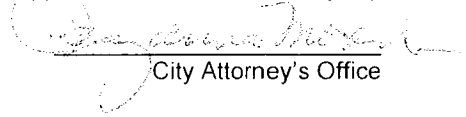


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City Attorney's Office

## OAKLAND CITY COUNCIL

RESOLUTION NO. \_\_\_\_\_ C.M.S.

INTRODUCED BY COUNCILMEMBER DESLEY BROOKS AND PRESIDENT PRO TEMP LARRY REID

**RESOLUTION IN SUPPORT OF CALIFORNIA SENATE RESOLUTION 69 (GLAZER, HALL, HUFF AND MITCHELL) WHICH URGES THE PRESIDENT AND THE CONGRESS OF THE UNITED STATES TO EXONERATE, CLEAR THE RECORDS OF, RESTORE HONOR TO, AND RECTIFY FEDERAL MISTREATMENT OF AFRICAN AMERICAN SAILORS UNJUSTLY CONVICTED OF MUTINY REGARDING THE 1944 PORT CHICAGO DISASTER**

**WHEREAS**, the City Of Oakland supports the fair treatment of all individuals with dignity and respect; and

**WHEREAS**, on July 17, 1944, an explosion occurred at the Port Chicago naval base on the Sacramento River in California that killed 320 American naval personnel, 200 of whom were African American enlisted men and injured another 390 military and civilian personnel including 226 African American enlisted men; and

**WHEREAS**, this disaster accounted for nearly one-fifth of all African American naval casualties during the whole of World War II and was the worst home-front disaster of the war; and

**WHEREAS**, the specific cause of the explosion was never officially established by a Court of Inquiry, in effect clearing the officers-in-charge of any responsibility for the disaster and, insofar as any human cause was invoked, laying the burden of blame on the shoulders of the African American enlisted men who died in the explosion; and

**WHEREAS**, Captain Merrill T. Kline, Officer-in-Charge of Port Chicago, issued a statement praising the African American enlisted men and stating that "the men displayed creditable coolness and bravery under those emergency conditions"; and

**WHEREAS**, many of these men were provided no psychiatric counseling or medical screening, except for those who were obviously physically injured; none of these survivors were called to testify at the Court of Inquiry and none were granted survivor leaves to visit their families before reassigned to regular duties even though this was a standard for sailors involved in a disaster and their white counterparts were given 30 days' leave to visit their families; and

**WHEREAS**, the survivors who later were ordered to return to loading ammunition expressed their opposition, citing the possibility of another explosion; the first confrontation occurred on August 9, 1944, when 328 men were ordered out to the loading pier; the great majority of the men balked, and eventually 258 were arrested and confined for three days on a large barge tethered to the pier; and

**WHEREAS**, fifty of these men were selected as the ringleaders and charged with mutiny, and on October 24, 1944, after only 80 minutes of a military court, all 50 men were found guilty of mutiny—10 were sentenced to 15 years in prison, 24 sentenced to 12 years, 11 sentenced to 10 years, and 5 sentenced to 8 years; and all were to be dishonorably discharged from the Navy; this was the largest mass mutiny trial in the United States to this day; and

**WHEREAS**, after a massive outcry the next year, in January, 1946, 47 of the Port Chicago men were released from prison and “exiled” for one year overseas before returning to their families; and

**WHEREAS**, in a 1994 investigation, the United States Navy stated that “there is no doubt that racial prejudice was responsible for the posting of only African American enlisted personnel to loading divisions at Port Chicago” and prompted by Members of Congress, admitted that the routine assignment of only African American enlisted personnel to manual labor was clearly motivated by race; and

**WHEREAS**, the United States Congress reduced the death benefit to those killed in Port Chicago from \$5,000, the normal amount given, to \$3,000, simply because the sailors were African American and, in many cases, families of sailors killed in the disaster were never told they were entitled to death benefit for the death of their relative; and

**WHEREAS**, despite the gross injustice faced by these sailors, only one of the men charged with mutiny was given a pardon by President Clinton in 1998; now, therefore, be it

**WHEREAS**, SR 69 is endorsed by the American G.I. Forum of California, American Legion- Department of California, AMVETS- Department of California, California Association of County Veterans Service Officers, California State Commanders Veteran Council, Military Officers Association of America- California Council of Chapters, Veterans of Foreign Wars- Department of California and Vietnam Veterans of America- California State Council; and now, therefore, be it

**RESOLVED:** That the Oakland City Council hereby endorses SR 69 and urges the President and the Congress of the United States to take action to ensure that the treatment of sailors by the United States Military after the Port Chicago disaster is rectified by providing for the full exoneration of all those who were wrongfully court-martialed and having the military records of those involved cleared of any wrongdoing or discharge references that were other than honorable, regardless of whether those sailors are alive or deceased; and be it

**FURTHER RESOLVED:** That a copy of this Resolution and a letter shall be sent to the Secretary of the Senate, Julie E. Adams, requesting her to transmit copies of Senate Resolution 69 and this Resolution to the President and Vice President of the United States, to the Speaker of the House of Representatives, to the Majority Leader of the Senate, and to each Senator and Representative from California in the Congress of the United States urging them to support Senate Resolution 69.

IN COUNCIL, OAKLAND, CALIFORNIA,

PASSED BY THE FOLLOWING VOTE:

AYES - BROOKS, CAMPBELL WASHINGTON, GALLO, GUILLEN, KALB, KAPLAN, REID, AND PRESIDENT GIBSON MCELHANEY

NOES -

ABSENT -

ABSTENTION -

ATTEST: \_\_\_\_\_

LATONDA SIMMONS  
City Clerk and Clerk of the Council of the City  
of Oakland, California