

Toward Freedom

THERE can be no doubt about it, racial discrimination in the armed forces is on the way out. Traditional Jimcrow practices are continually facing a crisis—and such practices are sure to grow less and less tenable.

Very substantial progressive change is definitely under way, and if we back up and strengthen the trends already evident—if we fight hard and correctly—the ultimate destruction of military discrimination, as of all other forms of Jimcrowism, is entirely possible in the near future.

Recall, for example, that we began this war with a “white man’s Navy,” only the menial tasks of the messman being open to Negroes. (When the heroic Dorie Miller was fighting our Japanese enemies at Pearl Harbor, he was technically “out of his place.”) But now Negro men have been admitted as fighting seamen into all branches of the Navy, and Negro women into the WAVEs and Nurse Corps—and they are being trained and commissioned as officers.

Recall that this war has seen the unprecedented entrance of Negroes into all branches of the Army—even including the Air Corps—and that right now, for the first time in history, white and Negro soldiers are advancing against our common fascist foe in mixed units together on the western front.

MORE than this, the military high command is showing a clear disposition to correct



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flagrant cases of racial discrimination which are brought to its attention. There was the order banning racial discrimination on Army post exchanges, issued about a year ago without public announcement, and then backed up last fall when southern reactionaries learned about it and demanded its withdrawal. Just recently, there were the restoration of “honor” and veteran rights to a group of Negro seabees who had been dishonorably discharged; the removal of a prejudiced commander of another group of seabees, and the voiding of all proceedings against the four Ft. Devens WACs and their restoration to active duty.

This latter case is particularly significant. These young ladies, goaded to rebellion by their prejudiced commander, had clearly violated the Articles of War. Yet, because of the circumstances surrounding their offense, the War Department not only removed their prison sentences (as most protesting groups asked), but it also voided the whole proceedings, restored the young ladies to active duty and removed their prejudiced commander.

IT SHOULD be clear that we are dealing now with a military high command which has learned a lot since the prewar days of apparently static Jimcrowism and other forms of discrimination in the armed forces. The necessities of victory and the whole democratic upsurge in the country have forced our military leaders to reconsider and revise many tradi-

The Time Is Here for Equality in the Armed Forces

tional practices in the handling of Negroes.

This process is far from complete; indeed, it is just getting under way—and it must be extended until the armed forces give full expression to the growing trend toward Negro democratic rights which proceeds apace in civilian life.

Two immediate cases where an immediate revision of policy is imperative are that of the more than 100 Negro officers of the 477th Bombardment Group (Freeman Field, Seymour, Indiana) who were arrested for refusal to sign an agreement to stay out of the “white officers club,” and that of the Negro WACs subjected to serious discrimination at Ft. Oglethorpe, Ga. The Freeman Field problem remains even though all but three of the 104 Negro officers were acquitted and released.

Many more cases will come to light; that is inevitable in this wartime process of change in military policy regarding the Negro. And they, like these, will call for vigorous struggle by the democratic forces of our country to make sure that progressive solutions are won.

But such struggles will be tactically unwise, and therefore ineffective, if they proceed through over-all condemnation of the military leaders of our country. Those leaders have given clear evidence of changing in the direction we want to go.

What we need now is overwhelming mass endorsement of the progressive steps already taken by our military high command, coupled with confident insistence that the progressive trend now under way be extended to the many areas which have not yet been affected. Along this path lie maximum results in our struggle for military equality.