

Military personnel, civilians among victims of blast

The 320 persons lost and 390 injured in the Port Chicago explosion included not only Navy personnel, but men of the Coast Guard, U.S. Merchant Marine, and Marine Corps, as well as civil service employees and civilians.

Most of the naval officers and Navy enlisted were assigned either to the Naval Magazine or the Naval Barracks commands. Thirty were members of Armed Guard crews assigned to the two ships.

The Coast Guard men manned a fire barge, and the civil service employees were a three-man Navy railroad crew.

The lone Marine killed was on pier guard duty.

Regardless of branch of service or assigned duty, Rear Admiral Carleton H. Wright, Commandant of the 12th Naval District at the time, expressed a view embodied in the Port Chicago Memorial.

At a press conference, he said they "gave their lives in the service of their country. Their sacrifice could not have been greater had this loss occurred on a battleship or a beach-head of the war fronts."



Memorial Site The area between the converging railroad tracks near the pier's entrance was selected as the location for memorial.

In Memoriam

U.S. NAVAL MAGAZINE AND NAVAL BARRACKS (211)

S2c James C. Akins
GM3c Clarence Allen, Jr.
Lt. (jg) Maxie L. Anderson
S2c Leslie K. Asare
S2c Isaiah Ash, Jr.
S2c David Bacon, Sr.
S2c Henry W. Bailey
GM3c Leonard Baker
S2c David Barnes, Jr.
S2c Joseph Battle
S2c Raphael O. Beason
S2c Silas Bell
Lt. Thomas L. Blackman
S2c David E. Blackwell
S2c Thimon Blaylock
S2c Johnnie C. Borders
CM1c James H. Born
S2c L. T. Bowen
S2c Charles L. Boyce
S2c Alvin Brewer, Jr.
S2c James Bridges
S2c Walter L. Brooks, Jr.
S2c Johnnie L. Broome
S2c Ernest L. Burnett
S2c Wilbert Calvin
S2c Lawrence L. Carlin
S2c Robert A. Carter
Lt. (jg) John B. Christenbury
S2c Eddie L. Clark
S2c Eugene Coffee, Jr.
S2c Bill Coleman
S2c Enos Coley
S2c Arthur A. Connor
S2c Frank Cooley
S2c Norman H. Craig
S2c Eddie L. Cross
S2c Jessie V. Crump
S2c Herman L. Curtis
S2c Horace Daniel, Sr.
S2c Hubby Dansby
S2c Floyd M. Davis
S2c Henry J. Davis
S2c Willie Davis
S2c James L. Devaughn
S2c Nathaniel Dixon
S2c Rayfield D. Doyle
S2c Herman Dunbar

S2c Arther L. Ebenezer
F2c Duntion I. Edwards
S2c Herbert L. Edwards
S2c Junios C. Ervin
S2c Luther Eusery
S2c Ananias Evans, Sr.
S2c Horace Evans
S2c John H. Evans
S2c William L. Evans
S2c John B. Fellsbret
S2c Robert L. Ferguson
GM3c Clarence S. Fields
S2c Jessie Finney
S2c Matthew Forkner, Jr.
S2c Joseph R. Francis
S2c Ford S. Franklin, Jr.
S2c Artie J. Frazier
CM1c Elmer B. Froid
S2c Gerard Gabriel
S2c Bennie L. Gaines
S2c Elgar Gant
S2c (CM) John S. Gibson
S2c Jethro Gilbert
S2c Samuel Glenn, Jr.
S2c Lewis D. Goudelock
S2c Harry L. Graham
S2c William H. Green
S2c Ross B. Grimage
S2c A.D. Hamilton
S2c Ernest E. Hamilton
S2c Emerald Hamm
S2c George R. Hammon
S2c John W. Hannah, Jr.
S2c Joe H. Hardaway
S2c John L. Harding
S2c B.C. Harris
S2c Roscoe A. Harris
S2c Phillip H. Harrison
S2c Clifford Harvey, Jr.

