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Strength for the Fight

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times higher than the Somoza regime they overthrew two years before the United States carried out modest regional defenses and support for the democratic resistance. For twenty months the United States gave the victorious Sandinistas their largest aid package, greater than the sum provided to all the rest of Central America.

How then could anyone read this book and still hesitate to quarantine the Sandinistas, militarily, through force of their own people who saw them steal the revolution? Robert F. Turner, eminent international legal scholar of East-West surrogate conflicts, omitted a key chapter on the Soviet Union's role in Central America from this otherwise superb book. He does not seem to comprehend that the U.S.S.R. uses first party (Cuba) and second party (Nicaragua) military surrogates because the United States lives in dread of being branded what it is—the ultimate military force in preserving Western civilization.

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Nalty, Bernard C. *Strength for the Fight*. New York: The Free Press, 1986. 424pp. \$22.50

Subtitled *A History of Black Americans in the Military*, Bernard Nalty's comprehensive account takes its title from a line in "The Warrior's Prayer" by black poet Paul Dunbar who did not ask the Lord to front the fray but to give him strength for the fight. Since the American Revolution,

blacks have been part of the American military. The experience of blacks in the military has paralleled their experience in American society—they have been sought when manpower was needed and rejected when it was not. Although this could be an angry book, Nalty has written a scholarly, objective history.

Black sailors were initially welcomed into the Navy during the days of the lash, salt pork, hammocks, and weevily biscuits. It was a hard service and few men volunteered for it. Up through the Civil War, black sailors were integrated into the sea service although there were no black officers. As it turned from sail and muscle to steam and machinery, the Navy's attitude was that blacks were inherently unable to learn the increasingly technical skills required. Additionally, Jim Crow had set into American society and it was believed that white sailors would be unwilling to serve with blacks. Blacks were thus largely confined to mess attendant duties. By the time the "Great White Fleet" sailed around the world, it was appropriately named.

The Army raised "colored" regiments during the Civil War. After the war, Congress limited the Army to four such regiments—the 9th and 10th Cavalry (of no small fame in Western history and legend) and the 24th and 25th Infantry. The 10th and 24th distinguished themselves in the assault on San Juan Hill which Theodore Roosevelt conveniently forgot as the legend of the Rough Riders grew.

When the First World War began, many blacks agreed with W. E. B.

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Dubois who urged blacks "to forget our special grievances and close ranks with our own white fellow citizens." The nobility of this sentiment was not returned. Black units in that war did a disproportionately large share of the drudge work with few opportunities to show their capabilities. Black combat units were poorly led by white officers and often performed accordingly. They were then castigated for fulfilling a self-fulfilling prophecy.

As Woodrow Wilson segregated the Federal civil service after the war, a variety of bureaucratic mechanisms were found and used to keep blacks out of any significant role in the peacetime military. The new Army Air Corps was totally white and determined to remain so.

By 1941 aviation had captured the Nation's imagination. Opportunities for blacks to learn to fly and to serve in technical capacities in the Army Air Corps thus became important to many American blacks. Under great pressure, the Air Corps did establish a completely segregated flight training program for blacks. From this program came the famous "Tuskegee Airmen" who, when finally allowed to fly in combat, never lost an escorted bomber to enemy fighter action. An impressive number of these airmen went on to prominent positions in the postwar era.

For the Army and Navy, the problem was to maintain a segregated military unit structure in the face of combat demands for manpower. Initially this was done by assigning blacks to supply and transport units. As the war progressed, this resulted

in black manpower being inefficiently used while combat units were in serious need of trained replacements. Under this pressure the Army finally began to assign small black combat units to larger units. The Navy opened a number of rates to blacks who were then assigned to selected replenishment vessels. The fast carrier task groups remained all white.

Blacks began the war by seeking significant combat roles in the belief that by so contributing to their country's defense they could gain their full and rightful place in America. They would be disappointed. For political and other reasons, President Roosevelt and the top military advisors were infinitely slow to recognize this and to respond. Secretary of the Navy Forrestal was the most senior official to push for full integration and he was unsuccessful.

After the war, segregation began to return to the Armed Forces, especially the Air Force. The Gillen Board tried to work out an equal opportunity solution within a segregated context. With the rise of the Soviet problem in Europe, it became clear that the United States was not going to be able to allow the postwar military to revert to the small, almost private club status of previous peacetimes. Responding to this and to his own deep sense of what was right, President Truman signed his executive order of 26 July 1948 banning all forms of discrimination in the Armed Forces of the United States.

This had an immediate and dramatic effect, putting the Armed Forces almost at the forefront of

social change—something that armed forces usually have little experience with. The services responded well within the confines of what they perceived to be their strictly military responsibilities.

As opportunities for blacks opened and expanded in the services, serious problems remained in matters of off-base housing, recreation, and customs of the local communities, as well as in military practice, tradition, and justice. These issues were recognized at unit levels but, in spite of pressure from the national black press, were largely ignored by the Eisenhower and Kennedy administrations.

These problems festered through the 1960s and eventually resulted in disturbances such as those experienced by the Navy on the *Kitty Hawk*, and *Hassayampa*, and the *Constellation*. By then the services had enlisted significant numbers of young urban blacks whose prior education had ill-prepared them for the technical demands of the Navy and whose prior experience had conditioned them to be suspicious of authority, especially when exercised by a white face in uniform. While the hardships of shared combat in Korea and Vietnam had built front-line units with good racial relations, the situation in units not directly exposed to combat had deteriorated. The symbolism of flags, handshakes, music, and patois had led to serious frictions which were not recognized by those in command. As

a result of these disturbances, the services undertook major programs of education and training to improve interracial tolerance and sensitivity.

The author is optimistic about the racial situation in the All Volunteer Force. Even in a booming economy, many young people are finding the military an attractive route to betterment. They enlist with a desire to improve themselves and do not seem to bring with them as much of the tensions of the civilian world.

Although Nalty is critical of the actions and attitudes of many military officials in this history, he does recognize the important contributions of several dedicated senior officers to improving the position of black Americans. Men such as Noel Parrish in the Air Force and Draper Kauffman in the Navy (for whom the recently commissioned FFG-39 was named) are cited for their genuine sensitivity to the needs and capabilities of their men and the actions they took in response, often with no great support from their superiors.

Nalty shows us clearly that race relations in the military have been a reflection of the attitudes of our nation. His story is one of individual glory and institutional failure. It is not an easy story to read, but it is ultimately an optimistic one showing that Americans can recognize when we need to do better and then do it.

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