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August 26, 1942

To: Mrs. Mary McLeod Bethune  
From: Charles P. Howard  
Subject: Handling of Negro Officer Candidates

On August 26, pursuant to your instructions I went to Fort Des Moines, Iowa, for the purpose of investigating conditions surrounding the Negro girls in training as officer candidates of the WAAC, and have this to report:

I reported to Captain Vann B. Kennedy, Public Relations Officer, advised him that I was making an investigation of the post at your request for the information of Mrs. Roosevelt, and asked for an interview with Colonel Don C. Faith. The Colonel was not immediately available, but upon his return I was granted an interview at once.

I advised Colonel Faith that my mission was to investigate conditions at Fort Des Moines relative to the Negro girls and informed him that I had been requested to do so by you.

Colonel Faith frankly informed me that as to housing, recreation, and eating the Negro girls are segregated, and that segregation was done in conformity with the "policy of the army;" that otherwise Negro girls are given absolute equality of opportunity.

For the purpose of facilitating my investigation I prepared a series of questions, and the answers thereto are by me

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based upon questions propounded to Colonel Faith and Captain Kennedy, interviews made this date with individual Negro WAACs and groups of Negro WAACs, and my personal observations made daily since the first day of the camp.

ASSIGNMENT:

All of the thirty-nine Negro officer candidates are assigned to one platoon and are a part of the First Company of the First Regiment WAAC. There are two other platoons in this company made up of white officer candidates.

HOUSING:

The Negro WAACs are all housed together in a building, located at the east end of the line of barracks.

RECREATION:

Service Clubs-- There are at present two centers of recreation; one for the white WAACs and one for the Negro WAACs located at different points on the post. There are under construction at this time two buildings--one to be known as Service Club Number 1 and to serve as a recreational center for white WAACs; one to be known as Service Club Number 2 and to serve as a recreational center for Negro WAACs. Negro hostesses are already on the ground supervising this recreation.

Post Canteen-- There is located on the post the Post Canteen. It houses on the main floor the principal canteen sales room having a soda fountain, books and newspapers, notions, leather

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goods, cigars, cigarettes, etc. On the same floor adjacent to this large room is a restaurant staffed by Chinese, and in the basement is a bowling alley. Every facility of this canteen is open to the Negro girls. I have personally seen them served at the soda fountain, bowling in the bowling alley and having meals in the restaurant.

Swimming Pool-- There is located on the post a swimming pool built to accommodate a population of possibly 400. There are on the post perhaps 700 to 800 enlisted men, the complement of post officers and their families as well as the WAACs. A schedule of swimming by companies is arranged. A definite period is set aside for the Negro girls to swim. Each company has a specified swimming time, however, the Negro platoon is given a specified period in which to swim separate from their company.

MEALS:

A special building has been constructed to serve as a dining hall for the WAACs. This building faces the north and is longer north and south than the east and west dimensions. The Negro girls are assigned special tables in the southeast corner of the dining room. As the third platoon of the First Company, they do not in their proper order fall in this seating arrangement. For the first few days of the school the tables assigned to the Negro WAACs were marked "Reserved C;" however, upon complaint being made by Negro girls Colonel Faith had the signs removed.

CLASSES:

Classes are conducted by platoons, companies, or two companies. In all matters of instruction there is absolute equality and

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the Negro WAACs have classes along with the whites, if it is a class of two platoons or more. Of course, if it is a one-platoon class, the Negro platoon receives its instruction along the same as any other platoon would receive platoon instruction.

DRILLING:

In the matter of company drill the Negro EAACs take their turn at commanding the company in the same ratio as white girls get their chance.

Today, August 26, I saw a Negro girl, Miss Charity Edna Adams of Columbia, South Carolina, in command of the First Company as Cadet Company Commander.

PHYSICAL TRAINING:

What is true of drilling is true of physical education: Negro girls take their turn in directing the whole company in physical education, and Mrs. Mildred E. Carter of Boston, Massachusetts, has been cited by her company commander as the best director of calisthenics in the company.

