
Defense Report

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Blacks in the Army

The number of blacks in the Army and their progress has been the subject of considerable discussion, especially in the press, since the allegations during the Vietnam War that the number of blacks in combat was too high considering the number of blacks in the Army.

Recent figures from the Army Staff reveal some interesting information on the "black content" of the Army, as the Pentagon calls it. The statistics show that the number of blacks in the Army rose from about 17 per cent in mid-1972 to a little over 22 per cent by late 1974 and has remained at about the same level since. The figure in late 1975 was 22.7%.

Some experts believe that the percentage is about to rise modestly again. They cite two factors: (1) the number of non-prior service blacks enlisting in the Army so far in FY 76 is slightly (.7%) ahead of FY 75 and (2) first term black enlistees continue to show a somewhat greater propensity to reenlist than their white counterparts.

How are blacks doing within the Army? The figures show quite well indeed. From June of 73 to late 75 the percentage of black sergeants (E-5's) rose one percent to about 19%; E-6's dropped from 24 to just under 22%; E-7's rose from 20 to 22.3%; E-8's rose from under 15 to about 17%; and the top grade, E-9's, jumped significantly from 9 to nearly 14%.

The figures also gave some indications as to what blacks are doing in the Army. For example, in combat divisions the black percentage was 22.9, somewhat above the Army-wide percentage. An increase in this figure is anticipated because so far in FY 76 23.7% of black enlistments have been for the combat arms compared with an overall 19% average for FY 75.

The figures also showed that the Army's extra efforts to obtain more black officers were beginning to pay off. Most notable was the input from ROTC which doubled from about 11 per cent in FY 72 to nearly 22 per cent currently. USMA graduates also increased from under 3 per cent in 72 to an estimated 5.5% in 76. The overall black officer input was 10.5% in FY 75, up significantly from only 2% three years ago.