



Councilmembers Desley Brooks and President Pro Tem Larry Reid    CITY OF OAKLAND  
CITY HALL - ONE FRANK H. OGAWA PLAZA, 2<sup>ND</sup> FLOOR - OAKLAND - CALIFORNIA 94612

## Agenda Memorandum

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To: Rules & Legislation Committee

From: Councilmember Desley Brooks, and President Pro Tem Larry Reid

Date: April 14, 2016

Subject: Resolution of Support for SR 69: Urging the Exoneration of Port Chicago 50

Colleagues on the City Council and Members of the Public,

With the Resolution of Support for SR 69 (Glazer, Hall, Huff and Mitchell), we are submitting the attached Bill Analysis from the Assembly Committee on Veterans Affairs, and text of the Senate Resolution.

Respectfully submitted,

Desley Brooks, Councilmember

Larry Reid, President Pro Tem



of the divisions were transferred to naval barracks near Mare Island and another division returned to Port Chicago to help with cleaning up and rebuilding the base

- g) Many of these men were in a state of shock, troubled by the vivid memory of the horrible explosion; however, they were provided no psychiatric counseling or medical screening, except for those who were obviously physically injured; none of the men, even those who had been hospitalized with injuries, were granted survivor leaves to visit their families before being reassigned to regular duties; and none of these survivors were called to testify at the Court of Inquiry
- h) 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
- i) After the disaster, white sailors were given 30 days’ leave to visit their families—according to survivors, this was the standard for sailors involved in a disaster—while only African American sailors were ordered back to work the next day to clean and remove human remains
- j) After the disaster, the preparation of Mare Island for the arrival of African American sailors included moving white sailors’ barracks away from the loading area in order to be clear of the ships being loaded in case of another explosion.
- k) The survivors and new personnel 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 from three divisions 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.
- l) 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.
- m) 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.
- n) 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”
- o) In the 1994 investigation, the United States Navy, prompted by Members of Congress, admitted that the routine assignment of only African American enlisted personnel to manual labor was clearly motivated by race.

- p) 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.
  - q) In many cases, families of sailors killed in the disaster were never told they were entitled to consideration for the death of their relative.
  - r) In 2010, the Port Chicago Naval Magazine Memorial site was designated as part of the National Park Service
  - s) 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.
- 3) Resolves:
- a) The Senate of California urges the President and the Congress of the United States to restore honor to, and rectify the mistreatment by the United States Military of, any sailors who were unjustly blamed for and convicted of mutiny after the Port Chicago disaster.
  - b) The Senate of California urges the President and the Congress of the United States to provide 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.

3) Related/Prior Legislation:

AJR 33 (Bonilla & Thurmond, 2016) urges recognition that the trial and conviction of the 50 African American sailors of the United States Navy for mutiny regarding the Port Chicago incident were wrongfully pursued because of racial prejudice, and urges the Congress of the United States to publicly exonerate those sailors in order to further aid in healing the racial divide that continues to exist in the United States. (Pending, Assembly Veterans Affairs Committee)

SJR 21 (Wright, Res. Chapter 47, Statutes of 2010) Memorializes Congress and the President of the United States to act to vindicate the sailors unjustly blamed for, and the sailors convicted of mutiny following, the Port Chicago disaster, and to rectify any mistreatment by the military of those sailors.

### POSITIONS

**Sponsor:** Author

**Support:**

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  
Vietnam Veterans of American - California State Council

**Oppose:** None on file

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Introduced by Senators Glazer, Hall, Huff, and Mitchell

March 15, 2016

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Senate Resolution No. 69—Relative to the Port Chicago Disaster.

1 WHEREAS, On the night of July 17, 1944, two transport vessels  
2 loading ammunition at the Port Chicago naval base on the  
3 Sacramento River in California were suddenly engulfed in a  
4 gigantic explosion, the incredible blast of which wrecked the naval  
5 base and heavily damaged the town of Port Chicago, located 1.5  
6 miles away; and  
7 WHEREAS, Everyone on the pier and aboard the two ships was  
8 killed instantly—some 320 American naval personnel, 200 of  
9 whom were African American enlisted men; and another 390  
10 military and civilian personnel were injured, including 226 African  
11 American enlisted men; and  
12 WHEREAS, The two ships and the large loading pier were  
13 totally annihilated and an estimated \$12,000,000 in property  
14 damage was caused by the huge blast; and  
15 WHEREAS, This single, stunning disaster accounted for nearly  
16 one-fifth of all African American naval casualties during the whole  
17 of World War II and was the worst home-front disaster of the war;  
18 and  
19 WHEREAS, The specific cause of the explosion was never  
20 officially established by a Court of Inquiry, in effect clearing the  
21 officers-in-charge of any responsibility for the disaster and, insofar  
22 as any human cause was invoked, laying the burden of blame on  
23 the shoulders of the African American enlisted men who died in  
24 the explosion; and  
25 WHEREAS, Following the incident, many of the surviving  
26 African American sailors were transferred to nearby Camp

