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The Luckless 92nd

The most extensive and whole-hearted effort by the United States Army to give American Negro troops a role in the war equal to that of white troops has so far been more productive of disappointment and failure than of anything else. That much could be told last week about the experience of the Army with the 92nd Division, an outfit in which all the enlisted men and a high proportion of the officers are Negroes.

The 92nd was intended to demonstrate that Negro troops could be used in front-line combat and also to meet criticism that Negroes were always given menial tasks. Last year therefore, the 92nd moved into the line on the Italian front. It rapidly acquired a bad reputation among other troops. They claimed that the men of the 92nd were "trigger-happy," that it was impossible to send out patrols near the 92nd because they shot at even their own patrols and at Italian civilians as well.

Then last December, the Germans launched a strong attack on the Serchio River line. Part of the line a few miles inland from the Mediterranean Coast was held by the 92nd. It crumbled under the Nazi assault and another division had to be hastily thrown into the gap. Last week misfortune apparently struck the 92nd again. After a two-day attack the previous week, German infiltrations forced the division back to its original positions. Casualties were officially admitted to have been high.

Writing about this reverse, Milton Bracker, New York Times correspondent, cabled: "Something should be noted now that has been troubling headquarters for some time: how to handle the division's public relations in view of the supersensitivity of some Negro papers at home, which have unquestionably tended to overemphasize the division's accomplishments and the inevitable racial aspects of the situation."