 24th and other similar units were to be maintained, it would take significant movement of personnel into and out of the unit to even come close to a percentage of 10% black soldiers to white soldiers in these formerly segregated units. Ironically, the fate of the 24th Infantry Regiment was indelibly linked to the implementation of an integrated Army; either the 24th would have to be dissolved or integration would have to be delayed.

Fate of the 24th Infantry Regiment

Ever since the 24th Infantry Regiment entered combat in Korea, senior military leaders in Korea had been calling for the deactivation of the 24th Infantry Regiment. Perhaps the most vocal of these individuals was General Kean, commander of the 25th Division. General Kean had been agitating for the deactivation of the 24th as early as September, 1950. In a letter dated September 9, 1950, to General Walker, Kean wrote, “It is my opinion that the 24th Infantry has demonstrated in combat that it is untrustworthy and incapable of carrying out missions expected of an infantry regiment.” Further, General Kean claimed if there “are a number of individuals in the 24th Infantry who have been and are performing their duties in a credible manner” it has been “completely nullified by the actions of the majority.”⁵⁹⁷ At the time of the letter, General Walker was not inclined to even consider the deactivation or removal of the 24th Infantry Regiment. At that point, Walker was in need of every soldier he could get, white or black.

There were several other factors at play when Walker decided to ignore Kean’s recommendation, including an assessment of Kean’s motivations. Although General Walker did not go on record about his opinion of Kean’s racial beliefs, others have suggested that Kean was

⁵⁹⁷ Bowers, Hammond, MacGarrigle, *Black Soldier White Army*, 157.

not a supporter of African American troops, including General Almond who thought highly of General Kean and his recommendation for the 24th Infantry Regiment to be disbanded. When interviewed in the late 1970s, General Ridgway observed that Kean's recommendation for dissolution of the 24th Infantry was supposedly for performance issues, but Kean was also a "Southerner."⁵⁹⁸ The other factor that might have influenced General Walker's decision to disregard Kean's recommendation was Walker's tenuous relationship with General MacArthur.

Almond recounted that during the dark days of July 1950 when the 8th Army was falling back by leaps and bounds further and further south on the Korean peninsula and were huddled in what was referred to as the "Pusan Perimeter," he and General MacArthur visited Walker at his command post in Taegu, Korea. Almond said that before they even arrived at Walker's command post, "it had been indicated that Walker was in the process of deciding to retire to the Pusan area," further shrinking the American footprint on the peninsula.⁵⁹⁹ MacArthur was furious with General Walker and according to Almond, MacArthur retorted; "Walker, you can make all of the reconnaissance you want. You can put your engineer to work if you desire in preparing intermediate trenches, but I will give you the order to retire from this position and there will be no ... Dunkirk in this command. To retire to Pusan will be unacceptable."⁶⁰⁰

Walker regained his composure after getting chewed out and went to his staff and declared:

"This Army fights where it stands. There will be no retirement."

⁵⁹⁸ In his interview, Ridgway also discussed some of the performance issues of the 24th Infantry Regiment that were brought to his attention. Ridgway made the comment, "Now, the 24th Infantry was a cause of constant concern to me and right down the line. The poor regimental commander – I think he got evacuated with ulcers finally, because he never knew what was going to happen next. He had had a lot of experience in handling colored troops." The regimental commander that Ridgway referred to was Colonel Corley. This was an unfortunate quote, although on paper Colonel Corley was "evacuated" from Korea for a medical condition, the evacuation was against Corley's will and appeared to be motivated less on Corley's ability to remain in Korea in command and more on his outspoken comments in support of his black soldiers. Interview with General Matthew B. Ridgway, Box 89, Oral Histories, Matthew B. Ridgway Papers, MHI.

⁵⁹⁹ Interview of General Edward M. Almond by Captain Thomas G. Fergusson, Box 1, Almond Papers, MHI.

⁶⁰⁰ Ibid.

What Almond did not mention in his interview was how close Walker had come to being relieved of command. General Ridgway recounted in his interview in the 1970s, “I think you’ll find ample evidence today to support the fact that General MacArthur’s public utterance about his confidence in Walker, and the relationship between them, are contrary to the facts. He did not have confidence in Walker.” Further Ridgway commented, “Their relations were very strained at the time. He even had considered relieving Walker of command.”⁶⁰¹ In light of the strained relationship between General Walker and General MacArthur, even if Walker had been inclined to adopt General Kean’s recommendation regarding the 24th Infantry Regiment, it is doubtful that MacArthur or his staff would have paid attention to the recommendation if for no other reason than the source – Walker. It was also possible that Walker sat on the recommendation out of spite for General MacArthur and his Chief of Staff, General Almond. It was highly likely that Walker was aware of Almond’s antipathy towards African American troops and the 24th Infantry Regiment, and what better way to get even with Almond than to ensure that the all-black 24th Infantry Regiment remained in combat. We will never know exactly what General Walker’s thoughts were on this matter because, tragically, in December, 1950, General Walker was killed in an automobile accident. The question regarding the fate of the 24th Infantry Regiment passed on to Walker’s replacement, General Matthew Ridgway.