S1c George W. Hayes
S2c D.C. Haywood
S2c Douglas L. Hector
S2c David L. Higginbotham
S2c Bobbie R. Higgs
S2c Cluster Hill
S2c Joseph Hills
S2c Charles W. Hite
S2c (SC) Rudolph W. Holden
S2c Stanford Holley
McMM3c (T) Eldred L. Holmes
S2c Ernest M. Howard
S2c Frank J. Howard
S2c Earl H. Hudson
S2c Glen Hughes
S2c Leroy Hughes
S2c Theodore L. Hughes
S2c William Humphrey, Jr.
S2c Ross D. Hunt
S2c Wave Hunt
S2c Rudolph W. Hunter
CM3c(T) Leroy Ingram
S2c D.C. Jackson
S2c James Jackson
GM3c E.M. Jackson
S2c Levi R. Jackson
S2c Paul E. Jackson
S2c Robert A. Jackson, Jr.
GM3c Samuel Jackson, Jr.
S2c Daniel L. Jamison
S2c Willie Jennings
S2c Henry L. Johnson
Lt. (jg) James B. Johnson
S2c Clarence Johnson
S2c Earl T. Johnson
S2c Gabe Johnson
S2c Robert Johnson
S2c Milton F. Johnson
S2c Daniel L. Jones

S1c Ivery L. Jones, Jr.
S1c Henry Joseph, Jr.
S1c Samuel Kearney
S1c (SC/B) Calvin King
S2c Clifton King
S2c Verna Land
S1c Sidney J. Laporte, Jr.
S1c Willie Law, Jr.
S2c Cleo Lawson
S2c Caludius W. Leslie
S2c (SC) Aaron A. Lewis
S2c T.C. Lewis
S2c Lemuel M. Long
S2c Robert Lyons
S2c Beattie J. Makins
S1c (GM) Russell E. Martin
S2c (GM) Alonzo Martin
S1c Daniel Massie
S1c Lawrence Mathews, Jr.
S2c Charles A. Mayfield
S1c Mitchell McClam
CCM(T) Clarence K. McFarland
S1c Calvin Melton
S1c Ernest C. Miller
McMM3c Ira Miller, Jr.
S2c Otis K. Miller
S2c Marshall Moore, Sr.
CM2c Thomas Moore
S2c William P. Moore
Ens. Gilbert Mordoh
S2c Willie Neal
S2c Willis Nettles
S1c James H. Nixon
S2c William H. Otey, Sr.
S2c Auguster Packer
S1c (SC) William F. Paschal
S2c Robert F. Peete
S2c Lester L. Perry
S2c Joe H. Person

S2c Alfred Phillips
GM3c Charles Pickett
S2c Houston Porter
S2c McCoy Porter
S2c David W. Potts
SM3c(T) Samuel H. Powell
GM2c Joe C. Preuit
S2c Arthus Reid, Jr.
GM3c James E. Rhodes
S2c Clyde F. Richardson
S2c James A. Roberts
S1c Mango Roberts
MoMM3c Alphonse Robinson
S2c Fred Robinson, Jr.
S1c Eugene J. Rogers
S2c Robert Sanders
S2c Wesley Saunders
Lt. Roland Schindler
GM3c Carl C. Scott
Lt. Vernon C. Shaner
S1c Joseph J. Sheckles
S2c Willie Sims
S1c James R. Smith
S1c Ellis Taylor
S2c Joseph M. Tolson
HA2c Maxie D. Towles
S1c (GM) Norvin L. Van Dunk
S1c Isaiah Wade
S2c Charles Walker, Jr.
S2c Walter L. Walker, Jr.
S2c Woodrow L. Walker
GM2c(T) William C. Warren
S2c James L. Washington
S2c Woodrow Washington, Jr.
GM3c Daniel West
Lt. (jg) Raymond R. White
S1c Joseph B. White
S2c Arthur Whitmore
S2c Mitchell A. Williams
S2c Maryland E. Wilson
GM3c Oliver Wilson
S2c Samuel D. Wilson
Lt. Harold A. Wood
S2c James E. Woods
S2c Walter E. Wright
S2c Charles E. Wyatt

NAVY AND CONTRACTOR EMPLOYEES (6)

Lawrence C. Bustrack, Macco Co.
Gunder Halverson, Macco Co.
Raymond V. Hunnicutt, Navy Employee
Thomas D. Hunt, Macco Co.
Harry A. Middleton, Navy Employee
Fred Zanarini, Navy Employee

OTHER MILITARY (6)

Pvt. Elwin A. Blanke, Marine Corps
BM1c Peter G. Broda, Coast Guard
MM1c William G. Degryce, Coast Guard
MoMM3c Edward J. Portz, Coast Guard
S1c Charles H. Riley, Coast Guard
S2c James C. Sullivan, Coast Guard

MARITIME SERVICE ON SS E.A. BRYAN (31)

