

## SUMMARY

An acute infectious disease attacking non-skeletal tissue, gas gangrene emerged as the most serious of war injuries as early as the first offensives in the autumn of 1914. Doctors, both surprised and powerless, thought they were witnessing the onslaught of a new disease. However, as the months passed, it became apparent that in this war of positions, what was evolving was an illness that had been known since Antiquity: wounds from shell explosions, soldiers immobilized in deleterious trenches, the

mediocrity and even lack of sanitary equipment, the slow and ill-conceived transfer of the wounded away from the front lines, and unsuitable healthcare. The Army's medical teams thus organized and launched a series of efficient therapeutic and preventive measures. These efforts succeeded and the amputation of a gangrenous member was no longer systematically applied. However, during this period of World War I, an essential and truly efficient therapeutic arm was lacking: antibiotherapy.

## A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF WHITE AND BLACK AMERICAN SOLDIERS DURING THE FIRST WORLD WAR

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When the United States entered the First World in 1917 immediate questions arose concerning the fate of black men within the organization. Black soldiers had long been segregated into race-specific units in the regular army, and army officials had no intention of tampering with this longstanding policy. How many African American soldiers would enter the army and whether or not they would fight in large numbers remained an open question. Over the course of the war, a systematic pattern of discrimination emerged: blacks were more likely than white soldiers to be drafted, placed in labor battalions, given inferior medical care, and refused commissions. A comparison between the wartime and postwar experiences of white and black soldiers underscores the disadvantaged position of African American soldiers within the wartime army

### SELECTING MEN FOR THE ARMY

There were approximately 18,000 regular army and National Guard officers available when the war began, and the American army would select and train nearly 182,000 officers from the civilians entering the military in the next year and a half (Coffman, 1968, 55-58)<sup>1</sup>. Approximately 1,200 of those holding commissions during the war

were black. This figure included 639 men who attended the one officer training camp held exclusively for black candidates in Fort Des Moines, Iowa in the spring of 1917, as well as physicians, dentists, chaplains, and National Guard officers. The army only allowed African American officers to lead black troops, while white officers commanded both white and black units during the war. Having white enlisted men recognize black officers' position of authority proved difficult throughout the war, and often black officers were advised by their superiors to avoid demanding salutes from white soldiers when passing them on the street or in camp. Even when white soldiers recognized the superior rank of a black officer, they often found a way to make their true feelings known. Mississippi troops, for example, saluted the black officers from Camp Zachary Taylor, Kentucky, they met in Camp Merritt, New Jersey, but added "Damn you!" under their breath (Imes, August 18, 1918).

At the beginning of the war, the regular army of professional soldiers could call on roughly 127,588 troops (including 10,000 African Americans) and 164,292 National Guard officers and enlisted men (10,000 of them black) serving state governments. The army anticipated creating three categories of combat divisions reserved respectively

for regular army, National Guard, and national army (drafted) troops. Army officials expected to fill the divisions reserved for National Guard and regular army troops with volunteers in the summer of 1917, but the expected numbers of white volunteers failed to materialize<sup>2</sup>. Army officials soon realized they would have to use white draftees to bring these volunteer-oriented divisions up to combat strength, as well as funnel conscripts into the national army units reserved exclusively for draftees. For the first time in American military history, therefore, draftees formed the majority of the citizen soldier population. Federal forces grew to almost 3.9 million by November 11, 1918, of which 72% was conscripted (Office of the Provost Marshal General, 1919, 227).

The power to select conscripts for the army lay with the thousands of local draft boards throughout the country which sifted through millions of registration forms and administered medical exams to determine who was eligible and fit to serve. Because large numbers of men applied for exemptions, the predilections of local boards played a large role in determining who went to war and who stayed home. Racial preferences and prejudices clearly played a role in the conscription process. During the first draft call in 1917, local boards examined 1,078,331 African Americans and 9,562,515 whites. Of these, draft boards placed 51.65% of blacks and 32.53% of whites in Class I, a classification that made them eligible for immediate induction (Barbeau and Henri, 1996, 36). These disproportionate figures held firm throughout subsequent draft calls (Office of the Provost Marshal General, 1919, 192). The Provost Marshal General estimated by the end

of the war that local boards placed 33% of white registrants and 52% of black registrants in Class I<sup>3</sup>.

There are several possible explanations for this discrepancy in the deferment rates between black and white men. The Provost Marshal General claimed that the larger number of white volunteers (650,000, as compared to 4,000 African Americans) diluted the quality of white men available for the draft. It is also likely that racially prejudiced local draft boards were less sympathetic to African American claims that their jobs or family responsibilities justified a deferment from immediate military service. In a striking commentary on the disadvantaged position of African Americans in American society, some local boards correctly noted that the thirty dollars a month that a black serviceman received as his military pay, often supplemented by family allotments of \$15-\$50 through War Risk Insurance plans, exceeded the wages received by most black laborers and farmers in the southern states (Chambers, 1987, 347, n. 82; Office of the Provost Marshal General, 1919, 192). Finally, draft boards did not automatically grant deferments. It is possible that fewer blacks applied for exemptions because the process required literacy and a detailed understanding of one's rights under the selective service regulations.

From this first draft call in 1917, 36% of blacks with a Class I rating were inducted into the military, compared to 24% of whites. The over-drafting of African Americans continued throughout the war during subsequent draft calls. By the end of the war, the military had inducted one-third of all black registrants and one-quarter of all white registrants (Chambers, 1987, 225).

Overall, African Americans and the foreign-born served in numbers greater than their proportion of the overall American population. Officials estimated that 13% of enlisted men were black and 18% were foreign-born, although these groups only made up 10% and 14.5% of the total population respectively (Keene, 2001, 20).

