

## THE FACTS

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The largest mass court martial in the United States wartime Naval history involving fifty Negro seamen charged with mutiny closed October 24, 1944 at Yerba Buena Island, California. The accused are charged with refusal to load ammunition on a transport on August 9th and 11th at Mare Island Naval Ammunition Depot.

1. Events leading up to the alleged mutiny date from the tragic explosion at Port Chicago, on July 17th in which 322 men were killed, the majority of whom were Negroes. The fifty seamen on trial were survivors of this explosion. Twelve of them had been hospitalized as a result of the explosion and several others given first aid treatment for shock, bruises and burns.

2. Doctors testified at the trial these men should have had months of rest or certainly a change of location or scenery, the usual Navy policy. None of the fifty seamen on trial were given survivors furlough or any kind of furlough after the Port Chicago tragedy.

3. About half of them were assigned to details after the Port Chicago explosion, to clean up the debris. They had to pick up what was left of their comrades in baskets - an arm, a leg, a head, a torso.

4. Despite their classifications for other kinds of skills these men had been placed on this monotonous assignment from 3 to 23 months. Until the time of their alleged "mutiny" their conduct records had been perfect.

5. Some 1200 to 1500 Negro sailors were used at the Port Chicago Ammunition Depot before the explosion. No white divisions were used. When the explosion occurred they brought in new crews of inexperienced men to load with the men who had worked there for some time and were more experienced. The men were rushed in their work by their superior officers.

6. About 258 out of 322 men originally refused to load ammunition on August 6th. The Negro seamen want to know why 50 men were picked for court martial. There were other men who said, "no", but were never court-martialed.

7. The men were sentenced to 8 to 15 years imprisonment.

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The following excerpt is from the S.F. REPORTER written by Zola Bryant

"Waterfront unions had officially warned both the Navy and the Army prior to the Port Chicago disaster that if they continued to use inexperienced workers in the loading of munitions, an explosion was inevitable. This warning was disregarded."

"For months prior to the Port Chicago incident it was the common knowledge of experienced long-shoremen and laborleaders that such a disaster was imminent."



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WHY?

Asks Thurgood Marshall, legal counsel NAACP.

"Why, at the time of the explosions at Port Chicago, every man loading ammunition there was a Negro?"

"Why did the Navy disregard official warnings by the San Francisco waterfront unions--before the Port Chicago disaster--that an explosion was inevitable if they persisted in using untrained seamen in the loading of ammunition?"

"Why did the Navy disregard an offer by these same unions to send experienced men to train Navy personnel in the safe handling of explosives?"

"Why were men with as little as two months' experience, allowed to work as winch-drivers at Port Chicago when the Longshoremen's Union will not allow a winch-driver to work on ammunition unless he has had several years' experience on a winch?"

"Why were the commissioned officers at Port Chicago allowed to race their men? I want to know why bets ranging from five dollars up were made between division officers as to whose crew could load more ammunition?"

ACT NOW!!

Write your representatives asking justice for these men.

Write Secretary of War Forrester protesting these discriminatory mass trials.  
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30 NEGRO SAILORS  
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CASE