Last colored units at Fort Lee to be integrated by next month

By LEE BARROW

FORT LEE, Va.—The last of the ghettos for colored which dotted this Army post during World War II is finally disappearing.

A year ago, four companies were stationed in what was derisively known as Fort Lee's "track belt." They were the 59th QM Reclamation and Maintenance (R and M) co., the 580th QM Service co., the 972nd QM Laundry co., and the 528th QM Service co.

Today the 528th is overseas. Its area is now occupied by a mixed unit, the 584th QM R and M co. The 580th has been moved into a previously all-white area. The 972nd is due to be moved and the 59th integrated by the middle of next month.

This next to the last step in Integration at Fort Lee is being accomplished quietly as the post reorganizes itself.

All four companies were assigned to the 94th QM battalion, commanded by Lt. Col. Tony D'Amore. The battalion itself is being reorganized to include only reclamation and maintenance units.

As a result, the 580th Service another battalion and the 972nd co. was assigned last week to

Tan-and-Whites

As new R and M companies are added to the 94th battalion, a reliable source told the AFRO, members of the now all-colored 59th will be assigned to them, thereby giving the battalion a tan-and-white complexion from top to bottom for the first time in its history.

Peculiarly, a quiet attempt to integrate the battalion last year failed. At that time the battalion headquarters company was mixed and several white youngsters assigned to other units. But Uncle Tomish officers ran to battalion headquarters, yelled about the "mistake" and asked that the white GIs be reassigned.

They were

This time, thanks to a Pentagon directive ordering integration as soon as is feasible, there won't be any mistaking the assignments as mistakes.

Men Favor Integration

The men themselves favor the integration. Its a common belief that they get all of the worst details because they belong to all-colored units.

True or not, it is generally felt that integration will ease Laundry co. is due to be reassigned also.

their work load.

Fears Unjustified

None of those questioned had any fears concerning promotions. When integration on a large scale was first attempted after World War II, many colored GIs feared that no white officer would approve of having colored NCOs serving over white soldiers.

Their fears were unjustified. At Lee, for example, the companies already integrated have many top grade non-coms, including some first sergents, serving in key positions. This is true throughout the Army, both stateside and abroad.

Whether or not Fort Lee will take the final step and integrate all of its social facilities on the post remains to be seen.

While no one is forbidden to attend a dance on post because of his color, two service clubs and an NCO club tacitly "reserved" for colored still exist.

Whether or not the colored and white NCO clubs will be combined and colored and white hostesses invited to attend the same service club saffairs, only time can tell.

300 to lose jobs at Lee

Cutback will hurt about 150 colored

FORT LEE, Va. — That rainy day for which some men saved — and some didn't — is less than a month away for many of Fort Lee's colored civilian employees.

On Oct. 16 approximately 300 workers, mostly laborers, will be laid off. Hardest hit will be those working for the post engineer section which must effect a "reduction in force" or "rif" of 176 employees.

Next in line will be the employees of such Second Army functions as post quartermaster, ordnance, station complement and transportation, due to drop 136 civilians.

It is expected that at least half of the 300 persons "riffed" (laid off) will be colored.

'Little Hope'

A public information office release held little hope that those riffed out of one job would be able to find work elsewhere on the post. The release said that "very few of the employees to be affected by the curtailment can be absorbed by other functions on the post."

The release explained: "The recent phaseout of the Quartermaster Replacement Training Command resulted in the filling of many of the civilian personnel vacancies existing at the Quartermaster Training Command."

It went on to say:

"In order to give employees 30 days notice as required by regulations and still meet the Oct. 16 deadline set by the cutback order, reduction-in-force notices are being issued today, Sept. 16) to all civilians employed at Fort Lee.

To Investigate Workloads

"By alerting all employees for possible release, Fort Lee officials will be afforded an opportunity to investigate workloads and make adjustments before actually cutting staffs.

"Those employees adversely affected will be notified on or before Oct. 2. Seniority, veterans' status and so forth will have a definite bearing on the final separation lists."

Lee job losers to need nest egg; openings 'scarce' in Petersburg

PETERSBURG, Va. — Unless they have a nest egg already saved up, the 300 persons due to be "riffed" (laid off) at Fort Lee next month are going to find squeeze.

They are not eligible for state unemployment compensation and their chances of getting another job soon in the Petersburg-Hopewell well area are practically nil.

"Jobs of any kind are scarce in this area," a Petersburg employment office spokesman told the AFRO, "particularly jobs for colored persons."

Hopewell Plant Hiring

He said that one Hopewell plant was doing "some seasonal hiring," that he had "a smattering of construction jobs available," and that he occasionally received calls for plumbers' helpers and porters.

Clerical jobs for colored are non-existent in this area. The spokesman said that one storekeeper's job was available but that he expected it to be filled in a couple of days.

As for unemployment compensation, the state law passed in December, 1936, by a special session of the legislature, forbids payment to government employees of any kind, "state, city, county or federal."

Since federal employees at Fort Lee do not participate in the social security program, they can not draw funds from that source.

Some of the workers will be able to draw payments from a federal retirement fund to which they have contributed but a majority of the workers laid off will undoubtedly be hired on a "temporary" basis and who did not participate in the retirement program.

Must Readjust

"Those who do find jobs," the spokesman said, "will have to readjust their scale of living to a small paycheck.

"I hear they get $1.60 an hour for firing boilers at Fort Lee. They won't be able to get that sort of money for similar work in Petersburg."

The employment situation in nearby Richmond is much better. The seasonal tobacco industry, where pay checks average better than $45 a week, is moving rapidly but normally has a slight cut-back in November.

There are about 900 jobs open for colored in semi-skilled, unskilled and service occupations which pay between $36 and $40 weekly. However, skilled jobs and clerical work are as scarce in Richmond as they are in Petersburg. The employment office is cooperating with the Urban League in their effort to fill previously illy-white jobs with colored personnel as they become vacant.

Employment experts, however,

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