OPINIONS:

Colonel Faith was asked at a Press Conference on Saturday, August 15th by a Negro press representative "if the Negro girls were of such high caliber, so well educated and so fine personally, why was it necessary to separate them from the white girls, house them in one building and separate them in the Dining Room?" To which he replied, "that was the army policy," and he refused to answer any further questions as to who directed that policy or from whom he got instructions to so handle them.

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Captain Kennedy, August 24th, when discussing the matter of segregation at the post with me stated that these Negro girls knew "what the policy of the army was" before they came to Fort Des Moines, and that they, therefore, came with that understanding. What the "policy of the army" was he did not state.

In my opinion Colonel Faith is administrating his post with the minimum of segregation consistent with his interpretation of "army policy."

However, I desire to make this observation: I know of no Federal Law that requires the segregation of Negroes in the Army. (As I understand it, the WAACs are an auxiliary thereof.) The State Laws of the State of Iowa directly prohibit the segregation of Negroes in eating places. There is no State Law in Iowa, requiring the separate housing of Negroes nor is there any State Law in Iowa, requiring separate recreational facilities for Negroes.

It is to be noted that the army purports to justify its segregation of Negroes in southern training camps to conform to State Law. It is difficult to understand how violation of State Law in this camp is justified. I do not have access to complete army regulations, but seriously doubt if there are any Federal Laws that justify segregating these Negro girls at Fort Des Moines.

CONCLUSIONS:

In the conduct of this investigation, I have been given every cooperation and assistance by Colonel Faith, Captain Kennedy,

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Director of Public Relations; and Captain Stillman, Captain of the First Company; including the right to interview the Negro girls; and the conclusions reached in this report are based on my personal observations from the opening of the camp to date, from my almost daily conversations with Captain Kennedy and from interviews with the Negro WAACs themselves.

APPENDIX:

For the purpose of facilitating this inquiry I prepared and submitted to Colonel Faith and to members of the Negro WAACs the following questions; and the answers of the Negro WAACs as follows:

1. In being seated in the Dining Room does the Third Platoon of the First Company logically fall in the southwest corner of the Dining Hall or are they definitely seated there?

Negro OCs: No, the Third Platoon does not logically fall there. It is purposely seated there.

2. Are all of the other companies housed from left to right beginning with the First Company?

Negro OCs: No.

3. Do the Negro girls use the big recreational room on the left hand side coming in just north of the chapel? (Recreation Hall No. 1)

Negro OCs: No.

4. Do Negro officer candidates command the entire Company in their regular turn or is their chance to so command circumscribed because they are Negroes?

Negro OCs: Yes. They take their regular turn, no circumscription.

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5. Are Negro girls allowed to use the swimming pool as other girls are allowed to use it or is there a specified period set aside for them to use it?

Negro OCs: Some of the officer candidates claim to have swam at the same time with white girls. It is generally agreed that swimming is held by companies, but a special period is allotted for the Negro girls alone.

6. Are Negro girls made to feel, either by direct statement or by inference, that a special concession is being made to them in permitting them to attend this school?

Negro OCs: Yes. The white girls are made to feel the same.

7. Are Negro girls allowed to use the canteen and the bowling alleys without restrictions based on their color?

Negro OCs: Yes.

8. Are Negro girls segregated in all class rooms and do they drill in segregated groups?

Negro OCs: No. They are segregated in no class rooms, and there is no segregation at drill.

9. In all instances where the entire company parades are Negroes always in the rear?

Negro OCs: No.

10. Are white girls permitted to visit one another indiscriminately and Negro girls prohibited from so doing?

Negro OCs: Negro OCs have been visited by white friends and vice versa.

11. Do the instructors in conducting classes refer to "razor-carrying Negroes," or tell Negro jokes embarrassing to the Negro WAACs?

Negro OCs: They have never heard any kind of Negro joke.

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12. Are any of the camp facilities, recreational or otherwise denied use by Negroes?

Negro OCs: There is one recreational center for Negroes and one recreational center for whites.

13. Are any subjects being taught unavailable to the Negro WAACs?

Negro OCs: No.

Respectfully submitted,

/s/ CHAS. P. HOWARD

CPH/s

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