

# Port Chicago Naval Magazine



National Memorial  
National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior



## The Explosion

At 10:18 p.m., a hollow ring and the sound of splintering wood erupted from the pier, followed by an explosion that ripped apart the night sky. Witnesses said that a brilliant white flash shot into the air, accompanied by a loud, sharp report. A column of smoke billowed from the pier, and fire glowed orange and yellow. Flashing like fire-

were completely disintegrated. A pillar of fire and smoke stretched over two miles into the sky above Port Chicago. The largest remaining pieces of the 7,200-ton ship were the size of a suitcase. A plane flying at 9,000 feet reported seeing chunks of white hot metal "as big as a house" flying past. The shattered *Quinault Victory* was spun into the air. Witnesses re-



Crew and Naval Armed Guard of the cargo ship S.S. E.A. Bryan who died in the explosion

works, smaller explosions went off in the cloud as it rose. Within six seconds, a deeper explosion erupted as the contents of the *Bryan* detonated as one massive bomb. The seismic shock wave was felt as far away as Boulder City, Nevada.

The *Bryan* and the structures around the pier

ported seeing a 200-foot column on which rode the bow of a ship, its mast still attached. Its remains crashed back into the bay 500 feet away.

All 320 men on duty that night were killed instantly. The blast smashed buildings and rail cars near the pier and damaged every building in Port Chicago. People on the base and in town were sent flying or





were sprayed with splinters of glass and other debris. The air filled with the sharp cracks and dull thuds of smoldering metal and unexploded shells as they showered back to earth as far as two miles away. The blast caused damage 48 miles across the Bay in San Francisco.

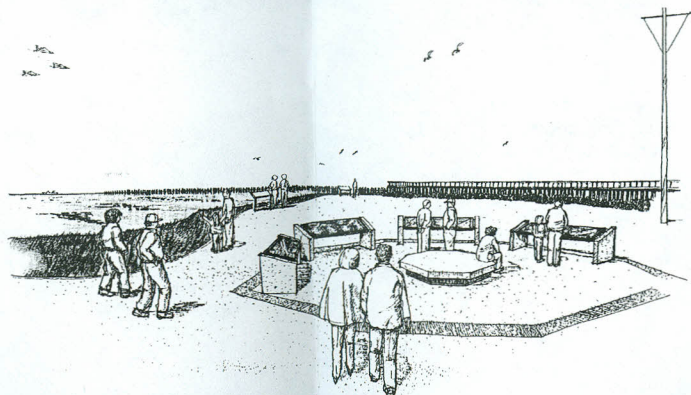
Navy personnel quickly responded to the disaster. Men risked their lives to put out fires that threatened nearby munitions

cars. Local emergency crews and civilians rushed to help. In addition to those killed, there were 390 wounded. These people were evacuated and treated, and those who remained were left with the gruesome task of cleaning up. Less than a month after the worst home-front disaster of World War II, Port Chicago was again moving munitions to the troops in the Pacific.

The men at Port Chicago were vital to the success of the war. And yet they were often forgotten. Of the 320 men killed in the explosion, 202 were the African-American enlisted men who were assigned the dangerous duty of loading the ships. The explosion at Port Chicago accounted for 15% of all African-American casualties of World War II.



Port Chicago sailors assembling ordnance



Artist's concept by Daniel Quan Design

## The Memorial

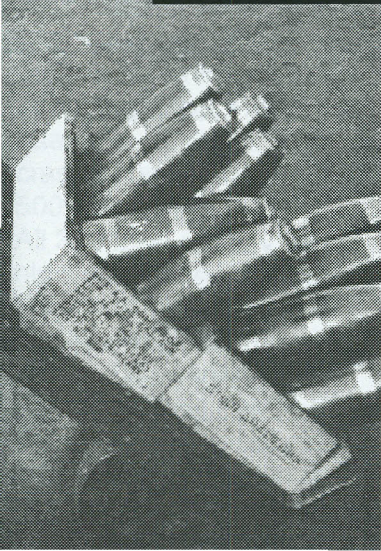
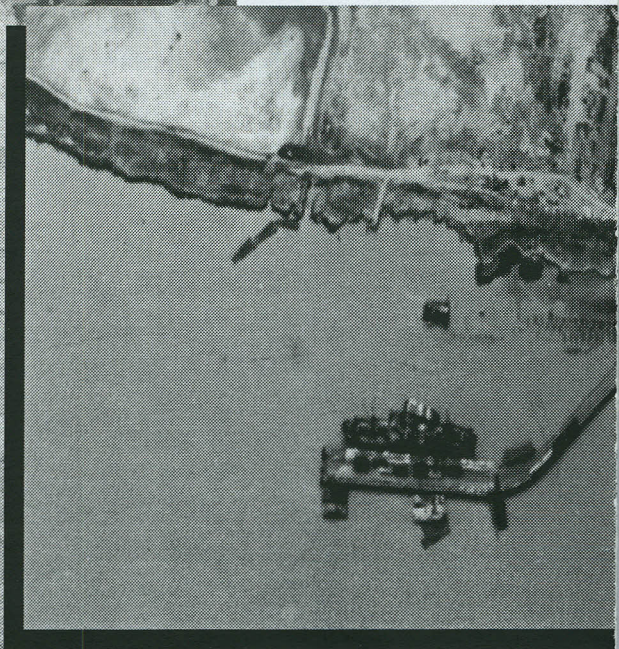
Port Chicago Naval Magazine National Memorial is administered by the National Park Service and the United States Navy. It honors the memory of those who gave their lives and

were injured in the explosion on July 17, 1944, recognizes those who served at the magazine, and commemorates the role of the facility during World War II.



# America at War

## Building Port Chicago



*Left*—Munitions crews move five inch anti-aircraft shells onto railroad cars

*Top*—Aerial view of Port Chicago and surrounding area before the explosion

*Right*—Bombs being loaded into a ship's large cargo hold