The Ridgway Factor

At the time General Ridgway inherited the 8th Army it consisted of Republic of Korea forces, a host of Allied Nations units, U.S. Marines, and U.S. Army units that included the 24th Infantry Regiment and other “colored” units such as the African American battalion of the 9th Infantry Regiment under General Almond’s control. General Ridgway inherited a demoralized military

⁶⁰¹ Interview with General Matthew B. Ridgway, Box 89, Series 5 Oral Histories, Ridgway Papers, MHI.

that was being heavily pressed by Chinese forces and the mood from private to general was that the situation was dire and the will to fight had been sucked from the United Nation forces.

General Ridgway also inherited the complaints by various white officers that black soldiers were not meeting the performance levels of their white counterparts in combat. He also had on his desk, the request by General Kean to deactivate or at least remove from combat action the 24th Infantry Regiment.

Among General J. Lawton Collins' papers were typed notes related to the recommendations made by General Ridgway for integration of forces in May, 1951. The notes stated that General Ridgway's recommendations for integrating the Far East Command's (FECOM) black soldiers was based on "11 months experience in Korea" that had "proved the advisability of such a move." According to the report, FECOM had 14 "Negro" units with the largest being the 24th Infantry Regiment. "The Negro units had a spotty record during the first year of fighting ... General Kean was asking Eighth Army to remove the 24th from combat and allow him to transfer troops of the regiment as replacements on a percentage basis to other USA units in Korea." The report stated General Kean's reason for recommending deactivation of the 24th was based on his opinion "that (the 24th) is untrustworthy and incapable of carrying out missions expected of an infantry regiment."⁶⁰² General Ridgway, ever the gentleman and politician, described General Kean's request in a much more appealing light than had Walker.

In his autobiography, General Ridgway discussed the request he received from General Kean regarding the 24th Infantry Regiment. General Ridgway wrote:

While I was still in command of the Eighth Army I had received from Major General William B. Kean, then commander of the U.S. 25th Division, an earnest and thoughtful recommendation for the integration of white and Negro troops. Kean had had full opportunity to observed Negro troops both in peacetime, at Fort Benning, and in Korea,

⁶⁰² Typed notes, undated, Box 22, Collins Papers, DDEPL.

where the all-Negro 24th Infantry Regiment was part of his command, and he felt that, both from a human and a military point of view, it was wholly inefficient, not to say improper, to segregate soldiers this way.⁶⁰³

General Ridgway's plan for integration started with "full integration beginning with the largest all-Negro combat units, the 24th Infantry Regiment and the two infantry battalions, one in the 9th and the other in the 15th Infantry Regiments." From there General Ridgway concluded "that we could break up the smaller all-Negro combat units of artillery and armor and finally do the same with the numerous small service supply units both in Korea and Japan." General Ridgway concluded:

It was my conviction, as it was General Kean's, that only in this way could we assure the sort of esprit a fighting army needs, where each soldier stands proudly on his own feet, knowing himself to be as good as the next fellow and better than the enemy. Besides it had always seemed to me both un-American and un-Christian for free citizens to be taught to downgrade themselves this way, as if they were unfit to associate with their fellows or to accept leadership themselves.⁶⁰⁴

The pivotal question posed by Ridgway's comments and the discussion concerning the 24th Infantry Regiment was whether he pursued integration because he was adroit enough to realize that deactivation of the 24th had to be based on a larger integration policy and not tied to the performance of one unit, or whether Ridgway acknowledging the injustice and inefficiency of a segregated Army? There was no question that if General Ridgway had only proposed the inactivation of the 24th Infantry Regiment and the two all-black infantry battalions in the 9th and the 15th there would have been severe backlash in the African American press still actively followed the actions of the 24th and, more often than not, printing articles that praised the unit for its performance as a shining example of the ability of black combat soldiers. The weight of the

⁶⁰³ Matthew B. Ridgway, *The Korean War* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1967), 192.

