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RESEARCH PAPER

ON

THE INTEGRATION OF THE UNITED STATES

AIR FORCE

AT LOCKBOURNE AFB OHIO

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12 July 1995

PREFACE

The Air Force of the 1990s is currently operating in a smooth and harmonious manner. That wasn't always the case. At the end of W.W.II many sought to put an end to segregation in the military and civilian communities. There were numerous battles in Congress and the White House concerning this issue. Many Black Americans served in W.W.II in an outstanding manner. In fact, Black Americans have made significant contributions in nearly every major campaign of the United States. This research will look at the actions that lead up to integration of Black Americans in the United States Air Force. In particular, special attention will be paid to the major Negro Air Force Installation. Lockbourne Air Force Base, near Columbus, Ohio, was the focus of attention during the Integration Era. Here's how the Air Force led the way toward integration of the armed forces and created the opportunity for Blacks to serve faithfully.

INTRODUCTION

The integration of the Air Force was the result of numerous meetings, discussions, and confrontations. The subject of a segregated Air Force versus an integrated Air Force was at the height of American politics during the 1940s. Air Force Secretary Stuart Symington and other military and civilian personnel played major roles in the quest to integrate. This research will divide the integration of the Air Force into three time periods; Pre-Integration Era, Integration Era, and Post-Integration Era. There were significant events that took place in each era. This research was conducted to educate myself and others on the Air Force's process to integrated black airmen.

PRE-INTEGRATION ERA

During the late 1940s Lockbourne Army Air Base located in Columbus, Ohio was the major installation for black servicemen. It was soon to become the focus of the Air Force's effort to integrate. Lockbourne Army Air Base (the 332d Fighter Group) had proven itself effective during W.W.II. The 99th Pursuit Squadron and the 332d Fighter Group were the only two black air units that saw combat during W.W.II. (4:36) The 332d Fighter Group first saw combat in February 1944. Its most notable achievement was destruction of a German navy destroyer by fighter aircraft, a feat that had never before been accomplished. Moreover, it is reputed to have been the only bomber escort group never to lose a bomber to enemy fighters during the war. (4:38) They also received the Distinguished Unit Citation for a mission on 24 March 1945 when the group escorted B-17's during a raid on a tank factory in Berlin. They fought the interceptors that attacked the formation, and strafed transportation facilities while flying back to the base in Italy. In addition to the Distinguished Unit Citation the 332d Fighter Group earned approximately

1000 individual awards and decorations. (4:37) At the end of the war an effort was made in the Air Force to assign Negro pilots to Lockbourne, after a long and troublesome search for a base where an all-Negro unit would be acceptable. (16:2) From 1947 to 1949 the 332d at Lockbourne consisted of the 99th Pursuit Squadron, the 100th, and the 301st. (1:213) The 332d was established as the 332d Fighter Wing on 28 July 1947. Organized on 15 August 1947. Discontinued on 28 August 1948. Activated again on 26 August 1948. Inactivated on 1 July 1949. (14:178) The main function of the 332d Fighter Wing was firepower demonstrations, gunnery training, and operational missions to maintain combat proficiency. (14:177/8) The symbol of the 332d was an azure on a fess nebule or, a panther passant sable armed and incensed gules. Their motto was "SPIT FIRE." (14:179)

INTEGRATION

The effort towards integration actually began with the formulation of the Gillem Board. This was, "A board of officers (the Special Board on Negro Manpower headed by Lieutenant General Alvan C. Gillem Jr.), established to evaluate the performance of black soldiers." The Gillem Board concluded that "all Negro divisions gave the poorest performance of Negro troops," but spoke favorably of, "the performance of Negro Infantry platoons fighting in white companies." (3:26) During the five months of the study, the Gillem Board examined War Department practices and policies on Negro utilization through testimony of competent authorities, civilian and military, and through exhaustive examination of documents of primary and secondary importance. (16:4) The Gillem Board Report, made this statement in reference to policies concerning Negro manpower: They must be objective in nature. They must eliminate, at the earliest

practicable moment, any special consideration based on race. They should point toward the immediate objective of an evaluation of the Negro on the basis of individual merit and ability. They should point toward a long range objective which visualizes, over a period of time, a still greater utilization of this manpower potential in the military machine of the nation. (16:4) The Gillem Report concluded in 1946 that segregation was inefficient. (6:134) As it turned out, the Gillem Report led the way to postwar integration of the services, but when it was released in 1946 most black leaders condemned it as simply a different plan of segregation. The plan was never implemented. (6:134) It was however, an indication of things to come.

