

**From:** [Carne001](#)  
**To:** [City Clerk](#); [mashcraft@alamedaca.gov](mailto:mashcraft@alamedaca.gov); [Tony Daysog](#); [Tracy Jensen](#); [Malia Vella](#); [Trish Spencer](#)  
**Subject:** [EXTERNAL] City Council Meeting, Consent Item 5-F, Port Chicago  
**Date:** Monday, October 16, 2023 1:42:03 PM  
**Attachments:** [Port Chicago.pdf](#)

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Dear Mayor Ashcraft and City Council Members,  
Please see attached letter to be included in **Correspondence** for City Council meeting 10/17/2023, **Consent Calendar Item 5-F, Port Chicago 50**.

Thank you,  
Sincerely,  
Carmen

October 16, 2023

Dear Mayor Ashcraft and City Council Members,

**Re: City Council Meeting, 10/17/2023, Consent Calendar Item 5-F**

*Adoption of Resolution Supporting Local, State and Federal Efforts to Exonerate the Port Chicago 50*

I am writing to express support for this item to exonerate the "Port Chicago 50". It seems more appropriate, however, for the item to be placed on the Regular Agenda in order to broadly include the public in this very important Resolution. The extensive tragedy that occurred on July 17, 1944 in nearby Port Chicago (next to Bay Point/Concord area) while loading ammunition and explosives to support WWII efforts deserves considerable attention. The inequitable treatment, racial disparities and lack of policy measures to protect both those loading the docks and on the ships tragically resulted in the deaths of 320 people—**202 black enlisted men, 67 crew and 30 Armed Guards**. Additionally, there were **390 injured which included 233 black enlisted men**. From the SS E.A. Bryan, there were **31 U.S. Merchant Mariners** who died, and from the SS Quinault, **36 U.S. Merchant Mariners**. As you are well aware, Alameda played an important role during WWII including the activities of the Naval Air Station and the U.S. Maritime Service, a civilian corps that included blacks. The Merchant Marines suffered the highest casualty rate (1:26) of all the service branches during WWII and were responsible for delivering the goods and supplies across all theaters of war. Their significant efforts were not without considerable risks as evidenced in the Port Chicago tragedy. There is a pending nomination for the National Register of Historic Places for the historic U.S. Maritime Service Officers School in Alameda where over 6500 USMM officers were trained from 1942-1953, one of only two such USMM Officers' training schools during WWII. World War II was a monumental effort, and Alameda played an important role in our nation's history. Please support the exoneration of the Port Chicago 50; the sacrifices of these outspoken black men who stood up during this time of crisis should be duly recognized. Correcting the unjust conviction of these brave men is long overdue.

Thank you.

Respectfully,

Carmen Reid

From the USMM.org website: <http://www.usmm.org/portchicago.html>

**Port Chicago Disaster - July 17, 1944**

**During World War II, one of the sources of ammunition for the Pacific Theater was the Naval Ammunition Depot at Port Chicago, California. Port Chicago is located on an arm of San Francisco Bay about 30 miles northeast of Oakland and San Francisco. The town of Port Chicago, population 1,500, was located about 1.5 miles from the pier. Not far away was Vallejo's Mare Island, a major Naval Base which included ammunition depots.**

**Construction of the depot was authorized on December 9, 1941, just 2 days after Pearl Harbor and started operation began in November 1942. The site was used as a shipyard during World War I and was served by the Santa Fe, Southern Pacific, and Western Pacific railways.**

**Most of the ammunition arrived by train from Hawthorne, Nevada, where it was made, was held in boxcars "parked" between protective concrete barriers, and when needed, the train was moved onto the pier which accommodated 2 ships. About a mile from the pier were barracks which housed the African-American ammunition handlers.**



**Pier at Port Chicago before the explosion.  
Lower left, one ship at dock. At the upper left  
are the concrete revetments or barriers which  
protected boxcars. At upper right are the  
barracks about one mile from the pier.**

#### **African-Americans in the Navy**

**After World War I, the Navy tried to exclude African-Americans, replacing their ranks with Filipinos. In 1932, the Navy again recruited blacks, but they were limited in numbers and confined to menial tasks, primarily as messmen (kitchen helpers). There were no black officers.**

**In 1942, the Navy reluctantly accepted blacks for general service, but in segregated units which did not include sea duty. At Port Chicago at the time of the disaster there were 1,400 black enlisted men, 71 officers, 106 marine guards, and 230 civilian employees.**

