

Socialization may be a key to blacks' military promotions

By Robert B. Adolph Jr.

Col. Remo Butler, the current commander of the 1st Special Warfare Training Group at Fort Bragg, is a remarkably successful officer.

He happens to be black. Although justifiably pleased with his current success, he is concerned that many other black officers have fared poorly in the Army at the more senior levels in comparison with their white comrades.

His concern is justified. While a student at the Army War College, Col. Butler wrote a paper entitled, "Why Black Officers Fail in The U.S. Army." For my money, it is the best research paper written to date on a subject senior white officers tend to shy away from.

The paper explodes the myth that white discrimination is the preponderant reason why fewer black officers succeed to the highest ranks in the military by way of comparison with their white counterparts.

Col. Butler does not say that discrimination does not exist — only that it is not, as commonly believed, the major reason there are fewer black colonels and generals than there ought to be.

I was not surprised to discover that the journal of the U.S. Army War College, Parameters, declined to publish his research paper. Butler's observations strike a chord of truth and are therefore potentially controversial. In my experience, there are few things more dangerous to bureaucracies than someone

armed with the truth.

Col. Butler, therefore, appears to be a very dangerous man to some. Without going into a myriad of statistics, it is simply important to know that black officers are promoted less frequently to the senior officer grades. This fact is not in contention.

What is in contention is the answer to the question of why this is so. Culture is one reason. Col. Butler points out that there is a distinct black culture in America. Few would argue this point, but "cultural misperceptions," as Col. Butler points out, don't tell the whole story. There must be more.

Also, there are no doubt a few intellectually challenged individuals who subscribe to the Ku Klux Klan's notion of racial superiority; but their number is, thank goodness, very small. And the Army, to its credit,

roots them out as soon as they are identified.

Through his research, this is essentially what Col. Butler discovered. Black officers who attended West Point or mixed-race colleges and universities did best in the Army. Black officers who attended historically black colleges fared worst.

One reason is that blacks who attended historically black colleges have not had the opportunity to socialize with whites.

Another compounding factor has to do with the predominant assignment of black officers to serve in positions as professors of military science in the ROTC departments within historically black colleges. It is my understanding that these colleges generally prefer black officers to serve as their trainers. The Army tolerates this preference. This is quite probably a mistake of serious proportions.

The overwhelming majority of these black officers are not in the combat arms. Of course, the combat arms produce the majority of the Army's senior officers. Moreover, the overwhelming majority of these officers are not former or future battalion commanders. The bottom line is that ambitious and upwardly mobile officers of any race generally avoid ROTC duty.

The potential effect is obvious. During the mentoring process and during their most formative time in college, ROTC cadets at historically black colleges are not exposed to the combat arms which are, again, the best path to one day wearing the eagles of a colonel or the stars of a general. Essentially, the fact that fewer blacks serve in the combat arms generally equates to fewer promotions, as well as fewer selections for bat-

tal command, also found mostly in the combat arms.

This is the bottom line:

(1) Blacks who attend West Point or mixed-race colleges and universities do better in the Army because they are better enabled to function within a majority white cultural context.

(2) Combat arms officers receive the majority of the Army's most senior promotions, and there are fewer blacks in the combat arms.

(3) So long as the Army continues to allow historically black colleges to dictate the skin color of professors of military science, the combat arms will probably not be fairly represented

and this situation will continue. I am glad to say that none of the reasons points to discriminatory behavior of senior soldiers or pre-judicial policies on the part of the institution of the Army.

Col. Butler's research paper is important because it provides for the possibility of meaningful change that can be made to turn this situation around — if only the Army possesses the courage to act.

Adolph is a retired Army Special Forces lieutenant colonel, currently works as a Defense Policy Consultant to the Bosnia Ministry of Defense in Sarajevo.

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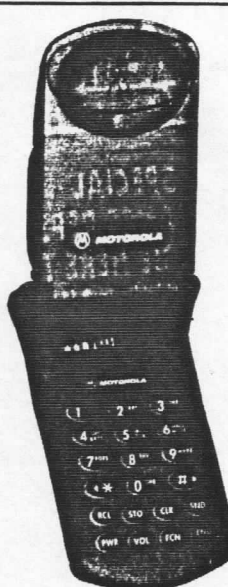
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