

FORT BRAGG, NONCOMMISSIONED OFFICERS' SERVICE

LUB

South of Butner Road

Fort Bragg

Cumberland County

North Carolina

HABS NC-397-C

NC-397-C

HABS

NC-397-C

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

SOUTHEAST REGIONAL OFFICE

National Park Service

U.S. Department of the Interior

100 Alabama St. NW

Atlanta, GA 30303

## HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

### FORT BRAGG, NONCOMMISSIONED OFFICERS' SERVICE CLUB

HABS No. NC-397 - C

Location: South of Butner Road, Fort Bragg, Cumberland County, North Carolina  
USGS Spring Lake, North Carolina, United States Quadrangle,  
Universal Transverse Mercator Coordinates: Zone 17  
Northing 3892400  
Easting 683600

Present Owner: Department of Defense  
Department of the Army  
Fort Bragg

Original Use: African American Noncommissioned Officers' Service Club And Guest House

Present Use: Vacant

Significance: The Noncommissioned Officers' Service Club Complex at Fort Bragg is a contributing part of an eligible Fort Bragg historic district for the National Register of Historic Places. Built right after World War II (WWII) but utilizing WWII building plans for temporary buildings, the two buildings served the 555<sup>th</sup> Parachute Infantry Battalion. The Army was still segregated at this time, and the 555<sup>th</sup> or "Triple Nickles" was the African American contingent. The Service Club Complex was at the southwestern part of the segregated African American area of Fort Bragg. The two buildings are also physically unique at Fort Bragg. The WWII temporary buildings plans called for wood for the construction, yet these two buildings were constructed out of concrete block with structural concrete block buttresses strengthening the walls. All other Fort Bragg WWII temporary buildings were constructed out of wood, and only one other building at Fort Bragg utilized this concrete block construction with buttresses.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History

1. Date of Erection: 1945 and 1946
2. Architect: Not Known
3. Original and Subsequent Owners: Department of the Army, Fort Bragg
4. Builder, contractor, suppliers: Not Known
5. Original plans and construction: The actual construction plans for the two buildings could not be located during the research investigation. The plans for the mass-produced service club temporary building (8-6813) were located. Several subsequent maintenance and renovation plans were also located. No mass-produced guest house temporary building plans (8-6811) were located; however, several maintenance and renovation plans were located.
6. Alterations and additions: The buildings have been repeatedly altered through the years. Primarily these alterations have been to the interior configuration of rooms, but the Service Club did receive new windows at an undetermined date and the original screened porch was converted to offices at an undetermined date.

B. Historical Context: African American Noncommissioned Officers' Service Club TC-1 (8-6813) and Guest House TC-3 (8-6811)

1. Introduction

Early in 1945, the United States War Department was confident that the long, horrific, world war would soon end. Army planners began to make preparations for postwar demobilization and transformation to a peacetime Army. As part of this planning, Fort Bragg was chosen as one of the installations that would be retained as a permanent post-war installation. This was good news for both the installation and nearby Fayetteville, North Carolina. Still, dramatic changes were planned on the post, including the mothballing of many of the 2,877 buildings constructed as temporary buildings for WWII. Where some 159,000 soldiers and civilians were housed and trained in 1943, by 1946 these buildings would stand empty.<sup>1</sup> However, some additional construction was also planned. Among the new buildings approved for construction in June of 1945 were two small cinderblock buildings that were to provide segregated recreational outlets for African American soldiers in the postwar era.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> M. Ruth Little, National Register Nomination Form, Fort Bragg Main Post, (Raleigh: Longleaf Historic Resources, 1996), p. 40.

<sup>2</sup> Letter of Major V. M. Robertson, Chief, Athletic & Recreation Branch, Army Service Forces, to Commanding General, Fourth Service Command, Atlanta, Georgia, 14 March 1946 (National Archives II, College Park, Maryland: RG 107 Records of the Secretary of War, Entry 188, Judge Hastie and Truman Gibson Files, Box 241).

Today, such buildings would be unnecessary and the very idea of racially segregated buildings abhorred. But during WWII, indeed in all American conflicts prior to WWII, Army policy was informed by a public posture of racial segregation. African American soldiers had been organized, trained, and housed in separate facilities apart from white soldiers since the Civil War.<sup>3</sup> Post WWII policy was expected to be no different. So when the post decided that the old segregated Service Club No. 5 would be converted into a personnel center for the post-war Army, a new service club and guest house were needed for the African American soldiers expected to be stationed at the installation. As will be seen, the new buildings, numbered 8-6813 and 8-6811, had a short life as segregated recreational facilities for the exclusive use of African Americans. President Truman mandated full integration of the Armed Services through Executive Order No. 9981 in 1948. While this order did not end segregation immediately—the last segregated unit in the Army was not integrated until 1954—the use of these buildings as segregated recreational facilities probably ended much sooner; around 1951. From that time until 2001, the buildings were used as a noncommissioned officers' club and administrative offices. Now, the buildings are targeted for removal in order to make way for a new communications building. The loss of these buildings brings about the purpose of this report.

In 1966, the National Historic Preservation Act (16 U.S.C. 470 et seq., as amended through 2001) recognized the importance of preserving buildings, sites, and objects, collectively called cultural resources, significant to our national heritage. This act, and its subsequent regulations, require the Army to inventory, preserve, and manage the cultural resources on its property that have been found to contribute to an understanding of America's past. When preservation of historic buildings cannot be accomplished, it is acceptable to fully record and document these resources prior to their destruction. Part of that documentation is a historic context statement for the buildings. Historic contexts provide a background and understanding of a particular resource's setting within the larger framework of American history. The following historic context for buildings 8-6813 and 8-6811 place the buildings within the larger history of Fort Bragg. Although not much is recorded about the buildings themselves, nor are great events known to have occurred within these two buildings, their small contribution to the daily lives of soldiers at that time is important to the history of the Fort Bragg and the African American military experience.

This historic context is organized as follows. The first section provides a general statement of American military policy regarding the training of African Americans during WWII, with special reference to activities and training of African American soldiers at Fort Bragg. The second section looks at African American soldiers at Fort Bragg during the war including training challenges and racial incidents. The third section looks at WWII and post-war Army policies concerning recreational facilities for African

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<sup>3</sup> Segregation policies prior to the Civil War were more complex and changed depending on times of war or peace and type of service. Blacks might be integrated into the ranks, excluded from the ranks, or formed into segregated units. See Steven D. Smith and James A. Zeidler, editors, *A Historic Context for the African American Military Experience*, Department of Defense, Legacy Resource Management Program (Champaign, Illinois: U.S. Army Construction Engineering Research Laboratories, 1998).

American troops, again with special reference to Fort Bragg, and with a focus on the two buildings constructed at the end of the war. A final section describes the activities of African American soldiers at Fort Bragg during the post war period from 1946 to around 1952, the period during which the buildings were used exclusively by African American soldiers. Some background is also provided concerning the units that were at Fort Bragg and participated in the Korean Conflict.

## 2. African Americans And the Mobilization for a World War<sup>4</sup>

The mobilization and training of millions of young men and women during WWII was a Herculean task that has been overlooked by historians who usually focus on the equally Herculean task of massive combat abroad. The challenges facing Army planners, the construction of new and upgrading of older installations, drafting and assigning men and women, transporting them across a vast nation, training them for an unknown kind of war of unparalleled geography and scale makes the mind boggle. At another level, the shock that these men and women experienced—uprooted from their homes and sent to strange new places—was something from which they never fully recovered. The sheer vastness of the mobilization effort left much room for mistakes, miscalculations and misunderstandings at every level. For everyone involved it was a time of tension, sacrifice, and wonder. For African Americans, and those involved in turning them into soldiers, the added challenge of years of prejudicial treatment and inequality made for an even higher level of tension and mixed emotions. At every military post and station across the land, African Americans encountered face to face, the consequences of that inequality. Fort Bragg's racial situation at the beginning of the war was no different than at any other installation. However, as will be seen, if such mistreatment can be measured and compared objectively, it would appear that Bragg escaped many of the larger problems and incidents that plagued other posts.

After World War I (WWI) the Regular Army was severely reduced in size. By around 1935 it had an enlisted strength of only 165,000. This core of professionals was supplemented by National Guard and a small reserve, and later by the quasi-military Civilian Conservation Corps, including some 9,300 reserve officers. But on the whole the Regular Army was seriously undermanned.<sup>5</sup> Mobilization had been studied and various plans adopted since the end of WWI, but Japan's invasion of China in 1937 and Hitler's seizure of Czechoslovakia in 1939 made a future war inevitable. Army planners recognized that in order to train massive numbers of volunteers and draftees, the old system whereby a soldier reported to and trained within a Regular Army unit could not be

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<sup>4</sup> Portions of this section were originally prepared for a study of a black officers' club at Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri, and a history of African Americans Soldiers at Fort Huachuca, Arizona. See Steven D. Smith, *A Historic Context Statement for a World War II Era Black Officers' Club at Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri*, for the U.S. Army Construction Engineering Research Laboratories and The Legacy Resource Management Program (Columbia, South Carolina: South Carolina Institute of Archaeology and Anthropology, 1998), pp. 9-15; Steven D. Smith, *The African American Soldier at Fort Huachuca, 1892-1946*, for Fort Huachuca and the Center for Expertise for Preservation of Structures and Buildings, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Seattle, Washington (Columbia South Carolina: South Carolina Institute of Archaeology and Anthropology, 2001).

<sup>5</sup> *American Military History 1607-1958*, ROTCM 145-20, Department of the Army, ROTC Manual (Washington, D.C.: Headquarters, Department of the Army, 1959), pp. 361-372.

accomplished. Large numbers of replacements would be needed, both fillers (to fill new units) and loss replacements (to replace casualties). To meet the demands of inducting, processing, training, and organizing these thousands of men and women, the Pentagon developed a different system. The concept was to establish different stations for each step in the induction and training process before assigning an individual to a new unit, or shipping that individual overseas to replace a casualty. Draftees would be initially processed at an induction station, and then transported to a large training facility that concentrated on basic soldier skills. After that training, the soldier was assigned to a particular tactical unit. The basic system began with an inductee reporting to an induction center where preliminary tests were given to determine his or her mental fitness and then he or she was shipped to a reception center. The job of the reception center was to determine the draftee's best military specialty. The AGCT was administered and interviews conducted. The draftees were then sent to either service schools or replacement centers for military training.<sup>6</sup> Here the new recruit would begin his or her military career and enter the replacement stream. This process might find the draftee suddenly separated from his home and family.<sup>7</sup> That shocking experience happened to thousands of young draftees; however, the men who arrived at Fort Bragg were more fortunate as it had its own Induction Center, Reception Center and was the site of the Field Artillery Replacement Training Center. Many draftees arrived there to stay until they completed basic training and were assigned a tactical unit. Upon graduation from the replacement center some even had the luck to fill a unit at Fort Bragg rather than being shipped to another location for advanced training.

This system was constantly reinvented and tweaked in an attempt to meet the demands of a dynamic war. The problems today seem insurmountable. At the beginning of the war, for instance, facilities were not yet constructed at the new training centers like Fort Bragg and men arrived to find their new homes would be merely tents. Many men who did well in basic became cadre for the thousands of others that arrived after them. In the beginning of the war most of the men became fillers for new units; then as the war continued more replacements were needed than fillers. While this problem seems simple, in a large bureaucracy, it wasn't. Infantry divisions took the greatest casualties so they soon needed the greatest number of replacements. To fill the Infantry's needs, a soldier's AGCT score was irrelevant. Further, soldiers already trained in one specialty were assigned to the infantry and shipped overseas. Other problems, including housing shortages, delayed training cycles. Through trial and error, the Army learned that the basic training program consisting of eight weeks needed to be lengthened. These issues and countless others just begin to describe the problems—and whatever solution was attempted, the result of a

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<sup>6</sup> For more detail about replacement policies see, Lt. Col. Leonard L. Lerwill, *The Personnel Replacement System in the United States Army* (Washington, D.C.: Center for Military History, 1952).

<sup>7</sup> Although the goal was to train all draftees in replacement training centers, the lack of facilities at the various replacement centers combined with the needs for more soldiers caused Army planners to revise the training program in December 1941—fillers had to be sent directly from the reception centers, see Robert S. Hoyt and Christopher A. Pope, *The History of the Replacement and School Command, Period of World War II, From Activation, 9 March 1942 to 1 September 1945*, Studies in the History of the Army Ground Forces No. 32 (1946), pp. 1-7, RG 337 Records of the Headquarters, Army Ground Forces, Entry 413, Box 10 (College Park, Maryland: National Archives II).

change did not become clear until eight and later thirteen or fourteen weeks after the change—the time involved in completing a basic training cycle.

Yet another seemingly insurmountable piece of the puzzle was how to incorporate African Americans into this system. From today's perspective, the answer was full integration within the ranks, thereby solving a host of interrelated issues having to do with the African American soldier. However, societal attitudes were not going to allow that to happen in the first half of the twentieth century. So along with planning the mobilization for the next war, the Army also had to plan how the African American soldier would fit into any mobilization plans. This planning, like that of the larger issue of mobilization, began as early as the end of WWI. Then the Army actually had two major concerns regarding African American troops. The first was—what was the place of the African American soldier in the rapidly shrinking peacetime Army? The second was how would African Americans be used in future mobilization?

In attempting to answer these two questions, the Army unfortunately turned to its immediate past experience in the Great War. This limited perspective ignored the positive contributions of African American soldiers during the nineteenth century, including their bravery during the Civil War and the enduring service of African American soldiers at frontier posts in the West. Colonel Charles Ballou, commander of the all-black 92nd Infantry Division in WWI and an influential spokesman on the subject, arrogantly dismissed this record proclaiming that the use of African American soldiers during the Civil War and in the western campaigns was “not instructive.”<sup>8</sup> Instead, the Army turned to its immediate experience with the two all African American divisions in WWI in order to set future official policy on African American troop employment, and focused mostly on the experiences of white commanding officers in the 92nd.<sup>9</sup> Indeed, the testimony of white commanders in the 92nd provided the bulk of both the opinions received by the War Department and the answers to questionnaires sent out by the Army War College. This testimony was overwhelmingly negative, concluding that the 92nd Division was a failure.

True, on the surface the 92nd's combat record pointed directly to such a conclusion; the division's performance in the Meuse-Argonne Offensive and in the Marbache Sector during WWI was uneven at best.<sup>10</sup> But the division's failure should have been evident in its organic composition rather than the men's skin color. The 92nd consisted of draftees

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<sup>8</sup> Colonel C.C. Ballou to Assistant Commandant, General Staff College, "Use to be Made of Negroes in the U.S. Military Service," 14 March 1920, in Morris J. MacGregor and Bernard C. Nalty, editors, *Blacks in the United States Armed Forces, Basic Documents, Volume IV, Segregation Entrenched* (Wilmington, Delaware: Scholarly Resources, Inc., 1977), p. 321.

<sup>9</sup> Ulysses Lee, *The Employment of Negro Troops*, United States Army In World War II, Special Studies, (Washington: Office of the Chief of Military History, United States Army, 1966), p. 16. This classic study, and the following other works were used in the development of this section: Bernard C. Nalty, *Strength For the Fight* (New York: The Free Press, 1986); Morris J. MacGregor, Jr., *Integration of the Armed Forces 1940-1965* (Washington: Center of Military History, United States Army, 1981); Steven D. Smith and James A. Zeidler, editors, *A Historic Context For the African American Military Experience*, Department of Defense, Legacy Resource Management Program (Champaign, Illinois: Construction Engineering Research Laboratories, 1998).

<sup>10</sup> Keith Krawczynski, "Chapter 6, World War I," in Smith and Zeidler, editors, *Historic Context*, p. 237.

who never trained as a division in the United States. Some 40 percent of the men were illiterate and many were drafted despite being physically unfit.<sup>11</sup> In France, the division was given inadequate preparation for trench warfare, some only a few hours. Their initial duties and training had consisted of police duty and unloading cargo. Meanwhile, the 92nd's staff officers were being shuffled in and out constantly, eliminating any opportunity to build unit cohesion. When ordered to the front, the 92nd marched without rifle-grenades, wire cutters, and even in some cases without maps. Poorly equipped and led by green, inexperienced officers, its performance was predictable. And yet, despite this neglect, some 92nd units earned awards and citations. General John J. Pershing even remarked that the 92nd's record stood "second to none." But 2nd Army Commander General Robert Bullard's comments became the standard—"Poor Negroes," he wrote in his memoirs, "they are hopelessly inferior."<sup>12</sup> Bullard was not alone in his assessment, white officers complained that black troops dawdled in combat and showed cowardice.<sup>13</sup>

Meanwhile, the Army practically ignored the 92nd's sister division, the 93rd. This division's performance painted a different picture. During WWI, the 93rd was filled with members of National Guard units from New York, Illinois, Ohio, Maryland, Tennessee, Connecticut, Massachusetts, and the District of Columbia. Only one regiment was filled with draftees. The critical difference between the 92nd and the 93rd was that in France the 93rd was put under French Army command. Desperate for manpower, the French Army and people warmly welcomed these African American reinforcements. The French reorganized the division along their own designs and provided its African American regiments with French equipment. Furthermore, the division was given orientation time and training in trench warfare before being thrown into the frontline. Practically across the board, the regiments of the 93rd performed well, and the 369th and 371st regimental records were simply outstanding. The 369th was on the front lines for 191 days, five days longer than any other regiment in the American Expeditionary Force. They never lost a foot of ground, and essentially bled to death in the trenches before finally being pulled from the front. France awarded the entire unit the Croix de Guerre. The 371st was also awarded the Croix de Guerre, with palm, for their performance. Three officers of the 371st won the French Legion of Honor, 123 men won individual Croix de Guerre medals, and 26 won the Distinguished Service Cross.<sup>14</sup> However, back in post-war America, the 93rd's record was ignored and the 92nd's ineffective record stood as the standard measure

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<sup>11</sup> Lieutenants W.N. Colson and A.B. Nutt, "The Failure of the Ninety-Second Division," *The Messenger*, September (1919): 22-25.