The work produced by the Gillem Board paved the way for the efforts of the Fahy Committee. On July 26, 1948, President Harry S. Truman issued an executive order, which declared to be the policy in the armed services without regard to race color religion, or national origin, and that promotions were to be based "solely on merit and fitness." (3:26) Executive Order 9981 also established the President's Committee on Equality of Treatment and Opportunity (chaired by Charles H. Fahy) to work with the secretary of defense and the service secretaries in implementing the Air Force's new policy. (3:26) Although the Fahy Committee was established in October 1948, the first meeting was not until January 1949. (7:114) When the Fahy Committee met for the first time it found that the Air Force favored integration and was prepared to promote a new policy that would end racial quotas, open all occupational specialties, and base promotion on personal merit and abilities alone. (3:27) The bottom line results of the Fahy Committee were that " Its presence ... served as a base for collecting quantitative data on Negro service... and finding and checking resistance to the Presidential order. In addition, "The presence of the

committee ... institutionalized Presidential interest in improving the status of Negro personnel within the Pentagon. (7:114) The Air Force was also moved by the proven inefficiency of segregation; the maintenance of two separate air forces, one black and one white, was impractical, an organizational nightmare, and wasteful. (6:138) After one meeting with the Fahy Committee, the Air Force submitted its plan for integration, which was approved on May 11 1948. it consisted of five points: (1) The break up of the major all-colored unit, the 332d fighter Group at Lockbourne Field; (2) Small Negro support units would be broken up as soon as possible; The 10 percent quota on enlistment would end; (4) Field commanders would be notified of the department's new policy and the desire to have it carried out; (5) The Air Force would closely follow the progress of integration. (15:45) Integration was about to happen. Here's how Lockbourne Air Force Base 's airmen were to be integrated and assigned throughout the Air Force.

Days after the announcement of the new policy, evaluation teams began interviewing the officers and enlisted men of Lockbourne's segregated 332d Fighter Group, administering tests to determine proficiency and aptitude. (12:239) The commander of the Continental Air Command would create a board of Lockbourne officers to screen those assigned to the All-black base. (9:499) The screening of officers and men at Lockbourne got under way on 17 May 1949. The board of officers under the leadership of Colonel Davis, the commander of Lockbourne, and representatives of Air Force headquarters, the Continental Air Command, and the Air Training Command, and important officers of Lockbourne, interviewed all the officers assigned to Lockbourne. (9:499) At the same time, a screening team in the Air Training Command gave a written examinations Lockbourne's more than 1,100 airmen and WAF's to determine if they were

in appropriate military specialties. (9:402) A team of personnel counselors interviewed all airmen, weighed test scores, past performances, qualifications outside of assigned specialty, and choices of career field, and then placed them in one of three categories. First, they could be earmarked for general reassignment in a specific military occupational specialty different from the one they were now in; second, they could be scheduled for additional or more advanced technical training; or third, they could be trained in their current specialties. (9:403) The black airmen of Lockbourne encountered some of the same problems that had bedeviled segregated organizations in World War I. Many of the enlisted men stationed at Lockbourne had fared poorly on the basic aptitude tests and could contribute little to the smooth functioning of an operational unit. (12:231/2) The screeners referred marginal or extraordinary cases to Colonel Davis's board for decision. (9:403) As it turned out many of Lockbourne's enlisted airmen tested in the two lowest groups, category IV and V. (9:397) By 25 July 1949, a full two months after the screening began, the Lockbourne board had recommended only 181 officers and 700 enlisted airmen to Air Force headquarters for new assignment. (9:403) When Lockbourne completed its evaluation, it recommended that 23 percent of its airmen be discharged, a percentage slightly higher than the Air Force average. Those evaluations of approximately 2,000 of the nearly 26,000 black in the Air Force-demonstrates that 1.35 percent were programmed for instructor duty, 19.6 percent were sent to technical school, 59.20 percent were retained in their current specialties, and 19.84 percent were scheduled for discharge. (7:121) The process of screening Lockbourne's troops was quickly completed, but the process of reassigning them was considerably more drawn-out. (9:403)

Lieutenant General Idwal E. Edwards, the new Air Force's Deputy Chief of Staff for Personnel, reviewed the policy of segregation for the new Air Force and concluded that maximum efficiency required that all Air Force personnel should be assigned on the basis of merit and ability, regardless of race. He faced bitter opposition to a policy of integration among Air Force officers, but General Edwards' willingness to support a change was reinforced by the first Secretary of the Air Force, Stuart Symington. (5:178) A December 1948 memorandum from General Edwards to Secretary of Defense Forrestal stated, "transfer qualified individuals from Lockbourne to appropriate assignments in other units, over a 12 month period. (2:7) Specific assignments were recommended for each airman and WAF. Personnel were declared to be "immediately available," "not available," or are to become available at a later date. The later two categories included those personnel needed at Lockbourne until mission involving the inactivation of the Fighter Wing were completed or who are being retained to maintain Lockbourne on standby status. (10:3) For many Negroes assigned to all-black bases for administrative purposes but serving on a day-to-day basis in integrated units, the change was relatively simple. These airmen had previously demonstrated their ability to perform their duties, and in conforming to the new order most commanders immediately assigned them to the units in which they were already working. (9:404) As of 31 October 1948 the Negro strength in the Air Force was 24,526 or 6.7 percent of the total and 296 officers, or .6 percent of the total strength. (13:) By December 1949 the Air Force had managed to integrate 1,253 units-over 18,489 black airmen had been reassigned. (9:404) Despite the announcement that some black units would be retained, practically all units were integrated by the end of the first year of the new program. (9:404) By the end of 1950, the Air Force had reduced the number of