**Loading went on 24 hours per day. The men moved the ammunition hand-to-hand, on hand trucks, or carts, or rolled larger bombs down a ramp from the boxcars which were right on the pier and placed them into cargo netting which they spread out on the pier.**



**African-American Navy enlisted men unloading ammunition from boxcar onto cargo netting, while white officer supervises.**

**The ammo included small caliber bullets, incendiary bombs, fragmentation bombs, depth charges, and bombs up to 2,000 pounds. The cargo nets were lowered by the ships booms into a hatch, where they were packed layer by layer and secured with dunnage (scrap wood).**

**Neither the officers nor the men received any training in handling ammunition. There was tremendous pressure to speed up the loading and officers made bets on the quantity of ammunition their unit would load in an 8 hour shift. The men were speeded up by threats of punishment. It was backbreaking, dangerous work.**

#### **The Explosion**

**On the evening of July 17, 1944 there were two ships being loaded at the pier. The Liberty ship SS E.A. Bryan, after 4 days of loading, had about 4,600 tons of ammunition and explosives on board; 98 black enlisted men continued work. On board the ship were 31 U.S. Merchant Marine crew and 13 Naval Armed Guard.**

**Docked at the pier since 6 PM that evening was the SS Quinault Victory being loaded by about 100 black men for its maiden voyage. On board were 36 crew and 17 Armed Guard. A Coast Guard fire barge was also moored at the pier. Besides 430 tons of bombs waiting to be loaded, the pier held a locomotive and 16 boxcars with its crew of three civilians, and a marine sentry.**

**At 10:18 an Army Air Force plane flying at 9,000 feet saw pieces of white hot metal, some as large as a house, fly straight up past them. According to the co-pilot, the "fireworks display" lasted about one minute. The explosion was heard 200 miles away.**

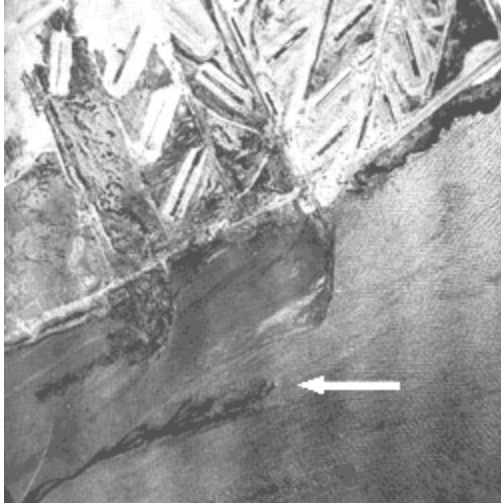
**The Miahelo, a Coast Guard patrol boat, was about 1,500 feet from the pier. The force of the explosion wrecked the wheelhouse, nearly capsized the boat, badly wounded the man at the wheel; and was followed by a 30 foot wall of water. A 16 inch shell, which did not explode, hit the engine room of a small tanker, the SS Redline which was passing nearby.**

**The 1,200 foot long wooden pier, the locomotive and boxcars, the SS E.A. Bryan, and 320 people (202 black enlisted men) on the pier were gone. All 67 crew and 30 Armed Guard aboard the two ships died instantly. Of the 390 military and civilians injured, which included men in the barracks and townspeople, 233 were black enlisted men.**

**There were no identifiable pieces of the SS E.A. Bryan remaining: 25,000,000 pounds of ship and ammunition were gone! Disappeared! The stern of the SS Quinault Victory lay upside down in the water 500 from its origin. The rest of the ship, which had been lifted clear out of the water and turned around, was in scattered pieces.**



**The wreckage of the SS Quinault Victory. The darker object at the far right is the propeller. The photo below shows the pier after the explosion. There is no sign of the SS E.A. Bryan, the arrow points to the wreckage of the SS Quinault Victory, beyond which there is an oil slick.**



**No cause for the explosion was ever determined.**

**The black ammunition handlers, many of whom had quietly voiced concerns about safety, feared loading ammunition again. Fifty enlisted black men, including one with a broken arm, were tried for mutiny. The men stated they were willing to follow orders, but were afraid to handle ammunition under unchanged circumstances. They stated they had never been ordered to load ammunition, only asked "if they wanted to load ammunition."**

