

Chapter 1 : Port Chicago disaster - Wikipedia

The Port Chicago 50 Disaster, Mutiny, and the Fight for Civil Rights. I'm really excited to share this little-known World War II civil rights drama.

Background[edit] Aerial photograph looking eastward in early The town of Port Chicago is in the upper right. The lower left shows utility and personnel piers extending toward the two sections of Seal Island. The munitions loading pier curves to the left beyond odd revetments. Marshy tidal zones separate the munitions pier from barracks buildings near the personnel pier and near the town. In , the town was a little more than a mile from a U. The original magazine was planned in with construction beginning shortly after the attack on Pearl Harbor. The first ship to dock at Port Chicago was loaded on December 8, The munitions, destined for the Pacific Theater of Operations , were delivered to the Port Chicago facility by rail then individually loaded by hand, crane and winch onto cargo ships for transport to the war zones. From the beginning, all the enlisted men employed as loaders at Port Chicago were African-American; all their commanding officers were white. Port Chicago was manned by workers drawn from those remaining. The Navy determined that the quality of African American petty officers at Port Chicago suffered because of the absence of high-scoring black men, and that overall levels of competence were further reduced by the occasional requirement for Port Chicago to supply drafts of men with clear records for transfer to other stations. Prior to his being sent to command Port Chicago, Kinne had no training in the loading of munitions and very little experience in handling them. The enlisted men were aware of the unsanctioned nature of the bets and knew to slow down to a more reasonable pace whenever a senior officer appeared. Two formal lectures and several informal lectures were given to the enlisted men by commanding officers, but follow-up confirmation of retained knowledge did not take place. Even the officers did not receive training: Lieutenant Commander Alexander Holman, loading officer at Port Chicago whose duties included officer training, had initiated a search for training materials and samples but failed to organize a training class before disaster struck. During loading operations, the winches were worked hard, requiring steady maintenance to remain operable. Disused brakes sometimes seized up and stopped working. The winches on the SS E. Bryan were steam-powered and showed signs of wear, even though the ship was only five months old. During loading operations on July 15 the winch at No. A steady application of grease quieted it through the night until its main bearing could be replaced the next morning on July On the afternoon of July 17, a bleeder valve on winch No. Albert Carr, a civil service plumber from Pittsburg, California , was called to replace it; it was his first day at Port Chicago. While at work he witnessed a man accidentally drop a naval artillery shell two feet onto the wooden pier but there was no detonation. Carr waited until the African-American winch operator tested the newly repaired winch then hurriedly left the pier, thinking that the whole operation appeared unsafe. Cronk, head of a Coast Guard explosives-loading detail tasked with supervision of the working dock, warned the Navy that conditions were unsafe and ripe for disaster. The incendiary bombs were being loaded carefully one at a time into No. The torpex charges were more sensitive than TNT to external shock and container dents. Nine Navy officers and 29 armed guards watched over the procedure. A Coast Guard fire barge with a crew of five was docked at the pier. Five to seven seconds later [16] [30] [31] a more powerful explosion took place as the majority of the ordnance within and near the SS E. Bryan detonated in a fireball seen for miles. The pier, along with its boxcars, locomotive, rails, cargo, and men, was blasted into pieces. Shattering glass and a rain of jagged metal and undetonated munitions caused many more injuries among military personnel and civilians, although no one outside the immediate pier area was killed. Among the dead were all five Coast Guard personnel posted aboard the fire barge. Injuries were treated, those seriously injured were hospitalized, and uninjured servicemen were evacuated to nearby stations. Of the dead, only 51 could be identified. The men of Divisions One, Five and Seven were reassigned other duty in distant locations and shipped out. The cleanup detail from Division Two dug into the wreckage of the pier and began tearing out the damaged portions. The men were in a state of shock; all were nervous. White officers, however, received the leave, causing a major grievance among the enlisted men. The official proceeding lasted for 39 days and included interviews with witnesses who were