<sup>12</sup> Pershing quoted in Emmett J. Scott, *Scott's Official History of the American Negro in the World War* (New York: Arno Press, reprint 1969, original 1919), p. 167. Bullard quote from Lee, *Employment*, p. 15. Bullard was a reputed racist and further his memoirs were written to discredit his personal rival, General Charles C. Ballou, commander of the 92nd. See Arthur E. Barbeau and Florette Henri, *The Unknown Soldiers: Black American Troops in World War I* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1974), pp. 139-140.

<sup>13</sup> see Ballou, "Use to be Made of Negroes"; Lieutenant Colonel Allen J. Greer to Assistant Commandant, General Staff College, "Use to be Made of Negroes in the U.S. Military Service," 13 April 1920, in Morris J. MacGregor and Bernard C. Nalty, editors, *Blacks in the United States Armed Forces*, p. 329; Major General W. H. Hay to Colonel Greer, 13 April 1919, in Morris J. MacGregor and Bernard C. Nalty, editors, *Blacks in the United States Armed Forces*, p. 331.

<sup>14</sup> Krawczynski, in Smith and Zeidler, editors, *Historic Context*, p. 218.

of African American combat performance, including that of their African American officers who were accused of a lack of initiative and cowardice.

Thus, the conclusions drawn from WWI were: 1) the African American soldier was an inferior soldier who required more intensive training than the white recruit; 2) African Americans were not disposed towards aggressive combat; and however, 3) led by white officers, they could be useful in labor units and at unskilled jobs. The African American officer was a decided failure. Still they had to be used. The black press was clamoring for their participation in the peacetime army, and re-enlistment by African American veterans was enthusiastic. Amazingly, after concluding that African American soldier performance was below par, the War Department's Operations and Training Section final 1922 plan began with an enlightened, realistic perspective on the future use of African Americans in the military. In precise, clear language, the War Department addressed the military realities:

Briefly, these [military realities] are: that the Negro is a citizen of the United States, entitled to all of the rights of citizenship and subject to all of the obligations of citizenship; that the Negro constitutes an appreciable part of our military manhood; that while not the best military material, he is by no means the worst; that no plan of mobilization for the maximum effort can afford to ignore such a fraction of the manhood, especially in these times when war makes demands upon the physical defectives and the women; and finally, that in a democracy such as ours political and economic conditions must be considered, and that decision must rest upon these two considerations.<sup>15</sup>

Furthermore, although it was modified and amended more than once, the fundamentals of the 1922 plan stood until 1938—and even then influenced the 1940 final pre-plan as mobilization began. The 1922 plan concluded that African American soldiers should operate in smaller units than the divisions used in WWI. Generally, according to the perceived wisdom of that time, blacks worked well in regiments or smaller units attached to a white unit. African Americans would definitely have to be used in combat in the future. The plan stated that as far as combat material went, about half the African Americans in WWI were effective. The plan recognized that it also had to filter through white draftees to find suitable combat material. Some frank statements and recommendations concerning African American officers were made also. It openly admitted that African American officers performed well under the French. Further, it asserted that African American soldiers were best led by white officers, but that qualified African American officers could be found, and that African Americans could not be expected to serve and do their best if they were not offered the incentive of promotion within the officer corps. The solution to the officer problem was to hold African

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<sup>15</sup> Lee, *Employment*, pp. 32-33.

American candidate officers to the same standard as the Army held white candidates and let the best rise to the top.

This enlightened attitude did not extend very far beyond the Pentagon, however, and while mobilization was simply a planning problem, the reality of African Americans in the shrinking Army was more pressing in 1922. Congress had created the four all-black regiments after the Civil War and these regiments could not be disbanded. But with four black regiments swelling the post war ranks, it left the service with the very real and distasteful possibility of having a larger number of African Americans than whites in its post-war Army. One quick solution to the possibility of a disproportionate number of African Americans in the Army was to immediately and severely cut back African American enlistment. Meanwhile the Army began reducing the all-black regiments to mere token size. During the 1920s, the once proud all black regiments barely survived. Only at Fort Huachuca did African American soldiers survive in any form of cohesive unit or receive combat training.<sup>16</sup> African American enlistment was, for all practical purposes, limited to those all-black National Guard units in New York, Massachusetts, Maryland, Illinois, New Jersey, and the District of Columbia. For an African American man to enter the Regular Army, he had to find an installation with a vacancy, apply to the base commander, and if accepted, get to the post at his own expense. Such opportunities were sparse. Further, these conditions would have been difficult in Depression-weary America for anyone, and for African Americans they were a formidable challenge. The result was that by 1930, the combined African American complement in the Regular Army and Army National Guard was only two percent of the total Army population. As far as the Regular Army goes, a 1934 report indicates that at that time, there were only 2,954 African American enlisted men (of a total 140,396), none of them stationed at Fort Bragg.<sup>17</sup> In addition, throughout this period, the black officer corps was virtually invisible. In 1940, there were less than ten active black Regular Army officers, around 300 Reserve officers, and around 200 black men commissioned in National Guard units.<sup>18</sup> This figure included line officers of all ranks, medical officers, and chaplains.

At the end of the 1930s and as war approached, Army planners still struggled with the solution to the African American mobilization problem. Few of the societal problems that had been at the heart of the problem with African American soldier performance had been solved between WWI and 1940. Racial attitudes were the same. Educational and career opportunities had not changed. Thus when mobilization of African Americans came up again, the same illiteracy problems, lack of skills and leadership opportunities plagued the manpower pool from which the Army would draw its African American soldiers for WWII.

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<sup>16</sup> Gerald W. Patton, *War and Race, The Black Officer in the American Military, 1915-1941* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1981), pp. 160-161.

<sup>17</sup> Captain E. Reynolds, "Colored Soldiers and the Regular Army" (Fort Huachuca, Arizona: typescript on file Fort Huachuca Museum, 1934).

<sup>18</sup> Hastie, "Negro Officers," pp. 318-319.

As noted, the Army revised, changed and debated different mobilization plans throughout the period between 1922 and the summer of 1940 when the great pre-war expansion began. Major revisions came in 1937 and again in 1940, the majority of which concerned the proportion of blacks to whites in various unit types. Historian Ulysses Lee has summarized these changes and the general policies that were in effect on the eve of WWII.<sup>19</sup> First, African Americans would be represented in the Army in equal proportion to their proportion of the total military age manpower available. It was suggested that they be mobilized early to allow their practically nonexistent pre-war numbers to grow to nine-plus percent of Army manpower. Second, African Americans would serve in all service and combat units for which they could qualify. Third, African Americans would be segregated into all-black units, and attached to larger white units (except the two large African American Divisions the 92<sup>nd</sup> and 93<sup>rd</sup>). Fourth, African American soldiers would be trained, housed and provided for in the same manner as whites (but separate from whites). Finally, the African American officer problem was resolved as follows: 1) officers for African American units could be black or white; 2) African American officer candidates would be held to the same qualification standards as whites; 3) African American officers would only serve in African American units (i.e., command only African American troops); and 4) African American officers would be confined to designated units, and at first this would consist of Reserve, National Guard and service units.<sup>20</sup>

In September 1940, the Selective Training and Service Act was enacted and the great Army expansion began in response to world war. The act boldly forbade discrimination on account of race or color in the selection of volunteers and draftees. By December 1942, the number of African Americans enlisted in the Army had increased from a 1939 level of 3,640 men to 467,883.<sup>21</sup> This trend continued throughout the war. Total African American representation in the military climbed as high as 701,678 in September 1944 and as high a total percentage as 8.81 percent in December 1945. Enlisted personnel reached the 10.29 percent figure that same month.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> For the purposes of brevity, this section omits the complex and fiery political debate regarding black participation in the impending war. Readers should be aware that black leaders, black activists and the black press demanded equal representation in all service arms and full integration. The 1940 NAACP annual conference focused much attention on the armed forces and the coming war. Letters swamped the War Department with questions about the planned mobilization. Slowly, such efforts began influencing war policies although not to the full extent desired. President Roosevelt, in anticipation of the upcoming election, issued a series of press releases assuring black voters that there would be proportionate opportunities in the armed forces. He also issued an Executive Order banning racial discrimination in government employment at defense plants. In other efforts to assuage black voters, famous black Army officer Benjamin O. Davis was promoted to Brigadier General and black leader William H. Hastie was selected as a civilian advisor to the Secretary of War. Throughout the war, black leaders watched and questioned the military's treatment of black men and women. Meanwhile the black press began calling for a "Double V" campaign, meaning a victory over the fascists abroad and Jim Crow at home. These efforts would eventually result in the integration of the armed services. For detailed treatments of this complex issue see the above citations, and A. Russell Buchanan, *Black Americans in World War II* (Santa Barbara, California: Clio Books, 1977).

<sup>20</sup> Lee, *Employment*, p. 50.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 88.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 415.

But as the expansion continued, the societal and institutional problems inherent in segregation and seen in WWI, once again became apparent. Again, there was the problem of unqualified African American volunteers and draftees (either as a result of low scores on intelligence tests or because of physical limitations) being selected simply to fill quotas. Again, racial intolerance and resistance weakened the effectiveness of the Army's training programs. During the later years, from 1943 onward, as more and more African American units were converted into service units and opportunities for advancement did not appear, African American soldier and officer morale sagged exactly as it had during WWI. Racial incidents on and off posts increased as a result of these tense circumstances. Possibly, some positive advances were being made simply by the fact that whites and blacks who had never worked together were being forced together to win a war. Conflict was inevitable, but so was a slow, growing acceptance, or at least exposure to other races, which must have affected and increased tolerance. Combat, the great equalizer, would prove again to a large number of Americans that African Americans were like whites—some brave, some not so brave. Both races bled red, and with proper training, both could soldier. There was, of course, still a long way to go at the end of WWII. But at Fort Bragg, the enlightened commanders of the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Division made the postwar years an overall positive experience for African American soldiers. There was still prejudice and hatred, but African American paratroopers had proven their mettle in Oregon during the war and the process of integration began within the 82<sup>nd</sup> before the President of the United States mandated it.

### 3. African Americans at Fort Bragg During WWII

As plans for mobilization finalized in the months leading toward Pearl Harbor and America's entry into the war, Army planners had to solve the problem of where to train African Americans. Segregation policies created housing problems for African American soldiers at military posts cross the nation. Army policy dictated that African American units would be no larger than brigades (two regiments or more), except at Fort Huachuca where two all black divisions were to be trained. But at the same time units had to be housed together for training and to maintain unit cohesion. Existing pre-war installation housing had been built with this in mind. Where new black units did not correspond in size and complexity to match the existing housing and recreation facilities available, the result would either be overcrowding, or underutilized space. Often, newly formed black units had to make do with makeshift facilities or tents until appropriate housing was built. At Fort Bragg, several African American recruits found themselves assisting in the construction of their facilities.

Another consideration was local community attitudes toward an influx of African Americans arriving in their neighborhoods. Army policy makers worried about the possibility that the African American population at any given installation might reach a number higher than the total white population in the surrounding region. It was commonly believed that any large body of African Americans in one place would spell trouble. Furthermore, when African American troops began showing up at military installations across the country, complaints poured into the Pentagon to the point that General George Marshall asked his staff to study the planned troop disposition with an eye toward redistribution so that African Americans would be posted only to installations

with a large African American civilian population nearby. But when the study was completed in January 1942, his staff advised that further shifting of African American troops would serve no useful purpose (apparently they had already studied the idea).

Ulysses Lee summed up the challenges of housing African Americans during WWII:

Purely military considerations played but small part in determining the location of Negro troops in the early period of mobilization. The main considerations were: availability of housing and facilities on the post concerned; proportions of white and Negro troops at the post; proximity to civilian centers of Negro population with good recreational facilities that could absorb sizable numbers of Negroes on pass; and the attitude of the nearby civilian community to the presence of Negro troops.<sup>23</sup>

Fort Bragg met the criteria for housing and training a large number of African Americans. It had a fairly large segregated African American civilian population including those living in a small town north of Fayetteville. It was going to be expanded far beyond its pre-war size. Segregated facilities could be built away from the white troops and near this community. So from September 1940 to August 1941, as some 31,544 civilians worked around the clock to construct its 2,739 new buildings, including a 1,680 bed hospital, the expansion included a segregated barracks area for African American troops near the village of Spring Lake.

The cadre for some African American units at Fort Bragg arrived in early August, long before massive new construction began and the first 'winners' of the Selective Service Act lottery arrived in December. These men were among the few remaining Regular Army troopers of the old 24<sup>th</sup> Infantry, 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> Cavalry Regiments, which were being stripped of their veterans to be sent to installations across the country to train the first African Americans to enter the war. Veterans of the 24<sup>th</sup> made up the core of the 76<sup>th</sup> Coast Artillery forming at Fort Bragg. On August 17, 1940, the first trainees arrived. This first complement of the 76<sup>th</sup> finished their basic training in October and the graduates found themselves preparing a tent city for the coming winter. In November, the men began to work on their own wooden barracks.<sup>24</sup>

Eventually, as mentioned, some 300,000 men would be inducted at Fort Bragg. The men served in such units as the 9<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, 2<sup>nd</sup> Armored Division, 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Division, 100<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, the 13<sup>th</sup>, 22<sup>nd</sup>, and 34<sup>th</sup> Artillery Brigades, and field Artillery groups consisting of the 13<sup>th</sup>, 22<sup>nd</sup>, and 32<sup>nd</sup> Corps, and the Field Artillery Replacement Training Center.<sup>25</sup> Within these larger units were hundreds of other

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<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 100.

<sup>24</sup> "History of the 76<sup>th</sup> Coast Artillery," in *76<sup>th</sup> Coast Artillery (AA), Fort Bragg, North Carolina* (Fort Bragg: on file Throckmorton Library, 1941).

<sup>25</sup> "History of Ft Bragg," p. 97-99.

Regiments, Battalions, and Companies, and others not attached to the larger units, but support units consisting of quartermaster, transportation, sanitation, medical, and administrative personnel. Most of these troops were white—in 1943, the ratio of black to white troops was about 1 to 10—but among the hundreds of African American units that were activated, served or trained at Fort Bragg from 1940 to 1945<sup>26</sup> were:

- 1) 34<sup>th</sup> Coast Artillery Brigade consisting of the 76<sup>th</sup> and 77<sup>th</sup> Coast Artillery Regiments,
- 2) 578<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery Regiment (Motorized) that was redesignated the 578<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery and the 999<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery Battalions,
- 3) 732<sup>nd</sup> and 795<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery Battalions,
- 4) 41<sup>st</sup> Engineer General Service Regiment (parent unit of the 358<sup>th</sup> Engineer Regiment),
- 5) 95<sup>th</sup> Engineer General Service Regiment,
- 6) 96<sup>th</sup>, and 384<sup>th</sup> Engineer General Service Battalions,
- 7) 555<sup>th</sup> Parachute Regiment,
- 8) Company L, 468<sup>th</sup> Quartermaster Truck Regiment,
- 9) 16<sup>th</sup> Battalion of the Field Artillery Replacement Training Center.

Most of the African Americans that took their basic and specialist training at Fort Bragg during the first years of the war (1940-1943) were trained as either artillerymen or engineers. Among the largest single group was the Coast Artillery. Nearly 6,000 African Americans were training in the Coast Artillery by 1941.<sup>27</sup> The first of these men, forming as the 76<sup>th</sup> and 77<sup>th</sup> Coast Artillery, began arriving in August shortly after their cadre had arrived and they completed basic training in October. As noted, some of these men were pulled away from training to assist in the construction of their barracks, which were not completed until February 1941. Throughout the winter months they lived in tents, heated by Sibley stoves, while training to be artillerymen. In February, many of these men, in turn, began to train the hundreds of Selective Service draftees that began arriving in troop trains. They were also drawn off to become part of the cadre for Coast Artillery units training all over the country including at Camp Wallace, Texas, Camp Lee, Virginia,

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<sup>26</sup> This partial list was compiled from Smith and Zeidler, *Historic Context*, pp. 300-313 and numerous documents cited in this report.

