

A Conversation on Race in the Military: Haven for Harmony or Haven for White Supremacists?

By **Simma Lieberman**, *The Inclusionist*



Is there an increase in the number of White Supremacists in the military? Is there an atmosphere of harmony across race or is it a haven for racist behavior? Should we be concerned? Or, is the military doing more to root them out? To expose and persecute white supremacists and haters based on race?

In my first self-produced podcast, “Every Day Conversations on Race,” Stephon Williams, a former Marine and Greg Jenkins, who served in the Army, offer their experience and observations.

According to the Military Times, shortly after the white supremacist demonstration in Charlottesville, ProPublica and Frontline PBS reported evidence of at least three service members, and three former service members of belonging to a white supremacist group that was tied to at least five murders.

Stephon is African-American and Greg is white. They’ve been friends for years and have every day conversations on race, frequently. Both Stephon and Greg connected when they first met around common experiences in the military, common values and desire to change systems to eliminate racism.

Stephon could tell after he worked with Greg the first time, that he understood issues of race, and felt comfortable having conversations on race with him.

When we talked about issues of race in the military, both men shared that the in the military there are people of every race together. For the most part people do get to know each other across race, but there are still people who bring their upbringing and racism with them. The military won’t tolerate it they said. After Charlottesville, people noticed the military tattoos of one of the leaders of the demonstration and quickly rooted him out.

Since Executive Order 991, which desegregated the military, a lot of work and progress has been made.

After Charlottesville, the Joint Chiefs of Staff condemned President Trump when he said there were good people on both sides.

When people in the military are so close together every day, they are forced to communicate. They sleep in the same quarters, eat together, train together and depend on each other across race. Greg said, “When you’re so close together you start to have

conversations and let go of preconceived biases about each other. Your lives depend on each other. You may not make it home. We have to look out for each other.”

Greg and Stephon help bring people together inside the military and outside of it as trainers and facilitators.

Stephon grew up in New Orleans and had to deal with race issues since he was young, because he was dark skinned. As he started to travel with the military and go to places like the Philippines he had to become aware of his own biases, and let go of them. He began to have conversations with people who were different and sharing who he was and learning who they were.

So in terms of the military, “Haven for harmony or haven for white supremacy?”, it’s not an environment that nurtures white supremacy, but there are white supremacists in the military that come from the general population and they are not welcome.

People like Stephon Williams and Greg Jenkins keep working and creating stronger environments for inclusion.

<http://raceconvo.com/episode-1-race-in-the-military-haven-for-harmony-or-haven-for-white-supremacy/>

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