For the first six months of the war, the army allowed draft-eligible men placed in Class I to volunteer<sup>4</sup>. One cannot conclude from the lower numbers of blacks volunteering for service that they were less committed to the war than white Americans. Instead, the fact that only 4,000 African Americans volunteered reflected the limitations imposed by the military on voluntary enlistment by blacks (Office of the Provost Marshal General, 1919, 192).

Finding places for black soldiers in an army that put a premium on raising combatant units was a contentious and difficult process throughout the war. Initially unsure about the role that African American soldiers would have in the war, the army only allowed blacks to enlist in the existing four regular army and eight National Guard regiments. Because these units were already near full capacity with 20,000 enlistees when the war began, this policy limited the number of volunteer positions available to African Americans to 4,000. Consequently, just over 96% (367,710) of the nearly 380,000 African Americans who served during the war were conscripted.

The segregation of black soldiers into race-specific units was a foregone conclusion. The army also formed ethnic-specific units for alien white soldiers, but there were important differences between these two forms of wartime segregation. Serving in a segregated unit

did not mean the same thing for an immigrant as it did for a black soldier. Army officials, ethnic community leaders, and native-born soldiers all agreed that ethnic-specific battalions should prepare immigrant soldiers for assignment in regular army units. This meant that alien soldiers only served temporarily in these developmental battalions to perfect their English and complete their initial training (Keene, 2001, 20). The army, however, embraced racial separation as a permanent arrangement to allow the black and white races to live in peace, not as a stepping stone to eventual social mixing or equality. Army officials placed white native-born soldiers in the same units as foreign-born and Native Americans without second thoughts about the overall effect on discipline because most white native-born soldiers did not object to serving alongside these troops (Barsh, 1991, 276-303; Britten, 1994; White, 1976, 15-25)<sup>5</sup>. Even if they disliked specific nationalities, native-born white soldiers hardly could expect to find much public support for contradicting the prevailing American ethos of the melting pot and demanding the permanent segregation of ethnic minorities. Racially distinct units, however, complimented the Jim Crow values that American southern communities recently had turned into law and many northern areas had adopted as a *de facto* way to regulate race relations.

Initially, the General Staff expected many black recruits to man trenches along the Western Front. Army officials, both publicly and privately, credited black infantrymen (led by white officers) with competent service in the Civil War, Indian Wars, Spanish-American War, and along the Mexican border.

Consequently, when the United States declared war the army prepared, as it had in previous wars, to train black combat troops. The first mobilization plan accepted by the General Staff on July 31, 1917 suggested training the majority of black draftees for combat. This plan would have placed an equal number of black troops in each camp across the nation, and created company grade positions for the black candidates currently attending the Fort Des Moines Colored Officers' Training Camp (Memorandum for the chief of staff, July 31, 1917). It assigned the remaining men, a minority of the draft, to service units.

A month later, however, political pressure to maintain the *statu quo* of civilian race relations beyond simply segregating black and white troops began to affect General Staff views on how to utilize blacks. The army's pressing need for infantry troops no longer dominated discussions on mobilizing black troops. The opposition of many communities, especially those surrounding Southern camps, to arming so many black men soon caused the chief of staff to reconsider the approved plan<sup>6</sup>. After his review, General Tasker Bliss agreed with those civilians who claimed it was too dangerous. "In some of the cantonments there would be as many as 14,000 colored troops alongside of not more than 18,000 white troops", Bliss told Secretary of War Newton Baker. "If either or both get out of hand.... nothing short of a national calamity would be the result" (Memorandum for the chief of staff, August 21, 1917). Bliss also rejected proposals to place black infantry units in segregated camps a mile away from the white cantonments or to concentrate all black troops in two

mobilization camps. While these options might have appeased Bliss's apprehensions about racial violence in the camps, he rejected them because he now fully appreciated southern fears about giving black men substantial training in handling firearms. "It is not so much that they fear that the Negro will strike if he gets a chance, but rather that they assume with curious unanimity that he has *reason* to strike, that any other persons in his circumstances or treated as he is would rebel", W. E. B. Du Bois commented caustically after the war on this wartime preoccupation of the white South with the domestic consequences of training black men to fire rifles (Du Bois, 1996, 602).

Bliss consequently advised Baker to approve a more politically viable plan which suspended the organization of any more black combat units and assigned black draftees to the Quartermaster and Engineer Corps, organizations which provided the bulk of menial, unskilled labor for the army. He supported this solution, Bliss told the secretary of war on August 21, 1917, since "the regiments organized for the service mentioned in this plan...[need] the minimum of training *under arms*" (Memorandum for the chief of staff, August 21, 1917). When black regular army soldiers rioted and killed white civilians in Houston after a clash with white police on August 25, 1917, southern civilian opposition to arming additional black troops for combat solidified (Haynes, 1976). Rather than manning the front lines, therefore, over 89% of all black troops would serve in assorted labor battalions, pioneer infantry units, salvage companies, and stevedore organizations. By comparison, approximately 56% of white

troops served in noncombatant units (Nalty, 1986, 112; American Battle Monuments Commission, 1938, 502; Office of the Provost Marshal General, 227)<sup>7</sup>. Army officials also resisted commissioning any more than the one class of black officer candidates who attended the Fort Des Moines Camp because the Engineer and Quartermaster Corps had decided to use white officers to command black noncombatant units and the number of black combatant regiments was too small to justify another camp (Memorandum for the chief of staff, August 31, 1917; Memorandum for the chief of staff, February 18, 1918; Memorandum for the chief of staff, May 16, 1918; Memorandum for the chief of staff, July 15, 1918).