⁶⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 193.

evidence, such as the gradual integration of units even prior to Ridgway's command in response to the manpower shortage, as well as Ridgway's own statements indicate that Ridgway's motives for integration were more aligned with an understanding that segregated units were hampering the Army's efforts and the time had come to embrace integration throughout all units.

As Mershon and Schlossman observed about General Ridgway, as was the case regarding many other issues facing the Army in 1951, he "assumed leadership on the issue of black troops and forged a single, coherent set of practices out of the various ideas and actions that local officers had already devised."⁶⁰⁵ No longer would the Army in Korea tolerate a hodge-podge of integration policies or would officers like General Almond be allowed to undo the movement toward an integrated force.⁶⁰⁶ General Ridgway's approach to desegregation was methodical and he took pains to make sure that General Collins and the Pentagon were aware of his actions.

In June, 1951, General Ridgway soothed General Collins fears, telling the Army Chief of Staff, "I am fully alive to the major aspects of our negro integration problem here. We shall develop our plans confidentially to an appropriate advance state, withholding all action until receipt of your instructions."⁶⁰⁷ In a follow-up letter in January, 1952, General Ridgway reported to General Collins: "Integration of colored personnel into the 45th is well along and has so far functioned most satisfactorily, even among the dyed-in-wool Southern personnel. No problems of any kind have been reported."⁶⁰⁸ Ridgway was the type of leader who, had "problems" arisen, he would have personally ensured that they were dealt with.

⁶⁰⁵ Mershon and Schlossman, *Foxholes and Color Lines*, 228.

⁶⁰⁶ Despite his occasional praise for General Almond as a fighting man and officer, General Ridgway also was wary of Almond's biases. Mershon and Schlossman noted that Ridgway "paid respectful attention to a questionable report from General Almond's X Corps staff claiming that the concentration of black troops in the Second Infantry Division's desegregated Ninth Regiment had caused that unit to perform badly during recent actions" or in other words – discounted Almond's concerns. Ibid.

⁶⁰⁷ Letter marked "Secret" and "Eyes Only" from General Matthew B. Ridgway to General Joe Lawton Collins, June 4, 1951, Box 17, Collins Papers, DDEPL.

⁶⁰⁸ General Matthew B. Ridgway to General Joe Lawton Collins, January 24, 1952, Box 17, Collins Papers, DDEPL.

As noted earlier, a number of factors were at play moving integration forward during the Korean War. Ultimately, it appears, however, that the most decisive factor was the leadership exhibited by General Ridgway. Ridgway's decisiveness was perfectly paired with his attention to detail. Unlike General Almond or General MacArthur, who tended to shoot from the hip, Ridgway moved as a chess player, calculating ten or twenty moves ahead. When Ridgway took over command of the 8th Army, he made a point of immersing himself in as many details of the condition of his command as was possible. He certainly would have been aware of the manpower needs among white units as well as the over-strength of several segregated black units. He would have been aware of the combat "reputation" of the 24th Infantry Regiment as well as the personal motives of some of the harshest critics of the 24th, including the harshest critic of them all, General Almond.⁶⁰⁹

Ridgway was acquainted almost immediately upon assuming command of the 8th Army with General Kean's position on the 24th Infantry Regiment, and he acknowledged as well, "I know the Commanding Officer of the 9th Infantry was always worried about his 3rd Battalion, which was colored."⁶¹⁰ At the same time, Ridgway had determined that African Americans were as capable as their white counterparts in combat. Ridgway commented during an interview in the 1970s that during the Korean War his opinion of the black soldiers was "there's nothing wrong with him if he has the right surroundings, the right officers, the right training and the right

⁶⁰⁹ General Ridgway made two very interesting observations about General Edward Almond, one had to do with his leadership abilities on the field of combat and one was more directed to his personality and hinted at his racial biases. Ridgway said of Almond, "Well, Almond was a very able officer. Almond is one of the few commanders I've had that, instead of ever having to push at all, I would have to keep an eye on unless he, maybe in his boldness, would have jeopardized his command or executed a very risky operation. He did on one occasion, and that was when the poor 2nd Division suffered." Ridgway continued to discuss Almond and his personality, "you know everybody has a different personality in which God has endowed him. Almond was apt to be pretty rough on other people's sensibilities, and he really could be cutting and intolerant." Despite these shortcomings, Ridgway still rated Almond as a "superior Corps Commander," not necessarily the "top level but superior." Interview with General Matthew B. Ridgway, Box 89, Series 5 Oral Histories, Ridgway Papers, MHI.

⁶¹⁰ Ibid.

leadership.”⁶¹¹ Armed with the needs of the Army, the negative view of segregated units by several senior officers, and his own personal belief in the capability of African American soldiers, Ridgway set in place a plan that eventually led to the integration of all Army units in Korea.