Elmer A. Andraschanko, Cook
Albert A. Arsenian, Seaman
William C. Benhart, Oiler
Martin M. Cacic, Seaman
Ray E. Davis, Wiper
Donald L. Dennon, Wiper
Thomas E. Dorsey, Seaman
George H. Falk, Bos'n
Marcus J. Franklin, Engr.
Alfred D. Gilbert, Engr.
James R. Gilstrap, Seaman
Joseph D. Grange, Jr., Engr.
Fred Hayes, Seaman
Delbert R. Hutchinson, Fireman
Peter C. Jepsen, Ch. Engr.
Charles A. Johnson, Utilityman
Clifford R. Johnson, Utilityman
Ralph A. Lantz, Seaman
John A. Louis, Engr.
Frank C. Malliza, Carpenter
Edward Maniaco, Messman
Harry E. Nathan, Seaman
Jesse Porter, Sr., Ch. Cook
Richard D. Robertson, Seaman
Aaron C. Sangster, Jr., Seaman
Ellsworth M. Shaw, Oiler
Howard A. Smith, 1st Mate
Andrew Suchan, Fireman
Robert F. Townsend, 2nd Mate
Harding E. White, Messman
George H. Witt, Utilityman

MARITIME SERVICE ON SS QUINAULT VICTORY (36)

Robert D. Bailey, Utilityman
Robert E. Bartlett, Messman
John D. Bell, Asst. Purser
Frederick E. Bentley, Seaman
Donald H. Cheney, Elect.
Hugh E. Crawford, Maint. Man
Floyd F. Crist, Seaman
Albert C. Dieder, Messman
Wallace M. Durland, Seaman
Kenneth J. Eulrick, Seaman
Burke E. Falor, Utilityman
Eugene W. Garrett, Fireman
Robert K. Hendricksen, Seaman
Elis Hendricksen, Engr.
Johannes N. Justesen, Steward
Walter F. Kannberg, Engr.
Robert E. Keim, 2nd Mate
Joseph B. Koeninger, Seaman
Earl L. Mallery, Engr.
Lloyd K. McDaniel, Seaman
Kenneth M. Moen, 3rd Mate
Robert S. Morell, Oiler
Isadore E. Narinsky, Seaman
Roy L. Nelson, Carpenter
David R. Parsons, 3rd Mate
Ellis B. Pinson, Engr.
Richard V. Potter, Fireman
Virgil R. Sandberg, Engr.
Albert R. Scott, Ch. Mate
Lester S. Skance, Seaman
Howard W. Sullivan, Seaman
Robert J. Sullivan, Master
Glen E. Thompson, Engr.
Louis J. Widner, Messman
John A. Williams, Ch. Engr.

SS BRYAN ARMED GUARD (13)

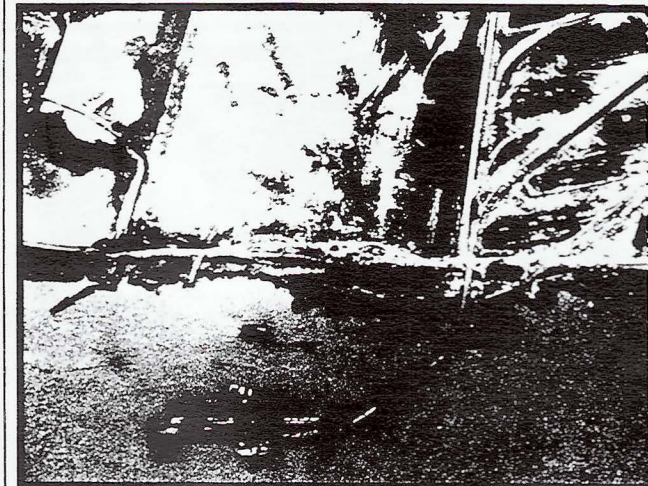
S1c Wayland E. Causey
S1c Rudy J. Cebellia
S1c Robert E. Chase
S2c Claude L. Chastain
SM3c John J. Gee
Lt. (jg) Ralph B. Hartman
S1c Clarence R. Hollandsworth
S1c Kenneth H. Multhead
A1c Jesse W. Mullican
S1c Lloyd J. Quick
S1c Martin J. Setzer
S2c George H. Singer
S1c Listern L. Small

SS QUINAULT VICTORY ARMED GUARD (17)

