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THE PORT CHICAGO DISASTER AND ITS AFTERMATH

A Study of Collective Stress

BY

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DISSERTATION

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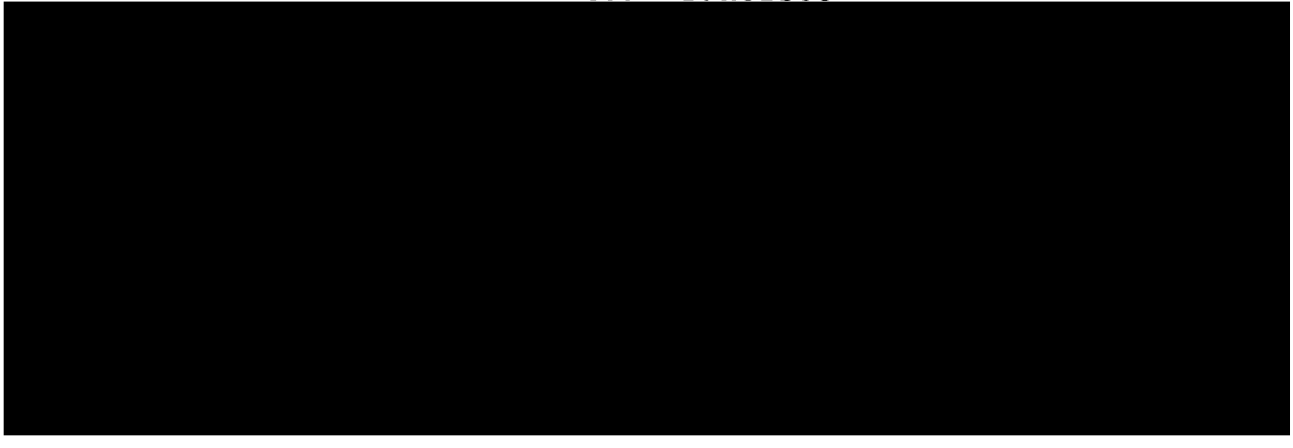

THE PORT CHICAGO DISASTER AND ITS AFTERMATH:
A Study of Collective Stress
by Robert L. Allen

DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

Military institutions "funnel" individuals through a series of stages (induction, training, duty assignment) whose purpose is to transform the citizen into an effective soldier. Following Robert Merton's means/ends paradigm, stresses may develop when the norms and goals of the primary group conflict with those of the institution of which it is a part, creating the possibility of rebellion by members of the primary group. However, the rebellious response may be postponed by the emergence of accommodating processes in the primary group. Individuals may accommodate themselves to dangerous and disagreeable work situations through the social psychological processes of "discounting" of risks and "balancing" grievances against perceived benefits. These accommodating processes emerge in the course of social interaction and enable individuals to reduce cognitive dissonance. However, if these processes are disrupted, as in a disaster, then this can shatter the constraints on collective protest and resistance, and result in rebellion.

This conclusion is based on a study of the Port Chicago (California) disaster of July 17, 1944, in which 320 U.S. sailors -- most of them black Navy enlisted men -- were killed when an ammunition ship they were loading suddenly exploded. The incredible blast wrecked the naval base and heavily

damaged the small town of Port Chicago located 1½ miles away. It was the worst home-front disaster of World War II. When the Navy ordered the surviving ammunition loaders to return to work most of them refused, expressing fear of another explosion. Eventually, 50 of these men were singled out, charged with mutiny and convicted.

The research into this incident involved qualitative sociological analysis of official documents and oral histories collected from survivors by the author.

Virginia F. Adams

"To be shot down is bad for the body," said Simple,
"but to be Jim Crowed is worse for the spirit."

"Simple on Military Integration"
by Langston Hughes

Crisis situations... are significant objects of sociological inquiry in that they constitute crucibles out of which innovations develop.

