

**NEGRO VETERAN**

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which they could not share. He himself had seen the shameful record written in the pages of history books. All the glowing words about equality coming out of the mouths of politicians had meant nothing to him but a series of shattered hopes. The only reason Bill Sanders reported to the Army was because he had to. It was the law.

The Army, however, felt no such antipathy towards William Sanders. In fact, he was regarded as good soldier material. Sanders was physically fit, intelligent and had enough education to read and write. The last factor was very important because the Army could not begin to make a soldier if a man was illiterate.

Hundreds of thousands of Negroes were rapidly being inducted into the Armed Forces, Bill knew. But he also knew that a large percentage of them had to be sent to Special Training Programs until they had attained a literacy equivalent to the fourth grade of school. Whites also had to have Special Training, but the proportion was about eight Negroes to every white.

Records show that the greatest number of illiterates, both in the Negro and white groups come from the Southern States. Thus, the Army, with its system of mass tabulation, has proven conclusively that the degree of literacy among Negroes depends on the educational opportunities available.

The Army experiment in mass education showed that a slightly higher percentage of the Negroes than the whites successfully completed the Special Training Program. Further study showed that the speed at which Negroes accomplish the desired standards was approximately as rapid as the rate of the whites.

Teaching men to read and write was only the beginning of the Army's educational task. Very few technicians were supplied to the Army from civilian occupations. While the shortage of specialists in the over-all picture was great, it was even more acute in connection with the Negro selectees.

During a specific period—in every thousand Negroes inducted—there were approximately six auto mechanics, three construction carpenters, less than one plumber, and a negligible number of draftsmen, machinists, and welders. The needs of the Army could not begin to be met by this small number of specialists.

The only answer to the problem was more training. The Army had to teach men to be mechanics, plumbers, carpenters, linemen, cable splicers, to do any job that a modern army geared for war has to know how to do.

The greatest asset to the training program were the thousands of "Bill Sanders" who had been inducted. The thousands of Negroes who had worked and fought for the chance to be near machines. The Negroes who had

been forced to leave any skill in which they became too adept. There was a backlog of hard earned experience and American mechanical ingenuity in Negro troops waiting to be channeled into specialized skills. The Army provided the channel.

Bill Sanders went through thirteen weeks of basic training in which he learned how to become a soldier. He crawled on his belly through mud, learned how to use a rifle, how to throw a grenade, and felt the impact of a Bazooka against his shoulder.

After a screening test, Bill was sent to Auto-Vehicle Recovery School. Here, he saw trucks being rolled into ditches, smashed before their eyes. He had learned long ago how to recover those trucks, how to repair them and set them back on the road in running condition. Now he learned more.

Bill Sanders learned about machines. For the first time in his life he had an experienced instructor who wanted to teach him. The Army was saying to him, "Go ahead—learn. The more you know the further you'll get in this man's Army." It was a new experience for Bill. It was wonderful.

From the day his mother told him he could only go to the movies on Sunday, Bill Sanders had been conscious of segregation. He accepted the fact that he ate and slept with Colored troops. But in the Army's school it was different. White and Colored troops were mixed and the amount of progress made depended solely on the individual's ability and willingness to learn.

Bill was developing a kinder attitude towards the Army than he had at the time of his induction. He heard that in some Officer Candidate Schools, white and Negroes were eating and sleeping together as well as attending the same classes. He began to see a reason for his being in the Army. He began to acquire a thing brass hats called "morale." To Bill Sanders it meant liking his job.

With intense interest in his work, and a feeling of being part of a something big and important Bill Sanders finished among the first ten and had an extra stripe on his sleeve when he graduated from the Auto-Vehicle Recovery School.

Those stripes meant a lot. They stood for the first time in his life he had ever been allowed to step out in front just because he could do a job a little better than somebody else. They stood for an equal chance—regardless of race, color, or creed.

A lot of changes had taken place in William Jesse Sanders by the time he had a year of Army in him. His neck had filled out and his muscles responded quicker. He knew this was due to regular Army life with good food and top medical attention. But Bill sometimes wondered about the Negroes who hadn't had the same opportunities as he, the thousands who had been rejected

as physically unfit. It was natural that Southern States should have a higher number of rejections among Negroes because those States had a higher Negro population than the rest of the country. But it was not natural that there should be a higher percentage of rejections. That percentage was a reflection of the opportunities afforded Negroes to get adequate housing, food and medical attention.

Bill was thankful that he had somehow stayed healthy enough to pass the Army physical. During his first year, he had learned about machines and had learned how to translate that knowledge into leadership. For this he had been made a Sergeant and had to learn how to assume authority—and responsibility.

Even his name had changed. His friends called him Big Bill. Other soldiers called him Sarge. Instead of driving a circus truck through one night stands, Bill was driving a one and a half ton truck northward in the rugged mountain terrain of Italy. His car-

go was—ammunition.

Sitting next to Bill was Chuck Tate, the assistant driver, and in the body of the truck were two men guarding the ammunition. But Bill felt alone. His truck had been separated from the long line of one-and-a-half tonners when a flat tire had forced him to pull out of the convoy. The responsibility of his cargo and his men weighed heavily upon him.

Chuck Tate proved to be some distraction with his constant stream of jokes and stories. Chuck was telling a story about the Louisiana cotton fields when they heard the explosion up ahead.

Big Bill jammed down on the brakes and had his truck stopped before the thud of the explosion had died. Bill's command was fast and business like.

"Chuck, run up and see what happened."

Chuck was out of the truck and flattening himself against the wall where the road had been cut through. Then he disappeared around the bend. A moment later he was back.

"Command car hit a land mine," he said quickly, "It's laying on its side about twenty yards downhill."

"Anybody in it?"  
"Just the driver, and it looks like he's passed out. But there's somebody else—I saw bushes moving on the other side of the road above us."

"That wouldn't be our boys," Bill said. He was thinking as fast as he talked. "They'd be down by the Command car helping the driver. Let's go."

"Gonna make a run for it?"  
Chuck asked. "It's a short stretch of road up ahead and then there's another turn. We can be out of their range in less than a minute."

"We're going," Bill said softly, "but we're taking that guy in the Command car with us."

"Are you crazy?" Chuck yelled. "If those Krauts hit our ammunition we'll go up like a keg of dynamite."

Bill turned and looked through the back glass of the cab. The two men in the truck had moved up

to see what the commotion was. "Did you hear us?" Big Bill asked.

They both nodded. "O. K." Bill said. Anybody wants to get out, now's the time to do it."

"It's pretty comfortable back here, Sarge" one of them said casually, "I guess we'll stick around," and the other nodded.

Bill turned to Chuck. "How about you," he said, "you want out?"

"I'll stick," Chuck said. "I don't like it but I'll stick."

"Okay," Bill said, "grab that rifle and keep pumping lead out the side window. Johnson, man the anti-aircraft on top of the truck. Turner, keep that machine gun going out of the back. Don't fire until they give us their position."

He swung the truck around the bend and then shifted the gear to extra low and turned the wheel sharp left. He could hear the chatter of a machine gun from above and then saw the splash of bullets in the dirt ahead.

(To be continued)

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