Given their pressing need for infantry troops, army officials had a broader appreciation of the sacrifices involved in agreeing to assign blacks primarily to noncombatant positions than did civilian communities interested primarily in preserving the racial *statu quo*. Still, the General Staff did not find it difficult, given their own racial prejudices, to accede to the wishes of civilians on this subject<sup>8</sup>. White citizens, however, were not the only ones who had vocal representatives pleading their case to the government as the army decided the fate of black conscripts. Leaders of national black organizations had lobbied hard for the black officers training camp in Fort Des Moines and now began a national petition drive to win clemency for the Houston rioters. To quiet accusations of discrimination from these leaders, the War Department formed one national army division (four infantry regiments rather than the sixteen initially proposed) out of black draftees and scattered these regiments among various

northern training camps (Barbeau and Henri, 1996; Nalty, 1986). The other black combat unit, the provisional 93<sup>rd</sup> Division, that contained three National Guard and one drafted regiment, would eventually serve with the French Army. The two under-strength regular army black infantry regiments and two cavalry regiments spent the war guarding the Mexican border and island territories.

Overall, African Americans made up approximately 1/3<sup>rd</sup> of the wartime army's laboring units and 1/30<sup>th</sup> of its combat forces (Chambers, 1987, 223). Out of the 200,000 African Americans who went to France, approximately 38,000 or 19% were combat troops (Nalty, 1986, 112). By comparison, nearly one million or 57% of the 1.8 million white troops in France were classified as combatants<sup>9</sup>.

Ironically, these manpower decisions often delayed the induction of black troops since the army emphasized filling infantry units in the first draft call. Congressmen from Southern states with high black populations protested about these delays because white civilians then became primarily responsible for meeting each state's 1917 draft quota. By the winter of 1918, the new cry in the South, like this one from Kentucky Congressman R. Y. Thomas, claimed "that the negroes are permitted to stay at home and hang around the towns and steal, while the white boys are taken from the farms and sent into the army" (Thomas, February 20, 1918). Once again, the army found itself under pressure to tailor its absorption of black draftees to satisfy the demands of white Southern civilians. This time, President Woodrow Wilson told the army to create laboring units whether or not the

war effort required them. The Provost Marshal General's Office consequently "assured the Governors of several of those [southern] states that, before any more white men are drafted, the remainder of the negroes [selected for the first draft call] will be taken. I am informed by the General Staff that we can make good on this promise" (Johnson, February 23, 1918). The army finally began large scale induction of black troops in the spring of 1918, but the restrictions placed on the army's use of black troops made absorbing these men a slow process. By July the War Plans Division anticipated a severe manpower shortage if it could not bring in more white men. The department solved this problem by re-organizing sixteen white pioneer infantry units as infantry brigades, filling the original pioneer infantry units with black troops and creating enough service units "... to enable the remaining 27,190 colored men to be called, thus making available in all states, the white registrants, Class I, 1918" (Memorandum for the chief of staff, July 21, 1918)<sup>10</sup>.

### ENTERING THE ARMY

Once inducted into the military, medical officials continued to note important differences between the army's white and black population. For the first time, the army administered mental exams to recruits. The new intelligence tests assigned each man a mental age as a score, and army psychologists wanted to establish a minimum mental age for all types and levels of service (Shaw, Dec. 12, 1917). There were serious problems with these first intelligence tests. Now-classic examples of the cultural bias inherent in these early

exams include a question on the beta exam for illiterate recruits that pictured an empty tennis court and expected the soldier to draw a net to complete the portrait and questions on the alpha exam for literate soldiers that tested soldiers' familiarity with brand-name products (Keene, 1994, 237). Unsurprisingly, the poorly designed tests claimed that upper-class whites were smarter than working-class whites, rewarded native-born Americans whites with higher scores than foreign-born soldiers, and asserted that white soldiers were more intelligent than black soldiers. By the end of the war, psychologists concluded that white and black draftees had an average mental age of 13.15 and 10.1 years old, respectively. In the parlance of the time, anyone with a mental age below 12 was considered a moron (Barbeau and Henri, 1996, 44). Subsequent investigations by historians and psychologists, however, have concluded that the tests more accurately reflected years of schooling and social class rather than intellectual capacity.

These composite mental ages also conveniently covered up test results in which literate black draftees from a few northern states outscored white draftees from several southern states. Blacks draftees from New York, for instance, scored higher than white draftees from Mississippi, Louisiana, and Arkansas, while black draftees from Illinois could add Alabama and Kentucky to that list. Black conscripts from Ohio received even higher scores, bettering white draftees from all the previously mentioned states as well as Oklahoma, Texas and Tennessee (Yerkes, 1921, 690-91, tables 205, 206). Robert M. Yerkes, the director of the Army intelligence testing program tried to explain away

disparate scores between northern and southern blacks by arguing that the more intelligent African Americans were clever enough to move to the North (Gould, 1981, 220). He never, however, offered any explanation for why these same northern blacks surpassed many southern whites on the exam.

Interestingly, the discovery that large numbers of men could not take the alpha intelligence test designed for literate recruits revealed the failure of many black and white recruits to receive adequate schooling. Intelligence testers estimated that the illiteracy rate hovered around 21.5% of all white troops and 50.6% of all black troops ("Negro Personnel in the War", Malone). Sample testing classified 49.5% of South Carolina men illiterate compared to 16.6% of New York men (despite large numbers of alien soldiers in the region) and 14.2% of men from Minnesota (Foster).

In general, however, the army was more concerned with the physical health of its troops than their intelligence. Medical statistics compiled during the war concerning the relative health of white and black soldiers revealed the continuation of pre-war patterns in the army. A study of soldiers in the peacetime regular army between 1908 and 1917 calculated the death rate (from disease and accidents) for white and black soldiers as 5.44 and 9.02 per 1,000, respectively (War Department, 1919, 350). This meant that the death rate for black soldiers was 2/3<sup>rd</sup>s higher than that of white soldiers serving in the peacetime army. In 1917 (when the army did little actual fighting), the figure for white soldiers decreased to 4.92 per 1,000 for deaths by disease, but increased to a dismal 11.13 per 1,000

for black soldiers (War Department, 1919, 956). If external causes (wounds, accidents) were added then the death rate rose to 6.11 per 1,000 for white soldiers and 13.19 per 1,000 for black soldiers.