Tomatsu Shibutani, Improvised News

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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION: The Research Problem

During World War II a U.S. Naval Ammunition Magazine located on the Suisun Bay at Port Chicago, California, was the most important facility for shipping munitions to U.S. armed forces in the Pacific. On the night of July 17, 1944, two transport vessels were loading ammunition at the base. Witnesses said that suddenly there was a small blast followed quickly by a gigantic explosion. The incredible blast destroyed the two ships and the loading pier, wrecked the navel base, and heavily damaged the small town of Port Chicago, located 1½ miles away. Some 320 American sailors were killed instantly by the explosion. In addition, several hundred military personnel and civilians were injured, and millions of dollars in property damage was caused by the huge blast. Windows were shattered in towns 20 miles away, and the glare of the explosion could be seen in San Francisco, some 35 miles distant. It was the worst home-front disaster of World War II. In fact, it was probably the most powerful man-made explosion prior to the atomic bomb detonated over Hiroshima a year later.

Of the Navy personnel who died in the disaster, most -- some 200 ammunition loaders -- were black. Indeed, every individual manually handling ammunition at Port Chicago was black, and every commissioned officer white. This was the standard operating procedure in the racially segregated Navy at that time.

Three weeks after the disaster, 328 of the surviving ammunition loaders were ordered back to work loading ammunition; but 258 of these men refused to work, saying they feared another explosion. All of the refusers were immediately incarcerated and during the next few days naval officers interrogated the resisters and threatened them with being shot. Finally, 50 men were singled out, charged with mutiny, court-martialed, convicted, and given sentences ranging from 8 to 15 years imprisonment.

A letter-writing and petition campaign to gain the release of the men was organized by the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund (NAACP LDF) which criticized the severity of the charges and the sentences. U.S. Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall, then a special council for the NAACP LDF, headed up the legal team which appealed the court-martial decision. Finally, after more than a year of public pressure and a biting legal attack by Marshall -- and the ending of the war with victory for the Allies -- the Navy relented and announced that it would set aside the remainder of the sentences of the "Port Chicago Boys." Subsequently the men were released from prison, but they were all immediately sent overseas for a year of "rehabilitation" before being discharged from the Navy. In effect, they were sent into exile before being allowed to return to their homes and families. Thus ended one of the most dramatic but least known incidents of World War II.

My interest in the Port Chicago incident was initially aroused several years ago while I was doing research on another project. I happened to discover a copy of a small pamphlet entitled, "Mutiny? The real story of how the Navy branded 50 fear-shocked sailors as mutineers." On the cover was a photograph of a group of black sailors who were handling what appeared to be ammunition cannisters. The pamphlet was published in March, 1945 by the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund. It recounted the Port Chicago disaster and disputed charges of an alleged mutiny by some 50 black seaman. The pamphlet had been published to publicize efforts to gain the release of the men from prison.

I had never heard of Port Chicago, and I was intrigued by what had occurred there. When I turned to standard historical reference works to check the facts I found that there were only brief mentions and apparently no substantial scholarly investigations of this incident.

As I read old news clippings and the few published accounts that were available, I found myself fascinated by various sociological aspects of the events at Port Chicago. To begin with, the race relations dynamics were of interest. Given that Port Chicago was a segregated base, was the "mutiny" actually an act of protest against discrimination? If so, what social psychological processes were involved in the shift from accommodation to protest among this group of men, and what was the relationship between this incident and

larger processes affecting race relations in the Navy and American society in general? From the standpoint of disaster theory the event was also intriguing. The prevailing models of disaster behavior predict a "return to normal" behavior by actors following a disaster. But the Port Chicago explosion was followed by a confrontation involving hundreds of men. What was different about the Port Chicago situation such that the expected behavior trajectory was dramatically altered?

The U.S. Navy, as a military institution, channels or "funnels" individuals through a series of stages (induction, training, duty assignment) whose purpose is to transform the citizen into an effective soldier (Coates & Pellegrin, 287f). But this process is seldom smooth since civilian values (e.g., the view that one has a right to refuse unreasonable demands) may conflict with military expectations (e.g., the military view that the reasonableness of orders may not be questioned). Individuals may resist and seek to expand their options in the face of the narrowing of behavioral options brought about by the funneling process. In such cases, sanctions of greater or lesser severity will be applied to overcome their resistance.