<sup>27</sup> Robert F. Jefferson, "African Americans in the U.S. Army During World War II," see Smith and Ziedler, *Historic Context*, p. 230.

Camp Davis, North Carolina, and at Fort Bragg.<sup>28</sup> The 76<sup>th</sup> would later serve overseas during the war in the Fiji Islands, and the 77<sup>th</sup> would serve in Tongatabu.<sup>29</sup>

Along with the 76<sup>th</sup> and 77<sup>th</sup> Coast Artillery, the 41<sup>st</sup> Engineer cadre arrived in early August 1940 in preparation for the first enlistees, who arrived from the 17<sup>th</sup> through the 20<sup>th</sup>. Again, the cadre came from the old 24<sup>th</sup> Infantry and the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> Cavalry, veteran African American units first formed in 1867. The engineer's beginnings were quite similar to that of the Coast Artillery (Figures 1 and 2). The unit's first basic graduating class was in October, and "It was during this training period that information was received making the 41<sup>st</sup> Engineers the mother of all future engineer units of colored soldiers and that, of the group then undergoing training, all but approximately fifty would be transferred within a few short months to new stations to train these units."<sup>30</sup> In other words, the first class became cadre for all subsequent African American engineer units across the nation. Meanwhile those remaining from the class and new recruits worked on construction projects through the winter, improving and maintaining range roads, clearing a new rifle range, and constructing concrete artillery observation posts. In seven months some 3,000 men had received basic training in the 41<sup>st</sup>, even though its accommodations were not completed until January 1941. In June of 1941, the unit furnished cadre for the 96<sup>th</sup> Engineer Battalion, which had received basic training at Fort Belvoir, Virginia before being transferred to Fort Bragg for engineer training.<sup>31</sup> A little friction developed between the 41<sup>st</sup> and 96<sup>th</sup>, because they had to share infirmary and officers' quarters. In order to get the 96<sup>th</sup> out of their quarters, the 41<sup>st</sup> assisted the 96<sup>th</sup>, their "sister organization" by writing letters of support.<sup>32</sup> The 41<sup>st</sup> was later shipped overseas to North Africa, constructing and repairing invasion ports, then on to Corsica, France, and Germany. The 96<sup>th</sup> was shipped to Australia, Port Moresby, and saw heavy combat at Cape Opamarai on Wakde Island.<sup>33</sup>

The other large organization containing African Americans was the Field Artillery Replacement Training Center. The 76<sup>th</sup> and 77<sup>th</sup> Coast Artillery and the 41<sup>st</sup> and 96<sup>th</sup> Engineers trained under the old system. As described earlier, the men were assigned to these organic units and took basic and specialist instruction within those units. Some became cadre or went on to special schools like the artillery school at Fort Sill, Oklahoma, but most stayed within their unit. But beginning in March 1941, the new

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<sup>28</sup> The 76<sup>th</sup> Coast Artillery, n.p.; Lt. Colonel M. R. Cox, 17<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery Public Relations Officer, "Fort Bragg, North Carolina," (Fort Bragg: on file Throckmorton Library, 1941), n.pp.

<sup>29</sup> Lee, *Employment*, p. 446.

<sup>30</sup> "History of the 41<sup>st</sup> Engineers," (Baton Rouge, Louisiana: The Army and Navy Publishing Company, Inc., 1941) p. 47.

<sup>31</sup> Cox, "Fort Bragg," n.p.

<sup>32</sup> Lee, *Employment*, p. 100.

<sup>33</sup> Hall, Gwendolyn Midlo (editor), *Love, War, and the 96<sup>th</sup> Engineers (Colored): The World War II New Guinea Diaries of Captain Hyman Samuelson* (Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1995); Lee, *Employment*, pp. 457, 606-608, 622.

replacement system came into being. The draftees assigned to the Field Artillery Replacement Training Center received basic and elementary specialist training at the training center within specially designed training units and then transferred as needed into a particular organic (tactical) unit, or to a school for advanced specialist training. These large training centers had been established for the four army ground arms: infantry, field artillery, cavalry<sup>34</sup> and coast artillery. At least 14 centers were established with Fort Bragg chosen as the center for the field artillery along with Camp Roberts, California, and Fort Sill, Oklahoma (where the Field Artillery School was also located).<sup>35</sup>

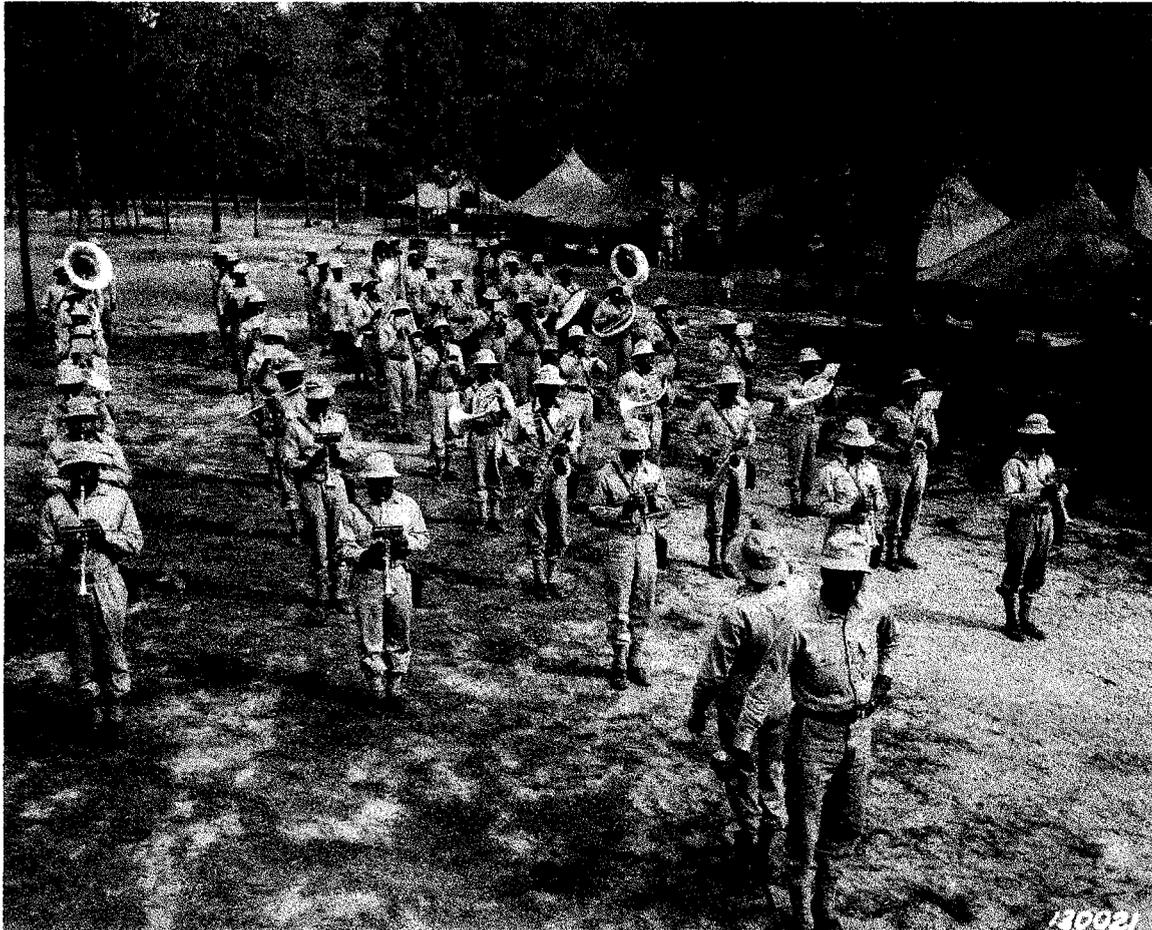


Figure 1: 41<sup>st</sup> Engineer Band at Camp Mackall, North Carolina (Photo Courtesy of the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Division Museum, Fort Bragg, North Carolina).

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<sup>34</sup> It is assumed that the cavalry centers became armor training centers, but this is not confirmed.

<sup>35</sup> Hoyt and Pope, *History of the Replacement and School Command*, p. 12.

FORT BRAGG, NONCOMMISSIONED OFFICERS' SERVICE CLUB  
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The Fort Bragg Field Artillery Replacement Training Center opened in March with 1,523 trainees arriving from Fort Meade, Maryland, Fort Dix, New Jersey, Camp Upton, New York and Fort Devens, Massachusetts. The cadre had arrived a month earlier. The first trainees were followed by a continuous stream of 11,000 men pouring in from all over the eastern United States. Fort Bragg boasted at the time that it was the largest field artillery center with a capacity of 16,500 men. The center had its own training and housing section within Fort Bragg, occupying 523 of the fort's new buildings. The center was organized into five training regiments and sixteen battalions of sixty-four batteries. The men trained on the 75 mm Gun, 155 mm Howitzer and 240 mm Howitzer, with a training cycle lasting twelve weeks.<sup>36</sup> The African American troops were assigned to the 16<sup>th</sup> Training Battalion and had its own segregated section, apart from the Spring Lake area. In 1943, this battalion gained attention in the army for a unique synchronized calisthenics routine using their rifles like a drill team to complete a series of physical exercises for the upper body (Figure 3). The training center remained open throughout the war and prepared thousands of troops for assignment to artillery units in the United States and overseas.



Figure 2: 41<sup>st</sup> Engineers on Parade at Fort Bragg, North Carolina (Photo Courtesy of the National Archives II, College Park, Maryland).

#### 4. Training Challenges of African American Troops at Fort Bragg

Shortly after WWII the Army analyzed African American soldier performance and the training regime much in the same manner as they had after WWI. One major study was a secret publication entitled *The Training of Negro Troops*. The report summarized this

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<sup>36</sup> Cox, "Fort Bragg," n.p.

performance as an “unhappy picture.”<sup>37</sup> This picture was largely the result of the “low educational level and the meager administrative and technical experience of the overwhelming majority of Negro Troops.” Years of neglect of African American education and economic opportunities in American society at large bore bitter fruit during the war years as the Army attempted to train African Americans for war. A common

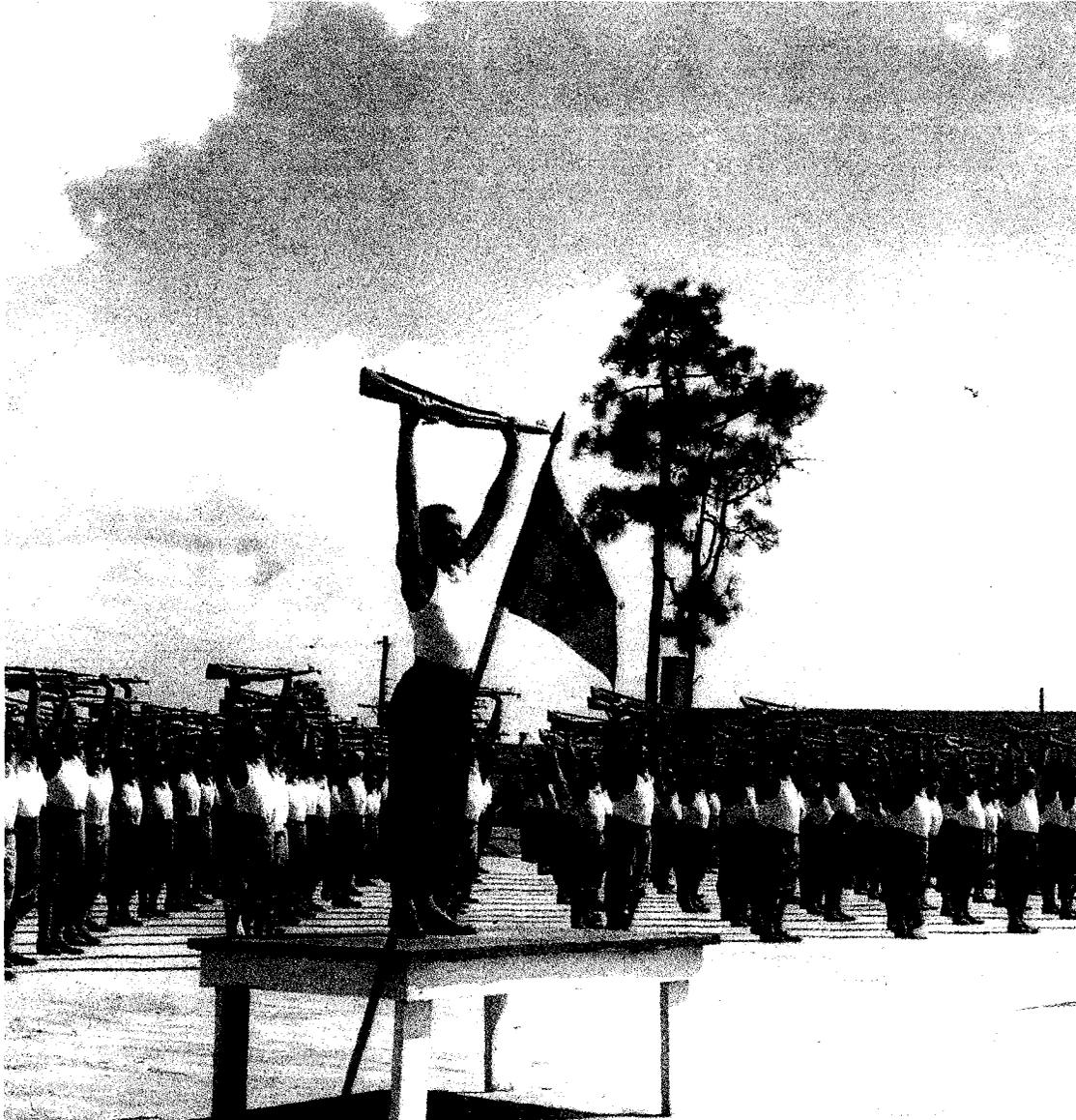


Figure 3: 16<sup>th</sup> Battalion at PT Training, Fort Bragg, North Carolina (Photo Courtesy of the National Archives II, College Park, Maryland).

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<sup>37</sup> Major Bell I. Wiley, *The Training of Negro Troops*, Study No. 36, (Washington, D.C.: Historical Section, Army Ground Forces, 1946), p. ii.

notion about the military even today is that it takes no great intellect to become a soldier. In fact, while genius is not necessary, the ability to read, write, and reason are basic necessities for learning soldier skills in modern armies. Illiteracy was very high within the pre-war African American population. This exacerbated the training situation at every level. The Army did anticipate this problem at the beginning of the war. It was expected that because of the inequalities that existed in American society at large, it would take longer to produce combat ready African American units. But the actual scope of the illiteracy problem was a surprise. It took several months of additional training, beyond that of the average white division, to bring African Americans units up to par.<sup>38</sup>

Overall, African American soldier training was, "beset with many difficulties," the most formidable being their lack of education. As part of the induction process, the Army routinely gave each draftee a general knowledge test, called the AGCT that aided it in assigning the draftee to a particular unit. The tests were designed to test intelligence not literacy. Those demonstrating mechanical aptitude, for instance, might be assigned to a mechanic's school—assuming the needed quotas of infantry soldiers were filled. The test classified the soldier into classes I to V—the latter being the lowest. About 80 percent of the enlisted personnel of the typical African American unit rated in Classes IV and V, against about 30-40 percent of the typical white unit. In fact, it was found that only 17 percent of the African American trainees had a high school education (41 percent for whites).<sup>39</sup> Scores for Fort Bragg's African American compliment were no different than the rest of the Army. As an example, the 76<sup>th</sup> Coast Artillery AGCT distribution for its 897 men in March 1941 fell as follows: Class I-0, Class II-2, Class III-28, Class IV-124, Class V-285, illiterates 351, and unclassified 7. In other words, 72 percent of the men of the 76<sup>th</sup> fell either in the last class or were illiterate.

The poor scores were not limited to the African American population, although it was more acute there. Nevertheless, the poor scores recorded by white troops surprised the Army. The problem was acute enough that in the summer of 1943, the War Department decided to conduct preliminary testing of both white and black personnel at their induction station rather than at the installations or reception centers, in order to reject men who were the most "backward." For those that were sent on, another series of tests were given at the reception centers and men in Class V were immediately assigned to Special Training Units, where they were given instruction until either they were able to be assigned to normal units or, after thirteen weeks, were given discharges.<sup>40</sup> The Field Artillery Replacement Center established a Special Training Unit for whites as early as December 1942. Six months later, on June 1, 1943, a special training unit for African Americans was established. Major Simon Graham, an educator from Roanoke Rapids, North Carolina was given command of the African American unit. In this unit the men

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<sup>38</sup> Especially the 92<sup>nd</sup> Division, see Palmer et al., *The Procurement and Training of Ground Combat Troops*, pp. 53-58.

<sup>39</sup> Major Bell I. Wiley, *The Training of Negro Troops*, Study No. 36, (Washington, D.C.: Historical Section, Army Ground Forces, 1946), p. ii, iii, 7.