**All 50 were found guilty of "mutiny," and sentenced to 15 years. Review of the sentence brought reductions for 40 of the men to sentences of 8 to 12 years. Joe Small, who acted as foreman for his group of loaders and others who were willing to criticize the operation had their original sentence upheld. An appeal by Thurgood Marshall of the NAACP was denied. In 1944 the Navy announced that blacks at ammunition depots would be limited to 30% of the total. In 1945 the Navy officially desegregated.**

**In January 1946 the 50 "mutineers" were released from prison, but had to remain in the Navy. They were sent to the South Pacific in small groups for a "probationary period," and gradually released.**

**A proposal in Congress to award \$5,000 to victims was reduced to \$3,000 because most of the beneficiaries were black.**

**Congressman George Miller (D-Martinez) lobbied to get the the sailors' convictions overturned and to get a presidential pardon in 1999 for one of the sailors, Frederick Meeks. Miller introduced legislation to make the Port Chicago National Memorial into a National Park. [San Francisco Chronicle article, July 5, 2002]**

**The Navy eventually bought out the town of Port Chicago, and the depot itself was incorporated into the Concord Naval Weapons Station. Concord was a major shipping point for ammunition during the Vietnam War and the site of many anti-war demonstrations which continue today.**

**African-Americans and Mariners gather at the site each year for a Memorial Service.**

**Mariners killed on SS E. A. Bryan on 7/17/44**

Last	First	Position	Home	Age
Andraschko	Elmer A.	2nd Cook	Unknown	Unknown
Arsenian	Albert A.	O.S.	Fresno CA	Unknown
Benhart	William C.	Oiler	Mill Town NJ	Unknown
Cacic	Martin M.	O.S.	Sacramento CA	Unknown
Davis	Ray E.	F/W	Cressona PA	Unknown
Denonn	Donald L.	Wiper	Baldwin NY	Unknown



Dorsey	Thomas E.	A.B.	San Francisco CA	Unknown
Falk	George H.	Bosun	San Pedro CA	Unknown
Franklin	Marcus J.	3rd Engineer	San Francisco CA	Unknown
Gilbert	Alfred D.	1st Engineer	Mena AR	28
Gilstrap	James R.	O.S.	Sacramento CA	Unknown
Grange	Joseph D. Jr.	Deck Engineer	Oakland CA	Unknown
Hayes	Fred H.	A.B.	San Jose CA	Unknown
Hutchinson	Delbert R.	F/W	Salem OR	Unknown
Jepsen	Peter C.	Chief Engineer	Alameda CA	Unknown
Johnson	Charles R.	Utility	Oakland CA	Unknown
Johnson	Clifford R.	Utility	Salt Lake City UT	Unknown
Lantz	Ralph A.	A.B.	Salinas CA	Unknown
Louis	John A.	Night Engineer	Unknown	Unknown
Malizia	Frank C.	Carpenter	San Francisco CA	Unknown
Maniago	Edward	Messman	Redwood City CA	Unknown

Nathan	Harry E.	O.S.	Sacramento CA	Unknown
Porter	Jesse Sr.	Chief Cook	Richmond CA	Unknown
Roberson	Richard D.	A.B.	Daly City CA	Unknown
Sangster	Aaron C. Jr.	A.B.	Richmond CA	Unknown
Shaw	Ellsworth M.	Oiler	Danellen NJ	Unknown
Smith	Howard A.	Chief Mate	Oakland CA	Unknown
Suchan	Andrew	F/W	Niagara Falls NY	Unknown
Townshend	Robert F.	2nd Mate	St. Louis MO	Unknown
White	Harding E.	Messman	Oakland CA	Unknown
Witt	George H.	Utility	San Francisco CA	Unknown

**Mariners killed on SS Quinault Victory on 7/17/44**

Last	First	Position	Home	Age
Bailey	Robert D.	Messman	Fossil OR	Unknown
Bartlett	Robert E.	Messman	Portland OR	Unknown
Bell	John D.	Purser	San Mateo CA	Unknown
Bentley	Frederick E.	A.B.	Seaside OR	Unknown

