

-L. C.
NAACP Gen office File
NAVY 1942-44

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COR. SAN PABLO & UNIVERSITY AVES.
BERKELEY, CALIFORNIA

April Fifteenth

1943.

Walter A. Gordon

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Mr. Walter White
Executive Secretary of NAACP
69 Fifth Avenue
New York City, N. Y.

APR 20 1943

Dear Walter:

I am enclosing a copy of a communication sent me by a Negro sailor stationed here on the west coast, which is self-explanatory.

I felt that getting this in your hands was one way of bringing to the attention of the Navy how they are killing the morale of the Negro sailors and Negro civilian population. It is a pity that boys should have to make such a plea for the opportunity to fight for their own Country. I assume that you will take it up with the Secretary of the Navy and give it publicity as you see fit.

I talked to some of these boys, and they are, of course, hesitant about giving their names. I received this letter written in longhand.

Please advise me of any progress in this matter, when you get the opportunity.

With the kindest personal regards, I am

Very truly yours,

Walter

Walter A. Gordon

WAG/gcm

Enc.

The morale of the "land-sailors," as we are often called by our sea-going shipmates, is being lowered to an alarming depth, through the law or practice of confining Negro Navy men to land bases, or ammunition depots. So far, there has been no appointments to the jobs we were so faithfully promised at Great Lakes, Illinois, and it seems as if the boys, that have completed their period of training in the service schools of both Hampton, Va. and Great Lakes, are destined to the same fate. While we expected to work hard, I also expected to be allowed to follow the trades which were promised upon qualification for these trades in a series of tests to determine one's ability to follow these trades. Having qualified for certain trades, such as, machinist's mate, aviation machinist's mate, aviation metal smith, store keeper, quartermaster radioman and Diesel expert, it is little wonder that it is a very disappointed group of sailors that find that valuable training they received, or were to receive, was being wasted in loading ammunition on ships. The same work these men are doing, in civilian life is classified as "stevedoring," and pays these civilians, with which these sailors often work side by side, more in one week than the average sailor makes in a month.

While the most of these boys go about their work of "passing the ammunition" cheerfully, because they realize the importance of their work and know that they are making a real contribution to the war effort, the enthusiasm which they once had is weakening daily, due to the fact that ratings that were promised them for doing their job well have failed to come through in proportion to the effort put forth by these men. Then, too, the fact that there are no commissioned Negro officers in the Navy, although there are plenty that could qualify, leaves very little hope for something better in the minds of these men. So many of the officers of these bases that are with these men daily, and see the excellent job these boys are doing, realize they deserve a better chance than they are getting, even if they hesitate to say so.

The chief complaint of the officers has been that the boys aren't "military." However, the men on these bases on the coast were not even as much as instructed in the "manual of arms," so we have often wondered just how were we expected to get the inspiration to try to be more military when the duties they perform daily had nothing in them that would inspire them to greater achievement. Then, too, away from the bases, on liberty, you can see a white ("S.P.") Shore Police, with a club and a pistol, while in the same town his "dark-skinned shipmate," a Negro "S.P.," will be seen carrying a club. We feel that we have boys in our group that can do any job that is to be done as well as the white boys.

Until we have been trained as well as they and given a fair trial, and until we have been given a chance to go to sea aboard battle-ships, destroyers and PT boats, that Negro Americans' bonds and dollars are helping to buy to save civilization from the Nazi and Japanese curse, we will take our protest to our leaders, that the high-ranking Navy officials may know how we feel. So far there are no Negro seamen aboard any U. S. Naval Vessels at sea, unless in the capacity of messmen, a branch in which we have been encouraged to join repeatedly. In trying to meet our obligations as citizens of a Democracy, we also feel entitled to the right to protest when discrimination is shown. It is with a feeling of something akin to shame when we walk the streets and meet other boys with the uniform of the same military organization as ours, and realize that we often have ratings on that are token ratings. Although we deserve them, we have not been trained in the things they stand for. We all know that token policies will not win this war. Therefore, we do not want token training. We ask for no special favors. We only ask for an opportunity to prove that we are worthy of the trust that we believed was placed in us the day we swore allegiance to the United States Navy. We feel that in order

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to build a sound future, we must have a sound war policy now. As of today, there are quite a number of the boys in blue that feel with the present policy the Negro in the Navy has been "tricked" into something.

We, the Negro sailors of the Naval Enlisted Barracks, of Port Chicago, California, are waiting for a new deal. Will we wait in vain?