

Primary Source: Black Soldiers on Racial Discrimination in the Army ^[1]

Below are excerpts of an interviews between black men who served in the American Army during World War II like William Perry and interviewers like Maggi Morehouse.

Racial discrimination in the Army

Morehouse

So what about the other thing, Double V, Victory at Home and Victory Abroad. Victory at home so that you could, you know, push for your rights at home and then Victory Abroad?

Perry

I think [Du Bois] always loved about pushing your rights, but I never, some of the things you just, you never envisioned it, some things were going to happen. And, uh, some things you accepted that this is fact, because this the way it's always been. And they'd always had Negro units and white units and you always thought you were going to get the short end of the stick with a black unit because that's just the way life was. And I thought it would be better, quite frankly, I thought the Army would try to really live up to a separate but equal thing. You know, when we went there. And some of the things they said at first when they saw this guy, this black Major Beezly, you know, and you didn't realize then that he really didn't have no authority of nothing. He's just a preacher. And, uh, then you saw, you didn't see Almond. We see these guys once in awhile. And then you begin to learn something about them and their background. See all three of the Commanders were from VMI [Virginia Military Institute], Almond, Woods and Coleman, they graduated with the VMI. Well, this, you begin to find that this is the theory the Army has. And, uh, I really found out, my first real experience, I got sick about two weeks after I was [?]. And I was in the hospital. I had a caught a flu or pneumonia ^[2] or something. And they had me bedridden the first week and they brought my food to me. And I didn't, you don't really ever think about these things. All the people in the hospital, of course they white, the nurses and everybody. And they brought your food and everything. Everybody treated you, you know, you didn't receive anything. So after the first week they said, 'Okay, you can get up, you can go on down to the mess hall and get your food.' So I got up and I went on, bouncing down to the mess hall and I got there, there might have been half a dozen or so black guys, they were standing there. I started going in and the guy tapped me, and said, 'Where are you going?' I said, 'They told me to come on down and eat.' He said, 'Well, you can't go in there and eat now. You gotta wait until the white guys finish.' And that was the first that really, like somebody slapped me in the face. You know. I had never experienced anything like that. And it's like somebody pulled a veil down, you know, begin to take a whole look at the whole situation after that.

A "troubleshooter" for black troops

Reuben Horner interviewed by Maggi Morehouse.

Horner

I left to go to RG 7th army headquarters RG as a troubleshooter for black troops in the 7 states that the 7th army... I was visiting the various posts. *[Deleted]* who held the job previous to me had set up a pretty good network of information through black chaplains on these posts. Club hostesses and so forth and ministers in those areas. When there was a large complaint or a number of complaints the orders were cut ordering me to the to this particular post. In other words I investigated the sources and analyzed the extent of the so called complaint and so forth. As one example at Fort Jackson, North Carolina they were having a lot of trouble. Naturally the complaints came in and I was sent down there. *[Deleted]* at the post according to headquarters and the *[deleted]* took me in to introduce me to the post commander. He was very nasty. He wanted to know what I was doing there and why. So I said sir you've been informed by letter preceding my visit stating the purpose of my visit. He says I never received any letter. But I had an open line or access to the 7th army commander a General Bush who was an armored officer and had supported my unit in Italy at one time. He welcomed me aboard very much and I did show up with my well he had read my awards and everything. He just discussed them and he evidently like took quite a liking to me. Anyways the this colonel ordered me off of the post. So I asked if I had permission to use his phone. He gave me the phone. I guess he thought I was going to call in for transportation. But I call headquarters in Atlanta we were headquarters at that time of the 7th army was in Atlanta right in the heart of Atlanta. I got in touch with General Bush and he asked what's going on? I said, "I'm having a rough time down here." I said, "I've just been ordered off of a post." He says, "what?" I said, "yes." He says, "Who ordered you off the post?" I said, "The commanding officer here Colonel *[Deleted]*." He says, "Is he there?" I say, "yes sir." He says, "Put him on." As the conversation with the colonel went on and the colonel got redder and redder. His face never... yes sir yes sir yes sir! So he said, "I'm sorry. We misplaced your letter and we weren't expecting you."

So he told a his adjutant to take me to where I would be billeted. Where I was to be billeted was his service room the

recreation room of one of the black organizations there. In the day room of one of the black organizations there. So when he said that I said I will not accept billeting in anybody's day room. I said you have guest quarters here where officers who like myself are here on official business. I said I will not accept such billets. So he told me off. I said I thought you wanted to be close to your troops. I said I want accommodations that befitted my rank and the services that went with it which includes a staff car and driver. So that ended that. And I came back.

When that was happening and some of the things that were happening were there was blacks were not permitted in certain sections of the post as an example. They were not permitted to catch the buses into town at the regular bus station on the post. Their laundry was not done in the laundry but given to colored families to do the laundry for the blacks. The sheets and so forth like that in the billets. Segregation in the theater. Civilians were permitted to attend the movies on the post but the black families were limited to just a few seats in the rear of the theater. The men instead of having suntans... this was in the summer... instead of having suntans were still in with hot heavy ODs. The chaplain was not permitted to give the soldiers and their families spiritual help or guidance. The service club was just a pigpen. So in my official report when I got back I reported all of this. I also gave a verbal report where General Bush and I sat down and we discussed. He says, "What is your opinion?" I said, "It seems to me that the command there is still living in the days of slavery. He treats the blacks just like they were slaves." And I said, "and to me the whole bunch of them if you want to know are bigots." He was very upset about how rude he was, this colonel. *[Deleted]* was with me. Colonel *[Deleted]* was incidentally within two weeks was relieved of his post command there.

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Black servicemen undertaking railway construction in Britain in 1943. Black troops were extensively employed in Britain to carry out manual roles, like truck driving and catering, for the US Forces. Image courtesy and copyright of [Imperial War Museums](#) [19].

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