<sup>40</sup> Wiley, *The Training of Negro Troops*, p. 9

were taught to read, write and interpret basic orders. Math and military field training were integrated into the training schedule along with recreational and social activities. The program started with 65 trainees and rapidly grew to an enrollment of 2,300 men. Eventually some 11,000 men graduated from the unit. For some reason, the school for African American troops at Fort Bragg only lasted a little over one year. In November 1944 the unit was transferred to Fort Benning, and the Special Training Unit for white troopers was re-established at Fort Bragg.<sup>41</sup>

The widespread educational deficiencies among African American soldiers meant that the cadre had to devise different methods for teaching African Americans. Progress was seen by reducing lectures to a minimum and increasing demonstrations, repetition, execution by the numbers, and the use of coach and pupil teaching methods. As noted, the training cycle for African Americans was increased in length.

Besides the lack of basic educational skills, a large percentage of African American trainees lacked mechanical skills, again the result of years of being denied training and opportunity in the civilian community. This problem became especially apparent in artillery units. At Fort Bragg, the commander of the 76<sup>th</sup> recognized the poor educational and mechanical skills in the unit and in an effort to find qualified non commissioned and officer candidates, he sent recruiting letters to African American college presidents asking them to encourage graduates to join the Coast Artillery.<sup>42</sup> Apparently he was unsuccessful in finding enough qualified men because the unit's overall lack of mechanical aptitude showed up immediately after leaving Fort Bragg. Assigned to the Second Corps area, the 76<sup>th</sup> experienced a high rate of malfunctioning searchlights. A review by the Second Corps Area Engineer reported that the problem lay in a "lack of preventive maintenance and maladjustment of the equipment through ignorance and inaptitude of the operating personnel." The engineer concluded that such men should not have been assigned to the coast artillery. This, of course rekindled a fierce debate within the war department about the use of African American troops in the artillery. The Civilian Aide to the Secretary of War for Negro Affairs responded that there should mass-transfers of African Americans with high AGCT scores from service organizations into the combat arms where they could be of more value. However, before relief could come for the 76<sup>th</sup>, the unit was transferred overseas.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Brigadier John T. Kennedy, *Fort Bragg At War: The Station Compliment* (Fort Bragg: on file, XVIII Airborne Corps History Office, ca. 1945), p. 77-78.

<sup>42</sup> Letter of Lt. Col. Harry R. Pierce to the President of the Hampton and Tuskegee Institutes, March 27, 1941 RG 107 Records of the Secretary of War, Civilian Aide to the Secretary, Hastie-Gibson Files, Entry 188, Box 205 (College Park, Maryland: National Archives II).

<sup>43</sup> Lee, *Employment*, pp. 249-251.

5. Racial Incidents

It is an unfortunate fact that all aspects of African American military history are tightly bound and intractably woven into the history of the African American struggle for equal rights and racial tolerance. Race relations affected almost every decision, attitude, and judgment involving African American troopers, and affected every outcome. For those attempting to solve racial problems within the Army, obtaining a true picture of the racial situation at any one post was always clouded by the common, non-racially based, complaining that any trooper does as a part of soldier life. Any veteran knows that hard words and griping about any and all aspects of soldier life are simply part of life in the ranks. No veteran of any army at any time believes he or she was treated fairly throughout their military experience. Something would be terribly wrong in their unit if that were so. But it is also clear that during WWII, young African American men and women faced injurious prejudice in the military because of the general climate and attitude in American society at large. Further, this prejudice was expressed both by individuals in the Army and by the Army's reaction to societal attitudes. Finally, these prejudices were manifested in harmful Army policies.

As thousands of African Americans arrived at Fort Bragg and other installations across the country, complaints about discrimination and segregation flooded the offices of the NAACP and Judge William Hastie, Civilian Aide to the Secretary of War. Hastie had been appointed to the Secretary to assist in various affairs concerning the use of African Americans in the military. Much of Hastie's time during the war was spent investigating soldier complaints. Hastie eventually resigned his position in protest against Army policies and Mr. Truman Gibson took his place. Together, these men offered African American soldiers a voice within the War Department where complaints could be investigated and, if substantiated, some redress could occur.

The existing files of Judge Hastie, Truman Gibson, and of the NAACP indicate that, compared to other installations, Fort Bragg seems to have had fewer racial problems than, for example, places like Fort Huachuca, Arizona, where two all-black infantry divisions trained or at Fort Jackson, South Carolina.<sup>44</sup> On the other hand, both at Fort Bragg and in Fayetteville, it is obvious that white soldiers and civilians were concerned to see the thousands of young African American men in uniform invading the old post and town. Furthermore, many of these new African Americans were northerners, not used to the Jim Crow policies across the South. The result was that as early as March 8, 1941 anonymous letters of complaint were received by the NAACP about conditions in and around the post. For instance, soldiers of the Coast Artillery complained that their white noncommissioned officers were not being replaced by African American 'noncoms' as promised. The problem was that the African American candidates were failing to pass the necessary tests. Complaints were also made against the 76<sup>th</sup> Commander, Colonel Pierce. One soldier warned that "The men all hate him and the adjutant and are liable to take a shot at either. . ." In other complaints soldiers reported not being able to attend the post

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<sup>44</sup> See for instance, Smith, *Fort Huachuca*, Chapter IV.

theatres, and being refused entrance to a dance at the nearby Fayetteville State Teachers College. Judge Hastie investigated and dismissed most of these early complaints, pointing out that Colonel Pierce was attempting to find qualified men for technical training (see above), and that the dance at the teachers college was for students only. He found that the post theatres were being partitioned off to segregate the blacks and whites, but lamented that this was a problem with the segregated facilities policy Army-wide. Overall, perhaps compared to the complaints he was receiving elsewhere, he thought that African American soldiers "are faring reasonably well at Fort Bragg."<sup>45</sup>

A few months later a double killing at a Fayetteville bus station changed Hastie's opinion, thrust Fort Bragg in the national headlines, and drew tremendous censure from African American organizations and citizens across the nation. The incident was so volatile that for a while it appeared that Fort Bragg might become the rallying symbol of wartime racial injustice for African Americans across the nation. Or as Judge Hastie put it; "From the point of view of Army public relations, the Fort Bragg incident has been the most widely publicized case of disorder involving colored soldiers which has occurred since the inauguration of Selective Service."<sup>46</sup>

There are, of course, two versions of what happened on August 6, 1941. Fort Bragg's Provost Marshall wrote a quick report of the incident the following morning. According to Provost Marshall McNeer, around 1:00 am on the 6<sup>th</sup>, after a night on the town, African American troops began piling into a segregated bus at Hay and Hillsboro Streets in Fayetteville for a return trip to Fort Bragg ten miles away. In subsequent investigations and accusations, no one ever disputed that the men had a night of drinking and carousing, as soldiers are apt to do. One inebriated soldier began to threaten the bus driver. The driver left the bus and called for the Military Police (MP). African American MPs, unarmed, entered the bus briefly but were threatened and left. Four white MPs then entered the bus and attempted to arrest and drag off the most violent of the disorderly soldiers. Here events get murky. McNeer's early report states that Private Ned Truman, of the 76<sup>th</sup> Coast Artillery, grabbed one of the white MP's pistols, ran to the back of the bus, turned and began firing. Sergeant Elwyn L. Hargrave was killed instantly and two other MPs were wounded. Truman was shot and killed by another MP who entered from the back of the bus. There were obviously other shots, as two African American soldiers were wounded, but whether Truman or the white MP's fired the shots it was not known at the time. Two other African American soldiers were beaten with nightsticks by the MP's, suffering serious injuries.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Letters of anonymous soldiers, Mr. Walter White of the NAACP and the Civilian Aide to the Secretary of War, March 8 through April 23, 1941 in RG 107 Records of the Secretary of War, Entry 188, Hastie-Gibson files, Box 205 (College Park, Maryland: National Archives II).

<sup>46</sup> Memorandum, Civilian Aide to the Secretary of War, November 18, 1941, RG 107 Records of the Secretary of War, Civilian Aide to the Secretary, Hastie-Gibson Files, Entry 188, Box 205 (College Park, Maryland: National Archives II).

<sup>47</sup> Major James W. McNeer, Memorandum from the Office of the Provost Marshall, August 6, 1941, RG 107, Records of the Secretary of War, Entry 188, Box 205, Civilian Aide to the Secretary, Hastie-Gibson files (College Park, Maryland: National Archives II).

The other side of the story came out in the African American press. In this version, the details about how it began are consistent. Some African American soldiers were giving the bus driver a hard time and he did leave the bus and asked the MPs to assist him in getting the bus quieted down for the trip to Fort Bragg. From that point the story changes. An MP, according to reporter Tom O'Conner who interviewed witnesses, jumped on the bus and immediately began hitting an intoxicated soldier with his nightstick. The soldier collapsed on the floor. Private Truman, witnessing the beating asked the MP if he was going to take the injured man to the hospital and the MP replied angrily that he was going to take the injured man to jail. Truman demanded that the soldier be taken to a hospital and the MP came at Truman with his nightstick. Truman, not wishing to join the injured man on the floor, kicked the MP, grabbed the gun, and shot the MP. He then turned on another MP, who had drawn his gun, and shot that MP in the neck, shoulder and hand. The MP returned fire and killed Truman (or in another version a third MP killed Truman as reported by the Provost Marshall). Three other soldiers were wounded.<sup>48</sup>

These were the two sides that emerged early in the investigation and were circulating in the African American press. There were other versions.<sup>49</sup> The public's attention was focused on Fort Bragg for the next few weeks, disrupting post training and morale. America's first African American general, General Benjamin Davis, Sr., assigned to the Inspector General's office to advise the office on matters pertaining to "colored soldiers," was quickly put in charge of the investigation. Davis reported to Fort Bragg five days after the incident. For almost five weeks Davis and a board of three other officers interviewed ninety-one witnesses, investigated the crime scene, and looked at FBI laboratory reports about the weapons, ammunition, and wounds. Despite this effort, the final result was surprising. What exactly happened, and who shot whom, was never conclusively determined. The MP who killed Truman was acquitted. But so was Ned Truman. In fact, amazingly the investigation concluded that Truman did not kill MP Sergeant Hargrave and Sergeant Owen, the MP first accused of shooting Truman, did not kill Truman. Two men were dead, the result of a third unknown African American soldier!<sup>50</sup> This result was contrary to either version in circulation, and naturally, quite unacceptable to the African American press. Adding fuel to the fire raging in and around Fort Bragg was what had happened immediately after the shooting. It is clear that Fort Bragg's MPs had gone on a "night of terror."<sup>51</sup> African American soldiers on leave and in

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<sup>48</sup> Tom O'Conner, "Negro Soldier Shot in Fear of Beating, Reporter is Told," August 11, 1941, clipping from RG 107, Records of the Secretary of War, Entry 188, Box 205, Civilian Aide to the Secretary, Hastie-Gibson files (College Park, Maryland: National Archives II).

<sup>49</sup> A socialist newspaper portrayed Truman as an American hero, while Ulysses Lee's version mentions no names but creates a picture of several soldiers and troublemakers involved in a general melee; see Albert Parker, article in the *Militant*, August 23, 1941, and November 22, 1941, in C.L.R. James, George Breitman, Edgar Keemer, and others, *Fighting Racism in World War II* (New York: Monad Press, 1980), pp. 128-132; Lee, *Employment*, p. 351.

<sup>50</sup> Marvin E. Fletcher, *America's First Black General, Benjamin O. Davis, Sr., 1880-1970* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1989), p. 93; Memorandum, Civilian Aide to the Secretary of War, November 18, 1941, RG 107, Secretary of War, Entry 188, Box 205, Civilian Aide to the Secretary, Hastie-Gibson files (College Park, Maryland: National Archives II); letter of Colonel C.B. Michelwait, To the Adjutant General, no date RG 107, Records of the Secretary of War, Entry 188, Box 205, Civilian Aide to the Secretary, Hastie-Gibson files (College Park, Maryland: National Archives II).

<sup>51</sup> "What Soldiers Told Courier Men About 'Night of Terror,'" *Pittsburgh Courier*, August 23, 1941.

the barracks were threatened. Many were searched and their money and property confiscated. Some reported being dragged out of buses or cars on returning from leave, roughed up, arrested, and kept overnight in jail.

The African American press and citizens across the nation reacted vigorously. Resolutions of protest of the "Fort Bragg Outrage," were passed around the African American community and signed by various organizations like the Pittsburgh Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) Ladies Auxiliary, the Contra Costa Industrial Union Council, branches of the NAACP as far away as Oklahoma, an African American Life Insurance Company in Chicago, Illinois, and other African American businesses and groups.<sup>52</sup> African American soldiers threatened riots and disturbances, and for the following months racial tensions were on edge at the installation.

While the findings of the Inspector General's investigation and subsequent acquittal of all involved did not end the protests, the post recognized problems with its Military Police and moved to correct that problem. A higher-ranking Regular Army officer replaced the Provost Marshall, a reserve officer, and the entire Military Police force was reorganized. An MP office was established in Fayetteville under the control of the Post's new Provost Marshall. The investigation learned that the African American MPs at the time of the incident were only soldiers temporarily assigned to that duty and had no training as police officers. These men were replaced by full time, trained, African American MPs.<sup>53</sup> Finally, buses to and from Fayetteville were closely monitored and extra Military Police were assigned to the loading areas during the weekends.

Slowly, tempers cooled, and racial problems elsewhere allowed Fort Bragg to escape being tagged as the location of WWII's worst racial incident. There were no other incidents of this magnitude at the fort during the rest of the war. There continued to be confusion, rumors and minor incidents though, which Truman Gibson duly investigated and attempted to redress when appropriate. For instance at the end of that same year, he received notice from the NAACP that members of the 384<sup>th</sup> Engineering Battalion were complaining that they were docked five or six dollars from their pay to cover the cost of cleaning services. Gibson looked into the complaint and responded. In this case it was a matter of a few men who did not clearly understand the need for basic budgeting. The unit had gained a reputation for dirty and disorderly clothing and had failed two inspections. The Army soon recognized that many of these men had lived a life of poverty and lacked even elementary money skills. For them, their meager soldiers pay was a fortune to be spent immediately. So the post had arranged for the men to get coupons from two different cleaning companies in an effort to teach the value of budgeting and saving. The coupons were given to the men to be used as needed for

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<sup>52</sup> See RG 407, Records of the Office of the Adjutant General, 1940-45, Decimal file 322.97, Entry 363a, Box 2293 for numerous letters and copies of the resolution passed around the black community (College Park, Maryland: National Archives II).

<sup>53</sup> Brigadier General Howard Snyder, Acting Inspector General, Memorandum for the Adjutant General, August 25, 1941, RG 107, Records of the Secretary of War, Entry 188, Box 205, Civilian Aide to the Secretary, Hastie-Gibson files (College Park, Maryland: National Archives II).

cleaning, the balance remaining from the coupon after cleaning could be cashed in for whatever they wanted. However, in order to get a pass, their clothes had to pass inspection before leaving post and they had to show that they had a coupon for cleaning on return. Most of the men did not complain but some thought that the coupons were part of their regular pay.<sup>54</sup> They complained that they were being forced to use their own money for cleaning.

Sometimes problems just materialized out of thin air in the racially charged atmosphere after the shootings. The next year, in July of 1942, a rumor spread that black and white soldiers had fought at a swimming pool on post. Gibson investigated and the rumor turned out to be totally fictitious.<sup>55</sup>

Perhaps Fort Bragg escaped major problems because the command acted quickly on the complaints it received and attempted to correct its deficiencies, as it had after the shooting, by reorganizing the Military Police. Another example was the case of Private John Woody. On August 13, 1942, Private Woody of the 578<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery walked into the offices of the CIO Union's Chicago Headquarters. He was away without leave (AWOL) from Fort Bragg. There he met with Judge Hastie, claiming that he and some 39 other men had gone AWOL—all of whom had left in protest of the racial conditions within the 578<sup>th</sup>. Woody testified that the 578<sup>th</sup>'s commander had ordered a man put into a boiler room, with the boiler operating, and left there as punishment for some minor offense. Woody had heard the man banging on the door, and tore down a few door boards so that the man could breath. The colonel arrived at about that time, and seeing what Woody had done, ordered Woody into the boiler room. Both men had been told to strip before being put in the boiler room. Woody stayed there about an hour and then was sent to the guard house where he was strapped down on a table. The Colonel later interrogated Woody, and Woody asked for a court martial, as was his right. Instead, he was placed in a special training detachment. This detachment is not to be confused with the Special Training Units (see above), but rather a punishment detail. While with the 'training' detail Woody witnessed another man being dragged by a rope after falling out of formation.