Thus the role of citizen-soldier has inherent contradictions which may manifest themselves forcefully during periods of stress. Indeed, the Port Chicago events hinted that actions resulting from such contradictions

could, at least momentarily, render the military chain of command virtually powerless. Power may inhere in the social structure but power is also subject to change through social redefinition by actors.

It therefore seemed that the key to understanding the Port Chicago events was to be found in the actors' interpretations of the unfolding situation. The "mutiny," as an instance of collective behavior, could emerge only if there were a consensus, a collective definition of the situation, that allowed the men to act in opposition to the will of the officers. For this reason my sociological interest focused primarily on the black enlisted men at Port Chicago, especially those who engaged in the work stoppage. How did these men perceive and interpret the situations which they encountered? What structural constraints affected the interpretive process? How did a consensus not to return to work emerge within this group?

Eventually I learned that many of the records pertaining to the disaster and the "mutiny" were now declassified and were available in various repositories including the National Archives, the Library of Congress, the archives of the U.S. Navy's Judge Advocate General's Office, the Navy History Library and Operational Archives at the Washington Navy Yard, the Roosevelt Presidential Library in Hyde Park, N.Y., the Historical Office of the Naval Construction Battalion at Port Hueneme, California, and the San Bruno Federal Records Center. I also gained access to

NAACP LDF records concerning the appeal and public campaign.

Over a period of time I accumulated thousands of pages of documents, including the court-martial transcript, the appeals brief, the transcript of the Navy's official inquiry into the causes of the explosion, Red Cross reports, and several files of internal Navy Department memoranda and related documents.

I also discovered that there is one book-length account of the Port Chicago incident. Entitled No Share of Glory and authored by Robert E. Pearson, this book was published before the primary documents were declassified. The author apparently relied chiefly on newspaper accounts. The book lacks any substantial treatment of how the black enlisted sailors viewed the situation at Port Chicago.

Although information from all these sources was extremely helpful, most of these materials presented the official Navy point of view and offered very little information or insight concerning the attitudes and behavior of the sailors who engaged in the work stoppage. Consequently, my next step was to request the help of the Navy Department in locating Port Chicago survivors whom I might interview.

A variety of strategies were employed to locate survivors, the most successful of which were blind mailings arranged through the help of the Navy Department. (See Methodological Appendix for a full discussion.) Eventually, I conducted in-depth interviews with nine survivors.

My interviews with these survivors generally confirmed that the men were aware of the dangers of the work at Port Chicago. Several spontaneously recounted incidents that reflected their recognition of the risks. Some men also described unsafe working practices which increased the danger. It also became clear that the enlisted men had a host of grievances concerning racial discrimination at the base.

I began my coding and analysis of the interviews with no definite hypothesis in mind. I was interested in investigating the processes through which the "mutiny" developed, and I suspected that these would be related to grievances about working conditions. Consequently, as I began coding the interviews the first categories to emerge fell under such headings as "expectations" (with regard to Navy life), "attitude" (toward officers), "images" (of the work at Port Chicago), "grievances." As I coded and analyzed "grievances" a set of processes for coping with grievances emerged, including "griping," "individual defiance," "confronting," "apathy" ("nothing can be done"). These were also coded.

Since my sample was small it was not possible to pursue theoretical sampling (Glaser & Strauss, 45f) to fully elaborate these categories and their properties. I also had no separate comparison group for checking and developing my results. For a time these constraints presented an insurmountable barrier to further analysis.

However, as I reviewed the data I was struck by the apparent lack of significant acts of mass resistance before the explosion. The enlisted men certainly had serious grievances and other matters about which they had long been disturbed, but aside from some individual acts of defiance and one brief work stoppage there was no evidence of any previous collective action. Why? Was there something in the social structure or social processes at Port Chicago that inhibited such a response? Obviously, the social structural fact of being in the military implied certain objective constraints on social action. But there was no change in the men's military status before and after the explosion, so this fact was not very helpful as an explanatory variable.