officers, civilians and enlisted men. Ordnance experts were questioned as well as inspectors who had overseen previous loading procedures. Five African Americans were questioned, none of whom were later to refuse to load ammunition. The Navy determined that the tonnage contest between divisions was not at fault, although the Judge Advocate warned that "the loading of explosives should never be a matter of competition. The report stated that the cause of the explosion could not be determined, but implied that a mistake made by the enlisted men in the handling of the ordnance was most likely at root. Wright, Commander, 12th Naval District, spoke of the unfortunate deaths and the need to keep the base operating during a time of war. He gave Navy and Marine Corps Medals for bravery to four officers and men who had successfully fought a fire in a rail car parked within a revetment near the pier. Wright soon began implementing a plan to have two groups of white sailors load ammunition in rotation with black sailors: No plan was forwarded to use black officers to command the black sailors, and no plan included any form of desegregation. Roosevelt by Secretary of the Navy James Forrestal who added his opinion that it was "mass fear" motivating the work stoppage. Forrestal told Roosevelt that white units of munitions loaders were to be added to the rotation " Three-hundred and twenty-eight men were asked, not ordered, to resume the dangerous task of ammunition loading; all said they were afraid and that they would not load munitions under the same officers and conditions as before. It was a mass work stoppage, which would have been called a strike if the workers had been civilians. Seventy of the men changed their minds after their superior officers made it clear that loading ammunition was their duty. On August 9, African-American sailors in the ordnance battalion continued to refuse to load ammunition. These men were taken under guard to a barge that was used as a temporary military prison or "brig", despite having been built to accommodate only 75 men. All said they were afraid of another explosion. On August 10, there had been conflicts between the prisoners and their guards as the prisoners were marched to the mess hall for meals. There was also a brief fight in the mess hall, and some prisoners were seen sharpening spoons into makeshift knives. Small sensed a general air of rebelliousness among the prisoners. To counteract the rising tension and offset the disaster he saw coming, Small convened a short meeting that evening aboard the crowded barge and told the prisoners to "knock off the horseplay", stay out of trouble and obey the shore patrol guards who were black and the officers, because the alternative white Marines as guards would be worse. Wright, who had seen nearly of his men killed in in the Battle of Tassafaronga, said that although loading ammunition was risky, death by firing squad was the greater hazard. To a man, Division Eight chose to obey all orders. Divisions Two and Four were split by the decisions of their men: Small and 43 others chose to form a group unwilling to obey every order. These 44 were taken back to the brig and the remaining were sent to barracks. On the morning of August 12, six men from Divisions Two and Four who had put themselves in the obey-all-orders group failed to show up for work call; these six were confined to the brig, making 50 prisoners in all. These 50 were identified by the Navy as mutineers. Joe Small was placed in solitary confinement. Each of the men was interviewed by officers, sometimes in the presence of an armed guard. Questions focused on identifying "ringleaders" of the work-stoppage and on what was said by whom at the meeting on the prison barge. Some men, upon seeing that the written statements did not reflect what they had said, refused to sign. Several men refused to give any statement at all. Others spoke freely, thinking that the officer was there as defense counsel. The rest were split into smaller groups and shipped out to various places in the Pacific Theater. Carl Tuggle, one of the, said in that a group of prisoners including himself were assigned menial tasks such as cleaning latrines and picking up cigarette butts at a series of Pacific islands. This was a crime punishable by death since the United States was at war. Even if the men were not given death sentences, they could get prison terms of 15 years. Reporters from the major and local newspapers were invited to watch the proceedings; Navy public relations officers gave reporters copies of photographs and press statements describing the trial as the first mutiny trial in World War II and the largest mass trial the Navy had ever convened. The prosecution team was led by Lieutenant Commander James F. Coakley who had recently served as deputy chief prosecutor in Alameda County under district attorney Earl Warren. Defending the accused men were six Navy lawyers, one as leader of the team and one attorney for every 10 men. Veltmann headed the defense. They discovered that not all of the 50 were experienced ship loaders. The two cooks had responded "no" when asked if they would load munitions. Another of the 50, who had a broken

