



AGENDA REPORT



TO: Honorable Mayor & City Council

FROM: Councilmember Treva Reid
District 7

SUBJECT: Remembrance Of The Port Chicago
Sailors

DATE: October 31, 2024

RECOMMENDATION

Councilmember Treva Reid Recommends That The City Council:

ADOPT A RESOLUTION ACKNOWLEDGING AND HONORING THE LEGACY OF THE PORT CHICAGO SAILORS AS WELL AS THE FIFTY SAILORS WHO FOUGHT FOR JUSTICE AND DESEGREGATION

BACKGROUND

This agenda report, along with the accompanying resolution, requests that the Oakland City Council adopt a resolution in remembrance of the Port Chicago Sailors and establish an annual “Port Chicago Remembrance Day” on July 17.

The Port Chicago Naval Magazine, located approximately 30 miles northeast of Oakland, was a major facility for supplying ammunition to the Pacific Theater during World War II. During the war, enlisted African American sailors were solely assigned to the hazardous task of loading high explosives onto cargo vessels.

On the night of July 17, 1944, two Liberty ships being loaded with munitions at the Port Chicago Naval Magazine exploded, resulting in the largest home-front disaster of World War II. This tragedy killed 320 people, including 200 African Americans, and injured 390 military and civilian personnel, 226 of whom were African American. The explosion obliterated the naval base and caused extensive damage to the town of Port Chicago, California. This incident accounted for nearly 15 percent of all African American casualties during World War II. Although the exact cause of the explosion was never officially determined, the blame was placed on the men who died in the blast.

Following this tragedy, 258 surviving African American sailors spontaneously protested these unjust conditions, drawing national attention to the injustices of Jim Crow segregation and unsafe military working conditions. On October 24, 1944, fifty of these sailors—later known as the Port Chicago 50—were wrongfully charged and convicted of mutiny, sentenced to 15 years of hard labor, and dishonorably discharged.

On July 17, 2024, following decades of advocacy by Congresswoman Barbara Lee, Congressman Mark DeSaulnier, Congressman George Miller, and Congressman John Garamendi, the Port Chicago 50 were fully exonerated by U.S. Navy Secretary Carlos Del Toro.

City Council
November 12, 2024

Today, the Port Chicago Sailors are honored as civil rights heroes for their courage in protesting the injustices of segregation. Their bravery directly led to the desegregation of the armed forces and is recognized as a significant moment in the civil rights movement.

With the support of community partners such as the Port Chicago Alliance and events like the Port Chicago Weekend, this history continues to be recognized at the City of Oakland's African American Museum and Library and the Oakland Museum of California, which raises community awareness about Port Chicago's legacy.

Several cities have adopted resolutions supporting the exoneration of the Port Chicago Sailors, including Albany, Antioch, Berkeley, Brentwood, Concord, Danville, Emeryville, Lafayette, Martinez, Orinda, Pleasant Hill, Pittsburg, Union City, Walnut Creek, and the Contra Costa Board of Supervisors, as well as bipartisan support from the State Senate and Assembly via Resolution SJR 15 and the Contra Costa Mayors Conference, which includes 19 cities.

As we approach Veterans Day on November 11, 2024, I invite you to join me in formally supporting the exoneration of the Port Chicago 50 and in proclaiming July 17th as "Port Chicago Remembrance Day," an annual observance dedicated to honoring those who lost their lives or were injured in the Port Chicago disaster. This observance will recognize their selfless sacrifices and acknowledge the profound impact the disaster had locally and nationally. It further honors the pioneering civil rights protest of the Port Chicago Sailors, the courage of the Port Chicago 50, the integration of the U.S. Navy, the destruction and dissolution of the town of Port Chicago, California, and the successful efforts to exonerate these brave sailors.

ACTION REQUESTED OF THE CITY COUNCIL

Councilmember Treva Reid Recommends That The City Council:

ADOPT A RESOLUTION ACKNOWLEDGING AND HONORING THE LEGACY OF THE PORT CHICAGO SAILORS AS WELL AS THE FIFTY SAILORS WHO FOUGHT FOR JUSTICE AND DESEGREGATION

For questions regarding this report, please contact Haley Hester, Chief of Staff, at HHester@oaklandca.gov.

Respectfully submitted,



Treva Reid
Councilmember, District 7

Prepared by:
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Councilmember, District 7