Medical officials claimed that each group received identical medical care in the military and therefore concluded that these discrepancies indicated that whites and blacks were racially predisposed to contract or succumb to different diseases. In several cases, however, black soldiers were actually more likely than whites to die from diseases that they contracted in lower proportions than whites. As indicated in Table 1, the 1917 medical investigation revealed that blacks had a higher tendency than whites to die from typhoid, influenza, and German measles even though a larger proportion of white soldiers fell ill from the same disease. This discrepancy suggests that the medical care received by black soldiers was inferior to that of whites, a conclusion supported by the reports of independent black observers throughout the war who noted that white medical officers often delayed in admitting blacks, whom they perceived as malingerers, into the hospital for treatment.

Table 1 also reveals that blacks soldiers were more likely to suffer from mumps, tuberculosis, lobar pneumonia, broncho-pneumonia, and syphilis than white soldiers. The statistics on syphilis were particularly alarming. Black soldiers were nearly 4 times more likely than whites to suffer from syphilis, but on average spent a day less in the hospital. For gonorrhea, blacks were twice as likely as whites to suffer from the disease, but spent on average three days less in the hospital (War Department,

Tab. 1 *Selected illnesses and deaths for white and black enlisted men, 1917 ratio per 1,000 of mean strength*

Disease	White illness	White deaths	Black illness	Black deaths
Typhoid	0.45	0.03	0.22	0.06
Measles	78.41	1.56	71.14	0.45
Influenza	61.39	0.02	33.29	0.06
German measles	14.87	0.50	3.67	1.22
Mumps	41.03	0.03	67.02	-
Tuberculosis	10.87	0.14	26.33	0.95
Syphilis	14.78	.03	48.37	0.28
Pneumonia, lobar	10.83	1.14	45.09	5.07
Bronchitis	77.72	0.01	72.97	-
Broncho-pneumonia	2.59	0.37	6.96	0.72

Source: *A Report of the Surgeon General, @ in U.S. War Department, Annual Reports, 1918, vol. 1 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1918), 852, 856, 860*

1919, 508-9). Medical officials calmly reported that these differences indicated that "a case of gonorrhea runs a much less serious course among colored than white troops". Major William Loving, a black officer investigating conditions among black soldiers, offered a different conclusion. Loving reported from Camp Zachary Taylor, Kentucky that black soldiers suffering from venereal disease went untreated because white doctors "... must actually handle the privates of colored men in order to get results" and they refused to do so (War Department, 1919, 509; Loving, September 23, 1918). It seems unlikely that the reluctance of these white doctors to treat black patients suffering from venereal disease was an isolated incident.

White army officials tended to blame black soldiers for their increased tendency to fall ill. "The negro is frequently not accustomed to orderliness, moral or physical discipline, not even to ordinary cleanliness and sanitation. One colored private

had complained bitterly because he had to comb his hair and take a bath every day", a typical intelligence bulletin read ("Morale of Negro Soldiers and Negro Civilian Population", Aug. 23, 1918). Once again, black observers offered another explanation. Inadequately housed and clothed black noncombatants often endured hardships more appropriate to the front line than in a stateside training camp. The equipment and housing requirements of white troops took precedence over the needs of black troops when the army allocated scarce resources. Some of the worst conditions existed in Camp Hill, Virginia which housed the black stevedores working at the Newport News embarkation port. "During the coldest weather Virginia has experienced in twenty-five years, the stevedores lived in tents without floors or stoves", forcing some to stand out around fires all night to avoid frostbite, Charles Williams, a black investigator, reported. Promised clothing within a month of their arrival in camp, these men worked in the sleet and snow

loading and unloading ships "without overcoats, rain coats, or even good shoes". These men had nowhere to bathe, nor did they receive a change of clothing until January 1919. "Cases are known", Williams continued, "where men had only one suit of underwear for two or three months. As a result, many of them were covered with vermin". (Williams, "Special Report on Conditions at Camp Hill"; "Summary of Complaints Received at National Office, N.A.A.C.P.")

Although the army initially made its decision to place the majority of black soldiers in laboring units due to political pressure from civilian Southern communities, over time the claims of white intelligence testers and medical investigators concerning African American soldiers' inferior mental and physical capacities helped army officials offer a different explanation for this decision by the second year of the war. Instead of acknowledging that they were bowing to the political realities of their society, army officials now claimed that black troops were not strong enough mentally or physically to fight along the Western Front. "The poorer class of backwoods Negro has not the mental stamina and moral sturdiness to put him in the line against opposing German troops", Colonel E. O. Anderson concluded in a memorandum on the black draft in May 1918. "The enemy is constantly looking for a weak place in the line and if he can find a part of the line held by troops composed of culls of the colored race, all he has to do is to concentrate on that." (Memorandum for the chief of staff, May 16, 1918)

The poor performance of the 92<sup>nd</sup> Division, the black unit under American command, also reinforced the growing official view that African Americans made poor combatants. Poorly trained

and led, the 92<sup>nd</sup> Division fared about as well as white divisions suffering under similar handicaps during the Meuse-Argonne campaign. By comparison, the decorated regiments of the 93<sup>rd</sup> Division that fought under French command amassed an admirable combat record. One unit, the 369<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, served for a record 191 days in the line, the longest of any American unit, white or black, during the war. As with the intelligence test results, however, army officials conveniently ignored any evidence that did not conform to the prevailing view about the value of black soldiers to the organization.

#### THE IMPLICATIONS OF SEGREGATION

Early in the war, the General Staff decided to use the majority of black troops as noncombatants and to maintain a white majority at all training camps. While quelling, for the most part, the apprehensions of white civilians that military service might create black terrorist bands, these decisions did not eliminate racial conflict from the organization nor seal the fate of black troops within it. These policies chiefly clarified where recruiters should send black draftees and how they should assign them, but absorbing black recruits in a noncontentious and expeditious manner became an uphill struggle. Consequently, General Staff officials and Division commanders continued to discuss possible revisions to their initial mobilization decisions throughout the war. These unending policy discussions portray, in a striking way, how racial instability preyed on the minds of army officials, especially when they realized the consequences if they faltered in containing it.