Cheney	Donald H.	Electrician	Portland OR	Unknown
Crawford	Hugh E.	Deck Maint.	Gladstone OR	Unknown
Crist	Floyd F.	O.S.	Portland OR	Unknown
Diede	Albert G.	Messman	Startup WA	Unknown
Durland	Wallace M.	A.B.	Boston MA	Unknown
Eulrich	Kenneth J.	A.B.	Columbia City OR	Unknown
Falor	Burke Elmo	Messman	Eureka CA	18
Garrett	Eugene W.	F/W	Tule Lake CA	Unknown
Hendrickson	Ellis	Night Engineer	Unknown	Unknown
Hendrickson	Robert K.	A.B.	Ketchikan AK	Unknown
Justesen	Johannes N.	Steward	Munkegad Denmark	Unknown
Kanneberg [Kannberg]	Walter Frederick	3rd Engineer	Allentown PA	Unknown
Keim	Robert E.	2nd Mate	Floral Park NY	Unknown
Koeninger	Joseph B.	A.B.	Chillicothe TX	Unknown
Mallery	Earl L.	1st Engineer	Baltimore MD	Unknown
McDaniel	Lloyd K.	O.S.	Springfield OR	Unknown

Moen	Kenneth M.	Jr. 3rd Mate	Bagley MN	Unknown
Morell	Robert E.	Oiler	Hood River OR	Unknown
Narinsky	Isadore E.	O.S.	Philadelphia PA	Unknown
Nelson	Roy L.	Carpenter	Seattle WA	Unknown
Parsons	David R.	3rd Mate	Laconia NH	Unknown
Pearson	Mike	Oiler	Pendleton OR	Unknown
Pinson	Ellis B.	Jr. 3rd Engineer	Lakeland FL	Unknown
Potter	Richard V.	F/W	Waldport OR	Unknown
Sandberg	Virgil R.	2nd Engineer	Minot ND	Unknown
Scott	Albert R.	Chief Mate	Hartsdale NY	Unknown
Skance	Lester S.	O.S.	Tacoma WA	Unknown
Sullivan	Howard W.	A.B.	Puyallup WA	Unknown
Sullivan	Robert J.	Master	Westfield NJ	Unknown
Thompson	Glen E.	Jr. Engineer	Estacada OR	19
Widnoe	Louis J.	Messman	Salem OR	Unknown
Williams	John A.	Chief Engineer	Queens Village NY	Unknown

**Naval Armed Guard killed on SS E. A. Bryan on 7/17/44**

Last	First	Rank	Home	Age
Causey [Causky]	Wayland E.[B]	S1c	Unknown	Unknown
Cebella	Rudy J.	S1c	Unknown	Unknown
Chase	Robert E.	S1c	Unknown	Unknown
Chastain	Claude L.	S1c	Unknown	Unknown
Gee	John Jefferson	SM3c	Unknown	Unknown
Hartman	Ralph B.	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown
Hollandsworth	Clarence R.	S1c	Unknown	Unknown
Muirhead	Kenneth H.	S1c	Unknown	Unknown
Mulligan	Jesse W.	S1c	Unknown	Unknown
Quick	Lloyd J.	S1c	Unknown	Unknown
Setzer	Martin J.	S1c	Unknown	Unknown
Singer	George H.	S1c	Unknown	Unknown
Small	Listern L.	S1c	Unknown	Unknown

**Naval Armed Guard killed on SS Quinault Victory on  
7/17/44**

Last	First	Rank	Home	Age
Albin	Jack L.	GM3c	Unknown	Unknown
Bergstrom	Delbert P.	GM2c	Unknown	Unknown
Bowman	Jack P.	S1c	Unknown	Unknown
Hall	John Gibson	GM3c	Unknown	Unknown
Hovland	George D.	S1c	Unknown	Unknown

Morrow	Andy	S1c	Unknown	Unknown
Mulryan	William H.	GM2c	Unknown	Unknown
Myers	Henry J.	S1c	Unknown	Unknown
Riiff	Woodrow Arthur	S1c	Fulton SD	32
Risenhoover	Jacob D.	S1c	Yuma AZ	Unknown
Robinson	William R.	S1c	Unknown	Unknown
Roedell [Rondell]	Charles H.	S1c	Unknown	Unknown
Rose	Jay Jr.	S1c	Unknown	Unknown
Ross	Otis Kyle	S1c	Unknown	Unknown
Saint	Woodrow W.	S1c	Unknown	Unknown
Sanders	Arnold T.	S1c	Unknown	Unknown
Sang [Sano]	Harold S.	S1c	Unknown	Unknown