Woody's complaints were investigated by Fort Bragg and found the most serious to be true. On August 10<sup>th</sup>, some forty-nine men had been AWOL, but it was after a payday and not necessarily the result of problems within the 578<sup>th</sup>. Woody later admitted that other prisoners while in the guardhouse had strapped him down, not the MPs. On the other hand, the commander of the 578<sup>th</sup> did place a man in the boiler room and Private Woody was also detained there. Furthermore, it was determined that the commander had

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<sup>54</sup> Letter of men from the 384<sup>th</sup> Engineering Battalion to Walter White. N.A.A.C.P, December 17<sup>th</sup>, 1942, and response from Truman Gibson to White, March 1, 1943 RG 107, Records of the Secretary of War, Civilian Aide to the Secretary of War, Hastie-Gibson files, Entry 188, Box 205 (College Park, Maryland: National Archives II).

<sup>55</sup> Telegram to William Hastie and reply, July 6, 1942 RG 107, Records of the Secretary of War, Civilian Aide to the Secretary of War, Hastie-Gibson files, Entry 188, Box 205 (College Park, Maryland: National Archives II).

formed a special training detachment. Although such detachments were legal, it had been used by the colonel as a method of avoiding courts martial. The incident concerning the soldier being dragged was also confirmed. After refusing to run any further during a physical training exercise, the soldier had been tied to another man. When they started running again, the exhausted man fell and was dragged about 30'. Fort Bragg stepped in and cleaned up the unit. Fort Bragg noted that the commander of the 578<sup>th</sup> "drives his men with threats and an iron hand; that he is not a leader..." The colonel was relieved of duty, and the special training detachment was disbanded. The entire 578<sup>th</sup> command was reminded that soldiers have the right to a court martial. No further actions were taken, and it appears that Private Woody was not punished.<sup>56</sup>

A survey of racial conditions at Fort Bragg in 1943 reported that "the relationship between white and negro personnel has been excellent during the past two years," with occasional fights noted. The survey concluded that "due to its geographical location, there still will be some danger of racial disturbances in the general vicinity of this post," but, "the outlook for continued harmonious relations between white and negro personnel at Fort Bragg is excellent." Overall, "negro personnel are treated fairly," and "facilities available to them are equally good as those available to white personnel."<sup>57</sup> However, there were still discriminatory and racist policies in place at Fort Bragg that created morale problems within the Post's African American community. Soldiers continued to write Judge Hastie complaining of conditions at the fort. A disgruntled soldier, who did not want his name used, wrote the Baltimore *Afro-American* on March 6, 1943, complaining that garrison prisoners from the 41<sup>st</sup> Engineers were being "treated more like dogs," being housed in pup tents regardless of weather, and being held for up to nine months before being tried for insignificant cases like AWOL. The prisoners were also being worked until one or two in the morning.<sup>58</sup> In 1945 a soldier wrote the NAACP that at Fort Bragg "I see looming before me hate for my people."<sup>59</sup> The results of these complaints are not known.

In some cases, whites and blacks banded together in an attempt to change racist policies. In April of 1945 the War Department received a confidential memo stating that separate masses had been ordered at a Chapel No.9 in the installation's Spring Lake area. Apparently black and white Catholic soldiers and civilians had been attending integrated masses at the chapel for some time without complaints from either race. For some reason,

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<sup>56</sup> Memorandum of the Civilian Aide to the Secretary of War regarding the testimony of Private John Woody, August 18, 1942 and attachments; Report of Investigation in the 578<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery, with supporting papers; both RG 107, Records of the Secretary of War, Civilian Aide to the Secretary of War, Hastie-Gibson files, Entry 188, Box 205 (College Park, Maryland: National Archives II).

<sup>57</sup> "Survey at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, Relative Racial Matters," 14 September 1943, RG 165 Records of the War Department General and Special Staffs, Entry 43, Box 444 (College Park, Maryland: National Archives II).

<sup>58</sup> Letter of anonymous soldier, March 6, 1943 in Phillip McGuire, *Taps for a Jim Crow Army: Letters from Black Soldiers in World War II* (Santa Barbara, California: ABC-Clio Publishers, 1983), pp. 154-155.

<sup>59</sup> Corporal Randolph Austin, 16<sup>th</sup> Separate Training Battalion, October 1, 1945, , *Papers of the NAACP*, Part 9, Series C, "Discrimination in the U.S. Armed Forces, 1918-1950," Reel 1, frame 402 (Columbia: University of South Carolina, Thomas Cooper Library, Microfilm).

and during what seems to be a most inappropriate moment, the chaplain informed the mixed congregation on Easter Morning, that henceforth, there would be two services, one for white and one for blacks. This order was not put in writing but given as an oral command to the post chaplain by Post Commander General Kennedy. Both black and white civilians and soldiers protested the order and once again racial tensions resurfaced. Both the Fayetteville NAACP and Father W.P. Ryan requested assistance from Truman Gibson, stating that it was their belief that this order violated Army policies regarding the use of facilities (see section on facilities). It is not clear if the policy was ever changed. However, an earlier 1944 pamphlet, attached as supporting documentation to the complaint, indicates that at Chapel No. 8 segregated services were in effect at that time, while at Chapel No. 9 a single service was held with no mention of separate black or white services.<sup>60</sup>

As the war ended, incidents of racial problems would decrease as the Army demobilized. However, occasional complaints still fared up. In January 1946, a soldier wrote the NAACP that African Americans were "subjected to treatment that is most humiliating, such as firing boilers, making white troops beds, cleaning officers' quarters, working in salvage yards, latrine orderlies, and any job that is considered."<sup>61</sup> In May of 1946, a sergeant in charge of eleven men on a troop train complained of being denied food service while traveling from Fort Bragg to Camp Kilmer, New Jersey. Concerning the latter incident, an investigation was made, but it was not substantiated and the sergeant was on his way overseas—so the matter was conveniently dropped.<sup>62</sup> Of course, racial problems would continue, even as they do today. However, after 1948, when Executive Order 9981 mandated integration, the Army no longer established policies based on the concept of 'equal but separate.'

## 6. Housing and Recreational Facilities For African American Troops

Prior to that Executive Order, it was War Department philosophy that its job was to win the war and not to serve as a method or experimental laboratory for instituting change in society. American society had instituted, through Jim Crow laws in the South and passive acceptance in the North, that the two races would be separate. This state of affairs translated into official policy in the Army. Therefore, at the beginning of the war, it was decided that black and white troops would be trained and housed in separate facilities. There was no official policy on segregated recreational facilities then, but since units were housed and trained separately, this usually meant separate recreational facilities simply as a matter of laying out the buildings to maintain unit cohesion. That is, a unit

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<sup>60</sup> Pamphlet, Directory of Religious Services, September 24, 1944, various letters concerning Eastern Morning incident, NAACP, *Papers of the NAACP*, Part 9, Series C, "Discrimination in the U.S. Armed Forces, 1918-1950," Reel 1, frames 386-398 (Columbia: University of South Carolina, Thomas Cooper Library, Microfilm).

<sup>61</sup> Anonymous letter to the N.A.A.C.P., January 19, 1946, *Papers of the NAACP*, Part 9, Series C, "Discrimination in the U.S. Armed Forces, 1918-1950," Reel 1, frame 404 (Columbia: University of South Carolina, Thomas Cooper Library, Microfilm).

<sup>62</sup> Complaint of S/Sgt Russell N. Hughes and accompanying correspondence, RG 159, Office of the Inspector General (Army), Entry 26d, General Correspondence, Box 241 (College Park, Maryland: National Archives II).

should train and be housed as a unit. So ideally, a unit's day rooms, barracks, physical training grounds, latrines, and mess halls, all should be together. In defense of the separation policy, the Army noted that white soldiers, and even some African American soldiers expressed preferences not to mix.

Separation policies solved little and presented the Army with yet another set of complicated mobilization problems. The smaller posts did not have the room or facilities available for segregated African American troops (they often did not know how many African American soldiers they would have to accept) and in finding room they had to somehow both keep the races separate and maintain some sort of unit integrity. In light of the policy of housing segregation, the Army instituted a policy that recreational facilities for African American troops would be provided at the various installations on the basis of the assigned African American unit's size. If an African American company were to be stationed at an installation there generally would be a company-sized day room, exchange, recreational building and so on. Installations training larger units would have more and larger recreational facilities. For example, installations expected to train over 5,000 men would get a 1,000 seat theatre, a large service club, and an eighteen person guest house. Installations with between 500 and 3,000 men would get, a "Modified RB-1 for use as a service club," a 364 seat theatre and a guest house for either ten or seven guests.<sup>63</sup>

In reality, the result of such policies was that often African American soldiers got the 'left-overs' in housing and recreational facilities, or did not get them at all.<sup>64</sup> The segregation policy did not sit well with African American troops and protests flooded the War Department, especially in regard to the official designation of recreational facilities as "colored" or "white." Eventually, on March 10, 1943, the War Department changed its policy for designating separate facilities. Posts were no longer to designate "colored" and "white" facilities. "Where necessary, recreational facilities may be allocated to organizations in whole or in part, permanently or on a rotational basis, provided care is taken that all units and personnel are afforded equal opportunity to enjoy such facilities."<sup>65</sup>

Fort Bragg's expansion plans gave the Army the opportunity to provide a full array of housing and recreational facilities for African American soldiers equal to, but separate from, the white quarters. The fort built a separate area near Spring Lake for most of the African American troops, essentially on the northeast side of the post, in an area where black laborers had been camped during the initial construction of Fort Bragg in WWI.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> John N. Cooley, Adjutant General, War Department, January 18, 1941 "Recreation facilities for Colored Troops," (Supplemental Estimates, F.Y. 1941) RG 407, Records of the Adjutant General's Office (College Park, Maryland: National Archives II).

<sup>64</sup> Lee, *Employment of Negro Troops*, p. 302.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 308.

<sup>66</sup> "Special Military Map," North Carolina, Camp Bragg, 1919, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, (Fort Bragg: on file, Environmental Office).

This land was not the best in the area. General James M. Gavin, commander of the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne would in later life recall, "When I at once toured the [Spring Lake] facilities . . . I was appalled. Their swimming pool was a muddy pond, without beaches and having little shelter where one could change clothes."<sup>67</sup> However, the nearby village of Spring Lake had an African American community for community support and at least in late 1941 the buildings constructed were new. Prior to that, however, the 76<sup>th</sup> Coast Artillery and the 41<sup>st</sup> Engineers had to suspend training to assist in the construction of their barracks.

There was another, smaller area near Smith's Lake (Smith Lake) for African American troops assigned to the Field Artillery Replacement Training Center (FARTC). Here the Army encountered another problem inherent to segregated facilities. During the early part of the war, African American troops were not arriving fast enough. The training center's housing area had too few troops, and some had to wait until more troops arrived in order to have enough men to make up a training class. Hence the barracks stood empty while the white area was overcrowded. As they waited for more men to make up a class, not only their training cycles were delayed, so was the training of smaller specialized training units.<sup>68</sup>

In January 1941, the War Department numbered the African American contingent at Fort Bragg at 8,012 enlisted men and no officers. Based on this, Fort Bragg was authorized \$149,275.00 for the construction of a Type SC-3 Service Club (\$55,700.00), a Type TH-3 (\$81,958.00) 1,038 seat Theatre, and a Type OQM-14 (\$11,617.00) Guest house with fourteen person capacity. Later an Officers' Recreation building OM-1 for \$16,500 was also authorized.<sup>69</sup> These were built in the Spring Lake area. In addition a recreational community building was planned in Fayetteville, costing \$75,000 and a \$21,820 soldier's club house at Spring Lake. In Wilmington, another recreational center was planned.<sup>70</sup> These latter three buildings may have been Army facilities but are believed to be United Service Organization (USO) buildings.<sup>71</sup> The USO was a private non-profit consortium of community and religious organizations who banded together during the war to provide a homes away from home for American GIs—a place where they could find moral

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<sup>67</sup> T. Michael Booth and Duncan Spencer, *Paratrooper: The Life of General James M. Gavin* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994), p. 314.

<sup>68</sup> Lee, *Employment*, p. 99.

<sup>69</sup> "Program of Construction and Estimated Cost, Recreational Facilities for Colored Troops," attached to January 18, 1941 letter of the Adjutant General, RG 107 Records of the Secretary of War, Box 242 (College Park, Maryland: National Archives II).

<sup>70</sup> "List of Recreation Centers For Negroes," January 18, 1941, RG 107 Records of the Secretary of War, Entry 188, Box 242 (College Park, Maryland: National Archives II).

<sup>71</sup> The U.S. Government built USO buildings and leased them to the USO. These buildings appear to be USO buildings, but there is some confusion. The contract for these buildings were awarded on October 10, 1941, according to a list attached to a letter to William Hastie, while the Fayetteville USO club had already opened in September. The date for the contract award may be wrong, the evidence for this is that the letter to Hastie is dated October 7, but the list uses the past tense "awarded" while dating the award to October 11. See list attached to Letter of W.J. Trent, Race Relations Officer, Federal Works Agency, to William Hastie, October 7, 1941, RG 107 Records of the Secretary of War, Entry 188, Box 242 (College Park, Maryland: National Archives II).

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recreational outlets. The Fayetteville USO opened in September 1941 and was the first in the nation to be operated by the National Catholic Community Service organization, a member of the USO, exclusively for the use of African American soldiers. The first floor of this building had a library with writing facilities, a game room and shower facilities. Upstairs was a single large room to be used as an auditorium, gymnasium or dance hall.<sup>72</sup>

The Spring Lake USO located on Seabrook Road, was smaller, but closer than the Fayetteville club, and was probably more frequented by the African American troops at Fort Bragg. Unfortunately, this club burned down in a fire in November of 1944. The Fayetteville Teachers College offered its gymnasium for the soldiers' use during the following year. This must have been quite popular with the soldiers as the college was attended mostly by young ladies. Despite the efforts of the Fayetteville Civic Association and Spring Lake residents, the USO club was never rebuilt, probably due to the fact that the war was drawing to a close at the time they attempted to get it rebuilt. Truman Gibson wrote the North Carolina Voters League in July 1945 indicating that restoration "has not been favorably considered because of the fact that only small numbers of Negro troops are now scheduled to pass through Fort Bragg."<sup>73</sup>

The survey of racial matters at Fort Bragg in September of 1943 provides an in-depth look at Fort Bragg's facilities at that time and is worth quoting at length:

The quarters for negro troops are adequate and of the same general type as is provided for white personnel. In the areas occupied by negro personnel the Army Exchange operates branch exchanges which are ample and convenient for the personnel in those areas. In addition, the main exchange located on the post proper, carries a larger stock of supplies available to all personnel. There is a total of eleven motion picture theatres at this station. One of these theatres, located in the area occupied by a majority of the negro personnel, is operated exclusively for negro personnel. The accommodations and pictures shown are the same as in the other theatres. In addition, one-half of one of the theaters located in the FA RTC area is available for Negro personnel in that area. There is one amphitheatre for shows and entertainments for the Negro personnel. When special shows are brought to Fort Bragg, for only one or two performances an equitable number of seats are made available to negro personnel. There are five type SC-3 service clubs at this station. One of them is assigned for the exclusive use of negro personnel and is located in the immediate vicinity of the area occupied by the majority of negro personnel. It is well furnished and is satisfactorily operated by Negro personnel. Adjoining this

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<sup>72</sup> "Program in Full Swing for Colored Soldiers," *The Evangelist*, October 3, 1941 (Albany, New York); Letter of George K. Hunton, Interracial Review to William Hastie, October 8, 1941, RG 107, Records of the Secretary of War, Civilian Aide to the Secretary (College Park, Maryland: National Archives II).

<sup>73</sup> Letter of Truman Gibson to Mr. R.H. Beatty, North Carolina Voters League, July 19, 1945, RG 107 Records of the Secretary of War, Civilian Aide to the Secretary, Hastie-Gibson files, Entry 188, Box 205 (College Park, Maryland: National Archives II).

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club a guest house is operated for their use. These facilities are similar to those furnished white troops. There is a USO Club for Negro personnel conveniently located at Spring Lake, North Carolina, in addition to two USO clubs available to them in Fayetteville. All compare favorably with those for white troops. Athletic facilities available to negro personnel are adequate and excellent. They include a nine hole golf course, swimming facilities at Young's Lake in the immediate vicinity of the area quartering the majority of negro troops and at Smith's Lake [Smith Lake] near the FA RTC Area where about 1,600 troops are stationed; post gymnasium, football fields, baseball and softball diamonds, tennis, volley ball, basket ball, and horseshoe courts. All are used exclusively by Negro personnel or are shared on an equitable basis.<sup>74</sup>

The service club in the Spring Lake area was designated Service Club No. 5. In July of 1944, the Army issued a directive that "all personnel, regardless of race, would be afforded equal opportunity to enjoy recreational facilities on each post, camp and station." This memorandum was known as the Anti-Discrimination order, and it appears that the men of Fort Bragg took it seriously. White soldiers housed in the vicinity of the Spring Lake area began to use Service Club No. 5 to make telephone calls, read newspapers, magazines and books, and to buy food, candy, sodas, and cigarettes in the cafeteria. The African American soldiers welcomed the whites and so did the African American women who operated the cafeteria. However, in November of that year the fort's Special Service Chief issued verbal orders that henceforth, whites would be excluded from using Service Club No.5. This upset the hostesses so much that they resigned their positions. The matter was investigated by General Benjamin Davis and the Fort Bragg command stood by its interpretation that service clubs were exempt from the provisions of the Army directive. The War Department concurred with this interpretation, stating that the directive included recreational facilities, exchanges, transportation and theatres, but did not include service clubs. Regardless, white soldiers apparently ignored the order because a survey conducted in December of 1945 by the NAACP found white soldiers still using the facility.<sup>75</sup>

While the African American soldiers struggled with prejudicial treatment on post, their families had equal difficulties off-post. Housing near Fort Bragg for Army wives and families was nearly impossible to find. Spring Lake was too small to accommodate the large number of African American families that appeared during the war, and as has been noted, the Guest House was very small. Fayetteville had its own segregated African American section, called 'Little Harlem,' but it had gained a reputation for crime during

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<sup>74</sup> "Survey at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, Relative Racial Matters," 14 September 1943, RG 165 Records of the War Department General and Special Staffs, Entry 43, Box 444 (College Park, Maryland: National Archives II).