General Ridgway broached the topic of integration with General Maxwell Taylor, who was the Army G-3 at the time. Ridgway recalled that General Taylor responded, “Well, there couldn’t be a more timely occasion than to raise the issue right now.”⁶¹² Armed with the tacit support of General Taylor, General Ridgway next used a visit by Secretary of Defense George C. Marshall to solidify his plan to integrate. In fact, several months prior to Marshall’s visit in April of 1951 General Ridgway gained even further leverage regarding the integration issue when he was promoted to Supreme Commander of the Far East after President Truman relieved General MacArthur.

Marshall made his visit to Korea in June, 1951. As recounted by Howard Means and Gerald Astor, besides General Ridgway and Secretary Marshall there was a third witness to the discussion concerning integration, Ridgway’s pilot, Michael Lynch. According to Lynch, Secretary Marshall initiated the conversation with Ridgway by stating, “Let’s finish this black thing. Let’s integrate blacks in the fullest sense and not put them in separate units anymore.”⁶¹³ From his limited perspective, Lynch thought that Marshall was the one who made the first move to order the integration, but the correspondence between General Ridgway and General Collins,

⁶¹¹ General Ridgway also indicated that he felt similarly about black officers although he confessed that “we didn’t have many examples on which to base any conclusion there.” However, Ridgway recalled, “There was one infantry rifle company commander, who was a captain and a Negro; he was very highly thought of. I’ve forgotten which unit. I think he was in the 9th Infantry, but he was just splendid!” It is hard to say with certainty, but it is highly likely that Ridgway was referring to Captain Walker. The same Captain Walker that was put in for a Silver Star, but General Almond had the medal squashed and then reassigned the black officer to a non-combat segregated unit. Ibid.

⁶¹² Ibid.

⁶¹³ Astor, *The Right to Fight: A History of African Americans in the Military*, 394. Astor also acknowledges Howard Means and his study *Colin Powell, Soldier/Statesman – Statesman/Soldier*.

among others refutes that version of events. Although Secretary Marshall should be given the credit for approving the plan for integration, there was no question that it was General Ridgway who was the driving force behind the move to desegregate the Army in Korea. With the backing of Secretary Marshall and the Pentagon, Ridgway showed his attention to detail side and used the occasion of the three year anniversary of President Truman signing Order 9981, July 26, 1951, to issue the order to desegregate forces in Korea.

The importance of General Ridgway's action first as 8th Army commander and then as Supreme Commander of the Far East should not be taken for granted. Mershon and Schlossman latched on to the momentous nature of General Ridgway's action when they observed "over the course of one year, General Ridgway had succeeded in securing the implementation of racial integration throughout one major Army command under wartime conditions."⁶¹⁴ Despite the years of excuses, denial, subversion, and near insubordinate action by numerous senior Army officers, General Ridgway persevered: at least in Korea the Army was now integrated.

The 24th Infantry Regiment Deactivated

When General Ridgway received permission from Secretary Marshall to integrate the Army in Korea, the fate of the 24th Infantry Regiment was sealed. There would be no room in the integrated Army for an all-black unit, even one with as much history as the 24th. General Ridgway was sensitive to the fate of the 24th Infantry Regiment and was aware that his actions on this matter would be closely watched. Ironically, some of the critics of integration tried to use the fate of the 24th Infantry Regiment as a tool to stop the policy's implementation. Indeed, some opponents to integration had attempted to dissuade Ridgway on that course of action, because "integration would have violated the 1866 act of Congress that had designated the 24th as an all-

⁶¹⁴ Mershon and Schlossman, *Foxholes and Color Lines*, 229.

black unit.” That excuse failed when it was pointed out that the 1866 law “had in fact been repealed during the early months of 1950.”⁶¹⁵

Besides General Ridgway, other officers who were aware of the potential explosiveness of deactivating a unit such as the 24th Infantry Regiment instead of just integrating the unit. Probably in effort to ease the announcement that the 24th would be deactivated, a rumor was started in the Pentagon at the time that stated that the 24th was being deactivated instead of integrated to “preserve the regiment’s legacy as an all-black unit.”⁶¹⁶ Unfortunately, General Ridgway’s decision to deactivate the 24th Infantry Regiment while not doing the same for other “segregated” units such as the all-black battalion in the 9th Infantry Regiment gave the impression that the 24th was singled out for deactivation because of perceived flaws in the unit, and, by proxy, because of perceived flaws in the men of the 24th Infantry Regiment. General Ridgway chose not to deactivate all of the segregated units for one easy reason, time. Colonel Ansel observed, “the integration of all units through the command, was more difficult and time-consuming” and as a result “to speed up the process the plan to inactivate all segregated units was dropped; rather, it was decided simply to remove the designation ‘segregated’ and assign white soldiers to formerly all-black units.”⁶¹⁷