In the literature on social movements and collective behavior there is general agreement that a precipitating incident or problem situation must occur to induce collective action in response (Toch, 7-11; Piven & Cloward, 14; Blumer, 171-179). Indeed, Blumer argues that the social unrest following such a disturbance is characterized by increased excitability and suggestibility of proximate individuals with the result that the unrest spreads rapidly through the group. Previously established ways of acting now appear as inappropriate or inadequate and new behavior emerges. Implicit in this model of the emergence of collective behavior is the idea that old modes of behaving or responding are discredited and discarded as new modes

appear. The model implies further that the continuation of the old modes of behavior might well preclude the emergence of the new. Thus, the breakdown of the old modes is a logically prior and necessary step in the process of emergent behavior.

This insight proved to be of crucial importance in the analysis of my data. It suggested that for the work stoppage to take place there must not only have been motivating "grievances," but there must also have been a breakdown in old modes of thinking and behaving which had inhibited collective action to redress the grievances. If such inhibitory processes existed, that would explain why there was no major prior work stoppage. Moreover, this insight also implied that time was a critical parameter in my analysis, and that the method of constant comparative analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 105f) could be applied before and after the explosion to the same group of respondents.

I now turned my original research question around and asked what processes could have inhibited the development of a work stoppage before the explosion? Re-analyzing the interview data from this new perspective I soon "discovered" many descriptions of two social-psychological processes by which the black ammunition loaders, in effect, accommodated themselves to what was in fact a dangerous and disagreeable work situation. Ironically, I had read these descriptions before, but they had no significance until I was sensitized by turning the question around.

The two key processes of accommodation were what I have termed discounting and balancing. By discounting I refer to a process in which the enlisted men came to minimize, to discount, the apparent risks involved in loading munitions. Balancing refers to a process by which the men balanced their grievances against the perceived benefits of Navy life. Discounting risks and balancing grievances were coping tactics that served to reduce tension and minimize confrontations between enlisted men and officers over grievances and the dangers of the work.

This is not to imply that discounting and balancing were the only coping tactics which emerged among the enlisted men. There is evidence from my interviews and the documents that some of the men confronted the officers with their concerns about working conditions and grievances. Other men went AWOL or engaged in other acts of individual defiance. However, all of my informants but one described incidents of discounting and balancing in their experiences at Port Chicago, and I have also found some evidence of these processes in the documentary record.

The enlisted men were confronted with a classic "double-bind" situation. They found themselves in a dangerous work situation, while at the same time, because they were under military control, there appeared to be no way to change or get out of the situation. Under such conditions individuals experience cognitive dissonance, a feeling that two experiential elements are in conflict or

contradiction. According to Festinger, individuals will seek to reduce dissonance by changing the situation or changing their behavior (including attitudes and opinions) (Festinger, 18-28). Behavioral or attitudinal change will occur if situational change is blocked. This was confirmed by the events at Port Chicago. Locked into a bad situation which could not be changed, discounting and balancing emerged as social processes by which many of the enlisted men changed their perception of the situation and thereby reduced the dissonant stresses they encountered at Port Chicago.

The explosion disrupted these processes by confirming the mortal dangers of the work. It was no longer possible to discount the danger since the danger had been so horribly demonstrated. As the men talked among themselves in the days following the explosion a new definition of the situation emerged which asserted that the risks involved in handling ammunition were unacceptable. Moreover, things were made worse by the fact that many of the survivors expected to be granted survivors' leaves to visit their families before being reassigned to regular duty. Such leaves were not granted, creating a major new grievance -- and one which could not be balanced by the rapidly diminishing benefits of Navy life.

Thus, from a social-psychological standpoint, my findings indicate that the explosion and its aftermath undermined the coping processes that had enabled the

ammunition loaders to tolerate the stresses of a dangerous and difficult working environment. In the post-disaster situation these processes were no longer appropriate nor effective in reducing dissonance. In essence, the coping processes affirmed that "things were not as bad as they appeared." But the awesome explosion and its aftermath showed that in reality things were even worse than they at first appeared, thereby negating the old modes of coping and opening the way for new behavior. As we shall see in the chapters that follow, the breakdown of these processes played an important, if not sole, part in the development of the work stoppage.