<sup>75</sup> Letter of General Benjamin Davis to the Secretary of War, and attachments, February 2, 1945; "Report of Investigation Tour made by Mr. Jesse Dedmon, NAACP, of Army Camps," December 31, 1945; both RG 160 Army Service Forces, General Correspondence, Entry 81, Box 241 (College Park, Maryland: National Archives II); "Discrimination in Use of Service Club at Fort Bragg, North Carolina," March 5, 1945, RG 165 Records of the War Department General and Special Staffs, Entry 43, Box 443 (College Park, Maryland: National Archives II).

the war. The Army constructed a housing project for African American families called Washington Square to relieve some of this problem. Unfortunately, these homes were in high demand, and when men were shipped overseas, their wives had to vacate their Washington Square quarters. Four wives with husbands overseas wrote Truman Gibson in August 1943 to complain that they were "served thirty days notice to vacate the houses that we now occupy because our husbands are no longer at Fort Bragg." Gibson could not help them, writing that "I am certain the local housing officer will give you enough time to make arrangements to move."<sup>76</sup>

7. Buildings TC-1 (8-6811) and TC-3 (8-6813)

In May 1945 Germany surrendered and in August Japan followed. During this time Fort Bragg began the process of demobilization and change to a peacetime army. Within a year, parts of Fort Bragg would become a ghost town where it was a once crowded, active city. After January 1946 the only large unit on the post would be the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne. For a brief period, the 82<sup>nd</sup> shared the post with the Field Artillery Replacement Training Center, which remained open until July 15, 1947. But it was merely a token outfit long before that. Since housing had been a critical problem for Fort Bragg's dependents, many buildings on post were converted into family housing as soldiers became citizens once again.<sup>77</sup> By 1946, the wartime wear and tear on the Spring Lake area had reduced it to a rather dismal hamlet. General Gavin had more to say about the site's condition than simply that it was a 'muddy pond.' His memories were that "The buildings were in a poor state of repair. It was obvious that these African American troops were going to be treated as second class citizens in the 82<sup>nd</sup> if their living conditions were not improved."<sup>78</sup>

Some minor improvements were already in the making. As noted, with demobilization, some buildings were being mothballed, but others were being converted for Fort Bragg's peacetime role. In January of 1946 Fort Bragg became the Headquarters, V Army Corps, and although this would not mean a lot of additional personnel, it did mean that some changes were needed to Fort Bragg's facilities. In addition to, or perhaps as part of the V Corps Headquarters, Fort Bragg established a new Personnel Center. This center was near the Spring Lake barracks area and a survey conducted by the War Department for this personnel center recommended that Service Club No. 5, the service club formerly reserved for African American soldiers, be converted for use by the center. To replace Service Club No. 5, a SER-C-M type Service Club with Guest House was planned in 1945 for the much smaller contingent of African American troops expected to be posted to Fort Bragg in the future. The construction for these new facilities, to be located at the corner of Ord Street and Butner Road immediately adjacent the African American

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<sup>76</sup> Letter of Mrs. Juanita Coley, Mrs. Elvin Thompson, Mrs. Pearl Mapp, and Mrs. Louise Jones, to Truman Gibson. August 3, 1943 and Gibson response, August 10, 1943, RG 107 Records of the Secretary of War, Civilian Aide to the Secretary, Hastie-Gibson files, Entry 188, Box 205 (College Park, Maryland: National Archives II).

<sup>77</sup> "History of Fort Bragg, 1918-1967," pp. 111, 115, 123.

<sup>78</sup> Booth and Spencer, *Paratrooper*, p. 314.

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theater, was approved on June 15, 1945. Construction proceeded rather slowly, especially in comparison to the lightning-like pace at the beginning of the war. The small, OQ-10 building for 10 guests—designated TC-3 in the 1940s and 8-6811 today—was completed as early as October 31, 1945. Meanwhile the Service Club—designated TC-1 in the 1940s and listed as 8-6813 today—was not completed until January 9, 1946. Both were built of concrete block, reflecting their expected permanent status, rather than the wood frame construction typical of WWII temporary buildings. The cost of the new buildings was \$14,029.70 and \$32,566.99 respectively. Both buildings were opened for use on February 1, 1946.<sup>79</sup>

Even as these buildings were being built it was clear to everyone that they would not be adequate. The lack of adequate recreational facilities for African American troops had been an on-going concern for the African American community since the Seabrook Road USO had burned in November of 1944 and the teachers college had been pressuring the USO to do something so that the college could get back their gymnasium. There was still a USO club for African American soldiers in Fayetteville. But it consisted of the second and third floor of a privately owned building “in a crowded, unattractive business section of town. The two floors used are unsafe, unattractive, and a fire hazard.”<sup>80</sup> It did not have dormitory facilities. In December 1945, community leaders in the Spring Lake area wrote of their concerns, pointing out that the new service club being built on post—building TC-1—was a “very small and inadequate building.”<sup>81</sup> The Army had recognized its shortcomings also and had approved on November 19, 1945 the renovation of building TC-100, an RB-1 type building that was across the street from the new service club under construction. The RB-1 building was called the Service Club Annex and opened on February 11, 1946. It was “outfitted with divans, easy chairs, piano, smoking stands, pool tables, ping pong tables, card tables, hand shuffle board, music box, and was used for dancing and special shows.”<sup>82</sup>

Although civic leaders in Fayetteville and Spring Lake still thought the facilities were inadequate after the club opened in 1946, the Army decided that no further action was

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<sup>79</sup> Major V.M. Robertson, “ASF, Fourth SvC, Office of the Chief, Athletic & Recreation Branch, Fort Bragg, North Carolina,” 14 March 1946; Letter of J.W. Seabrook to Truman Gibson, December 28, 1945; Letter of G.L. Butler, Chairman, and P.E. Tilley, Secretary, Inter-Council of Civic Organizations to Truman Gibson, July 14, 1946; Letter of Colonel William H. Kendall, to Fourth Service Command, March 18, 1946; all RG 107 Records of the Secretary of War, Civilian Aide to the Secretary, Hastie-Gibson files, Entry 188, Box 241 (College Park, Maryland: National Archives II); 1948 Fort Bragg Master Plan, pp. M-24-1-4 (Fort Bragg, North Carolina: on file, PWBC); “Summary of Requests Approved by Headquarters Fourth Service Command For Period 1-30 November Inclusive,” RG 165 Records of the General and Special Staffs, Entry 234d, Box 744 (College Park, Maryland: National Archives II); Real Property Cards for Buildings 8-6811 and 8-6813 (Fort Bragg, North Carolina: on file, PWBC).

<sup>80</sup> Letter of G.L. Butler, Chairman, and P.E. Tilley, Secretary, Inter-Council of Civic Organizations to Truman Gibson, July 14, 1946, RG 107 Records of the Secretary of War, Civilian Aide to the Secretary, Hastie-Gibson files, Entry 188, Box 241 (College Park, Maryland: National Archives II).

<sup>81</sup> Letter of J.W. Seabrook to Truman Gibson, December 28, 1945, RG 107 Records of the Secretary of War, Civilian Aide to the Secretary, Hastie-Gibson files, Entry 188, Box 241 (College Park, Maryland: National Archives II).

<sup>82</sup> Major V. M. Robertson, “ASF, Fourth SvC, Office of the Chief, Athletic & Recreation Branch, Fort Bragg, North Carolina,” 14 March 1946 RG 107 Records of the Secretary of War, Civilian Aide to the Secretary, Hastie-Gibson files, Entry 188, Box 241 (College Park, Maryland: National Archives II).

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necessary. In a letter defending this decision the Army pointed out that among recreational facilities for African American troops on post were the new service club, its annex, guest house, library, swimming pond with bath houses and water-front equipment, a nine hole golf course, field house, eight tennis courts, seven soft ball courts, twenty volley ball courts, eight outdoor basket ball courts, two football-soccer-speed ball fields, two badminton courts, two baseball fields, and the main post exchange and all branches.<sup>83</sup> Apparently what the command meant was that the athletic fields and exchanges all across the post were available to African Americans after the Anti-discrimination directive of 1945. However, as most of the African American troops were still being housed in the Spring Lake area, an area almost a mile away from the main post, these facilities might be available but not convenient. How many of the recreational facilities listed were actually convenient to the Spring Lake area is not known.<sup>84</sup>

Little is known about the activities within the two new buildings on the corner of Butner and Ord. William Weathersbee, a 55<sup>th</sup> veteran who was on post during the period in which the buildings were used exclusively by African Americans, did not make extensive use of the Service Club. Perhaps the reason is that it was so small, that most of the activities associated with short-term recreation—shooting pool, reading magazines, playing ping-pong or cards—were available at the annex. Furthermore, the Spring Lake housing area still had dayrooms for periods when the soldiers had just a brief time off. Weathersbee remembers though that the soda fountain was “about the only place to get a sandwich” or get a quick breakfast, and that there was a library in the front (north) of the building. He would come by on Sunday morning for breakfast. He did not use the Guest House. When he had leave or sufficient time off, Weathersbee, like most soldiers, wanted to get off-post.<sup>85</sup>

However, if building TC-1 was a quiet place of rest, reflection and snacks for the African American troops shortly after the war, it became the site of classic nights of swing, jazz and blues during the Korean Conflict. Three articles in the *Chicago Defender* during the early 1950s indicate that the guest house and its annex were popular music spots on Sunday evenings. The first article appeared in July 1950 and reports that Corporal Joseph Davis presented a piano concert at Service Club No. 5 to some 300 people. A month later, another article appeared featuring an African American jazz trio from the 80<sup>th</sup> Infantry Battalion who also played at Service Club No. 5. While it is not known if TC-1 and its annex became Service Club No. 5 when they were built to replace the original Service Club No. 5, it is possible.<sup>86</sup> Regardless, confirmation of TC-1's use as a music

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<sup>83</sup> Major V. M. Robertson, “ASF, Fourth SvC, Office of the Chief, Athletic & Recreation Branch, Fort Bragg, North Carolina,” 14 March 1946 RG 107 Records of the Secretary of War, Civilian Aide to the Secretary, Hastie-Gibson files, Entry 188, Box 241 (College Park, Maryland: National Archives II).

<sup>84</sup> It is known that the only recreational facilities in the Spring Lake area still extant today are one ball field, the lake area, and an outdoor amphitheater in a ravine to the east of the Service Club.

<sup>85</sup> Interview with Mr. William Weathersbee, July 10, 2001.

<sup>86</sup> “A Wow on Piano,” “Meet Jake Crosby-Called ‘Little Illinois’ By His Pals In Service,” and “More Entertainment Than Powder On Menu At Fort Bragg N. Carolina,” all *Chicago Defender*, July 22, 1950, February 2, 1951 and March 24, 1951 respectively.

hall, as opposed to the annex, comes in a *Chicago Defender* article in February of 1951. This article highlights the music of Private Jake Crosby who played on Sunday evenings at Fort Bragg's "non-commissioned officers club of detachment 2, 3420<sup>th</sup> ASU," at Fort Bragg. William Weathersbee remembers that TC-1 became detachment 2's NCO club during the Korean War.<sup>87</sup>

Each Sunday night a gay and hilarious crowd gathers at the club and lets go its musical emotions as Crosby and his tenor sax takes the spotlight. It matters not what orchestra has been booked by the club, it too welcomes Crosby. He takes his place in the band box and stands there in typical saxophone fashion, swaying back and forth and blazing out notes much like that of the famed Illinois Jacquet. So much is his style of playing like that of the popular jazz-playing saxophonist that the moniker "Little Illinois" was pinned on him by jazz enthusiasts back in his hometown of Meridian, Miss. where over a span of ten years he organized two bands of his own."<sup>88</sup>

Given the size of TC-1 it is surprising that 'orchestras' played in the building; however, with the front room cleared it would provide adequate space for a small band and around forty people. The use of the word orchestra was probably generic for any little group and not a full orchestra. It would appear that while TC-1 was not used daily as extensively as the annex, it probably saw great use as a small jazz hall.<sup>89</sup>

#### 8. African American Soldiers at Fort Bragg 1946 to 1952

On July 26, 1948, President Truman issued Executive Order 9981 proclaiming that henceforth "there shall be equality of treatment and opportunity for all persons in the armed services without regard to race, color, religion, or national origin." This order ended the segregated Army. It would take until 1954 before the last of the all African American, segregated units were disbanded Army-wide, and at Fort Bragg, segregated units remained until around 1952. On the other hand, the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne, under the command of General James Gavin, took steps toward integration even before the president issued his Executive Order.

The story of General Gavin's integration efforts at Fort Bragg begins with the 555<sup>th</sup> Parachute Infantry. Early in WWII African Americans clamored for opportunities in all branches of the armed services and in all aspects of the combat arms. This included the new parachute infantry units being established at Fort Benning, Georgia. Eventually, the Army decided to form an African American parachute unit and activated the 555<sup>th</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> This is supported by another 555<sup>th</sup> Veteran, Samuel McKinney, telephone interview with the author, August 30, 2001.

<sup>88</sup> "Meet Jake Crosby."

<sup>89</sup> Jake Crosby went on to a music career as a "very well respected tenor sax player." His son, Will Crosby, plays blues guitar for a Chicago-based blues band called Mathew Skoller Band, see [www.charlie.com/charlie/aujourd'hui/staff/will.html](http://www.charlie.com/charlie/aujourd'hui/staff/will.html).

Parachute Infantry Company at Fort Benning on December 30, 1943. The 555<sup>th</sup>'s test platoon began with twenty volunteers from the 92<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Division at Fort Huachuca, Arizona. Sergeant Walter Morris and fifteen other men graduated from the first school in January of 1944 and their African American officers (and the final enlisted man) followed in March. The platoon was soon up to company size during the spring of 1944 and in mid summer was transferred to Camp Mackall, North Carolina. There they received combat training and continued to expand their complement until November when they were activated as the 555<sup>th</sup> Parachute Infantry Battalion.<sup>90</sup>

As they trained in North Carolina they awaited their call to battle overseas. Such orders never came. Instead, they were shipped in May 1945 to Pendleton Air Base, Oregon for a classified mission. This mission was called "Operation Firefly", an important, dangerous, but until recently relatively unknown part of the world war. Out west, civilians had learned the value of fighting forest fires by parachuting into the area of the fire, immediately digging trenches around the fire to isolate it, and then returning home by marching to an assembly area where they could be picked up. Meanwhile in November 1944, the Japanese began launching rather sophisticated high altitude balloons with bombs attached, in the hope that the prevailing winds would float them across the Pacific to land on the United States. It was hoped that this terror weapon would cause panic among the Americans who would demand the United States cease hostilities against the Japanese. Some of these balloon bombs made it to the United States and were causing a few casualties.<sup>91</sup> Despite the efforts of the government to cover up the existence of the balloons, the casualties they caused were difficult to cover. At the time, the threat that the bomb might contain chemical-biological agents instead of explosive or incendiary devices, was very real, so the War Department was taking the occasional balloon bombing incidents very seriously. The 555<sup>th</sup> mission—to assist in fighting forest fires—also included reacting immediately to any reports of Japanese balloon bombs by jumping into the area and disposing of the bombs. To accomplish this double mission, the 555<sup>th</sup> had to learn to jump into heavily forested areas. Normally, parachutists are taught to avoid the trees, but in the mountainous conditions out west where the forest fires were burning and bombs were dropping, the trees were unavoidable. So their training included methods for landing in trees and then getting safely to the ground, which might be well over 100' below when they landed. The men carried up to 150' of rope to get themselves out of the tall trees. The 555<sup>th</sup> performed many jumps in thirty-six separate fire missions assisting civilian firefighters and an exercise with the U.S. Navy. After successfully accomplishing their mission in October 1945, they were sent back to North Carolina and assigned to Fort Bragg. In December of that year, they were assigned to the 13<sup>th</sup> Airborne Division. In February 1946, as the new Service Club, Annex, and Guest House opened

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<sup>90</sup> Bradley Biggs, *The Triple Nickles, America's First All-Black Paratroop Unit* (Hamden, Connecticut, Archon Books, 1986), pp. 16-24, 36-41; Patrick K. O'Donnell, *Beyond Valor: World War II's Ranger and Airborne Veterans Reveal the Heart of Combat* (New York: Free Press, 2001), p. 107.