The authors of *Black Soldier White Army* came to their own conclusion regarding the decision to deactivate the 24th Infantry Regiment. They argued that “the decision to inactivate the 24th was certainly a result of dissatisfaction with its performance, but it was also the culmination of a gradual change in Army policy toward segregated units that had been under way since early

⁶¹⁵ Bowers, Hammond, MacGarrigle, *Black Soldier White Army*, 261.

⁶¹⁶ Notes to Bradley Biggs article (author unknown – possibly CMH author – makes reference to an interview with a black officer assigned to the Pentagon at the time – possibly Steve C. Davis), Box 2, Oral Interview Notes BSWA, CMH.

⁶¹⁷ Colonel Ansel, *From Integration to Desegregation*, 38.

1950.”⁶¹⁸ This conclusion in view of the integration of other “segregated” units supports the theory that the 24th Infantry Regiment was singled out based on “performance” criteria. Of course, assessment of performance that was portrayed negatively was done more often than not by senior military officers who were clearly biased against black soldiers in general. General Ridgway manifestly deserved credit for the quick and efficient implementation of integration, for after all, as one historian has observed, “by the end of October 1951, 75 percent of Eighth Army units were integrated.” Nevertheless, his handling of the issue of deactivating or integrating the 24th Infantry Regiment was a missed opportunity.

In many ways the deactivation of the 24th Infantry Regiment was as politically sensitive as the whole issue of integration. Since the beginning of the Korean War, the 24th was essentially the “face” of African American soldiers in the war. Their successes had been hailed by the African American press and provided inspiration to the African American community at large. It was not surprising then that when the decision was made to deactivate the 24th Secretary of Defense George C. Marshall felt it necessary to personally write to several Senators who had expressed concern with the slow progress of integration in the Army. Secretary Marshall wrote to Senator Herbert H. Lehman and Senator Hubert H. Humphrey:

For the past several months the Department of the Army has been conducting an intensive study in Korea directed toward improved employment of Negro manpower, particularly in combat units. Comments and recommendation were obtained from commanders concerned and the opinions of several hundred personnel, both white and Negro, were compiled from written questionnaires and personal interviews. Far East Command has been directed to inactivate the Negro 24th Infantry Regiment and to replace it with an integrated infantry regiment. Further, general integration has been ordered in the Eighth Army in Korea and in units in Japan of both combat and service type, excepting only the 40th and 45th Infantry Divisions. This integration will be phased over a three month period with a target date of 30 September (1951) for completion. Secretary Pace, General Collins and General Ridgway are giving the above plan their full support. They ask that you consider this information confidential until a public statement is released on the subject by

⁶¹⁸ Bowers, Hammond, MacGarrigle, *Black Soldier White Army*, xiii.

Far East Command about August 1st.⁶¹⁹

The Republican Party and Dwight D. Eisenhower's campaign staff did not allow the deactivation of the 24th Infantry Regiment to go unnoticed. In an attempt to draw away African American votes during the 1952 presidential and congressional races, the Republican Party used the issue of the 24th to attack the Democratic Party. In a pamphlet titled "The Republican Party and the Negro: Facts for Party Speakers and Workers" the Republicans put out talking points regarding the 24th. The pamphlet declared:

Although the famous Negro 24th Infantry was the first U.S. unit to win a battle against the North Korean Communist Army in 1950, this regiment was "smeared" for alleged cowardice. Later it was disbanded forever although it was one of the oldest regiments in the Army (1867) with a proud tradition. It could have been preserved as an integrated unit, but the (Truman) Administration said "No."⁶²⁰

Whether this argument had much effect in the African American community during the election of 1952 is doubtful. Although the Truman Administration did oversee the deactivation of the 24th, it also implemented the Presidential Order which started the process for desegregation of the Armed Forces which culminated with the integration of African American soldiers in white units during the Korean War. The Republican Party could only counter that "when the vote on elimination of segregation in the Armed Forces was taken on June 21, 1950 (Senate), 61 per cent of the Democratic Senators opposed elimination while 87 per cent of the Republican Senators voted to eliminate segregation in the Armed Forces."⁶²¹ Final vote was 42 for elimination of segregation and 29 against.