CHAPTER 1

BLACKS IN THE UNITED STATES NAVY*

Black men have found themselves in every American war since the war for independence, although black spokesmen have not always been enthusiastic supports of America's foreign adventures, especially during the Philippines campaign at the turn of the century and, more recently, the Vietnam war. Black men were never welcomed into the military with open arms; their participation was often allowed only after a fierce struggle with a racist military and political bureaucracy, and the tasks black soldiers were given were sharply restricted. Black men recruited into the military usually found themselves discriminated against and employed chiefly as laborers and menials serving the needs of white troops and officers. For example, during the Civil Was it was only after a series of military reversals and a strident campaign by black and white abolitionists that the North agreed to use black troops. Some 500,000 blacks contributed their services to the Union cause; 300,000 of these were employed as servant and laborers. Or again: of some 380,000 black troops who served in World War I, 340,000 were assigned to labor battalions, stevedore batallions, supply regiments and other service units.

*Uncited quotations in this and subsequent chapters are taken from transcriptions of interviews with survivors conducted by the author.

Black soldiers were essentially the day laborers of the American military machine. Indeed, black soldiers have found that their position in the military parallels their position in civilian life: black men are a source of cheap, subordinated labor in both domains. Indeed, if we think of the military as an employer, then the black struggle within the military has been in part a struggle for the democratization of labor usage. Segregated units, discrimination in pay, discrimination in promotions and ratings, the lack of black officers -- these and other grievances of black soldiers correspond closely to the grievances of black workers in civilian life. But whereas civilian workers may resort to various forms of protest, including strikes, to improve their conditions; the forms of protest allowed in the military are virtually non-existent -- protest being instead treated as insubordination, refusal to obey orders, or even mutiny, and punished accordingly. Thus, protest and resistance in the military has been much more risky and difficult to organize.

Many examples of black men being victimized by racist forces -- such as the Brownsville case of 1906 and the mob attacks on black soldiers during and after World War I -- are relatively well known, but much less familiar are the instances of active resistance on the part of black servicemen. These acts of resistance are a hidden part of the heritage of popular struggle against racial oppression. The Port Chicago rebellion is perhaps the most spectacular

example during World War II, but Port Chicago was not an isolated incident. Within the Navy alone there were several other examples of mass protest and resistance: A two-day hunger strike by 1,000 Black SeaBees in March 1945 to protest Jim Crow practices and the lack of promotions; the so-called Guam riot of December 1944 in which black sailors armed themselves to resist harassment by white shore patrolmen and marines; and the case of 15 SeaBees who in October 1943 were dishonorably discharged because they dared to speak out against discriminatory treatment in the Navy. The Army, too, was wracked by frequent racial disorders during the war.

Those instances of protest and resistance cannot be separated from the state of the black struggle and the conditions which black servicemen encountered in the military. On the eve of World War II black America was in a watchful, skeptical mood. The Garvey movement had re-awakened a sense of racial pride in many Afro-Americans, and the labor and radical movements of the Thirties -- in which many blacks participated -- had demonstrated the importance of collective action. Italy's invasion of Ethiopia in 1935 and the rise of Hitler's racist regime had attracted black attention to the developing international conflict, but economic depression and rampant racial discrimination at home continued to pre-occupy black leaders, the black press, and the black community generally, and shaped the black response to the war. Unlike World War I, in which a leader,

such as W.E.B. DuBois could urge the black community to "forget our special grievances and close ranks shoulder to shoulder with our white fellow citizens...fighting for democracy," World War II was from the very beginning regarded by most black spokesmen as a struggle on two fronts. A. Phillip Randolph took the lead in January, 1941, when he began organizing the March on Washington movement to protest discrimination in the war industries and segregation in the armed forces. Early in 1942 the Pittsburgh Courier inaugurated its immensely popular "Double V" campaign, calling for victory over the fascists abroad and victory over racism at home. Later that year the Courier published the results of an opinion poll which found that almost 90% of those questioned felt that blacks should not soft-pedal demands for complete freedom; a survey of 1,000 blacks in New York found that more than 1/3 of those interviewed believed it was more important to make democracy work at home than to defeat Germany and Japan.

