



More than sixty-one years ago, on July 26 1948, President Harry S. Truman issued [Executive Order 9981](#) which states in part:

*"It is hereby declared to be the policy of the President that there shall be equality of treatment and opportunity for all persons in the armed services without regard to race, color, religion or national origin. This policy shall be put into effect as rapidly as possible, having due regard to the time required to effectuate any necessary changes without impairing efficiency or morale."*

This order ended racial segregation within the United States military. The Executive Order was brief; it contained six paragraphs and less than 250 words. Its impact upon our military forces was however, significant.

Over the course of the next five years, we would move from a racially segregated military to an integrated one. As we celebrate Black History Month, I think it's relevant to pause and look back at where we were, where we are, and where we hope to be. I believe that prior to President Truman's Executive Order, we were not living up to our full potential as a fighting force.

If we were organized today like we were in 1948, more than 20% of our force would be segregated into separate "blacks only" units. Can you imagine sustaining our current level of effort in Iraq and Afghanistan using segregated forces? Many of us have had more than one tour in theater. I personally can't imagine subtracting the outstanding soldiers of color from my squads, companies or brigades and successfully carrying out my warfighting mission.

What a tremendous waste of talent and skills we would have to endure if our forces were still segregated! Fortunately, we no longer man our units based upon a person's race, gender, or origin. We've evolved a long way over the past 60 plus years. There have been numerous speed bumps along the way, but we are far better because of the journey.

I wish I could say that we've completely banished racism from the Army. We all know that just isn't so. We still have those few who linger in the shadows and live in the past, waiting for opportunities to spread discontent. Racism hurts unit cohesion: it destroys trust, and kills morale. It also cuts both ways.

Fortunately, most of our leaders measure a person's ability based upon their performance and potential instead of what they look like, where they came from, or how they worship. In today's Army, advancement is earned through ability and talent. When we find someone not able to comply with this leadership requirement, we have a system in place to remove them and correct the problem.

We'll never live in a truly color blind world. Personally I think that's a very good thing. Diversity brings so much to the table. What a boring world we'd live in if we all looked, spoke, and thought the same. We'd never find a new approach or perspective that helps us overcome a stubborn problem, a solution that's there but we just can't see because of our background.

I do firmly believe that we are better at making race and gender neutral decisions for promotions and recognition than at any time in the history of the United States Army. I also believe we remain ever vigilant so that we never regress.

As leaders and as subordinates, it's our joint responsibility to shine light into the darkness that is racism. Working proactively, we can and will continue to make our Army an even better place to be – embracing diversity for the good of the force.

*SECURE THE HIGH GROUND!*