In the summer of 1917, newly overwhelmed with a large number of black recruits whom they could not absorb easily, General Staff policymakers considered assigning black drafted troops as cooks and assistant cooks within white combatant units. This scheme would help the army immediately absorb at least 35,000 black troops out of the 75,000 black troops anticipated from the first draft. As importantly, these assignments would relieve white combatant troops from fatigue duties, thus increasing the number of hours they could spend training each day.

General Staff policymakers, however, rejected this proposition several times even though it complimented their decision to use drafted black troops primarily as laborers. Assigning black and white troops to the same units might, they claimed, push racial tempers to the breaking point. Brigadier General C. H. Barth, commander of the 81<sup>st</sup> Division, training in Camp Jackson, South Carolina, tried to allay this concern, telling the General Staff that southern officers with whom he had spoken felt that "there would be no friction between races in consequence of such assignments... [because] no colored man would be in position to give orders to any white man" (Barth, C. H., August 31, 1917; Memorandum for the chief of staff, July 31, 1917). Members of the War Plans Division remained unswayed. Even if white soldiers accepted the proximity of black soldiers, War Plans Division officials noted this scheme would create a key command problem with the potential to damage army discipline even more severely than outright racial rioting. Officials feared that white soldiers might subsequently limit the services they

would perform for the organization, thereby creating a mutinous situation. Few soldiers enjoyed general fatigue duties, and army officials realized they would only confirm the low status of this work by reserving it for black troops. "There is at present wide-spread objection in the service to the performance of duties of a menial nature, but to admit their menial quality by assigning such duties exclusively to an inferior race would make it well nigh impossible to persuade white men ever to ever again resume these duties, Lieutenant Colonel J. W. Barker concluded in the General Staff's third review of the plan." (Memorandum for the chief of staff, May 6, 1919)

If white soldiers refused to work in the kitchen who would substitute when black kitchen workers became ill? Officers used kitchen police duty as a common company punishment for rule infractions, but army authorities knew they did not have the power to punish white soldiers by detailing them to work with black soldiers. To prevent these limitations in their power over white troops from becoming explicit, General Staff officials rejected this suggestion. The gain in training time did not outweigh the potential damage such assignments could inflict on army authority.

War Plans Division officials also remained leery of black advancement organizations, whom they suspected would immediately protest these assignments unless they made black men eligible for all positions in white organizations. Among themselves, these officials frankly admitted the desire to avoid antagonizing these organizations by sponsoring such a blatant policy of inequality. Implicit in their concern not

to "unnecessarily emphasize the inferiority of the colored race", lay an apprehension that such a policy would dishearten black soldiers as well as their civilian leaders. So while the assignment of black labor units to training camps exempted white troops from general maintenance duties, white troops remained responsible for intra-unit fatigue duties.

This two year exchange highlights an important goal of army racial policy—to maintain disciplinary control by segregating black and white troops as systematically as possible. It also underscores how the army tried to juggle the competing concerns of white and black civilians, and white and black citizen soldiers when formulating racial policy. In addition, the policy of strict segregation altered the fates of both white and black soldiers within the wartime army.

Army planners believed they could formulate distinct personnel plans for white and black soldiers, but because racially-motivated mobilization policies influenced the structure of the wartime army, they affected all members of the organization, white and black, in some way. White racial prejudices directly affected the military experience of black soldiers by limiting their combat opportunities. Decisions made about the treatment of black soldiers also, however, altered the fate of white soldiers in the organization.

Placing a white majority in each mobilization camp undermined the army's initial intention to form regional units in the National Army. Army planners originally adopted a plan to preserve the local integrity of individual units after considering the prohibitive cost of transporting troops to training camps far from their homes. Men might

be happier and easier to discipline, army planners reasoned, if they entered the army with men from the same region. Yet because some sections had higher concentrations of blacks than others the army could not automatically send men to the camp closest to their home and still keep an acceptable racial balance. Instead the army sent black men from Alabama, Florida, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, and Tennessee to train and to work in the North. When the draft in Southern states did not provide enough white men to fill up the combat divisions organizing in southern camps, the army had to ship white draftees from northern and western states to train in Camp Gordon, Georgia and Camp Pike, Arkansas ("Replacement of Personnel in the A.E.F. in France", 5-7; Lerwill, 1954, 174-176). Subsequent replacement and classification procedures further diluted the local integrity of most units, but racial policies provided the critical first push to abandon this principle.

Mixing men from different regions also disturbed the protocol of race relations accepted among men from the same region. Southern white troops resented the familiarity northern officers sometimes exhibited towards black troops, while northerners viewed southerners as often fanatical in their fear of black aggressiveness (Paul, December 14, 1918). Friction also emerged among southern and northern black soldiers placed in the same units. It is difficult to gain a first hand account of how black soldiers viewed each other in these units, since evidence of this tension comes from the observations of white intelligence officers. Some observers feared that northern blacks might convince their southern brothers to fight for social

equality. "It's like mixing rotten apples with good ones", an intelligence officer from Camp Jackson, South Carolina exclaimed (Intelligence officer, Camp Jackson, S.C., December 2, 1918). Others felt that educated black soldiers, who exhibited better discipline and work habits, set a good example for southern blacks (Intelligence officer, Camp Meade, Md., October 30, 1918; Memorandum to chief, Military Morale Section, Oct. 31, 1918). Differences in educational and regional background often strained intra-company relations. "I knew one company in which Negroes from Tennessee were mixed with Negroes from Philadelphia. They did not get along well together, each group keeping separate, and there was considerable bad blood", observed an intelligence officer from Camp Logan, Texas. "The Philadelphia negroes asserted a superiority over the Tennessee negroes, which the latter resented." (Townsend, December 2, 1918) These tensions resembled in some respects the tensions exhibited by whites from different regions, but black soldiers never forgot their unique position in the army. Illiterate black soldiers who saw educated black men placed in the same labor battalions as they became demoralized when they realized that black men, no matter how educated, were destined to become laborers in the army. "Strange to say that even the colored soldiers from the south take notice of this state of affairs and several of them mentioned the matter to me", noted Major William Loving, a black officer, after inspecting conditions at Camp Humphreys, Virginia, for the War Department, "saying that the educated colored man was not given a chance" (Loving, November 2, 1918).

