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Staff Report

Date: May 24, 2016

To: City Council

From: Valerie J. Barone, City Manager

Prepared by: Joelle Fockler, MMC, City Clerk
Joelle.fockler@cityofconcord.org
(925) 671-3390

Subject: **Consider Approval of Letter of Support to Representative DeSaulnier for House Resolution 616 Publically Exonerating the 50 African American Sailors of the United States Navy who were Tried and Convicted of Mutiny in Connection with their Service at the Port Chicago Naval Magazine in Concord, California, during World War II**

Report in Brief

Representatives Mark DeSaulnier and Barbara Lee co-sponsored House Resolution 616 publically exonerating the 50 African American sailors of the United States Navy who were tried and convicted of mutiny in connection with their service at the Port Chicago Naval Magazine in Concord, California, during World War II.

Local agencies are showing support of their effort to publically exonerate these brave sailors by sending letters of support to Representatives DeSaulnier and Lee.

Recommended Action

Staff recommends that the City Council approve, execute, and direct staff to send the attached letter expressing support of House Resolution 616.

Background

In July 1944, at the Port Chicago Naval Magazine located on the shore of Suisun Bay in Concord, California, munitions loaded onto a cargo vessel bound for the Pacific Theater detonated. Massive explosions destroyed everything in the vicinity. The blasts were felt as far away as Nevada. Every building in Port Chicago and many in Concord were

damaged or destroyed. Smoke and fire extended nearly two miles into the air. It was the deadliest home front disaster of World War II.

In 1944, the armed forces were still segregated. All of the enlisted men loading munitions at the site were African American, while the officers overseeing them were white. Most had no training or experience in ship loading or safe handling of munitions. The officers held competitions to see which unit could load the most explosives in the shortest time.

The explosions killed or injured 710 people, 435 of whom were African American. Of those, 202 died and 233 were injured. This single incident accounted for more than 15 percent of all African American Naval casualties in WWII.

Just weeks after the explosion, the surviving sailors were ordered to continue loading munitions under the same unsafe conditions. When the surviving 258 African American sailors understandably refused to return to work, 50 were charged with mutiny and convicted. Although their sentences were eventually commuted, their mutiny convictions have remained. Under today's standards of review, these convictions would never have happened.

Financial Impact

No fiscal impact.

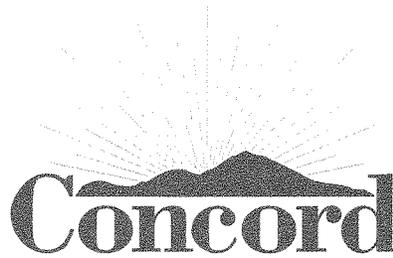
Public Contact

The City Council Agenda was posted.

Attachments

1. Letter to Representative DeSaulnier

CITY OF CONCORD
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Concord, California 94519-2578
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CITY COUNCIL
Laura M. Hoffmeister, Mayor
Ronald E. Leone, Vice Mayor
Edi E. Birsan
Timothy S. Grayson
Daniel C. Helix

Tim McGallian, City Treasurer
Valerie J. Barone, City Manager

May 24, 2016

Representative Mark De Saulnier
101 Ygnacio Valley Road
Suite #210
Walnut Creek, CA 94596

Dear Representative DeSaulnier:

The Concord City Council would like to express support for your House Resolution 616, co-sponsored by Representative Barbara Lee, to publicly exonerate the 50 African American sailors of the United States Navy who were tried and convicted of mutiny in connection with their service at the Port Chicago Naval Magazine in Concord, California, during World War II.

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convicted, although their sentences were eventually commuted. However, their mutiny convictions have remained. Under today's standards of review, these convictions would never have happened.

This letter was reviewed by the City Council at the May 24, 2016 Council meeting and we support your effort to publicly exonerate these brave sailors who served our country and should be recognized for their courage.

Sincerely,

Mayor Laura Hoffmeister

Vice Mayor Ronald E. Leone

Councilmember Edi E. Birsan

Councilmember Timothy S. Grayson

Councilmember Daniel C. Helix

cc: Concord City Council
Representative Barbara Lee
Senator Steve Glazer
Assemblymember Susan A. Bonilla
Valerie Barone, City Manager
Congressional Black Caucus
NAACP