

Martin Luther King Day 2019

Monday 21 January 2019 is Martin Luther King Day and it reminds me of a request I got in 2004 from the Moorhead School District. I was asked if I would give a presentation to the Moorhead teachers' development day for MLK day. As all of you know I'm an old white guy, although in 2004, I was much younger! Why, I said would you like an old white guy to present? Because of a project on Veterans' oral history started in 2001, they wanted something related to Veterans. Using video oral histories from the Library of Congress' oral history project, I was able to find stories from minority service members who served during WWII. It became a very good presentation and I was asked to do it for other audiences. I will be giving the presentation for the Green Valley Forum Club on 13 March. I'm scheduled for the week between the *What does transgender mean* and *The capture of John Dillinger in Tucson*. In updating my research, I relearned that the military was ahead of most of the country with its integration policies.

Following the end of WWII, the Army and Navy adopted policies for equal rights for black servicemembers. It was not widely implemented, however, prompting President Truman to establish a civil rights committee to racial violence. In 1947, the Army Air Corps closed the segregated officer training program at Tuskegee, AL and began integrated training. Truman signed Executive Order 9811 to provide equal treatment of black servicemembers. By 1951 all branches of the military developed policies dropping all segregated units, on-post facilities and training programs. Black servicemembers served in integrated units during the Korean War, the first combat with integrated units. The last racially segregated unit in the armed forces of the US was abolished in 1954. I find it interesting that a major Supreme Court case of modern times also occurred in 1954 when the justices ruled unanimously that racial segregation of children in public schools was unconstitutional, *Brown v. Board of Education*. The chief attorney for the plaintiffs was Thurgood Marshall who was appointed to the Supreme Court by President Johnson in 1967. In 1955, Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat on a Montgomery, AL bus. Her arrest led to many boycotts, sit-ins and demonstrations many led by Martin Luther King, Jr.

Of course, many cases and laws followed and yet, we still have discrimination based on race, gender, religion and other reasons. When I was in the Air Force one of my fellow airmen broke up with his girl friend because he heard that she had attended a college party where a black was present. That was in 1965.

All Veterans should be proud of the early integration of the military, setting an example for the rest of the nation. One might argue that it was not early because the Civil War and the Emancipation Proclamation occurred 100 years earlier.

I found a Mark Twain quote that I like "Never argue with a fool, onlookers may not be able to tell the difference."