Because they were only 3 percent of American combat forces, African Americans suffered substantially fewer battlefield deaths and wounds than white soldiers. Overall, black soldiers from the 92<sup>nd</sup> and 93<sup>rd</sup> combat divisions accounted for 773 of the 52,947 battlefield deaths sustained by the American Expeditionary Force in France during the war, less than 2 percent of all battlefield fatalities. Of American soldiers wounded, 4,408 were black and 198,220 were white. White soldiers, therefore, made up nearly 98% of those wounded on the battlefield (American Battle Monuments Commission, 1938, 515). Clearly these disproportionate casualty rates were one consequence of racially-motivated policies designed to keep black soldiers in the rear unloading boxes instead of manning the trenches along the front.

#### AFTER THE WAR

When the Armistice was declared on November 11, 1918, American soldiers celebrated briefly and then began immediately clamoring to return home quickly. White and black soldiers left France with vastly different impressions of the French. "The French soldier is all right", an intelligence officer heard one group of white American soldiers fume, "but damn these French civilians" (Nolan, May 27, 1919). French villagers, white soldiers surmised, ungratefully focused on the property American soldiers damaged or the food they pillaged, rather than how they had rescued France in her hour of need. Instead of thanking them, French proprietors overcharged American soldiers and refused to heed southern soldiers' request that they ban black

soldiers from their establishments (acting chief of staff, G-2, 4<sup>th</sup> Division, May 17, 1919; memorandum for General Marlborough Churchill, November 18, 1918; "French Soldiers Like Negro Yanks", October 11, 1918; Memorandum for Colonel Moreno, April 2, 1919).

When white American troops began to declare in their conversations and in letters home that "we fought the war on the wrong side", American Army officials realized that they had a serious problem on their hands (Memorandum for General McIntyre, March 13). The relatively comfortable life American soldiers found in Germany increased white soldiers' complaints about miserly French. The soldier's daily experience with French parsimony lent credibility to untrue stories that the French government was demanding reparations from the American government for property American soldiers damaged, charged rent for the fields soldiers slept in, exacted tax on all the meat and ammunition purchased from the French during the war, and forced the American government to buy French property for their wartime bases at exorbitant prices which the Americans would have to sell at a loss. "Gossip, over heard largely thru Officers' messes and elsewhere, is tending to increase his [the American soldier's]... dislike for French business methods, whether individual or national, tending to make him feel that he is being stung, and that his nation is being stung", an intelligence officer noted (Nolan, May 27, 1919; Acting chief of staff, G-2, 4<sup>th</sup> Division, May 17, 1919; "Relations Between American and French Armies", January 17, 1919; Goddard, July 1942, 19).

African American soldiers, however, came home with an extremely favorable

view of the French. Among returning troops, only black soldiers expressed a preference for Europe over the United States in official surveys of soldier opinion (Memorandum for General Marlborough Churchill, Apr. 25, 1919). These soldiers preferred to highlight the differences between France and the United States, rather than France and Germany<sup>11</sup>. "You know now that the mean contemptible spirit of race prejudice that curses this land is not the spirit of other lands", the Reverend F. J. Grimké told a group of returning black soldiers (Grimké, 1919, 242). Soldiers from the four regiments that served directly with the French Army attested to the willingness of the French to let black men fight and to honor them for their achievements. Social interactions with French civilians—and white Southern soldier's reactions to them—also highlighted crucial differences between the two societies. Unlike white soldiers, African Americans did not complain about high prices in French stores. Instead, they focused on the fact that "we were welcomed" by every shopkeeper they encountered. "One merchant in St. Die told a field officer in our Division... that the white soldiers come into my store and throw their money at me, but the black soldiers act as if it were a pleasure to trade with me and it is they that I welcome", an African American officer told W. E. B. Du Bois (Du Bois, "The Black Man and the Wounded World"). French intelligence operatives confirmed that this was the general reaction of French merchants who dealt with both white and black American soldiers (Rapport sur les relations franco-américaines, 1<sup>er</sup> octobre 1918).

This support created a dilemma for French officials and, in some respects,

the positive review from black troops troubled them as much as white soldiers' complaints. While the French relished the moral high ground that African Americans accorded them, these soldiers did not have the political power to turn such support into concrete financial aid for France. Instead, the interracial mingling accepted in French society contributed to white Americans' image of France as a disagreeable place. The military *attaché* to the French embassy worried privately to his superiors that resentful southern whites might hurt his efforts to secure a favorable assistance package from the United States (Collardet, 6 août 1919). In 1920, charges from Germany that French colonial troops were terrorizing women in the Rhineland brought back the disturbing memories many white American veterans still harbored of social equality in France. With diplomatic relations already souring over the issues of war debts and German reparations, publicity over the "shame upon the Rhine" recalled the offensive racial mixing between African Americans and French women during the war. This scandal doomed any chance of rallying American public opinion behind financial or military aid to France in the immediate postwar period (Keylor, Summer 1993; Nelson, 1970; Marks, July 1983).