wrist in a sling was also asked if he would load ammunition, to which he replied that he would not. Coakley began his prosecution by calling officers from Port Chicago and Mare Island as witnesses. Tobin of Ryder Street Naval Barracks said that he personally ordered six or seven of the men to load munitions on August 9 but was unable to verify if any others were so ordered. He said that the men he had spoken with were willing to follow any order except to load munitions; that each man expressed fear of another explosion. Tobin verified that the men were not aggressive or disrespectful. Lieutenant Ernest Delucchi, Commander of Division Four at Port Chicago, testified that he personally ordered only four of the 50 defendants to load munitions. Veltmann objected to this hearsay but was overruled after Coakley explained it was evidence toward conspiracy. Delucchi confirmed that a cook and a man with a broken wrist were among the 25 men in his division that now sat among the 50 accused. Delucchi added that the cook and a second man were sailors he did not consider "up to par"; the cook in particular was prone to nervous attacks and was seen as a liability at the pier. Morehouse confirmed to Veltmann that some of his men had said they were afraid to handle ammunition. Following Morehouse, Lieutenant James E.

Chapter 2 : The Port Chicago 50 « Book-A-Day Almanac

The Port Chicago 50 is the story of 50 African American Navy men who were put on trial for mutiny when they refused to return to work after an explosion destroyed the dock they worked on and killed hundreds of men.

By Sherry Book Review: One quick trip to the library later, I started reading. Why I Finished It: After browsing his website , I learned why. Sheinkin used to write history textbooks, and during his research he would come across all kinds of really interesting stories. Of course, these were not allowed into the textbooks, and so he vowed to use them to write a book one day. I knew nothing about the Port Chicago 50 – the black men who refused to load ammunition onto boats at a Navy shipyard after a massive explosion caused by unsafe and unfair working conditions. I had no idea how instrumental the following court case and events were in leading up to what we know as the civil rights movement and ending segregation in the United States armed forces. As I was reading, I kept having to remind myself that I was reading about World War 2, especially as characters that I am used to reading about in connection with civil rights in the s, such as Thurgood Marshall, made an appearance. We tend to think of history as chunks of time, or chapters in a textbook, consecutive, but separate. Read more about primary sources below. History buffs of all ages. This is definitely a book that teachers could use to lead into learning about the civil rights movement since it is so interesting and makes you want to know more! Help students realize how much life primary sources bring to a story by pairing Port Chicago 50 with another traditional historical account, maybe from a textbook. Which story are you more interested in? Which story makes you want to ask more questions? Which story is more memorable? American Memory Project – from the Library of Congress, this collection provides access to all types of primary sources that document the American experience. DocsTeach – from the National Archives, this tool allows the teacher easy access to thousands of primary source documents selected from the National Archives. You can choose to build your own collection to use with students, or choose from the collections and activities already created. Select several time periods and have students determine what prejudices were present and the impact it had on history. Use the commonalities to help students make connections and experience the continuity of history for themselves. The students, through group and independent research, should be prepared to answer questions about their role in the events of the Port Chicago explosion and trial, as well as their views. This is a fabulous activity that encourages students to think creatively and really develop a deeper understanding of the issues facing their character. I would take it a few steps further, in conjunction with the theme activity from above. Instead of limiting the students to characters from this one event discussed in the book, have them choose or assign people from a wider selection of history or even include fictional characters. Using a learning management system we like Edmodo!

Chapter 3 : The Port Chicago 50 Book Review | Teen Ink

The information about The Port Chicago 50 shown above was first featured in "The BookBrowse Review" - BookBrowse's online-magazine that keeps our members abreast of notable and high-profile books publishing in the coming weeks.