<sup>91</sup> Of some 9,000 balloons estimated to have been launched, about 1,000 reached the U.S., see O'Donnell, *Beyond Valor*, p. 352.

for business, the Triple Nickles were assigned to the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Division for administration, training, and supply.<sup>92</sup>

Gavin's efforts toward integration began one month before that. Arriving at Fort Bragg in the late fall of 1945, Gavin was in the midst of attempting to save the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne from deactivation. Seeing the pride, esprit and high state of training in the 555<sup>th</sup> he invited the regiment to march in the 82<sup>nd</sup>'s victory parade in New York in January of 1946 (Figure 4). Noting the poor housing conditions the unit was occupying, Gavin "decided that there was only one way to handle the situation, and that was to integrate them into the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Division without delay, making them part of the division" and thereby sharing barracks and training space.<sup>93</sup> Gavin's plan was in line with official Army policy for the use of African Americans in the postwar period. A board headed by Lt. General Alvan Gillem in 1945, recommended a post-war policy that would place small segregated groups of African Americans within larger white units.<sup>94</sup> At first Gavin met resistance because the 555<sup>th</sup> would be sharing the 82<sup>nd</sup>'s battle honors earned in Europe. Gavin's response was that by training and serving alongside the white soldiers, they would earn those honors. Eventually the Army agreed with the move but it would not be approved until November of 1947. Then in December, in a "driving downpour of sleet and rain," an official ceremony was held to deactivate the 555<sup>th</sup> Parachute Battalion and make it the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion of the 505<sup>th</sup> Airborne Parachute Regiment of the 82<sup>nd</sup> Division. Standing in front of the ranks at this ceremony was William Weathersbee, proudly bearing the unit's guidon.<sup>95</sup> Gavin's decision to incorporate the Triple Nickles did much for the morale of African Americans at Fort Bragg.

As noted, when the sun rose on July 27, 1948, the day after Truman issued his executive order, the Army did not stop everything and immediately shift African Americans into white units. Unit integrity and training schedules had to be maintained and life for segregated African American units continued as before. For months after the integration order there were still many African American units. Besides the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, African American units at Fort Bragg in late 1948 included the 503<sup>rd</sup> Airborne Antiaircraft Battalion, 98<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery Battalion, 589<sup>th</sup> Quartermaster Field Service Company, 758<sup>th</sup> Heavy Tank Battalion, 558<sup>th</sup> Medical Company, 65<sup>th</sup> Ordnance Ammunition Company, 95<sup>th</sup> Transportation Company, 112 APU TY F unit [?].<sup>96</sup> Interestingly, the

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<sup>92</sup> Biggs, *Triple*, pp. 56-73; "Negro Paratroopers Find Fire-Fighting No 'Snap'," *Chicago Defender*, September 15, 1945.

<sup>93</sup> Booth and Spencer, *Paratrooper*, p. 314.

<sup>94</sup> "Utilization of Negro Manpower in the Postwar Army," Comments from Colonel McCrimon, Army Ground Forces, March 29, 1946, RG 160 Records of the Staffs of the Army Ground Forces, General Correspondence, Box 240 (College Park, Maryland: National Archives II).

<sup>95</sup> 505<sup>th</sup> Unit History, typewritten manuscript, post war files of the 505th (Fort Bragg, North Carolina: 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Museum, n.d.), p. 252; William Weathersbee, interview, July 13, 2001.

<sup>96</sup> "Station List of Negro Units," attached to Major General H.R. Bull, War Department General Staff, Letter headed "Experimental Unit of Negro Personnel, October 11, 1948, RG 165 Records of the War Department General Staff, Entry 43, Box 796 (College Park, Maryland: National Archives II).

Army was still forming all-black units after the order. On June 10, 1949, the 80<sup>th</sup> Airborne Antiaircraft Battalion was activated while the 503<sup>rd</sup> was inactivated. Some members of the old 503<sup>rd</sup> were transferred to this unit. The 80<sup>th</sup> was activated with "Negro Personnel."<sup>97</sup> The 80<sup>th</sup> was made an organic element of the 82<sup>nd</sup>. The 98<sup>th</sup> FA, 578<sup>th</sup> Heavy Tank, and the 80<sup>th</sup> AA remained all-black units at least until 1952.<sup>98</sup>

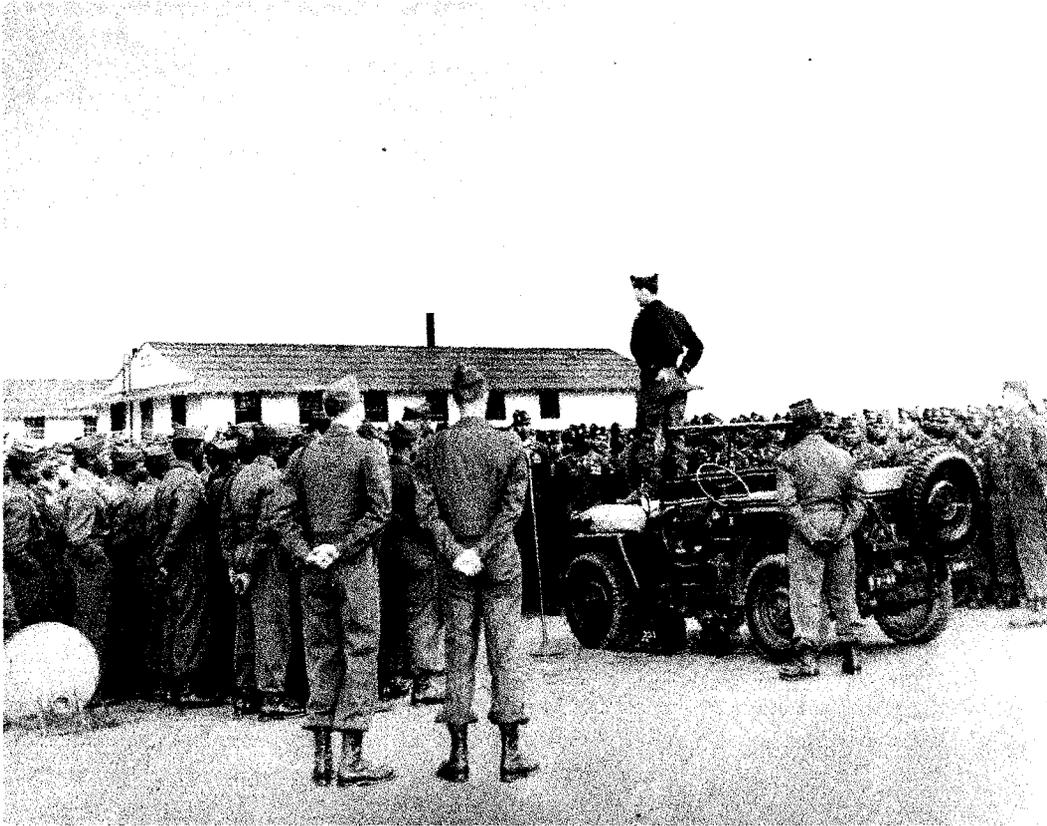


Figure 4: General James Gavin Talking to the 555<sup>th</sup> Airborne Infantry Battalion at Fort Bragg, North Carolina (Photo Courtesy of the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Division Museum, Fort Bragg, North Carolina).

However, Truman's order did have an immediate impact on the troops. As the Army absorbed the meaning of the President's order, soldiers reacted with apprehension. At Fort Bragg, Colonel Donald Seckert remembers:

When the order for integration was received everyone was apprehensive. There were predictions of fights in the officers and NCO clubs and in the barracks. The night the order was effective, I was at the Officers' Club Annex—the huge barn-like building which was located behind the Main

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<sup>97</sup> "Activation of the 80<sup>th</sup> Airborne Antiaircraft Battalion and Inactivation of the 503<sup>rd</sup> Airborne Antiaircraft Battalion," May 9, 1949, and attachments, 503<sup>rd</sup> AA BN files of the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Division (Fort Bragg: 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Museum).

<sup>98</sup> See 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Annuals for 1952 (Fort Bragg: 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Museum).

Club. We went there to drink and often eat, because the dress code was less rigid than in the Main Club. Two colored couples came in and sat at a table by themselves. They were served, and danced, and enjoyed themselves, but were left strictly alone. After that, it became normal to see black officers and their wives or dates in the club.

At first colored officers and soldiers were assigned to the formerly all-white units one or two at a time. For many years the Puerto Rican and other Spanish heritage soldiers far outnumbered the African American soldiers in most units of the 82<sup>nd</sup>. . . There did not appear to be any problems of a true racial nature until the beginning of the sixties.<sup>99</sup>

Thus progress in integration and race relations on the post continued with some steps forward and some backward. Forward steps included the promotion of Master Sergeant Oliver O. Gaines to Sergeant Major, the highest ranking enlisted man on post in July of 1951. Gaines was the first African American to hold this slot at Fort Bragg.<sup>100</sup> Another major step was Fort Bragg's integration of its elementary schools. In 1951, Fort Bragg opened the "South's first unsegregated elementary schools with one Negro teacher on the staff of 43. . . The new system has been in effect since Sept. 6 when parents living on post were notified that Negro children of post personnel would attend the same schools as whites." By that time, Fort Bragg was also able to boast, "the Negro families live in every housing unit."<sup>101</sup> This seemingly minor bit of progress was actually quite significant as housing in and around Fayetteville and Spring Lake remained a problem throughout the 1950s. For instance, General, then Lieutenant Colin Powell, could not find adequate housing for his bride in Fayetteville as late as 1961. They eventually found temporary space with a white friend.<sup>102</sup>

During the period between the end of the war and the Korean Conflict, the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne remained the primary organization at Fort Bragg, with the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion of the 505<sup>th</sup>, the 98<sup>th</sup> FA and the 80<sup>th</sup> AA being the primary African American units organically attached to the 82<sup>nd</sup>. The veterans of the old 555<sup>th</sup> continued to flourish within the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne. In 1947, Chaplain Gerald L. Hayden joined the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion as the first African American jump Chaplain. Later that year the battalion was chosen by General Gavin to demonstrate a new marshalling technique involving a rotating sequence of five stations each five miles apart. The troops would go from station to station, getting mission briefings, equipment and ammunition issuance, communications equipment, parachutes, and finally enplaning for the mission. This technique was adopted based on the threat of nuclear war.

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<sup>99</sup> Colonel Donald A. Seckert, Typewritten manuscript, 504<sup>th</sup> Airborne, Post-War Files, 1946-1957 (Fort Bragg: 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Museum, n.d.), p. 396.

<sup>100</sup> "Sgt. Gaines Gets Top GI Job at Fort Bragg," *Chicago Defender*, July 28, 1951.

<sup>101</sup> "Mix Schools at Fort Bragg—No Riots," *Chicago Defender*, October 27, 1951.

<sup>102</sup> Gail Buckley, *American Patriots: The Story of Black in the Army From the Revolution to Desert Storm* (New York: Random House, 2001), p. 378-379.

The 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion was so successful in performing this tactic that it became the "atomic age battalion," and was sent to various Army-Air Corps shows as a demonstration unit (Figure 5).<sup>103</sup>

The Army also organized large-scale field exercises at various military installations across the nation to keep the forces prepared during the post war period. These exercises were given code names like "Exercise Combine" "Combine II and III," "Exercise Tarheel," "Exercise Swarmer," "Exercise Southern Pines," and "Exercise Longhorn." As a typical example of these exercises, Fort Bragg and Camp Mackall played host to "Exercise Tarheel," from March 20 to May 30 1949. This exercise was divided into five phases. Phase I consisted of planning and training at their home base at Fort Bragg. In Phase II, the Division moved to Camp Mackall and established a bivouac area. Phase III consisted of tactical field exercises at the battalion and regimental level. This phase included mock combat against aggressor forces in which it was reported that aggressor parachute units had landed in the area north of Lower Little River and were overrunning Fort Bragg. In Phase IV, the Division joined a Task Force and attacked the aggressors off Fort Bragg. In Phase V, everyone returned to base and was debriefed. In these exercises the troops practiced combined arms tactical maneuvers on a large scale. One of the goals of this particular exercise was to test a revised Fire Support Coordination Center. The result was a recommendation that the revisions be adopted as the Army wide Standard Operating Procedure (SOP).<sup>104</sup>

One exercise will go down in infamy for the veterans of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion of the 505<sup>th</sup> Combine III<sup>105</sup> was held at Elgin Field, Florida in 1948 and the African American units made an impressive show. The 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion of the 505<sup>th</sup>, the 98<sup>th</sup> and the 758<sup>th</sup> were all singled out as putting "on a show worthy of praise from the nation's top military experts."<sup>106</sup> But tragedy also struck the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion in this exercise. The battalion and a tank company were in attack position when eighteen B-29's on a bombing run with live ammunition strayed off course and bombed the battalion. Three men were killed outright and many men were wounded. The Army arrested the flight crews while they were in flight, however, later, a blackout was ordered over the whole incident and to this day the investigation of the incident has not been seen by 555<sup>th</sup> veterans.<sup>107</sup> Apparently, the bombing crews were not punished.

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<sup>103</sup> Biggs, *The Triple Nickles*, pp. 78-79.

<sup>104</sup> Final Report, Exercise "Tarheel," 1949, RG 319 Records of the Army Staff, Army Command Reports, 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne, Box 4387 (College Park, Maryland, National Archives II); "Annual Historical Report 505<sup>th</sup> Airborne Infantry Regiment, Fort Bragg, North Carolina," February 25, 1950, RG 319 Records of the Army Staff, Army Command Reports, 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne, Box 4389 (College Park, Maryland, National Archives II).

<sup>105</sup> Bradley Biggs states that the Eglin Field Exercises were Combine II, but the unit annual for 1948 calls it Combine III, see Biggs, *The Triple Nickles*, pp. 80-82 and 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Annual for 1948 (Fort Bragg: 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Museum).

<sup>106</sup> 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Annual for 1948 (Fort Bragg: 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Museum).

<sup>107</sup> Biggs, *The Triple Nickles*, pp. 80-82.



Figure 5: Members of the 555<sup>th</sup> outside of their HQ at Fort Bragg, North Carolina (Photo Courtesy of the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Division Museum, Fort Bragg, North Carolina).

The following year the pace picked up considerably, especially after North Korea invaded South Korea in June. The year began normally with the 82<sup>nd</sup> participating in Exercises Boondocks I and II, Portrex and Swarmer. The goal of Boondocks was to provide small unit tactical training and ran from January through March. Exercise Swarmer in April and May was a combined arms exercise. During Exercise Swarmer, the 98<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery Battalion was “successfully air-transported into the air-head which marked the first time in military history that such an operation had been conducted with a 155mm howitzer battalion.”<sup>108</sup> As hostilities broke out in Korea, though, training exercises took on a different tone. Some men began to be lost to overseas deployment, and others transferred to different units to become cadre and officers in preparation for overseas deployment. By the end of the year equipment became scarce due to an aircraft shortage, and a planned airborne exercise was cancelled in November of 1950. The still all-black 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, however, did demonstrate an airborne problem to a class of the Armed Forces Staff College in which artillery, engineers, armored and pathfinder units

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<sup>108</sup> Captain Camillus W. Hoffman, “Command Report, 98<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery Battalion, 1 January 1950 to 31 December 1950” January 8, 1951 RG 319 Records of the Army Staff, Army Command Reports, 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne, Box 4389 (College Park, Maryland, National Archives II)

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made a heavy drop. Furthermore, village fighting and close combat training was inaugurated in that same month. Fort Bragg, too, saw changes through the year and newly activated units called up for the Korean crisis meant reopening barracks and housing facilities that had stood abandoned for several years.<sup>109</sup>

In 1950 veterans of the 555<sup>th</sup> began another page of their unique history. With the Korean Conflict growing, the Army reactivated the Rangers. The modern Rangers were a special commando unit formed in June of 1942 and led by Major William Darby. Darby's Rangers established themselves as a tough unique unit of elite fighters during WWII, and their feats included the famous heroic climb at Point Du Hoc on Omaha Beach. In 1950 volunteers were called to enlist in the Rangers and some 5,000 men from the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne attempted to join. The Rangers did not train at Fort Bragg, but rather were sent to Fort Benning. Rangers had to be paratroopers first. The units were organized into 110-man companies for special operations, such as infiltration, raid, bridge destruction, and knocking out enemy communications. They were highly trained and today, Ranger training is considered among the toughest military training one can get.<sup>110</sup>

Although Truman had issued his Executive Order (EO) the Army organized a segregated all-black company of Rangers, designated the 2<sup>nd</sup> Ranger Company. These men were from the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion of the 505, and many were veterans of the old 555<sup>th</sup>. Also joining these men were members of the 80<sup>th</sup> AA Battalion. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Ranger Company arrived in Korea at the end of December 1950 and was assigned to the 7<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division. Under the command of 1<sup>st</sup> Lieutenant Warren E. Allen, the company was at the front and in combat within three days.<sup>111</sup> The company made one of the few airborne jumps of the war, along with the 14<sup>th</sup> Ranger Company at Munsan-Ni. In this action the unit was part of the 187<sup>th</sup> Regimental Combat Team. Its mission was to trap retreating North Korean Units between Seoul and the Imjin River. The jump was made on March 23, 1951.<sup>112</sup> Although the jump was successful, with only wounded to report, the combat team met minor resistance as most of the enemy had escaped across the river before the 187<sup>th</sup> arrived. So, the task force was kept together and given a new mission as ground troops. They attacked the next day to link up with the 3<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division to their east (Figure 6). They remained in combat until the 30<sup>th</sup> of March when they were relieved.<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> Major Herman M. Volheim, "Command Report, 505<sup>th</sup> Airborne Infantry Regiment, 1 January 1950 to 31, December 1950,"; Lieutenant Ralph H. Cruikshank, "Historical Report, 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne, Fort Bragg, North Carolina, 1 January 1950 to 31 December 1950," RG 319 Records of the Army Staff, Army Command Reports, 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne, Boxes 4388, 4389 (College Park, Maryland, National Archives II)

<sup>110</sup> [www.grunts.net/army/rangers.html](http://www.grunts.net/army/rangers.html); Jack Trim, "Rangers Prowl Fort Benning's Fields As Army Revives Happy Hatchetmen" Newspaper Article dated November 12, 1950 in author's possession provided by Mr. William Weathersbee.

