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THE DECATUR DAILY

"My Country -- May She Ever Be Right but, Right or Wrong, My Country!"

DECATUR, ALABAMA

March 17, 1943.

President Francis P. Gaines,
Washington & Lee University,
Lexington,
Virginia.

Dear President Gaines:-

This clipping, from "The Southern Watchman",
an Alabama weekly publication, was sent to me by a friend
who was aware that I attended Washington & Lee for three
years.

What is the explanation of it?

What is the truth of it?

Under what circumstances could this ever occur
at a Southern institution such as Washington & Lee?

Awaiting your reply, I am,

Very truly yours

Barrett C. Shelton

Publisher

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Negro Press Boasts Of W. & L. Army Graduates

Currently receiving a play in the negro press is the news story to the effect that "history will be made Saturday when, for the first time, four negroes—the first ever to attend a major white college in the South—will walk up the podium in the historic Robert E. Lee chapel of Washington and Lee University to receive their diplomas."

The Pittsburg Courier, carrying this story under a Lexington, Va., dateline, informs its large army of readers that these four negroes are members of the ninth graduating class of the Army's School for Special Service Officers.

The Courier continues:

"The officers—Lts. William Neal Brown of Aliquippa, Pa.; Clarence E. Jacobs of Atlantic City, N. J.; Edward Strawther of Mercersburg, Pa., and Harold Jennifer of Washington, D. C.—represent two bran-

ches of the service, Air Force and Infantry, and have been attending the old Virginia college and living on the campus along with their fellow white officers.

"Lt. Brown, Air Force officer, was sent to the school from Jefferson Barracks, Mo. He is also a graduate of Hampton and the Air Force Officer Candidate school at Miami Beach, Fla.

"Lt. Strawther hailed from the famous 25th Infantry, 93rd Division, and, being an all-around athlete, was active in the athletic program of the Army Special Service school.

"Lt. Jennifer also comes from Fort Huachuca, where he was director of the special training unit for the educationally underprivileged. He attended Springfield College, where he starred on the basketball team.

"Col. Leon T. Davis, commandant of the school, revealed that all the men made commendable records at W. and L. and their instructors were well pleased with their work."

March 19, 1943

Mr. Barrett C. Shelton
The Decatur Daily
Decatur, Alabama

My dear Mr. Shelton:

I am glad you wrote to me for the facts concerning the remarkable story that seems to have been circulated in some parts of the country.

Last fall we rented to the United States Government certain of our buildings to be used for the Army School for Special Service (the old morale branch of the Army). This is a highly professional school, all the students being commissioned officers; and the administration, instruction, disciplining, and features of student life are as separate from our own school as if the institution was in another state. Since this is the only school of its kind in the United States, and since the War Department felt that Negro units should have some of the morale training of this specialized nature, the latest school had four Negroes in its student body.

The relationship of Washington and Lee to this school is exclusively a rental matter. We have no more responsibility for their students, or control over them, than we would have over the customers who might enter a store building which we had rented to a tenant.

I hope this statement will be a sufficient answer to your question, but if there is any point which I have not made clear, please write me.

With best wishes, I am

Cordially yours,

Francis P. Gaines
President

P. S. As a matter of information, the Commencement of this School was not held in our chapel. If you could get the statement which I have made to you into the hands of the editor of the paper that re-published the fantastic story from the Negro press, I shall be grateful.