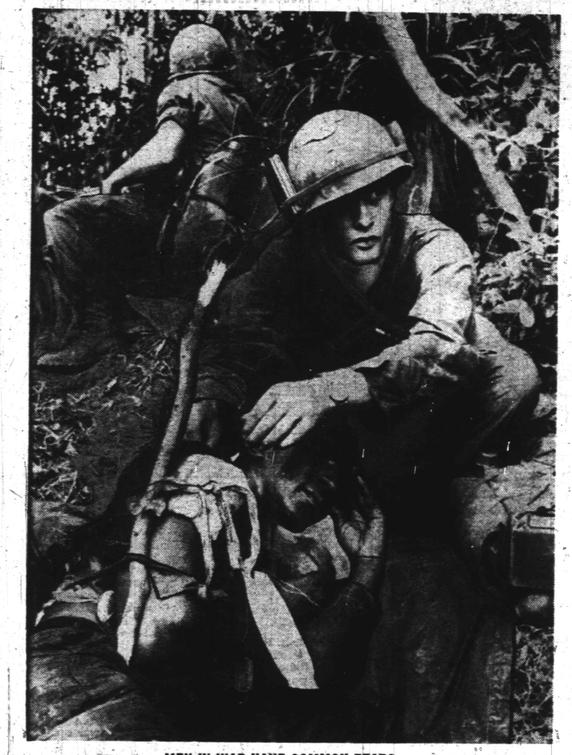
IN THE FEVERISH, WAR TORN JUNGLES OF VIETNAM

# BULLETS ARE COLOR BLIND

**Despite a few incidents here and there integration is proceeding smoothly in the armed forces; the black man is, in increasing numbers, finding a home within the U. S. military. The Vietnam War has served this purpose well.**



MEN IN WAR HAVE COMMON FEARS

## FOXHOLES

The line of reasoning that says something like there are no bigots in foxholes is one of war's half-truths.

An occasional fist fight prompted by a racial slur is not, however, the story of the black soldier in Vietnam.

Neither is more serious racial battling, and there has been some.

In August, six months after Da Nang was declared off limits to U. S. servicemen because of civil unrest, racial tensions led to a mass fist fight at the naval base.

It is hardly necessary to say that such instances are rare, and far less significant in magnitude than the rioting that has plagued the cities of the United States.

By LEON DANIEL

The massively complex U.S. fighting machine in Vietnam functions unhampered by the racial frictions which plague the nation that produced it.

The Black American knows he is a good soldier. The Pentagon knows it. More important, so does the white soldier who fights beside him.

The record of colored soldiers fighting in this war speaks for itself.

### Magnificent

Gen. William C. Westmoreland, the South Carolina-born commander of all U.S. fighting men in Vietnam, put it this way:

"One of the greatest stories to come out of this war is the magnificent job being done by the black soldier."

There are critics who see chinks in the armor. They say that a search below the surface would reveal that racial tensions still exist in the armed forces.

These skeptics contend that the existence of colored bars in Saigon, Bien Hoa, Nha Trang and other cities prove their point. They say colored soldiers use the bars to escape racial tensions during their off-duty hours and because they are not wanted in the bars frequented by white soldiers.

### A fact

But the fact is that most U.S. servicemen in Vietnam — black and white alike — don't hang out in the sleazy joints that feature the delicately-buile Vietnamese business girls who peddle both "Saigon Tea" and themselves.

The Khanh Hoi section of Saigon, which lies on the "wrong side" of the Saigon River where the people are very poor, contains some 20 bars which are used almost exclusively by black soldiers.

These servicemen frequent sections like Khanh Hoi and the white soldier stay away. It appears to be a case of voluntary association. One soldier asked about it said he did not like the slightly more affluent bars on Tobo Street because he did not "dig all that hillbilly music."

The fact nevertheless remains that on any given night on garish Tudo Street you can see black and white soldiers raising cain together.

Deep in the jungles, where bullets are color blind and livings seems more important than pigmentation, racial tensions ease. Blacks and whites share the risks as well as their canteens.

Most colored soldiers apparently agree with the Pentagon's assertion that there is no official discrimination against them and that work assignments and promotions are based solely on merit.

11 percent of the American population is black.

Department of Defense figures show that 10 percent of all U.S. servicemen in Vietnam are black. The breakdown by services is 13 percent in the Army, 10 percent in the Air Force, 7 percent in the Marines and 6 percent in the Navy.

### Dead %

Sixteen percent of all the battle dead in Vietnam have been black. Of the Army's dead, 21 percent and of the Marine dead 10½ percent. The figure for the Air Force is 3 percent. No black sailors have died so far as a result of hostile action.