In accordance with the order to deactivate the 24th Infantry Regiment, in September, 1951 the

⁶¹⁹ Letter from George C. Marshall to Senator Herbert H. Lehman and Senator Hubert H. Humphrey, July 20, 1951, Box 22, Collins Papers, DDEPL.

⁶²⁰ Pamphlet titled "The Republican Party and the Negro: Facts for Party Speakers and Workers," Box 53, Rabb Papers, DDEPL.

⁶²¹ Ibid.

24th Infantry Regiment was replaced by the 14th Infantry Regiment. Colonel Joseph Baranowski recalled that - with the 14th moving in to replace the 24th – its soldiers moved to the rear and began turning in their equipment. “Those soldiers with enough points were sent to Japan or the United States, while those with less time in Korea went to replacement centers to be reassigned and integrated regardless of color into other infantry units. On 1 October, 1951, the regiment was no more,” Baranowsky was to proclaim.⁶²²

Although the 24th Infantry Regiment had gone through difficult times and had its share of problems, ultimately, given the inadequate leaders that the unit endured and the biases that senior commanders in the 25th Division and X Corps had towards African American soldiers, the 24th Infantry Regiment had lived up to its motto as the “Fighting 24th” and was a credit to itself and the Army as a whole. The 24th Infantry Regiment was also partly responsible for the implementation of integration by the Army. It was through the gradual integration of white NCOs into the 24th that the Army first experimented with a process of integration that eventually led to the assigning of African American soldiers to white units. Also, the irony was that the attacks made against the fighting capability of the 24th spurred white senior officers who had previously been reluctant to advocate for integration to take up the torch for greater integration of all units. The 24th may have ultimately been a casualty of integration, but it was also the spark that lit the fuse to bring about an integrated U.S. Army.

Although combat necessity played a major role in the movement towards integration of black soldiers in white units as well as the concern by some of the senior white officers in Korea about the “performance” of all-black units such as the 24th, another one of the factors that moved integration forward in 1951 was General Matthew Ridgway. One of the what if’s of history is,

⁶²² Interview with Colonel Joseph Baranowski, August 24, 1994, Box 2, Oral Interview Notes BSWA, CMH.

had General Walker not been killed in a car accident in December, 1950, would the Army still have integrated black soldiers with white soldiers before the end of the Korean War? Would an overall integration policy been in place by June/July 1951? The conclusion offered by this study is: not likely.

CONCLUSION

At the end of the Korean War segregation of soldiers by race in the U.S. Army was a thing of the past. Although there were scattered pockets, primarily of small units, in various parts of the United States and overseas that took several more years to fully integrate, the policy of segregation in the U.S. Army had been replaced by a policy of integration by the time of the armistice. Racism, and more specifically, servicemen and officers who held racist beliefs still were found in the U.S. Army post-Korean War, and the Army would continue to fine tune their policies towards African American soldiers well into the 1970s and 1980s to deal with this problem. In some respects, the goal of a “color-blind” Army is something that continues to be an elusive goal since racism is one of those unique human conditions that can be fought, but never truly vanquished. Perhaps though, some historian in the future will be able to chronicle the end of racism not only in the armed forces, but in society as well, since our armed forces are very often a reflection of the society from which recruits are drawn.

The primary goal of this study was to chronicle when and how the U.S. Army finally broke down the barriers to an integrated force. As noted in the first chapter, the road to integration wound through two world wars and the growth of an African American community in the United States that realized that a symbiotic relationship existed between the armed forces of the U.S. and the African American people. Through their military service black soldiers were able to increasingly make the case for equality, first on the battlefield, and then during the 1950s and 1960s in society as a whole. Had young African American men attempted to “sit out” either World War I or World War II because of inequalities in society at the time, as some members of the black community had initially called for, then the civil rights movement very well could have been delayed several decades. Instead, despite the inequalities, tens of thousands of young

African American men volunteered and served their country with distinction. They served despite the obstacles thrown their way and by having to endure officers such as Lieutenant General Edward Almond who denigrated their every move. The African American community also used the growth of their press and political awareness to highlight the accomplishments of their fighting men.

