

“NAACP Asks Navy Dept. Probe of Mutiny Charge,” October 28, 1944

The Pittsburgh Courier

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NEW YORK—As a result of the action of the Twelfth Naval District in singling out an even fifty Negro sailors to be charged with mutiny for refusal to load ammunition at the Mare Island depot, August 9, Special NAACP counsel, Thurgood Marshall, has requested thorough and impartial investigation by the Navy Department, in his letter to Secretary James V. Forrestal.

After spending twelve days investigating circumstances and reviewing testimony of the Seamen being tried at Yerba Buena Island, California, Mr. Marshall declared “These men are being tried for mutiny solely because of their race or color. In this instance the trial is really incidental. I am convinced that there are sufficient facts involved to warrant a thorough and complete investigation by your office as to the following conditions, which existed in the Twelfth Naval District:

1. Why is it that the only naval personnel loading ammunition regularly was Negroes with the exception of their officers and petty officers?
2. Why is it that Negro seamen,

many of whom have had special training in such schools as gunnery schools, were nevertheless relegated to the duty of loading ammunition?

“3. Why is it that these men were not given any training whatsoever in the dangers to be found in loading ammunition or the proper methods to be used in loading ammunition?

“4. Why is it that men with no prior experience whatsoever were given the duty of handling winches in the loading of ammunition when civilian longshoremen were not permitted to handle winches on ammunition unless they had had several years’ experience in winch handling?

“5. Why is it that Negro seamen with no prior experience in ammunition were given the job of hatch tender in the loading of ammunition?

“6. Why is it that officers ‘raced’ their gangs in contests in the loading of ammunition?

“7. Why is it that one of the accused, Seaman Green, while suffering with a broken wrist, despite the fact that the Navy doctors ordered him on the sick list, was not placed on the sick list, but was ordered to load ammunition?

“7. Why is it that the Negro seamen who had been loading ammunition and who were at Port Chicago at the time of the explosion were not given any leave whatsoever as a result of this explosion, but were forced to return to the duty of loading ammunition? A psychiatrist from the United States Navy testified at the court-martial proceedings that such an explosion as occurred at Port Chicago would have a lasting effect upon the minds of the men who were near the explosion.

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