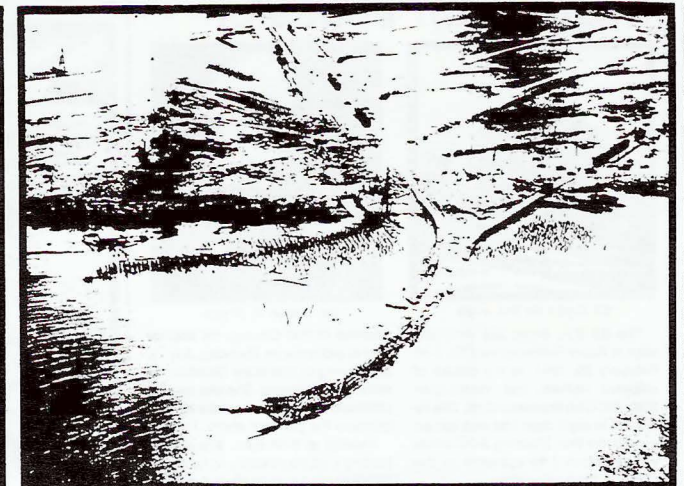
GM3c Jack L. Albin
GM2c Delbert P. Bergstrom
S1c(M) Jack P. Bowman
GM3c John G. Hall
S1c George D. Hovland
S1c Andy Morrow
SM2c William H. Mulryan
S1c Henry J. Myers
S1c Woodrow A. Riift
S1c Jacob D. Risenhoover
S1c William R. Robinson
S1c Charles H. Roadell
S1c Jay Rose, Jr.
S1c Otis K. Ross
S1c Woodrow W. Saint
S1c Arnold T. Sanders
S1c Harold S. Sang

Port Chicago Explosion Memorial Souvenir Edition

Memorial dedicated 45 years after historic explosion



Pier 1 before. . .



and after. . .

Two ships lost in war's worst stateside disaster

The waters of Suisun Bay were nearly calm under a cool southwest breeze at 10:15 p.m. on the night of July 17, 1944. The lights of the Naval Magazine pier flooded the Port Chicago shore line, otherwise shrouded in darkness under a moonless, clear sky.

The crew of an empty oil company tanker passing in mid-channel probably viewed the familiar scene with no concern, as must have the flight crew of a C49 cargo plane enroute to Sacramento from Oakland, flying at 9,000 feet.

Those in the cockpit of another northbound airliner, lower but further away were, no doubt, passing overhead without interest in what was going on below.

Passengers getting off a train that had just arrived at Port Chicago depot were claiming baggage. Some may have been discussing the circus that was in town and had given its last performance earlier in the evening. As they drove home, they may have passed the town's theater where nearly 200 of its citizens watched a movie, unconcerned about the activity on the Naval Magazine's pier, where 98 sailors were "topping off" a 6,000-ton load of

bombs and ammunition on the Liberty Ship SS E.A. Bryan.

On the opposite side of the pier, the Victory Ship Quinalt Victory was being rigged for loading by the Naval Magazine's 102-man Sixth Division. A three-man Navy locomotive crew had just pushed the last of 16 boxcars on to the pier containing nearly 500 tons of depth charges and incendiary bombs for the Bryan and about 250 tons of bombs for the empty Quinalt Victory.

Sixty-seven merchant seamen were on their ships, along with 30 members of the Navy Armed Guard of both vessels. A Marine Sentry was on pier guard duty, and five Coast Guardsmen manned a fire barge at the piers' end. Three civilian contractors were working late a few hundred yards away in an office on a second pier under construction.

Less than four minutes later, persons who had moments before left the pier heard the sound of splintering wood and scraping metal as if a forward boom on the Bryan might have given way and crashed down onto one of the boxcars. This was followed immediately by an ear-splitting, massive, sharp explosion as bombs in several of the railcars detonated simultaneously.

An ascending column of boiling, billowing gases flashing with shades of orange and red rose into the black sky. Smaller explosions, like bursting fireworks, crackled inside the cloud as its color changed first to brilliant white, then to yellow and reddish orange. Red hot metal fragments tore through the side of Bryan and dropped into her open holds, igniting powder and setting off a series of small, quick explosions.

Area seismographs recorded the time as 10:18 p.m. and 47 seconds. Less than seven seconds later their needles jarred more fiercely to the deep rumble of a thundering roar as the remaining explosives detonated in Bryan as if the ship were one, huge bomb.

Not confined to a rising column as in the first explosion, this second blast wave rolled out across land and water pushing the mushrooming cloud to 12,000 feet. Tearing Quinalt Victory from her mooring, it twisted her and

Continued on insert page 2

Repeat unlikely because of safer handling

Navy investigators determined that there were six possible causes for the first explosion and where it might have occurred. They based their opinion of the most probable cause upon circumstantial rather direct evidence, since no one lived who had actually witnessed what had happened.

The most likely was detonation of a "supersensitive element" in the course of handling.

The 350-lb. depth charges and incendiary clusters being loaded in slings and nets from boxcars into the SS Bryan's two forward holds were considered as supersensitive under certain conditions: if unintentionally fused, if a casing was damaged, or if explosive material were somehow leaking. An initial explosive could have resulted from rough handling, failure of loading gear, collision of the switch engine with a loaded boxcar, or, finally, sabotage, although there was no evidence to support the latter.