<sup>111</sup> Corporal C.E.J. Garmaker, "Rangers In Korea, Soldier Correspondent Goes On Patrol With Rugged Volunteer Unit, *Stars and Stripes*, Far East Weekly Review, February 24, 1951.

<sup>112</sup> William Weathersbee, who volunteered for the 2<sup>nd</sup> Ranger Company remembers making the company's planning sandtable for this operation.

<sup>113</sup> Lt. Colonel Roy E. Appleman, *Ridgeway Duels For Korea* (College Station, Texas: Texas A&M Press, 1990), pp. 382-389.

9. Fort Bragg: Korea and Beyond

Meanwhile, as the conflict in Korea intensified, Fort Bragg's compliment expanded. National Guard and Army Reserve units were activated and began training at the post. The expansion was not as dramatic as WWII, however, the Army did double in size in five months. By June 1951 the Army increased to 1.6 million, some 230,000 serving in Korea alone. African Americans volunteered in large numbers, and their strength increased to 13.2 percent of the total Army by December 1952.<sup>114</sup> In 1951, the 18<sup>th</sup> Airborne Corps was reactivated and the post became known as the 'home of the Airborne.' During that same year an Air Support Center was also established and the 11<sup>th</sup> Airborne Division was attached to the 18<sup>th</sup> Airborne Corps. A year later the Army established the Psychological Warfare Center, which included Special Forces operations. The 10<sup>th</sup> Special Forces Group came on board. Despite a close relationship with Pope Airfield, the Army established its own airfield as part of an exercise at that time.



Figure 6: 2<sup>nd</sup> Ranger Company crosses a stream northeast of Kumma-ri, Korea (Photo U.S. Army Signal Corps copy in possession of Mr. William Weathersbee).

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<sup>114</sup> MacGregor, *Integration*, p. 430.

Exactly when the two buildings, 8-6811 and 8-6813, were no longer assigned exclusively to African American soldiers is not known. Since segregated African American units were still in existence at Fort Bragg until the Korean Conflict, it would seem logical that the transition occurred during that time of expansion. Certainly, by the end of the war, African American veterans did not return to find themselves confined to these two buildings. William Weathersbee remembers that TC-1 remained an NCO club throughout most of the 1950s. It is possible that it remained so even longer. The two Real Property Cards for these buildings are both dated November 1, 1964. The information for these cards is typed and they were designated at that time as an "Open Mess-NCO" (8-6813) and "Guest House" (8-6811). These designations are crossed out and handwritten over them are "Bde Hq" for both buildings. In addition, building 8-6811 indicates that the buildings were converted to Headquarters buildings on March 17, 1993. It is possible that these building remained as an open mess and guest house into the middle 60s and were converted into administrative buildings relatively recently.

After Korea, Fort Bragg continued to serve the army as one of the largest training centers. Through the 1950s, Fort Bragg continued its strong tie to airborne training and operations. In August of 1967, the 82<sup>nd</sup> celebrated its 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary as an airborne division and its 50<sup>th</sup> as an infantry division—and during much of that history it called Fort Bragg home.<sup>115</sup> And also, during much of that period, African Americans and white soldiers schooled, trained, fought, and died together in integrated units. Racial tensions at Fort Bragg, like many other installations, continued and probably became more inflamed during the Civil Rights period of the early 1960s. Racial incidents continue today. However, it can be argued that the integration of the armed forces after WWII did much to increase racial tolerance in American society at large. Men and women who would not mix in civilian society were forced to work and train and die together in the Army. Their experience in a stressful but mixed racial setting has to have had a positive effect on their racial attitudes later in life as civilians.

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<sup>115</sup> "History of Fort Bragg," pp. 1-15.

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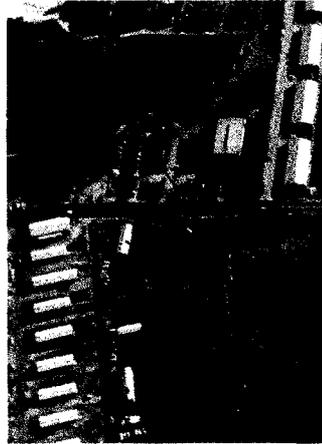


Figure 7: 1968 aerial view of complex (Fort Bragg Public Works Business Center).

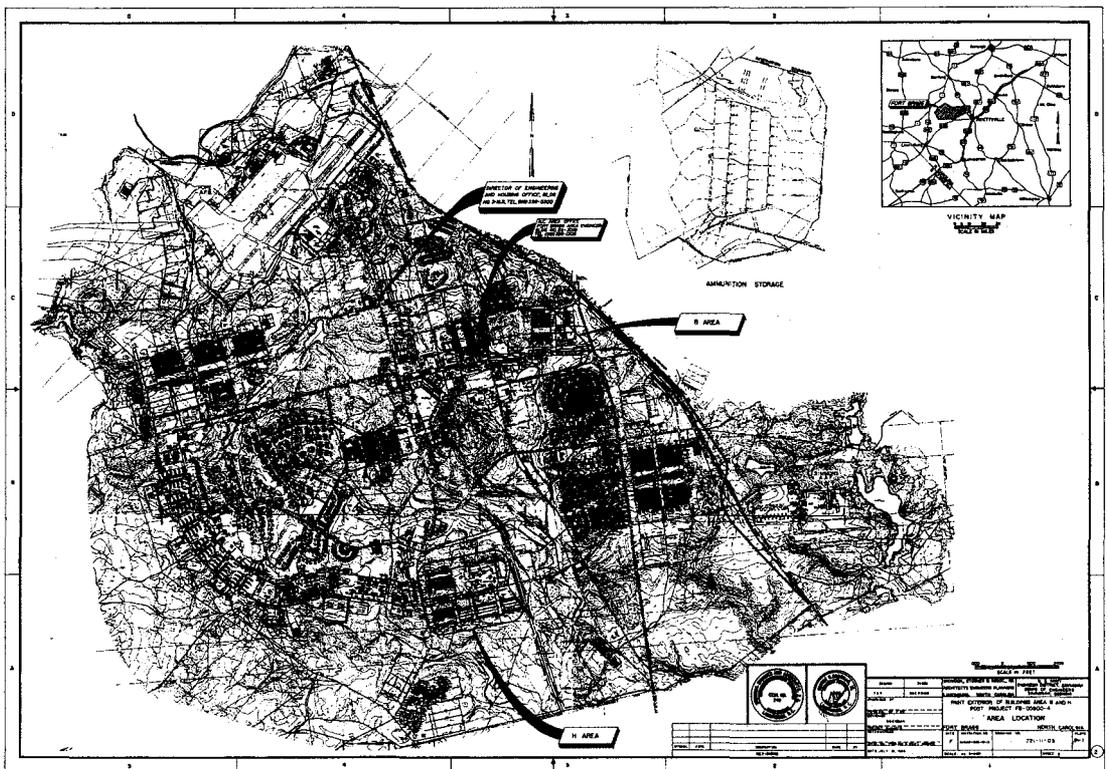


Figure 8: Map of Fort Bragg (Fort Bragg Public Works Business Center).

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Title: Historian

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Date: September 2001

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL STATEMENT

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural Character:

This is a United States Army military installation facility that was occupied from 1945 to 2001 at Fort Bragg, Fayetteville, North Carolina. The complex includes a noncommissioned officers' service club and a guest house (see photographic documentation HABS No. NC-397-1 through NC-397-5). The Service Club is a rectangular mass oriented north south with a screened porch that is now enclosed for offices on the east facade. A small porch on the north facade protects that entrance and a small porch on the east facade protects that entrance. Small porches on both the north and south facades protect those doors. The Guest House built for the noncommissioned officers' wives has a rectangular mass oriented north south located approximately 58' to the west of the Service Club. A small porch on the north protects that entrance and a small porch on the south protects that entrance.

2. Condition of the Fabric:

General condition of the exterior envelopes are good, partly due to their method of construction with concrete block on a concrete block and slab foundation. Some improvements have been made to the Service Club especially to the original screened porch that was converted to office space at an unknown date. The windows of the Service Club are replacements, but no date for their replacement could be found. Little improvement has been made to the Guest House. Weathering has occurred at the doorframes and the cornice/eave/soffit configuration of the Service Club and the Guest House roof. Weathering has also taken a toll on the plywood used to board up the windows of the screened porch. Weathering has severely crippled the effectiveness of the windows and doors and their frames of the Guest House. Panes of glass are missing, and in some cases where window air conditioners had been placed whole bottom sashes are also missing. The roofing material is in good condition and was replaced at an unknown date. The concrete block was painted at an undetermined point and paint failure is occurring on all facades.

B. Site:

1. General Setting:

The African American Noncommissioned Officers' Service Club complex is located on Fort Bragg, North Carolina. The Service Club faces east with its long axis perpendicular to Butner Road. The Guest House is oriented the same way, and is located approximately 58' west of the Service Club. An asphalt driveway enters from Butner Road east of the Service Club and turns into a large parking lot east and south of the Service Club. The site is predominately flat, but there is a very slight slope down to the southeast.

2. Buildings:

The complex includes the Service Club with a low rectangular mass (HABS No. NC-397-A-2) and a Guest House with a low rectangular mass (HABS No. NC-397-B-2).

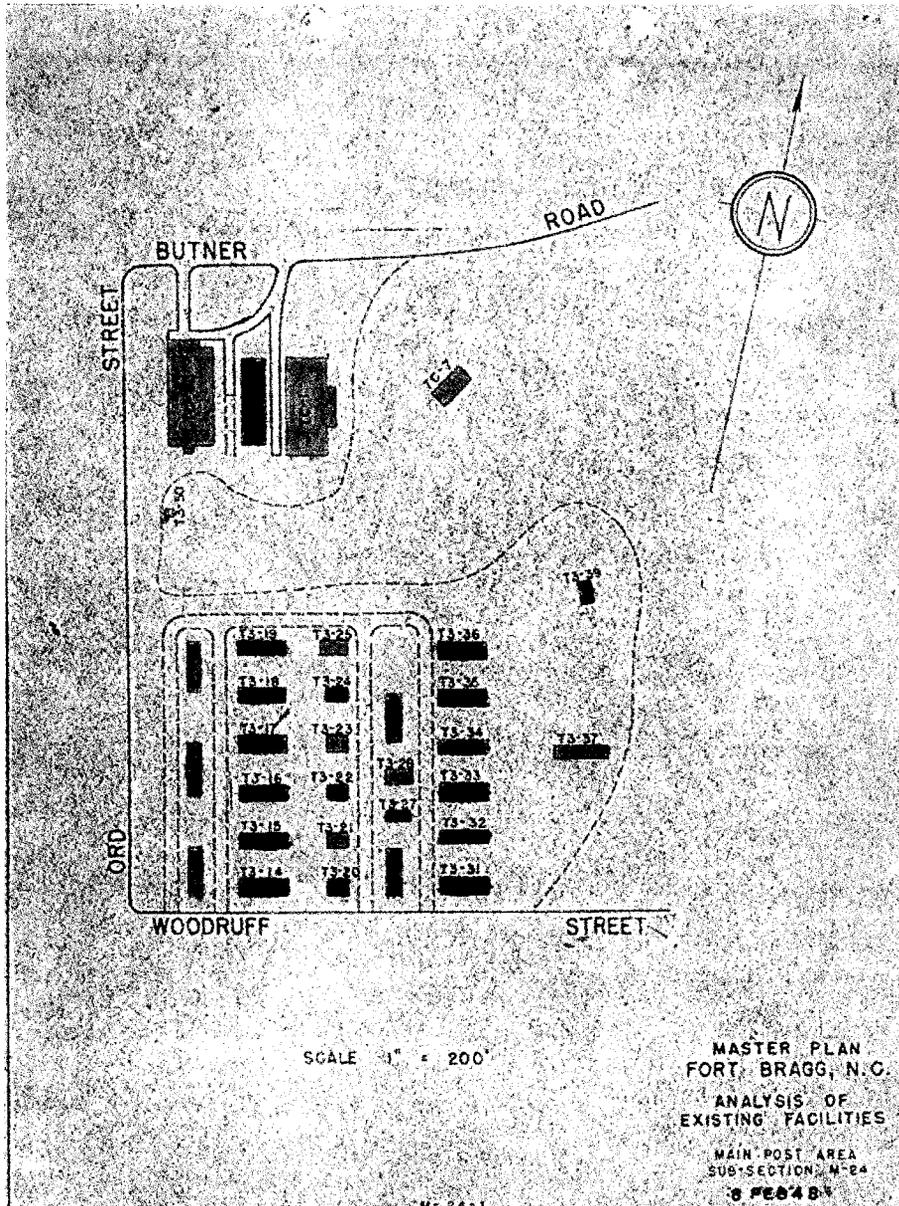


Figure 9: Portion of 1948 Master Plan with complex in northwest corner (Fort Bragg Public Works Business Center).



some fescue but is mostly bare sand with an asphalt driveway between the two buildings. A large pine tree is in the southwest corner. The west facade has wieglea, but there is no coherent planting rhythm. The north facade is planted with a large deciduous bush. The east facade faces the same area described in the Service Club section. The west facade faces an expanse of lawn (mostly fescue with sand patches); there are no other plantings on the west facade. The south facade has two large deciduous bushes on either side of the door. An asphalt sidewalk leads east to the parking lot, while a concrete sidewalk leads west across the lawn. An asphalt service drive leads from the parking lot to a street to the south. There is no overall planting scheme.

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### PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

- A. Architectural Drawings: Existing drawings, "Mobilization Buildings, Service Club for Enlisted Men, Type Ser-B-M," by War Department, Office of the Chief of Engineers—Construction Division, Washington, DC.

Original drawings utilized for documentation are located at: Archives, Artifact Curation Facility (Building 3-1333), Cultural Resources Program, Environmental and Natural Resources Division, Public Works Business Center, Fort Bragg, North Carolina.

- B. Historic Views: Original aerial photography utilized for documentation are located at: Archives, Artifact Curation Facility (Building 3-1333), Cultural Resources Program, Environmental and Natural Resources Division, Public Works Business Center, Fort Bragg, North Carolina.

- C. Interviews:

Mr. William Weathersbee, Raeford, North Carolina (555<sup>th</sup>), 10 July 2001 and 30 August 2001.

Mr. Samuel McKinney, Fayetteville, North Carolina (555<sup>th</sup>), 30 August 2001.

LTC Sion H. Harrington III, USAR (Ret.) Military Collection Archivist & Coordinator, Military Collection Project, NC Division of Archives and History, 25 July 2001.

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82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Annuals for 1952. Fort Bragg: 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Museum.

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- E. Likely sources not yet investigated: None
- F. Supplemental material: None

#### PART IV: PROJECT INFORMATION

The Cultural Resources Program in the Public Works Business Center at Fort Bragg, North Carolina sponsored this project. The project was completed at the Land and Heritage Conservation Branch of the Construction Engineering Research Laboratory (CERL) part of the United States Army Corps of Engineers, Engineer Research and Development Center (ERDC). The project historian was Steven D. Smith of the South Carolina Institute of Archaeology and Anthropology (SCIAA), with assistance from Kristen LaBrie. Adam Smith (CERL) produced the architectural description section of the report. Martin Stupich produced the large-format photographs contained in the report. Documentation was coordinated with the Fort Bragg Cultural Resources Program through preservation planner Brian M. Lione. Robert P. Anzuoni, Director of the 82nd Airborne Museum and Donna Barr Tabor, historian at the XVIII Airborne Corps historian's office, assisted with the documentation.

Date: September 30, 2001