

Black Brigadier General At Fort Lewis Is Inspiration To All

By JANICE HAYES

"Anyone can succeed in the Army. All it takes is hard work and a positive mental attitude," said Brigadier General Guthrie Turner, Commander of Madigan Army Medical Center, Fort Lewis, Washington.

Turner, a soft-spoken native of Snow Hill, North Carolina, became the first Black doctor on active duty promoted to general in the U.S. Army in May of 1980. He has been the commander of Madigan since June of 1980.

Although his hair is growing grey in places, the years have been kind to Turner. Physically he is trim and virile. His face is smooth and brown like a copper penny. It displays few of the battle scars one would expect to see after almost three decades of military service.

"My parents did not approve of my decision to join the Army," Turner recalled. "They had never known anyone who had done well in the military. I was their only son, so naturally they wanted the best for me. It took them years and years to accept it."

"Before my parents died in 1968," he continued, "there was an article in my hometown newspaper about a medical battalion I was commanding in Vietnam. The local sheriff called my father and invited him to sit on a bench in front of a drugstore right across from the courthouse. Integration was not 100 percent in Snow Hill at that time. My father was the first Black man to sit where only Whites had sat before. It was then that I think he was made proud of me," Turner said.

Turner is in charge of approximately 2,000 people at Madigan, both military and civilian personnel. Madigan serves 135,000 patients within a 50-mile radius. 160,000 records are on file in the hospital's records section.

According to Turner, Madigan has a three-fold mission: responsive health care, health care training and clinical research. "I make rounds daily in an attempt to keep in touch with my staff and their needs. Right now I think we are fulfilling our mission. We do a lot of things well."

"On the other hand, there are a lot of things that we would like to do, however, we lack the resources. For instance, I would like to have more physicians and nurses in the Emergency Room on holidays and weekends. I would also like to keep the pharmacy open on the weekends, but we lack the personnel," he said.

The Army plans to build a new hospital facility at Madigan. The design phase will be completed early next year. General Turner has been instrumental in the planning thus far. "We got the economic proposal completed and approved. Then we took the contract bids for a design engineer," he said. The design contract was given to a Seattle firm who will be working with a firm from Birmingham, Alabama.

"When I joined the Army in 1953, I had no intentions of staying in. I was still planning to get out in June 1956," Turner said. "When I was turning in my gear, a colonel, whom I respected very much, talked to me earnestly. Among some of the things he said to me was that I had exceptional leadership qualities, and I think exceptional meant at that time, as a minority. In addition, he said to me if you

stay in the Army you will not only be an outstanding physician, but you can be an outstanding soldier."

"I knew that if I got out of the military and practiced in the South, I could never become an outstanding physician because the world of Black and White had not mixed as much outside of the Army as it had in the Army," he said.

A graduate of Howard Medical School in Washington D.C., Turner's medical speciality is aerospace medicine. According to Turner, a friend, another minority officer who came into the Army to become a flight surgeon, influenced him to pursue a career in aerospace medicine. "Just listening and observing him and seeing exactly what he did made me want to do the same thing," Turner said.

Aerospace medicine takes care of flight

crew members and their families. It's a form of family practice for aviators and crew members. Astronauts usually have flight surgeons for their physicians because when they leave the earth's environment, the atmosphere is hostile. Therefore, it takes a specially trained physician to make sure that the environment and the person's capabilities are not at odds with each other.

Turner is married and has three children. His wife is also a native of North Carolina. Kim, his oldest daughter, said her father is a very positive and encouraging person. "He is always encouraging people to do the best they possibly can at whatever it is they choose to do," she said.

"He doesn't believe in wasting time, he believes in productivity. I can't remember seeing him lying around the

house watching T.V. or resting often. With one exception, he does like to watch Patton whenever that comes on," she said.

"I believe you have to have a philosophy in life. Mine is hard work and good deeds shall be rewarded. Most human beings are of average intelligence. What separates one from another is how he applies that intelligence. Very few of us really work up to our full potential," Turner said.

Unlike the staunch General Patton portrayed by George C. Scott, Turner is a man of small frame. His eyes are big and brown and as steady as a sharpshooter. As he talks he very seldom looks away

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