Today, these possible reasons have been considerably reduced in probability. Fail-safe mechanisms, improved stability of explosive material, and, most important, stringently enforced safety procedures render a recurrence

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Project sponsored by Navy WWII Armed Guard veterans

Once a month, a salty group of old sailors get together and tell sea stories over Sunday brunch. They tell of the howling winds of the Murmansk run; the terror of the German raiders; and long hours sweating out the slow dawns over the North Atlantic and South Pacific, their ships silhouetted against the distant sky, like clay arcade ducks at the mercy of enemy submarines.

And, there are tales of bars and brawls, and girls left behind in Sydney and South Hampton.

Inevitably, before long, thoughts turn to serious matters: ships lost and shipmates who went down with them; prayers for those among their dwindling numbers who since their last meeting, now spin yarns in Fiddler's Green instead of the Coconut Grove at Santa Cruz.

These are the U.S. Navy Armed Guard Veterans of World War II — the remnants of a valiant corps of fighting sailors who manned the guns on our merchant ships and fought and died beside their Merchant Marine brothers. It is the Western Division of this nationwide organization which sponsored and raised the money for the Port Chicago Memorial.

Organized into crews of 15 to 20, the 30 Armed Guardsmen who perished in

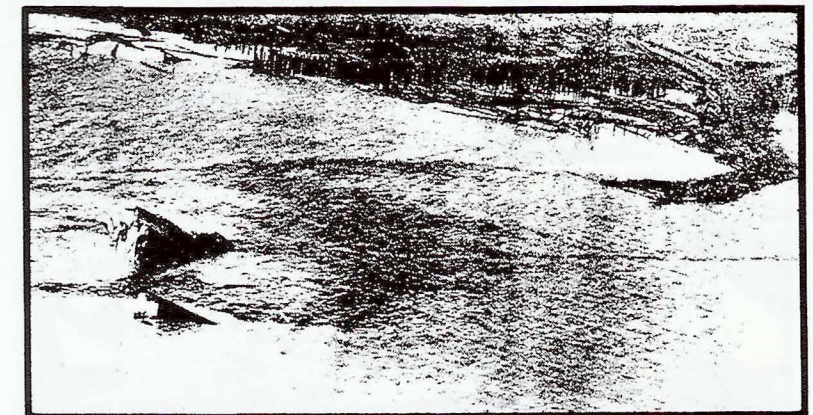
the two ships at Port Chicago may have been a record for a single disaster.

The U.S. Navy Armed Guard traces its beginnings to World War I, when crews were assigned to Allied merchant vessels facing the German U-boat menace. Navy men maintained guns installed on these merchantmen, manned them when under attack, and repelled enemy boarding parties seeking to reprovise their undersea wolf packs.

Disbanded after the armistice, Navy Armed Guard crews had served on 384 ships during the war, a far cry from the 6,236 commercial vessels they protected during World War II.

In 1941, with the war in Europe spreading and the obvious, eventual involvement of the United States, measures were taken to prepare for the protection of U.S. and Allied vessels falling victim in increasing numbers to German raiders in the Atlantic and aircraft within range of their airfields. However, Congress could not authorize arming U.S. flag cargo vessels due to the Neutrality Act of 1939. The portion of that Act dealing with this prohibition was repealed in November, 1941, less than one month before the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor which propelled this nation in the war.

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The explosion tore Quinalt Victory from the pier and broke her into sections, the largest, a 60-foot section of keel and the bow, were visible at low tide.

Port Chicago Explosion Memorial Souvenir Edition

Bryan named for noted Washington educator



SS Bryan on the ways.



Dr. Enoch A. Bryan

The SS E.A. Bryan slid down the ways at Kaiser Richmond yard No. 2 on February 29, 1944, to the cheers of shipyard workers and Washington State 4-H Club representatives. She fitted out in eight days and was turned over to the War Shipping Administration on March 8 for operation by the Oliver J. Olson Company.

Named for Dr. Enoch A. Bryan, founding President of Washington State University, the 7,212-ton Liberty Ship was built in 18 days and christened by Mrs. Gertrude Bryan Hayes, Dr. Bryan's daughter.

Mrs. Hayes represented 10,000 Washington State 4-H Club members who had, during a two-month drive, sold a record \$3,370,555 in order that the ship might bear the name of the man who had presided over WSU when it was known as the Washington State Agriculture School.

The ship proudly bore a plaque bearing the names of the state's former 4-H'ers serving their country.