The following version of this book was used to create this study guide: *The Port Chicago* Roaring Brook Press, The Port Chicago 50 is a historical account by Steve Sheinkin geared toward young readers of World War II and civil rights that details the Port Chicago disaster, and the ensuing trial in which Joe Small and other black workers refused to return to work under unsafe conditions. The book is told in the third-person past-tense narrative mode, with Sheinkin interrupting the narrative at numerous points for purposes of context and to relay other important information. For example, many wanted to prove themselves capable of combat roles in the military, while others hoped that stellar service would lead to greater rights for blacks in general in America. Facing pressure from civil rights groups and important leaders "both white and black" the U. Navy changed its policy to allow blacks to be trained as seamen, though blacks would not be allowed to serve at sea except as mess attendants. The Navy feared that racism and segregation would compromise their ability to win the war. Despite this, Joe Small and the others in his basic training class still looked forward to serving America, though they were disappointed in being relegated to shore work. They were even more concerned when it was revealed they would be serving at Port Chicago, an isolated installation with a large pier at the end of railroad tracks, where they would be loading live ammunition onto Naval ships. Small was even more concerned by the lack of safety precautions for example, mattresses were what were used to stop bombs on rail carts from slamming into ships after being unloaded from train boxcars and taken down to the pier, and was disturbed that only black men, supervised by white officers, would be loading the ammunition and bombs onto the ships. There were no whites at all doing the actual loading. Despite their ignored concerns and fears that they expressed to their commander, Lieutenant Delucchi, Small and a few hundred other blacks worked courageously and tirelessly to quickly and efficiently load ships for war. A few years passed uneventfully. Things suddenly changed on the night of July 17, Small and his detachment had just bedded down for the night when a massive explosion, followed by an even bigger explosion, rocked Port Chicago. Men scrambled down to the pier, which had been obliterated. Two ships in dock being loaded were destroyed and sunk. Hundreds were dead, their bodies torn apart and unrecognizable. The cause of the explosions was not known, but Small and his men were commended for the way they handled the situation, putting out fires and assisting with rescue efforts. Robert Routh was blinded by the explosion, and sent to the hospital for his injuries. The Navy quickly began investigating the explosion, and though no official blame was placed, many officers at Port Chicago blamed Small and the black loaders, calling them careless and stupid. On August 11, Small and the remaining Port Chicago men were ordered back to work loading ammunition at another port. Small and a few hundred others refused to return to work because nothing had changed in terms of safety or the kind of work involved. Various officers attempted to convince the men to return to work, but only when charges of war time mutiny that carry the penalty of death were threatened, did the majority of men return to work. Only Small and 49 others "The Port Chicago 50" refused. They said they would follow any order except loading ammunition. They knew they were doing the right thing by refusing this order, but the Navy saw otherwise. The men were arrested and tried for mutiny. The judges found them all guilty, and the men were sentenced to 15 years hard labor "a light sentence given the nature of the situation, owed largely to the skill of the defense attorney, Gerald Veltmann. They insisted the trial was a farce because the men involved are black, and because they never actually mutinied. At the same time, enormous pressure from blacks and whites alike compelled further integration of the armed forces. It was decided that Small and the others would be released and allowed to serve at sea instead around the same time all military roles were opened up to blacks. Small and the others heroically and ably served out their Naval careers before retiring to successful civilian lives. However, they were haunted for the rest of their lives by the events of the explosion and trial. Small, along with the others, never doubted they did the right thing, no matter how much it cost them. In the s, it was

declared that the work loading ammunition that Smalls and the other black men were ordered to do was indeed the result of racism “but convictions of mutiny remain to the present day because no evidence was found of racism in the trial itself. This section contains words approx.

Chapter 4 : Steve Sheinkin » The Port Chicago 50

Bomb was a Newbery Honor Book and The Port Chicago 50 won the Boston Globe/Horn Book Award for Nonfiction. His other acclaimed books include The Notorious Benedict Arnold and Most Dangerous. Sheinkin also writes the Time Twisters series.

Chapter 5 : calendrierdelascience.com | The Port Chicago Disaster, Mutiny, and the Fight for Civil Rights

Online shopping from a great selection at Books Store.

Chapter 6 : The Port Chicago Disaster, Mutiny, and the Fight for Civil Rights Book Review

The Port Chicago 50 is a historical account by Steve Sheinkin geared toward young readers of World War II and civil rights that details the Port Chicago disaster, and the ensuing trial in which Joe Small and other black workers refused to return to work under unsafe conditions.

Chapter 7 : The Port Chicago 50 (Audiobook) by Steve Sheinkin | calendrierdelascience.com

The Port Chicago 50 is well researched, carefully footnoted, and amply illustrated. Sheinkin's sources include the 1,page transcript of the trial of the 50 black sailors charged with mutiny for refusing to work after the explosion.

Chapter 8 : Port Chicago 50 by Joseph Rund on Prezi

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Chapter 9 : THE PORT CHICAGO 50 by Steve Sheinkin | Kirkus Reviews

The Port Chicago 50 spotlights a little-known event from World War calendrierdelascience.comh oral histories, trial transcripts, and newspaper accounts, it chronicles a key incident leading to the end of segregation in the U.S. military.