The impatient and skeptical mood of black America was further apparent in the refusal of blacks in many communities to meekly accept discrimination in housing and employment, or police brutality, or harassment by white mobs. In the summer of 1943 these issues sparked racial disturbances in Los Angeles, Detroit and New York -- the latter precipitated by an incident in which a white policeman shot a black soldier in Harlem. Just a few short miles from Port Chicago, in December 1942 the lack of

adequate recreational facilities for black servicemen in the town of Vallejo, California, led to a clash between black and white sailors in which several men were injured. In sum, as America entered World War II black people were in no mood to put aside their grievances, and instead were actively opposing every manifestation of racism.

A brief look at the situation of blacks in the Navy offers further insights. Black men have served in the U.S. Navy since the American Revolution, but following World War I the Navy attempted to exclude blacks altogether, replacing them with Filipinos (Stewards). The Navy's growing need for stewards and messmen led to a reversal of this policy in 1932, but black recruits were still limited in numbers and relegated to the most menial tasks. There were no black officers and the number of black sailors above messman level was negligible. Black organizations protested this situation but changes did not occur until the advent of World War II. Historian L.D. Reddick has suggested that during the course of the war the Navy's racial policies evolved through three stages (Reddick, 207). In the first stage the Navy virtually excluded blacks except in the messman branch. As manpower shortages developed and criticism by black leaders and organizations mounted the Navy in April 1942 reluctantly agreed to accept blacks for general service but within a completely segregated system of training and assignments. Finally, in June 1945, partly as a result of rebellions such as occurred at Guam and Port

Chicago and continued pressure by black organizations and the press, the Navy announced that it was abolishing segregated training camps and assignments. To be sure, the manpower needs created by the war provided the motive force behind this progression from exclusion to segregation to integration, but Reddick concluded that it was the struggles undertaken by black sailors themselves, supported by the press and black people's organizations, which set the pace and direction of change.

With so much said by way of describing the general social and military context, let me now turn to an examination of the Port Chicago rebellion itself, a case which has received scant attention from historians and social scientists.

ENTERING THE NAVY

The men who later served at Port Chicago were both draftees and volunteers. That is, some men entered the Navy accidentally or incidentally while others' entry was intentional. (There was no apparent difference in the attitudes of draftees vs. volunteers, although the sample was too small for statistical analysis.)

For some men it was largely "by chance" that they ended up in the Navy. Joseph Small*, who was later to be accused of being a "ring leader" of the mutiny, described in an interview how he entered the Navy:

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*Mr. Small agreed that his real name could be used in this dissertation.

> I was drafted, and the Navy was a "by chance" situation, because there were two of us, close friends. When we went through our physical examination the doctor asked us which one wanted to go into the army, and neither one of us answered. He just grabbed a stamp and went "bam". He looked at it and then said "All right, move out soldier". My buddy happened to be ahead of me and so he got the Army and I got the Navy.

"I didn't have any choice," another draftee said. "I wanted to go in the Army. I think it was about 13 of us that went down to the induction center at the same time and all of us was running right behind one another -- we were all trying to stay close so we could be together. No two went to the same place. When they got to me they just sent me over to the Navy office there and the next thing I know I'm in the Navy. I didn't want to be in it."

Another draftee selected the Navy as the lesser evil. "They told me I had a choice between the Marine Corps and the Navy. The man said, 'Hey, we'll take a skinny guy like you, fatten you up and make a fine Marine out of you. And remember, the Marines are the first to land, they'll make history right away.' I said, 'First to land?' He said, 'Yeah.' So I said 'Where's the Navy?' And that's how I came by the Navy."