Dr. Bryan was a 4-H club patron during his years at the Pullman, Wash., school as its head from 1893 to 1917. After five years as Idaho State's Commissioner of Education, he retired and returned to Pullman as a research professor until his death in 1941.

The SS Bryan had completed her maiden voyage to the Pacific and had

returned to Port Chicago for another load of ordnance on Thursday, July 13, after taking on fuel at the Standard Oil refinery in Richmond. She was moored starboard side to heading west inboard between the pier and shore.

Arriving at 8:30 a.m., she started loading 1 1/2 hours later and had been taking explosive cargo aboard, day and night for 3 1/2 days. Her crew were preparing to get underway in the early morning as the tide ebbed. Her holds were nearly full with more than 5,000 tons of bombs, shells and ammunition. Three of her five holds had been topped off and the final 500 tons of depth charges and incendiary bombs were being winched aboard and stowed in her two forward holds from railcars on the pier.

Most of her crew was aboard, but some, along with members of her Armed Guard, were ashore on official business or last-minute liberty. All who were aboard and on the pier perished as she exploded like a monstrous bomb. Only fragments of her hull that were cast ashore remained of the pride of Washington State University.

Heartbroken at the ship's destruction, Mrs. Hayes expressed a belief shared by all who have lost loved ones at sea: "There is no consolation unless it is in knowing that it is this sort of thing we have to expect of the ships and men who go into action that they may go down in action."

Built by the Oregon Shipbuilding Corporation in its Portland, Ore., yard, for her maiden voyage to the war zone.

Two ships lost...

Continued from insert page 1
tore her into several sections. The largest was a 60-foot section of hull with propeller attached and a portion of her bow. She had been moored port-side to the pier with bow facing up stream, but now the torn bow faced nearly the opposite direction.

Only fragments of Bryan could be found. The larger ones, a few slightly larger than a suitcase, were cast up to a mile inland.

As the terrible cloud faded, and its thunder rolled off into the distance, stunned silence fell upon a scene that would reveal 320 military and civilians had lost their lives and 390 were left injured by World War II's worst stateside disaster.

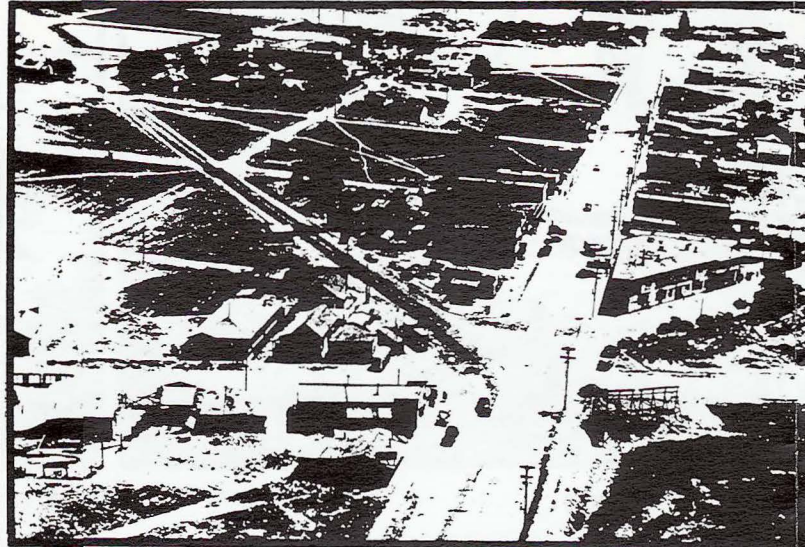


Dr. Bryan's daughter christens the ship at Kaiser's Richmond yard.



All that's left of the SS Quinault Victory only ten days after delivery to the War Shipping Administration.

Town of Port Chicago, U.S. Naval Magazine suffer heavy damage



The town of Port Chicago (above left), less than two miles from the pier, suffered extensive damage to several



structures (above right). Below are examples of damage on the Naval Magazine.

Only 10 days old

Quinault victory's career ended before it started

Quinault Lake shimmers blue in the cool alpine summer of Washington State's Olympic Peninsula. Its waters rush through northern Grays Harbor County to the rugged coast in the silver Quinault River, alive with salmon during the yearly runs. This lake and river are named for a proud Pacific Northwest Indian tribe, and so was the SS Quinault Victory.

Built by the Oregon Shipbuilding Corporation in its Portland, Ore., yard, for her maiden voyage to the war zone.

The 7,606-ton ship was christened by a representative of the Quinault tribe as other tribal members chanted blessings for safe passage. Their chief was serving with the Army in Europe and could not attend, but his son did and remembers well that proud moment.