black units to nine with 95 percent of its black airmen serving in integrated units. Some eighteen months later only one segregated unit was left, a 98 man outfit, itself more than 26 percent white. (Using the Air Staff's very restricted definition of a "Negro unit" that is, one whose strength was over 50 percent black, statistics show how radical was the change in just one year:) Negroes at this time were serving in 3,466 integrated units in the Air Force. (9:406/7) Of course these figures represent the Continental United States. There were some countries overseas that had difficulty with the assignment of black airmen to their countries. The state department did not specifically forbid the assignment of Negro personnel to any overseas areas, but stated that the governments concerned should first be queried before assigning Negroes to certain areas. (11:2) The areas of question were Iceland, Greenland, Canada, Newfoundland, Bermuda, and British possessions in the Caribbean area. The word from Assistant Secretary of the Air Force Eugene M. Zuckert was, " We plan to comply exactly with the State Department's letter (Air Force Letter 35-3). (11:2) When Negro personnel, through normal assignment procedures, come up for assignment to one of these areas, we will hold the assignment in abeyance and through the Secretary of Defense and the State Department, query the government concerned. (11:3) In time the issue of assignment of black airmen to those countries would be resolved. The integration of black airmen had some problems, but , for the most part it was successful.) When all was said and done the 332d Fighter Wing was inactivated on 1 July 1949. (8:2)

POST-INTEGRATION ERA

The Air Force showed that integration could be carried out easily, quickly, and painlessly. The success of the Air Force placed increased pressure on the other services to get the job done. ((6:138) Surprisingly, integration was swift and painless. It took five

years after the Fahy Committee reached its conclusions in 1950 before the armed services could announce that they were fully integrated. (6:137) The Air Force record was good and a definite prod to the other branches of the armed forces. The Fahy Committee commented favorably upon the Air Force's ability to integrate a large number of individuals (more than 20,000). The Air Force had demonstrated to itself, to the Fahy Committee, and by inference to the other services that blacks had a wider range of abilities than anybody had thought. (7:136) In a well publicized tour of a cross section of Air Force installations in early 1950, E.W. Kenworthy (Executive Secretary of the Fahy Committee) surveyed the integration program for the committee. His favorable report won the Air Force laudatory headlines in the national press and formed the core of the Air Force section of the Fahy Committee's final report, "Freedom to Serve." (9:408) Headlines were abound as news traveled about the success of the Air Force's integration. Dowdal H. Davis, president of the Negro Newspaper Publishers Association, reported on the highly encouraging reaction to the breakup of the 332d Fighter Group, and the headlines reflected this attitude: "The Air Force Leads the Way," The Chicago Defender headlined; "Salute to the Air Force," the Minneapolis Spokesman editorialized; and "the swiftest and most amazing upset of racial policy in the history of the U.S. Military," Ebony magazine concluded. Pointing to the Air Force program as the best, the Pittsburgh Courier called the Progress toward total integration "better than most dared hope. (9:408) This closes the successful Air Force policy to integrate black airmen.

CONCLUSION

In response to this significant event you would have to say that the Air Force set the example for the civilian sector when it came to integration of Black Americans. It makes

you extremely proud as a Black American in the Air Force that the Air Force was a leader in the fight for equal opportunity. There were many factors that occurred during all three eras that I chose not to address. I intentionally omitted racial incidents and other pressures blacks had to endure during the Integration and Post-Integration eras, however, they warrant attention. It is my intention to research those issues at a later time. The intent of this paper as I stated earlier is to inform those who did not know of the Air Force's willingness set the pace for integration and equality in our country. Serving as an active duty Air Force enlisted member for the past 18 years I really appreciate the efforts of those that flew before me. You've made my service to my country an easier experience. This paper shows that if given a chance Black Americans can perform at the highest levels. Let me leave you with a poem from the famous Black Poet Paul Lawrence Dunbar.

The Colored Soldier

In the early days you scorned them - And with many a flit and flout -
Said, these battles are the white men's - And the whites will fight them out.
Then you called the Colored Soldiers - And they answered to your call.
They were comrades then and brothers, - Are they more or less today.

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