Coming home meant more than bringing back favorable or unfavorable memories of the French. Like all previous generations of American veterans, these soldiers intended to organize veteran's societies and lobby for benefits. Initially, there was some hope in the black community that black veterans might channel their anger over wartime discrimination and their positive interracial experiences in France

into support for a civil rights crusade at home. Black advancement leaders in the United States eagerly awaited these troops return. "[B]y the God of Heaven, we are cowards and jackasses if now that the war is over, we do not marshal every ounce of our brain and brawn to fight a sterner, longer, more unbending battle against the forces of hell in our own land", cried Du Bois in the pages of *The Crisis* (Du Bois, May 1919). The chief of the AEF Intelligence Bureau feared the same development, and alerted his officers in January 1919 to report any signs that black soldiers were organizing a secret organization dedicated to maintaining "the social equality between the races as established in France"<sup>12</sup>. William York confirmed that officers and enlisted men in the 92<sup>nd</sup> Division enthusiastically discussed this possibility. "It is hoped that we may exert political influence and fight all kinds of discrimination", he told Du Bois in January (York, January 25, 1919). These hopes were never realized, however, as plans to form an activist black veterans organization evaporated upon their return home.

White veterans were more successful in pursuing plans to form a politically influential veterans group. In Paris, a group of officers laid the foundation for the American Legion, which soon became an important lobbying organization for veterans. At the Legion's first domestic meeting in St. Louis, controversy swirled around the question of membership for black veterans. "Some delegates from Southern States were prepared to fight against allowing negroes to become members or to walk out, while others from northern States, notably Major Hamilton Fish [who had served with the 369<sup>th</sup> Infantry], were prepared to make a fight for full equality for negroes", reported the army intelligence informant

attending the St. Louis caucus (Memorandum for the chief of staff, May 23, 1919). Competing white and black delegations from Louisiana forced the race question out into the open (Parker, April 15, 1919). A separate state delegation of black veterans had come to press for full membership rights before the national caucus. The decision to seat the white delegation and send the black delegation home respected a compromise negotiated in Paris that left chartering decisions up to individual states (Pencak, 1989, 68-69). Needless to say, southern legionnaires' determination to exclude black veterans from their organization, even in segregated posts, thinned the ranks of potential legionnaires considerably in the affected states<sup>13</sup>. Membership in the Legion fluctuated in the inter-war period between 600,000 and 1,000,000. In 1925 the Legion recognized 100 black posts with an overall membership of 1,862 out of approximately 380,000 potential members. By 1930, the Legion could boast 3,557 black members but the number of posts had dropped to 43<sup>14</sup>.

## CONCLUSION

White and black American soldiers had vastly different military experiences during the First World War. Local draft boards' propensity to over-draft black soldiers sent large numbers of recruits into the army whom officials had already determined would not fight in

any significant numbers. Under the guise of objectivity, army officials claimed that the lower intelligence, inferior moral sensibilities, and weaker physical condition justified their politically-motivated decision to place the majority of black soldiers in non-combatant units. This decision placed the burden of fighting and the resulting casualties on white troops. In addition, the insistence on segregation and the army's concerns about racial violence encouraged the military to abandon the regional orientation previously deemed crucial to fostering esprit de corps in its companies and regiments. After the war, black and white soldiers returned home with different views of the French, although each initially expressed interest in forming veteran's organizations to advance their interests. Only white veterans, however, prevailed and although a token number of black veterans joined the American Legion, for the most part the anger fueled by discriminatory racial practices during the war found little concrete political expression in the postwar period.

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## NOTES

1. The army trained over 48% of these officers in specially-formed officer training camps for civilian recruits. In addition, technical and specialist agencies commissioned 70,000 civilians who were experts in their respective fields, while the army promoted 16,000 soldiers from the ranks.
2. The total force raised during the war numbered 4,412,533 including 3,893,340 soldiers, 462,229 sailors, 54,690 marines, and 2,294 Coast Guard troops. Of the 3,893,340 soldiers, 2,810,296 (72%) were conscripted. Men enlisted in large numbers from Northern urban areas where support for the war and conscription was strongest, while few volunteered from dissenting sections of the Midwest and South. In April 1918, all distinctions between regular army, National Guard, and national army divisions were formally eliminated and all became units of the United States Army.
3. The Selective Service system contained five classifications. Class II and III included temporarily deferred married men and skilled workers in industry and agriculture; Class IV contained married men with economic dependents and key business leaders, while those unable to meet physical and mental requirements were placed in Class V (Chambers, 1987, 191).
4. After December 15, 1917, Class I registrants with the appropriate skills could still volunteer for the Surgeon General's, Engineers, Signal, and Quartermaster's branches. Draft-eligible men could enlist in the navy or marines until July 27, 1918. All voluntary enlistment ceased in August 1918. At the end of the same month, Congress extended the draft-eligible ages from 21-30 to 18-45 (Chambers, 1987, 187; Office of the Provost Marshal General, 1919, 223).
5. These authors credit the stereotypes of Indians as natural warriors for the acceptance of Native Americans by white soldiers. Separate Indian units had been tried, and discarded, in the 1890s. Most Indian groups resisted segregation as contrary to their goals of assimilation. They also worried that segregation would lead to a re-classification of Indians from white to colored.
6. The Army had encountered similar opposition from civilian communities as it closed frontier posts after 1890 and assigned black regular army divisions closer to established communities. Black soldiers entered these towns at a time when recently passed segregating and disenfranchising legislation had heightened racial animosities. Black troops further de-stabilized race relations when they refused to obey these new Jim Crow laws. In 1906, without a trial, the army discharged 167 black regular army soldiers accused of raiding and killing civilians in Brownsville, Texas (Fletcher, 1974).
7. These percentages were derived from assuming that out of 3,893,340 soldiers, there were 380,000 black soldiers, including 338,000 noncombatants and 42,000 combatants and 3,513,340 white soldiers, including 1,040,222 combatants, 1,973,118 noncombatants and approximately 500,000 unclassified troops when the war ended.
8. Arthur Barbeau, Henri Florette and Bernard Nalty have meticulously documented the harsh discrimination and abuse black soldiers faced, a direct outcome, they conclude, of the prejudiced and stereotypical image policymakers had of blacks.
9. These percentages are extrapolated from the figures of 2,057,675 cumulative arrivals in Europe of American military personal and 1,078,222 actual combat strength of the American Expeditionary Force (AEF) by November 11, 1918 provided by the American Battle Monuments Commission, 1938, 502.
10. Pioneer infantry units were trained to work just behind the front at work that required more technical skill than the tasks labor units performed. These troops needed some infantry training so that they could fight as last resort reserves or defend themselves if overrun during an enemy offensive.
11. For additional discussion of the African American/French friendship see Stovall, 1996, 16-24.
12. Concern that Du Bois was responsible for radicalizing black troops brought *The Crisis* under heavy MID surveillance in the postwar period (Kornweibel, Jr., 1998, 54-60).
13. Only four of the twelve states which made up the "Solid South" (North Carolina, Tennessee,