Following the ship's outfitting, she was turned over to the United States Lines by the War Shipping Administration on July 11, 1944, and, a few days later, set sail for Port Chicago to load for her maiden voyage to the war zone.

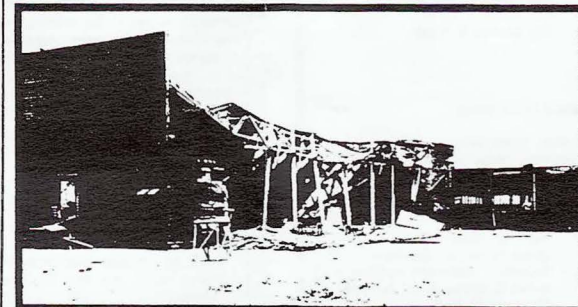
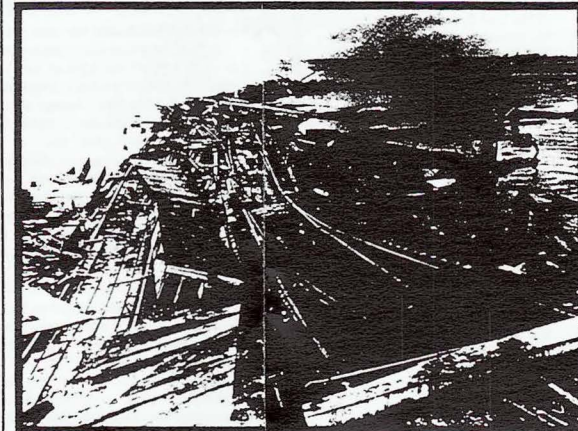
At 6 p.m. on July 17, after a brief fuel stop at the Shell Oil dock in Martinez, she moored starboard side to, heading east, alongside the Port Chicago magazine's loading pier.

Wind and tide had caused some problems, and, off and on, her master had ordered slow turns of the engine to keep her snug to the pier. This was the case at 10:15 p.m. as her crew and Naval magazine sailors readied her holds to take aboard bombs from 16 rail cars lined up on the pier between her and the SS E.A. Bryan.

It was the first time she had been rigged for loading and things were delayed because of trouble with the new shackles, preventer guys, and winch whips. But, the loading was scheduled to begin at midnight, beginning with 253 tons of bombs and projectiles.

Most of her crew were aboard and many of her Armed Guard had not left the ship; and, they never did. The explosion in the SS Bryan ripped her apart and flung sections of her hull into the channel.

Moments before, her mast had stood tall, as the lofty pines lining the lake and river bearing her name. But, the next morning as the dark sky began to turn grey in dawn's first light, all that could be seen of this proud ship were the stern of her keel, with its still propeller, and her torn bow, grotesquely protruding the surface of the ebbing water of Suisun Bay.



Heroic town deserves a medal...

Continued from insert page 1
their control from the Japanese. In Contra Costa County, hospitals were treating wounded residents of Port Chicago, as its citizens sorted through the damage wreaked by the Naval Magazine explosion the night before. Although the town was not "razed" or "leveled" as early news reports stated and later reports historically repeat, three buildings had been flattened, several suffered heavy structural damage, and all others had been damaged in some way. Thirty-nine of its citizens had been injured, most of them by shattered window glass.

The explosion resulted in the most extensive investigation ever conducted into the causes and consequences of massive munitions explosions, as well as methods to prevent them and their resulting injuries.

The outcome of that investigation eventually led to a decision by the U.S. Congress to buy out private interests and create an uninhabited area surrounding the loading docks at Port Chicago. This was done in 1968 after more than 10 years of dispute between the town's residents and the U.S. Government.