There are reasons why black Americans are killed in Vietnam in disproportionate numbers. Some of the reasons are readily apparent, others are less evident.

It is said that colored volunteer for paratroop duty in disproportionate numbers. There is some evidence to support this. About one third of the paratroopers in Vietnam are colored and jumping out of airplanes in the Army is a volunteer proposition.

Some are placed in combat roles because heir inadequate educations have not prepared them for technical jobs behind the lines.

### Few officers

Last year black men constituted a disproportionate 13.4 percent of the draftees inducted and this obviously tends to place a proportionately larger number of them on the firing line.

There still are relatively few black officers in the armed forces —less than one half of one percent in the Navy and Marine Corp. The Department of Defense is looking for ways to find more leadership. The three service academies this year had more than four times as many as they did three years ago.

Despite a few problems, integration is proceeding smoothly in the Armed forces and the black man, in increasing numbers, is finding a home in the military.

The Defense Department says that the reenlistment rate is about three times the rate for whites for the first reenlistment. The figures for subsequent reenlistments. In other words, career personnel show the rate is about 10 percent higher than for white servicemen.

First Sergeant Willie Little, a 40-year-old airman from St. Louis, Mo., is not likely to ever become part of that percentage of soldiers who have died in Vietnam. He runs a post exchange at Nha Trang, which is very good duty.

### Beach

Little, you might say, has it made. He lives in an attractive villa with five other senior non-commissioned officers, all but one of whom are white. The beach is nearby and there's always cold beer in the refrigerator. The war, to Little seems a long way off.

Little joined the Army in 1943 when he was 19. Back in those days it was not an integrated army but Little says, "I just accepted it as a fact of life."

He came out of the Army in 1946 and got a job as a substitute clerk in the Post Office at St. Louis. He had just gotten married and substutes in the post office weren't getting much work.

### Pretty good

So in 1947, Little went back into the service, this time in the Air Force.

For Little it has been a pretty good life since then, though not perfect. There was the time when there was no housing for colored at a base in Kansas and he had to send his family to St. Louis. He still worries about it some, and says he doesn't care where his next duty station is if he can house his family adequately.

"When I consider a base the only thing I think about is what kind of housing I can get," Little said.

That is a problem the military alone can't alway settle.

## SINCE 1633

Blacks and whites have fought alongside each other since 1633. When the Massachusetts settlers battled Indians.

A runaway slave named Crispus Attucks was the first man shot in the Boston Massacre. About 186,000 colored persons fought with Union troops in the Civil War but in nearly all instances they were segregated and their ability as soldiers was questioned.

A few colored units distinguished themselves in WW II battles, but most were placed in noncombatant roles such as engineering, transportation and supply.

On July 26, 1948, President Truman attempted to desegregate the armed forces with a sweep of his pen, but the fact is that some segregated units remained as late as the Korean War.

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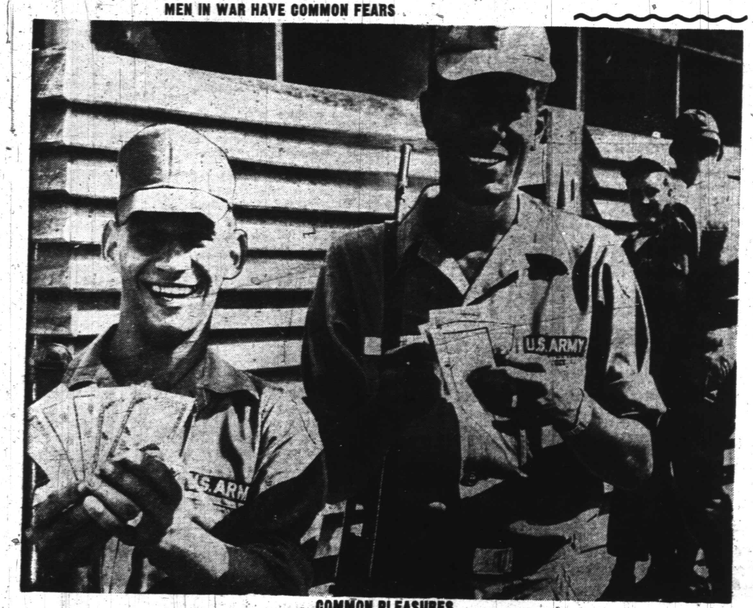
A COMMON HOUSE TO BUILD

A COMMON LIFE TO PROTECT



COMMON PLEASURES