

WAR DEPARTMENT
OFFICE OF THE UNDER SECRETARY
WASHINGTON, D.C.

July 3, 1942

MEMORANDUM

TO: Lt. Gen. H. H. Arnold, Commanding General,
Army Air Forces

The Aviation Squadron (Separate) is a special type of organization of the Army Air Forces established to accommodate colored soldiers in a situation in which some provision had to be made for their placement. There now exist somewhat less than 50 such units of 250 men each. The Air Forces plan to increase this number to more than 100 units aggregating more than 25,000 soldiers before the end of the year.

An Aviation Squadron (Separate) has no definite function. I am sure that the Inspector General, on the basis of inspections by Brig. Gen. B. O. Davis, will verify the fact that no one seems to know what these units are supposed to do. In fact, they do whatever odd jobs, usually of a housekeeping nature, the local commander can find for some extra men. A squadron at Barksdale Field, with defined functions in the work of the Bombardment school is the exceptional rather than the general case. Each commander is left to decide for himself how to use these troops, where to house them out of the way of the rest of his command, and what to do about improvising recreational facilities for them.

The following is a description of life in the 3rd and 11th Aviation Squadrons (Separate) as given in a letter of a soldier to a civilian who transmitted the communication to this office. While this office receives numerous complaints about these squadrons, the letter in question is so lucid and detailed, I quote it:

"The work of these aviation squadrons (sep.), according to Captain Campbell commanding officer of the 11th, shall be pick and shovel work on air fields. Major McReady, formerly Captain and commanding officer of the 3rd describes them as equivalent to the labor battalions of the first

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World War. The definitions of these officers are obvious efforts to describe a function which is not so clear.

"For the months of April and May of this year the 11th was stationed at Hunter Field. During that time a portion of the men were employed as base guards. About thirty men drawn from the 11th and 3rd composed a hangar detail. Though some of them had qualified as mechanics they were all employed to lift and clean rather than do technical work on the planes. A white civilian, and a white soldier on probation from the guard house bossed the "Colonels detail", a group of Negro soldiers who picked rubbish and shoveled sand at the base. Still other soldiers in these "aviation squadrons" the 11th and the 3rd, had regular jobs as janitors at the base headquarters building and at the post theatre. We were employed at random for menial jobs; no one could be quite sure of our purpose.

"Though the standard drill period for aviation troops lasts eighteen days, in the absence of any real work Negro aviation troops drill to pass the time. They do close order drill without arms, they do parade movements of no use in combat. But parading cannot be their function. On Army Day the 11th and the 3rd marched in Savannah without arms and at the end of the parade behind the city garbage trucks. Our basic training is continuous but never complete. Most of us have never shot any army rifle.

"Some few of the soldiers in the 11th are recruits, some were drawn from the quartermaster corps, some from the medical corps, some from the engineers. Many have over a year's service. All of them, however long their period of service, still spend each day doing right and left face. Some are illiterate, some have college training. None of them whatever their background, have received specialized training since they became members of this organization.

"Local variance pertains in the matter of living conditions and treatment. Negro soldiers at Hunter Field live in tents about four miles from the base. Most of the white soldiers live in barracks on the base. The chapel, the post theatre, the library, the recreation hall, and the service club are not for Negro use. A barber shop and canteen have recently been constructed in the Negro tent area.

"While discrimination at Hunter Field is consistent, glaring instances of it are not to be ignored. The treatment of Negro soldiers at the base hospital is a case in point. Ward No. 2 is a Negro ward. It is quarantined, in a careless way, for it must contain all Negro patients, those with contagious diseases included. Customarily those patients who are able sweep and mop the floor each day. On the morning of May the twentieth the out patients of the ward completed their chore as usual. At about four in the afternoon the white ward boy ordered them to sweep and mop again. They refused. The ward boy left and returned with a technical sergeant who went to the bed of Cpl. Miller of the 827 Engineers and ordered Cpl. Miller who protested, "Guy, I'm not supposed to work. I've had an operation." Opening the flap of his holster the sergeant gripped the butt of his pistol. The ward boy snatched back the covers to reveal two unhealed incisions in the abdomen of Cpl. Miller. On seeing the wound the technical sergeant snarled, "Well, that's the only reasons why you don't have to get up. Boy, I want you to understand that when you're ordered to do something you do it! If it wasn't for that operation you'd be working like the rest of them." He then ordered Pvt. Dandridge up, contrary to doctor's orders. Only the interceding of the captain in charge saved these patients from possible injury.

"At Morris Field there are about three hundred and ninety Negro soldiers. They occupy one barracks and a little cluster of tents just outside the base enclosure. A latrine containing ten toilets, ten showers, and sixteen wash basins provides the only

toilet facilities. Until recently one mess hall capable of seating eighty-eight served them all. Now the 11th, a company of about one hundred and thirty, has set up its own mess hall in a tent house that will seat forty-eight.

"Special regulations discourage Negro soldiers from entering the base proper. They are informed that they can trade in the post exchange only after five thirty P.M. White soldiers trade there all day. Special services are held for the Negro soldiers at the chapel. Only twenty seats are available for them at the post theater."

If more information is deemed necessary, I believe reports on the experience of all commanders in the functioning and accommodation of these units should be requested. In addition, or as an alternative, an Inspector General's investigation of a few typical units, for example the 3rd and the 11th Aviation Squadrons (sep.) mentioned in the above quoted letter, would serve more completely to develop the picture of what the utilization, housing, and special services program of these units has been to date and would at the same time provide an appraisal of their military value.

It seems to me that several courses of action merit consideration. In some instances two of these squadrons could be combined into one of the new air base defense units. Others might be combined into engineering or ordnance units, or other types of organization which have some useful function in the expanding Air Forces. In addition, the utilization of men with technical training or aptitude in tactical squadrons might properly be authorized as more men are needed in such functions. It is only to the extent that substantial need for these squadrons is established and defined that retention of any of them in their present form seems justified.

The foregoing proposals are but suggestive of possible courses of action. It is believed that more specific recommendations for more effective utilization of these units can be made only by those who know the types of units for which there is increasing need in the expanding program of the Air Forces.

/s/ WILLIAM H. HASTIE
Civilian Aide to the Secretary
of War

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YWHN:NOW
Extension 2431-4972

July 1, 1942.

MEMORANDUM

TO: The Secretary of the General Staff

At the Army Air Base near Tuskegee, construction and operation plans embrace separate messing and housing facilities for colored and white officers and separate eating facilities for white and colored civilian personnel. The Tuskegee project designed for the training of Negroes is certainly a place where there is not even color of justification for such separation. If the white members of the command desire such separation they are not adapted to the job at hand. If the soldiers themselves are to respect all officers regardless of color, they must observe identity of treatment accorded to white and colored officers in matters of official policy. This situation is already serious and may become acute.

At Fort Huachuca and at other stations to which Negro officers will be assigned during the months to come the same problem will probably arise unless War Department policy is made clear.

It is strongly urged, therefore, that a formal policy be established and announced: (1) that wherever colored and white officers are serving with the same organization no separation of accommodations and facilities shall be made on a racial basis; (2) that among civilian employees of like status at Army posts, no racial distinction shall be made in the utilization of facilities provided for the convenience of the employees.

*Hastie's
objectives*Civilian Aide to the Secretary
of War.