In sharp contrast to the efforts by the African American community to praise the ability and prowess of the black soldier the tradition bound officer community in the U.S. Army attempted to portray the black soldier as anything other than a capable warrior. Although this attempt to cast a shadow on the effectiveness of black soldiers was most prevalent during World War I and World War II it continued to some extent during the Korean War. It was best epitomized in the Army War College study of 1924 that concluded: “In the process of evolution the American negro has not progressed as far as the other sub-species of the human family.”⁶²³ The Army and the majority of its white officers during this period focused on maintaining a segregated system, as well as an attempt to utilize African American soldiers primarily as laborers as opposed to combat soldiers. When some of these officers were forced to utilize black soldiers as combat forces then tended to embrace the idea only as an opportunity to ensure that not just white men become casualties of war, as Almond famously quipped to his men in the 92nd Infantry Division: “Your Negro newspapers, Negro politicians and white friends have insisted on you seeing combat and I shall see that you get combat and your share of the casualties.”⁶²⁴

The tide turned for integration after World War II when President Truman signed Order 9981 in the summer of 1948. With the stroke of his pen Truman changed the “official” policy of the United States government to provide “equality of treatment and opportunity for all persons in the

⁶²³ See page 15.

⁶²⁴ See page 80.

armed services without regard to race, color, religion, or national origin.”⁶²⁵ As was discussed in the first chapter, President Truman’s order was only the first step in what was a delicate chess game between the politicians and advocates of integration and the obstructionists in the civilian military structure and the senior officer corps. The weight of enforcement of Truman’s order was left to the officially titled “President’s Committee on Equality and Opportunity in the Armed Service,” better known as the Fahy Committee. It was through the arm-twisting of the Fahy Committee that some of the first cracks in the segregated military structure began to show. However, the greatest argument against continued segregation of troops came in the form of an invasion in the Far East and the outbreak of the Korean War.

The second chapter’s theme was continuation of racial conflict in Korea despite the efforts of President Truman and the Fahy Committee to provide equality of treatment and opportunity, more specifically, racial conflict between white officer and black soldier in the 24th Infantry Regiment. Drawing on the interviews conducted by CMH for *Black Soldier White Army*, instead of focusing on an “official history” of the 24th IR – as was the case in *Black Soldier White Army*, this study wanted to explore the personal dynamics and interactions between whites and blacks in one of the oldest segregated units in the U.S. Army. Through the interactions of white officer and black soldier one of the most significant obstacles to a segregated Army began to shine through – segregation itself.

The premise behind segregated units was the belief that African American men would fight at their best when placed in units populated by other black soldiers and led by white officers. Of course in hindsight and through the spectrum of our current understanding this notion is absurd, however, at the time of the Korean War this was still held to be the “proven” and tested method

⁶²⁵ See page 93.

of placing black soldiers in combat. In reality, as demonstrated in the second chapter, segregation tended to create ill will among both white officers and black soldiers. White officers tended to regret their assignment to lead African American soldiers and believed that their assignment was everything from a punishment to a sure way of getting killed. At the same time, the black soldiers responded to racist white officers with everything from straggling and civil disobedience to the most extreme, “fragging” of an officer. The resistance by African American soldiers represented an important dynamic that was not expressed in *Black Soldier White Army*, and that was that the black soldiers of the 24th IR were not helpless victims in a segregated and racist Army, but rather active participants who were not afraid to push back against the system.

That the “system” was definitely flawed and skewed against black soldiers was demonstrated in the third chapter which explored military courts-martials, drugs, venereal disease, and medals during the Korean War. Particularly relevant to this study were courts-martials and medals, since they are the two “ends” of the spectrum of battlefield performance for African American soldiers.

The black soldiers of the 24th IR were constantly belittled by white officers for their supposed “failure” on the battlefield, especially during the opening months of the war. Because of the reputation placed on black troops by several senior officers it was not surprising that a disproportionate number of African American soldiers were singled out for courts-martial trials for acts of “cowardice” on the battlefield. Some of the officers who disparaged black soldiers had been trained under the “old-school” Army philosophy of black inferiority reflected through the documents churned out at the Army War College during the inter-war years, and by the time of the Korean War those same officers had risen to senior positions of authority. They were not afraid to use those positions of authority to continue to demoralize the black fighting man, or in

the extreme case use the military judicial system to punish them.

While African American soldiers faced heightened scrutiny for misdeeds on the battlefield, military medals for acts of bravery were also closely examined and in some cases denied because of racial hostility by officers, the most egregious example being the case of Captain Forest Walker who was denied a Silver Star by Almond because Walker was a black officer.⁶²⁶ The role of medals in the Korean War demonstrated that although significant progress was made on race relations during the three years of the war, continued racism by individual actors, specifically officers, was one of the highest hurdles the U.S. Army had to overcome in order to fully embrace the promise of Truman's Order 9981 and ensure "equality of treatment and opportunity." The role of officers in and around the 24th Infantry Regiment was the focus of chapter four.