1 Shoemaker where they remained until July 31, 1944, when two of  
2 the divisions were transferred to naval barracks in Vallejo near  
3 Mare Island and another division returned to Port Chicago to help  
4 with cleaning up and rebuilding the base; and

5 WHEREAS, Many of these men were in a state of shock,  
6 troubled by the vivid memory of the horrible explosion; however,  
7 they were provided no psychiatric counseling or medical screening,  
8 except for those who were obviously physically injured; none of  
9 the men, even those who had been hospitalized with injuries, were  
10 granted survivor leaves to visit their families before being  
11 reassigned to regular duties; and none of these survivors were  
12 called to testify at the Court of Inquiry; and

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

17 WHEREAS, After the disaster, white sailors were given 30  
18 days’ leave to visit their families—according to survivors, this was  
19 the standard for sailors involved in a disaster—while only African  
20 American sailors were ordered back to work the next day to clean  
21 and remove human remains; and

22 WHEREAS, After the disaster, the preparation of Mare Island  
23 for the arrival of African American sailors included moving the  
24 barracks of white sailors away from the loading area in order to  
25 be clear of the ships being loaded in case of another explosion;  
26 and

27 WHEREAS, The survivors and new personnel who later were  
28 ordered to return to loading ammunition expressed their opposition,  
29 citing the possibility of another explosion; the first confrontation  
30 occurred on August 9, 1944, when 328 men from three divisions  
31 were ordered out to the loading pier; the great majority of the men  
32 balked, and eventually 258 were arrested and confined for three  
33 days on a large barge tethered to the pier; and

34 WHEREAS, Fifty of these men were selected as the ringleaders  
35 and charged with mutiny, and on October 24, 1944, after only 80  
36 minutes of a military court, all 50 men were found guilty of  
37 mutiny—10 were sentenced to 15 years in prison, 24 sentenced to  
38 12 years, 11 sentenced to 10 years, and 5 sentenced to 8 years; and  
39 all were to be dishonorably discharged from the Navy; this was  
40 the largest mass mutiny trial in the United States to this day; and

1 WHEREAS, After a massive outcry the next year, in January,  
2 1946, 47 of the Port Chicago men were released from prison and  
3 “exiled” for one year overseas before returning to their families;  
4 and

5 WHEREAS, In a 1994 investigation, the United States Navy  
6 stated that “there is no doubt that racial prejudice was responsible  
7 for the posting of only African American enlisted personnel to  
8 loading divisions at Port Chicago”; and

9 WHEREAS, In the 1994 investigation, the United States Navy,  
10 prompted by Members of Congress, admitted that the routine  
11 assignment of only African American enlisted personnel to manual  
12 labor was clearly motivated by race; and

13 WHEREAS, The United States Congress reduced the death  
14 benefit to those killed in Port Chicago from \$5,000, the normal  
15 amount given, to \$3,000, simply because the sailors were African  
16 American; and

17 WHEREAS, In many cases, families of sailors killed in the  
18 disaster were never told they were entitled to consideration for the  
19 death of their relative; and

20 WHEREAS, In 2010, the Port Chicago Naval Magazine  
21 Memorial site was designated as part of the National Park Service;  
22 and

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

26 *Resolved by the Senate of the State of California*, That the Senate  
27 urges the President and the Congress of the United States to take  
28 all necessary action to restore honor to, and rectify the mistreatment  
29 by the United States Military of, any sailors who were unjustly  
30 blamed for and convicted of mutiny after the Port Chicago disaster,  
31 which occurred in the town of Port Chicago, California, in 1944;  
32 and be it further

33 *Resolved*, That the Senate further urges the President and the  
34 Congress of the United States to take action to ensure that the  
35 treatment of sailors by the United States Military after the Port  
36 Chicago disaster is rectified by providing for the full exoneration  
37 of all those who were wrongfully court-martialed and having the  
38 military records of those involved cleared of any wrongdoing or  
39 discharge references that were other than honorable, regardless of  
40 whether those sailors are alive or deceased; and be it further



1     *Resolved*, That the Secretary of the Senate transmit copies of  
2 this resolution to the President and Vice President of the United  
3 States, to the Speaker of the House of Representatives, to the  
4 Majority Leader of the Senate, and to each Senator and  
5 Representative from California in the Congress of the United  
6 States.

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**DRAFT**

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 consideration 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

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