

1 [Port Chicago Sailors]

2 **URGING THE CONGRESS AND THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES TO ACT TO**
3 **VINDICATE THE SAILORS UNJUSTLY BLAMED FOR, AND THE SAILORS CONVICTED**
4 **OF MUTINY FOLLOWING, THE PORT CHICAGO DISASTER OF 1944 AND TO RECTIFY**
5 **ANY MISTREATMENT BY THE MILITARY OF THOSE SAILORS**

6

7 WHEREAS, On the night of July 17, 1944, two transport vessels loading ammunition at
8 the Port Chicago naval base on the Sacramento River in California were suddenly engulfed in
9 a gigantic explosion, the incredible blast of which wrecked the naval base and heavily
10 damaged the town of Port Chicago, located 1.5 miles away; and

11 WHEREAS, Everyone on the pier and aboard the two ships was killed instantly - some
12 320 American naval personnel, 200 of whom were enlisted African-American men and another
13 390 military and civilian personnel were injured, including 226 enlisted African-American men;
14 and

15 WHEREAS, The two ships and the large loading pier were totally annihilated and an
16 estimated \$12 million in property damage was caused by the huge blast; and

17 WHEREAS, This single, stunning disaster accounted for nearly one-fifth of all African-
18 American naval casualties during the whole of World War II; and

19 WHEREAS, The specific cause of the explosion was never officially established by a
20 Court of Inquiry, in effect clearing the officers-in-charge of any responsibility for the disaster
21 and insofar as any human cause was invoked, laid the burden of blame on the shoulders of
22 the enlisted African-American men who died in the explosion; and

23 WHEREAS, Following the incident, many of the surviving African-American sailors
24 were transferred to nearby Camp Shoemaker where they remained until July 31, when two of
25 the divisions were transferred to naval barracks in Vallejo near Mare Island; another division,

Supervisors Ammiano, Bierman, Katz

BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

1 which was also at Camp Shoemaker until July 31, returned to Port Chicago to help with the
2 cleaning up and rebuilding of the base; and

3 WHEREAS, Many of these men were in a state of shock, troubled by the vivid memory
4 of the horrible explosion; however, they were provided no psychiatric counseling or medical
5 screening, except for those who were obviously physically injured; none of the men, even
6 those who had been hospitalized with injuries, was granted survivor leaves to visit their
7 families before being reassigned to regular duties; and none of these survivors was called to
8 testify at the Court of Inquiry; and

9 WHEREAS, Captain Merrill T. Kline, Officer-In-Charge of Port Chicago, issued a
10 statement praising the African-American enlisted men and stating that "the men displayed
11 creditable coolness and bravery under these emergency conditions; and

12 WHEREAS, After the disaster, white sailors were given 30 days' leave to visit their
13 families - according to survivors, this was the standard for soldiers involved in a disaster -
14 while only African American sailors were ordered back to work the next day to clean and
15 remove human remains; and

16 WHEREAS, After the disaster, the preparation of Mare Island for the arrival of African
17 American sailors included moving the barracks of white sailors away from the loading area in
18 order to be clear of ships being loaded in case of another explosion; and

19 WHEREAS, The survivors and new personnel who later were ordered to return to
20 loading ammunition expressed their opposition, citing the possibility of another explosion; the
21 first confrontation occurred on August 9 when 328 men from three divisions were ordered out
22 to the loading pier; the great majority of the men balked, and eventually 258 were arrested
23 and confined for three days on a large barge tiered to the pier; and

1 WHEREAS, Fifty of these men were selected as the ring-leaders and charged with
2 mutiny, and on October 24, 1944, after only 80 minutes of a military court, all 50 men were
3 found guilty of mutiny - 10 were sentenced to 15 years in prison, 24 sentenced to 12 years, 11
4 sentenced to 10 years, and five sentenced to eight years; and all were to be dishonorably
5 discharged from the Navy; and

6 WHEREAS, After a massive outcry the next year, in January 1946, 47 of the Port
7 Chicago men were released from prison and "exiled" for one year overseas before returning to
8 their families; and

9 WHEREAS, In a 1994 investigation, the United States Navy stated that "there is no
10 doubt that racial prejudice was responsible for the posting of only African American enlisted
11 personnel to loading divisions at Port Chicago; and

12 WHEREAS, In the 1994 investigation, the United States Navy, prompted by Members
13 of Congress, admitted that the routine assignment of only African American enlisted personnel
14 to manual labor was clearly motivated by race; now, therefore, be it

15 RESOLVED, That the Board of Supervisors of the City and County of San Francisco
16 does hereby respectfully memorializes the Congress and the President of the United States to
17 act to vindicate the sailors unjustly blamed for, and the sailors convicted of mutiny following,
18 the Port Chicago disaster, and to rectify any mistreatment by the military of these sailors; and
19 be it:

20 FURTHER RESOLVED, That the Board of Supervisors request the Clerk of the Board
21 transmit copies of this resolution to the President and the Vice President of the United States,
22 the Speaker of the House of Representatives, and each Senator and Representative from
23 California in the Congress of the United States.

24
25 **SUPERVISOR AMMIANO**



City and County of San Francisco

City Hall
1 Dr. Carlton B. Goodlett Place
San Francisco, CA 94102-4689

Tails

Resolution

File Number: 991557

Date Passed:

Resolution urging the Congress and the President of the United States to act to vindicate the sailors unjustly blamed for, and the sailors convicted of mutiny following the Port Chicago Disaster of 1944 and to rectify any mistreatment by the military of those sailors.

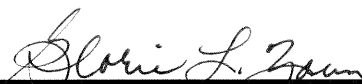
August 16, 1999 Board of Supervisors — ADOPTED

Ayes: 10 - Ammiano, Becerril, Bierman, Brown, Katz, Kaufman, Leno, Newsom, Yaki, Yee

Absent: 1 - Teng

File No. 991557

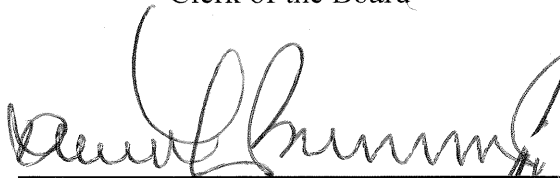
I hereby certify that the foregoing Resolution was ADOPTED on August 16, 1999 by the Board of Supervisors of the City and County of San Francisco.



Gloria L. Young
Clerk of the Board

AUG 27 1999

Date Approved



Mayor Willie L. Brown Jr.