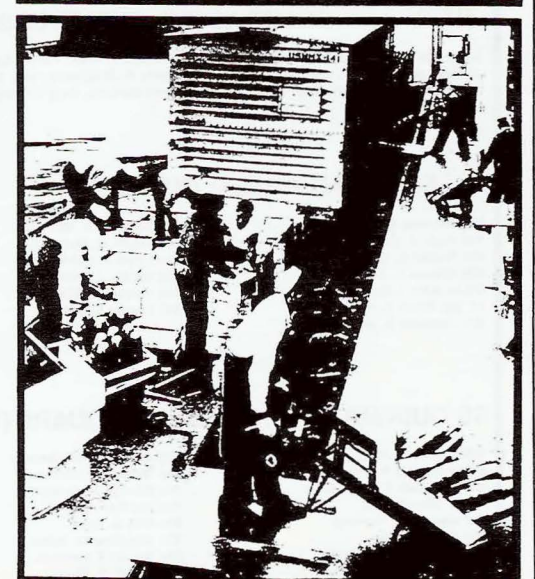
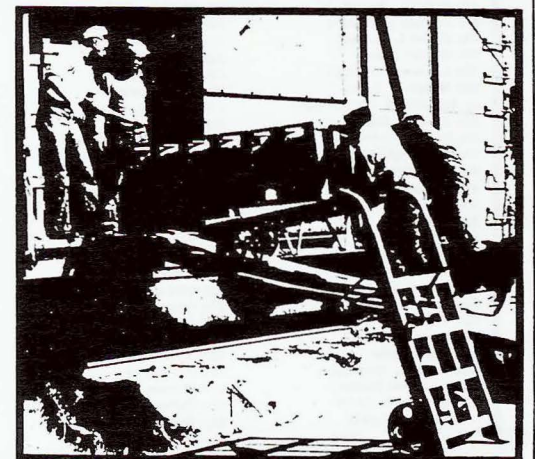
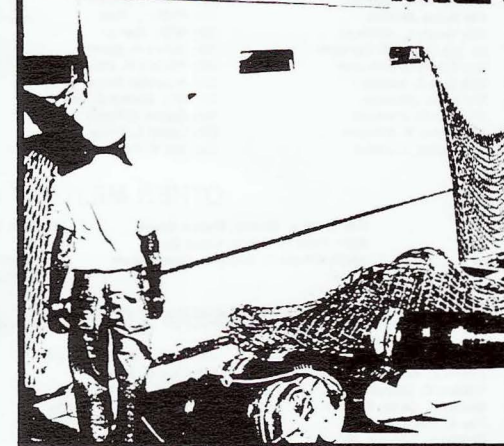
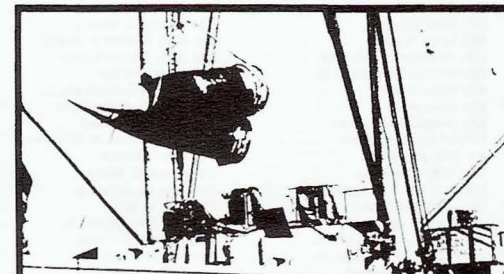
Through the legal process of eminent domain, Congress appropriated about \$18 million to compensate owners for the loss of their property. A few months later, Port Chicago died as a town, most of her structures pushed into holes and buried by bulldozers.

At the height of the war in Vietnam, Port Chicago sacrificed its life to the defense of freedom and the long-range national defense interests of the country.

The town was a veteran of four wars: as Bay Point, a shipyard there built wooden ships for the Navy during World War I. It was wounded in World War II; and symbolically, it was "killed in action" during the Vietnam War.

We've come a long way since 1944

Explosive handling "techniques" 45 years ago



Repeat unlikely...

Continued from insert page 1
curance of the Port Chicago explosion virtually impossible.

Since 1944, there have been major improvements in the state of the art of designing and operating explosive handling gear and development of better safety procedures.

These procedures are far superior to those followed 45 years ago, some evolving from lessons learned from the Port Chicago disaster.

However, safety procedures at the weapons station assume the "worst case" could happen.

Armed Guard veterans...

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In the meantime, a new crop of Navy Armed Guard gunners, radiomen, and signalmen were being trained at a training center in Little Creek, Virginia. These second-generation armed guarders were equipped for action vastly different than their World War I predecessors faced.

The German U-boat had become a greatly improved, longer-range submarine with advanced, deadly firepower. They also had to prepare themselves to deal with surface raiders which, along with their submerged brothers, had turned the Atlantic into a virtual German-controlled ocean.

There were enemy planes to deal with and dreadnaughts lying patiently in waiting off the West coast of Europe. Indeed, many Armed Guardsmen and merchant sailors were lost just off the coast of the Carolinas, which had become known as "Torpedo Alley."

Assembled and administered from centers in San Francisco, New Orleans, and New York, Armed Guard crews were formed there and assigned to commercial ships. Most had never been to sea before, and when the war was over, they returned to the

farms and midwest factories from which they came.

Gone at last were the fears of floating in icy seas with only a life jacket to keep them alive. No longer would their heads ache from the roar of rapid-fire five and three inch guns that rattled the deck plates of the liberty and victory ships on which they sailed.

But, the memories remain, and those who still remember gather with their brides, who sweated out the vigor of war with them, to honor the 1,810 shipmates who never returned; who cannot meet with them now in the twilight of life and talk of battles, bars and brawls, and girls left behind in Sydney and South Hampton.

The articles appearing in this special section were written by J.D. Tikalsky and are based on investigative reports, newspaper articles and other historical material from the Naval Weapons Station Public Affairs Office files.