

Want Combat Duty, Negroes Cry in Vain

Most of Them Still Toting Bales and Resentment Grows

By ROI OTTLEY

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PARIS, Nov. 13.—Despite neatly-handled ballyhoo, the Negro soldier in France still is doing little else than most Negroes do in civilian life—they are heavin' bales and totin' bags.

Until an anti-tank unit arrived in France recently, not one Negro division had had actual physical contact with the enemy. Most observers here feel that this is no accident. The almost exclusive use of Negroes as service troops is an open scandal in this theater of operations.

This situation has caused resentments among Negroes. It has caused tempers to mount among white troops.

The Negro is in a dilemma not of his own making.

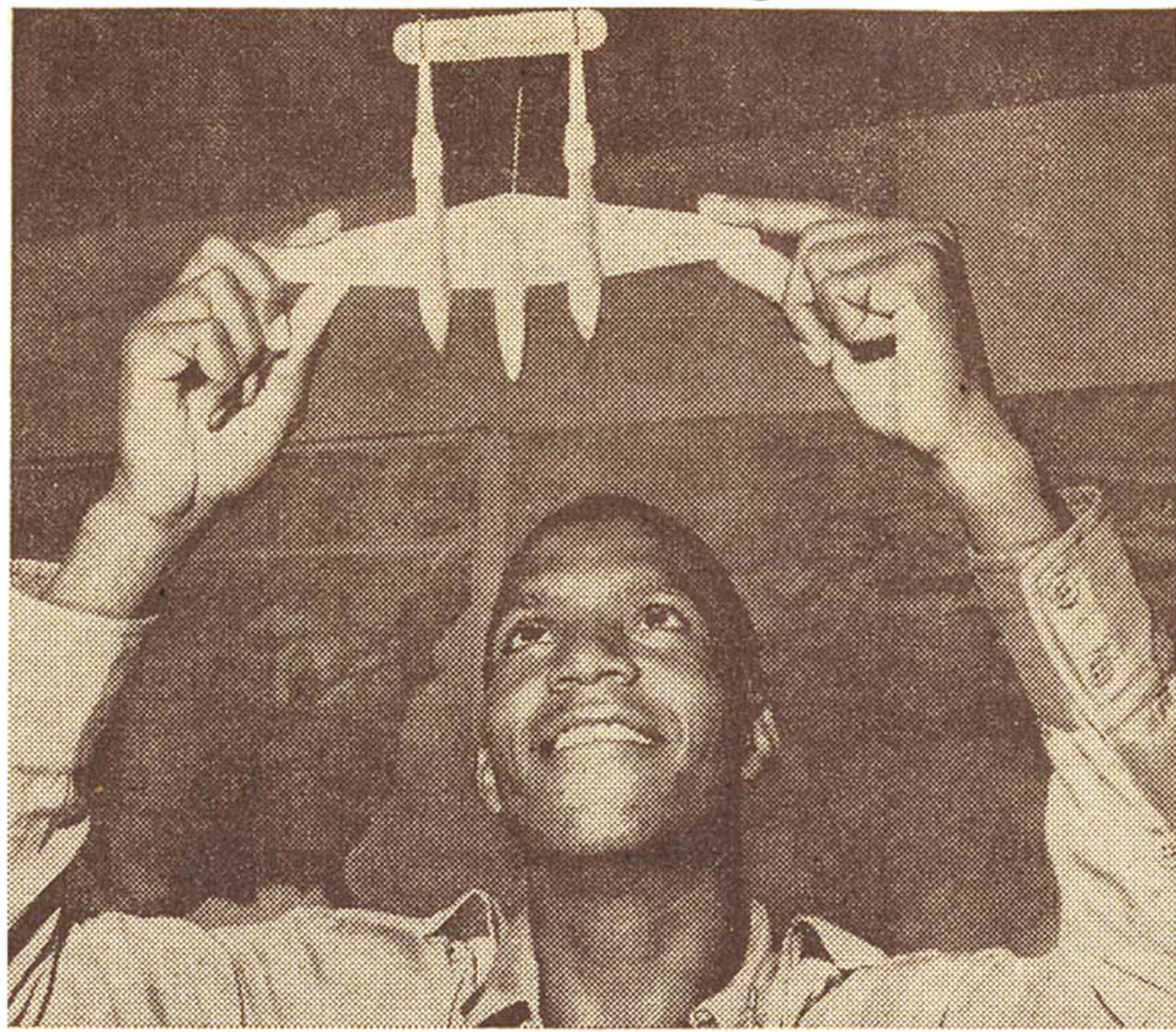
Issue Is Dodged

In recent days *Stars and Stripes*, the GI newspaper here, has been receiving letters from white soldiers complaining that Negroes are being "overplayed" in the news. They contend that Negroes are behind the lines and therefore not exposed to danger. Gen. Eisenhower's praise of the Red Ball Express, the supply line which contains more than 70 per cent Negro personnel, swelled the numbers of protesting letters.

Negro soldiers anticipated this attitude from certain white GIs. Moreover, they feel that on their return home this charge will be thrown in their face and reduce their chances of sharing the social benefits to come with victory.

No member of the High Command will comment on this situation. Nor will they explain why Negroes have been concentrated in the service divisions regardless of their ability and qualifications to do other tasks. The issue has been dodged repeatedly at press conferences.

Some observers here feel that the encomiums of praise Negro service divisions have been receiving, is an attempt by the High Command to allay criticism at home and to improve the morale of Negro troops here.

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Lt. Ben Johnson hasn't had a chance to use the knowledge he acquired in the Anti-Aircraft Artillery School in Camp Davis. Here he is shown inspecting a P-38 model in the school's Target

Wants Combat

Everywhere I've gone in England and France, Negro soldiers have asked me, "Have you seen any Negroes fighting up front?" They avidly read the Negro newspapers for information about the Negro aviators fighting in Italy. They have been buoyed up a little by the recent recruiting of a Negro paratroop unit. This, they feel, will give them an opportunity to come to grips with the enemy.

"I want combat duty," Lt. Ben Johnson, former Columbia University track star, told me in forceful language. He is in a trucking unit, attached to the Red Ball Express, which was one of those anti-aircraft divisions converted into a service unit. His attitude is typical of the Negro soldier here.

"Psychologically," he said, "I do not feel in a strong position to demand better treatment after the war, because I'm not up there trading punches with Jerry.

"I guess certain officers fear the Negro may become cocky after the war.

"The men who oppose Negroes doing combat duty, know that when a white man and a Negro are in the same foxhole day in and day out, it breaks down barriers. And they don't want that to happen."

"There still are officers," he continued, "who believe that the Negro can't be made into a first-class soldier. They don't even give him a chance.

"Yet, Negroes are getting a marvelous education here. They have been going to theaters, staying at hotels, going to pubs in England and now cafes in France, and even visiting the homes of French and English families. Things they could

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not do at home.

"It's something you can't expose a man to and expect him to forget it overnight.

"I think the most important thing that every Negro has learned here is that the white soldier is a human being just like himself. Negro soldiers are seeing the white man in his strength and weaknesses. He has seen him show fear and bravery.

"Even the Negro soldier's policing of the German prisoners has done something to him.

"They have seen Germans doing the dirty work—like digging latrines, putting up tents, serving officers at mess, digging graves, washing pots and pans.

"This has made a profound impression on the Negro—for, after all, the Germans are white, too!

"As I see it," Johnson concluded, "Negroes are as capable as white men to do front-line combat duty. I think somebody's making a big mistake."

He reflected for a minute. Then he said, "I guess this segregated army is at the bottom of it all."

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