

THE SECRETARY OF THE NAVY

WASHINGTON

CONFIDENTIAL

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT:

1. Following the explosion at the Port Chicago Pier on the night of 17 July 1944 it became necessary to evacuate some of the enlisted personnel from the barracks at that activity and three divisions of negro enlisted personnel, consisting of 328 men, were transferred to the Naval Ammunition Depot, Mare Island, California for duty.

2. On the afternoon of 10 August 1944 the three divisions of negro enlisted personnel refused to perform their assigned duty of handling ammunition to be discharged from a merchant vessel then berthed at Mare Island. When the orders to work were repeated to the men individually, 70 of them obeyed, but 258 continued to refuse to carry out the orders. The men were informed with great care of the needs of the situation, their obligation to obey orders and their opportunity to be of especial service.

3. On 12 August 1944 the Commandant of the Twelfth Naval District visited the Naval Ammunition Depot at Mare Island and addressed the insubordinate group of 258 men. The men were given an opportunity to explain the reason for their refusal to handle ammunition and thereafter were again required to state whether they would comply with orders. All but 44 of the men stated that they would do so. However, 6 others again changed their minds and refused to work at the assigned duty of unloading ammunition from a ship. 4 The Commandant reports that the refusal to perform the required work arises from a mass fear arising out of the Port Chicago explosion. This fear is unreasonably associated with the handling of ammunition in ships, rather than in the handling of ammunition as such.

5. The recalcitrant 44 and the 6 others who changed their minds were all transferred to the Naval Training and Distribution Center, Shoemaker, California to await further action.

6. As a result of the above incident the Commandant of the Twelfth Naval District reports that no action will be taken against the 70 men who first refused duty but who later obeyed when given orders individually. The 208 men who refused duty but later complied with orders after being addressed by the Commandant will be tried by summary courts martial on charges of refusing to obey orders. The 50 men who have continued to override authority will be brought to trial by general courts martial on charges of mutiny.

7. A copy of the complete report in this matter is attached hereto.

No white enlisted personnel are performing similar work at the Naval Ammunition Depot or the Naval Magazine. To avoid any semblance of discrimination against negroes the chief of the Bureau of Naval Personnel has authorized the procurement and training of our battalion

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MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT:

1. Following the explosion at the Port Chicago Pier on the night of 17 July 1944 it became necessary to evacuate some of the enlisted personnel from the barracks at that activity and three divisions of negro enlisted personnel, consisting of 320 men, were transferred to the Naval Ammunition Depot, Mare Island, California for duty.
2. On the afternoon of 10 August 1944 the three divisions of negro enlisted personnel refused to perform their assigned duty of handling ammunition to be discharged from a merchant vessel then berthed at Mare Island. When the orders to work were repeated to the men individually, 70 of them obeyed, but 250 continued to refuse to carry out the orders. The men were informed with great care of the needs of the situation, their obligation to obey orders and their opportunity to be of especial service.
3. On 12 August 1944 the Commandant of the Twelfth Naval District visited the Naval Ammunition Depot at Mare Island and addressed the insubordinate group of 250 men. The men were given an opportunity to explain the reason for their refusal to handle ammunition and thereafter were again required to state whether they would comply with orders. All but 44 of them stated that they would do so. However, 6 others again changed their minds and refused to work at the assigned duty of unloading ammunition from a ship.
4. The Commandant reports that the refusal to perform the required work arises from a mass fear arising out of the Port Chicago explosion. This fear is unreasonably associated with the handling of ammunition in ships, rather than in the handling of ammunition as such. No white enlisted personnel are performing similar work at the Naval Ammunition Depot or the Naval Magazine. To avoid any semblance of discrimination against negroes the Chief of the Bureau of Naval Personnel has authorized the procurement and training of one battalion of white enlisted men for Port Chicago and one for the Naval Ammunition Depot, Mare Island. Authority has also been granted to arrange necessary rotation.
5. The recalcitrant 44 and the 6 others who changed their minds were all transferred to the Naval Training and Distribution Center, Shoemaker, California to await further action.

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Signature- Carl d. Spicer

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6. As a result of the above incident the Commandant of the Twelfth Naval District reports that no action will be taken against the 70 men who first refused duty but who later obeyed when given orders individually. The 200 men who refused duty but later complied with orders after being addressed by the Commandant will be tried by summary courts martial on charges of refusing to obey orders. The 50 men who have continued to override authority will be brought to trial by general courts martial on charges of mutiny.

7. A copy of the complete report in this matter is attached hereto.

James Forrestal