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Benjamin O. Davis Jr. Collection - President's Committee on Equality of Treatment and Opportunity in the Armed Services (4)

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The Army could treat the Negro soldier like any other individual, assigning him solely on the basis of ability and Army need without any attempt at segregation because of race or color. Or the Army could attempt to create a separate Negro army which would have the same variety of units and require the same range of skills as the white army.

The Gillem Board decided on the second alternative. It decided that segregation must be maintained; and therefore, if the Negro soldier were to be used according to his individual capacity, Negro units must be created which would conform in general to white units.

Having made this basic decision to segregate the Negro soldier and make him the subject of special treatment, the Gillem Board was compelled to make several consequent recommendations. In the first place, it was doubtful whether the Army could actually form from the 10 percent Negro component the same variety of units as could be formed from the 90 percent white component, especially since the abilities and skills of the Negro soldiers, as a group, did not parallel those of the white soldiers as a group. Therefore, the Gillem Board proposed that individually qualified Negroes be assigned freely to overhead units as well as to regularly organized Negro units. An overhead unit is a post housekeeping detail which performs the duties connected with the administration of an Army base. Negroes assigned to overhead units, the Gillem Board planned, would work with whites on a "duty interspersal" basis, but would have their own segregated messes, barracks, and dayrooms. By opening up overhead installations to Negroes, the Board hoped to provide job opportunities for those whose skills might not be used in regular Negro units.

In the second place, if the Negro soldier were to be considered a special case, then it was necessary that some agency be charged

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