In examining the role of officers associated with the 24th IR the biggest take away was that good or bad performance by a unit was often inextricably linked to leadership. Even under the adverse conditions imposed on the 24th IR by the institution of segregation an outstanding officer/leader could shape the performance of the unit and instill in the men the esprit de corps so essential in military organizations. Colonel Corley was one of the better leaders to take the helm of the 24th IR and as a result the men underneath his command were able to demonstrate their ability as soldiers. It was under Corley's tenure with the 24th IR that PFC William Thompson sacrificed his life to protect the withdrawal of his fellow platoon mates. Unfortunately, the institution of segregated units also carried its fair share of disgruntled and racist officers. The racist officer coupled with a segregated unit could spell disaster. Men such as Lieutenant Colonel Melvin Blair created an atmosphere where the chain-of-command could nearly

⁶²⁶ See page 257.

disintegrate and leave a unit in chaos. Fortunately for the men of the 24th IR, Blair was relieved of command after his inexcusable performance the night of November 30, 1950, but often the damage by officers such as Blair was difficult to repair.

One of the largest opponents to the 24th IR was an officer who was not even in the immediate chain-of-command, Lieutenant General Edward Almond. As chronicled in chapter four, Almond was the epitome of the “old-school” racist Army officer. His record of racial antagonism towards black soldiers went back to World War II and his command of the 92nd ID and continued through into the Korean War when he stood at the elbow of General Douglas MacArthur as chief-of-staff. Almond had the ear of MacArthur and power well beyond his position. Although he did not involve himself in the day-to-day operations of segregated units such as the 24th IR, he exerted his considerable influence over race relations through shaping opinion and purposely resisting any attempts by the Army to integrate during the war. Almond was one of the most outspoken critics of the 24th IR and other black units. Ironically, it was the vociferous complaints of poor performance by men such as Almond and Major General William Kean that helped the transition from segregation to integration.

Despite the imposition of a segregated system even when black troops were successful on the battlefield those successes were often overlooked or ridiculed in order to maintain the illusion of black inferiority. One of the most common complaints by white officers of black troops was the supposed tendency among black soldiers to “straggle” and melt away from the front, sometimes without their weapons. Some of the early efforts to integrate units came about as an attempt to stem the tide of straggling among black units and proponents of “limited” integration including men such as Colonel Corley. Corley felt that white NCOs could be successfully incorporated into black units to offer additional direction and leadership. Although the units were still

primarily made up of black enlisted personnel, the addition of white NCOs was a first step towards the larger goal of integration.

The largest obstacle to continued segregation of units in the Korean War was manpower. As discussed in chapter five, the growing need for replacements in white units due to casualties meant that Army officers were more open to assigning black replacements to white units. White units attempted to carry the fight to the enemy with their ranks depleted while several all-black units such as the 24th IR were bloated with more replacements than they knew how to handle. Combat necessity, the most demanding of all military criteria, required that officers take a step back from traditional allocation of manpower resources, particularly as it pertained to African American soldiers. The manpower crisis coupled with the continued complaints of black unit inferiority caused the Army to push integration further in the first six months of the Korean War than it had moved in the first two years after Truman's Order 9981.

It was after the first six months of the Korean War, even while the manpower crisis and complaints about the failures of the 24th IR and other segregated black units swirled in Korea, that a forceful leader emerged after the accidental death of General Walker, that leader was General Matthew Ridgway. General Ridgway was one of those larger than life individuals that proponents of "great men/women" history love to highlight. Besides turning around the morale of the 8th Army in general, and reversing the defeatist mentality of United Nation forces, Ridgway also utilized his position of authority to once and for all settle the issue of segregation versus integration for servicemen in Korea. After laying the groundwork to get his superiors at the Pentagon to back his position, on the three year anniversary of Truman's Order 9981, Ridgway announced that it was the policy of the U.S. Army in Korea that soldiers would no longer be segregated according to their race.

Ridgway's order was one of the defining moments not only of the Korean War, but the struggle by the African American community to garner their first truly decisive victory in the battle for civil rights. The United States Army, along with their sister services, had once and for all decided that the color of an individual's skin would make no difference on where that individual was assigned. Although the 24th IR was deactivated as a result of Ridgway's order, it was the sacrifices of the men of the 24 IR along with other segregated units in the Korean War that helped pave the way for the end of segregation.

The performance of the 24th IR, although badly maligned by certain segments of the military hierarchy, was truly a testament to the dedication and perseverance of the average African American soldier. The soldiers of the 24th IR and other segregated units in Korea continued to fight and stand-up for their rights against overwhelming odds and they deserve the lion share of credit for bringing an end to segregation in the U.S. Army.

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CMH	Center of Military History
GPO	Government Printing Office
DDEPL	Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library
HSTPL	Harry S. Truman Presidential Library

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