Kentucky, and Virginia) would even consider applications for black posts.

14. For compilations of membership figures for black posts, Administration and Organization,

Class Post - Black File, American Legion National Headquarters, Archives, Indianapolis, Indiana.

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### SUMMARY

Comparing the experiences of white and black soldiers in the American army during the First World War reveals the toll that racist policies took on both African American soldiers and the army as a whole. African Americans were more likely than whites to be selected by local draft boards to serve and to die from disease once inducted into service. On the other hand, because they constituted only 3 percent of American combat forces, African American deaths in combat were few. The decision to segregate the army,

place most African American soldiers in laboring units, and maintain a white majority in every training camp also affected the experiences of white soldiers. These policies forced the army to dilute the regional character of most units and placed the burden of fighting the war primarily on the shoulders of white soldiers. Arguably, the American army was less effective than it might have been because it squandered the talents of many within its ranks by limiting the opportunities for blacks to fight and lead.

### RÉSUMÉ

Quand on compare les expériences des soldats blancs et des soldats noirs dans l'armée américaine pendant la Première Guerre mondiale, on voit immédiatement que les mesures racistes appliquées par les autorités américaines ont, au-delà des soldats noirs, atteint l'armée elle-même. Un pourcentage plus élevé des Noirs américains ont été enrôlés et sont morts de maladies. Mais parce qu'ils ne constituaient que 3 % des forces combattantes, ils ont été peu nombreux à mourir au combat. La volonté de former les régiments

par race, de déplacer la plupart des soldats noirs dans les services auxiliaires, et de s'assurer que la majorité des soldats dans chaque camp d'entraînement étaient blancs, a aussi eu des conséquences pour les soldats blancs. L'armée américaine a abandonné le principe des unités régionales et a fait porter le poids de la guerre en priorité sur les soldats blancs. Il est possible que l'armée américaine ait été moins efficace sur les champs de bataille parce qu'elle n'a pas voulu utiliser les capacités des Noirs américains à combattre et à commander.

## LA COMMUNAUTÉ JUIVE DE FRANCE ET LA GRANDE GUERRE

par Philippe-E. LANDAU

Avant la Première Guerre mondiale, le judaïsme de France et d'Algérie compte 180 000 âmes, soit 0,5 % de la population nationale (Benbassa, 1997, 205-224; Becker, Wiewiorka, 1998, 103-168). Minorité insignifiante au regard du judaïsme mondial qui totalise 13 millions de personnes et dont les effectifs les plus nombreux se trouvent dans l'Empire tsariste et aux États-Unis, cette communauté est pourtant la troisième en Europe occidentale derrière l'Allemagne (480 000 Juifs pour 65 millions d'habitants) et le Royaume-Uni (270 000 Juifs sur une population de 46 millions).

Depuis la défaite de 1870, la perte des effectifs alsaciens et lorrains, forces vives de la communauté d'environ 40 000 individus, a été comblée par l'accroissement démographique du judaïsme algérien mais aussi par l'immigration de 30 000 Juifs originaires d'Europe centrale et de l'Empire ottoman, fuyant les vexations antisémites et attirés par la grandeur du pays des droits de l'Homme, sans oublier le retour à la mère-patrie de 12 000 Juifs alsaciens (Landau, 1999a, 13)<sup>1</sup>.

Parfaitement intégrés à la société française depuis les décrets émancipateurs de 1791 et malgré les remous de l'affaire Dreyfus, les Juifs se définissent avant tout comme israélites, car « ce mot désigne nettement et uniquement une religion. Le mot juif implique ou rappelle

une certaine nationalité territoriale, distincte, exclusive<sup>2</sup> »; et ils se répartissent dans toutes les classes sociales même s'ils sont davantage représentés dans les classes moyennes. Quelques aperçus généraux complémentaires s'imposent toutefois. Hormis en Alsace occupée où un judaïsme rural perdure, la population juive est surtout urbaine, plus particulièrement localisée dans les grandes agglomérations: Bordeaux (3 500 âmes), Lille (2 800), Lyon (2 200), Marseille (5 500), Nancy (4 600) et bien sûr Paris qui compte plus de 60 000 personnes pour une population de 2,8 millions d'habitants. Ainsi, un tiers de la minorité israélite réside dans la capitale et sa banlieue et, en excluant les effectifs d'Algérie, près d'un Juif sur deux<sup>3</sup>.

Les israélites de souche originaires du Comtat-Venaissin, du Bordelais et d'Alsace-Lorraine sont les plus nombreux à accéder à la petite et moyenne bourgeoisie. Leur éducation et leur mode de vie les conduisent à adopter une attitude malthusienne (environ deux enfants par couple). Ils représentent alors 45 % de la communauté ce qui traduit un vieillissement du judaïsme autochtone. Ils animent cependant les institutions culturelles et culturelles malgré l'indifférence religieuse qui les touche. En 1909, Paris totalise 11 synagogues, 37 sociétés d'assistance et de bienfaisance, 2 hôpitaux,