Some of the draftees did indeed want to be in the Navy -- the Navy was their first choice. But as one man explained, there was really little chance for draftees to determine which branch of the service they were sent into: "The branch that needed you the most at that time, that's where you were sent."

Some volunteers also found themselves in the Navy quite by accident. "I was going to volunteer for the Army," one Port Chicago survivor recounted. "I wanted to get into the Army cavalry. But on the day I went down to volunteer, the Army recruiting office was closed. I guess they closed at 5 p.m. and my father and I got there shortly after five. I peered around the corner and the Navy office was standing wide open. I shouted to the guy down there, 'Will the Army open up any more today?' He waved to me and said 'Come on down here.' And I did."

Another man volunteered for the Navy in 1942 when he was only sixteen years old. He wanted to follow in the footsteps of his four older brothers who had all enlisted in the Navy. He managed to get in, and the fact that he was underage was not discovered for seven months -- whereupon he was promptly discharged. He re-enlisted in 1944.

Most of these young draftees and enlistees were from the rural areas and towns of the South, or from the northern cities. Most were in their teens or early twenties. Some were high school graduates and a very few had attended college. All were sent to the U.S. Naval Training Center at Great Lakes, Illinois.

GREAT LAKES TRAINING CENTER

Located on a sprawling facility near Lake Michigan and 40 miles north of Chicago, Great Lakes was this country's

largest naval training center, and the only naval training facility for black sailors during World War II.

According to an official Navy history of Great Lakes (GLH), the facility was formally commissioned in July, 1911. It had a training capacity of 1,500 men. In World War I the center grew until it became a community of 50,000 people, and in World War II it included a population of 100,000.

After Pearl Harbor, new construction was undertaken at Great Lakes to enlarge the station. The expansion program added eight new training camps, including one -- named Robert Smalls* -- set aside for training of black recruits. Each of the new training camps housed 4,500 men.

Lt. Commander D.W. Armstrong, son of the founder of Hampton Institute, was sent to head up the program to train black recruits at Great Lakes. The program had been established following the Navy Department's decision in early 1942 to accept black men for general ratings outside of the Steward's Branch.

"There was no disagreement on the policy of segregation," reports the official history of Great Lakes (p. 264). "That was DuPers [Bureau of Personnel] policy, and no voice was raised at Great Lakes against segregation until late in the war. In 1942 and 1943 there seems to have been no doubt about the wisdom of the segregation policy."

*Robert Smalls was a black Civil War hero. A pilot of a Confederate transport vessel, he ran the ship out of Charleston Harbor in 1862 and delivered it to a Union squadron. Smalls was subsequently made a pilot in the northern Navy.

Although there was no opposition -- from the officers -- to the policy of segregation, Armstrong was accused by hardliners of being "not tough enough" and lax about disciplinary problems. Other officers thought that Armstrong favored "special treatment" for blacks, for example, by "having the Negro recruits learn and recite a creed dealing with the advancement of the Negro race, and having them sing spirituals en masse on Sunday nights" (GLH, 265).

In 1943 Armstrong established a special slacker squad to mete out severe punishment to "troublesome" black recruits. In accordance with the policy of segregation, black regiments competed only among themselves, never with white regiments. Moreover, Armstrong apparently believed that blacks were not qualified to compete against whites for roosters and in school selection.

Special segregated service schools were set up for black recruits at Camp Smalls. Schools for Gunners Mates, Radiomen, Quartermasters, Signalmen, Yeomen, Storekeepers, and Cooks and Bakers were established in 1942 followed by others in 1943. White officers and, for the most part, white instructors provided training at the schools. It was estimated that as many as one-third of all black recruits attended service schools at Great Lakes or elsewhere.

Black recruits were of special concern to naval intelligence. The official history of Great Lakes reported that

> Station intelligence watched the Negro regiments carefully. In August 1942 an inflammatory leaflet issues by the Colored Americans National Organization was found in Camp Smalls. In June 1943 when there were race riots in Detroit the Commanding Officer ordered special vigilance. In the next six months several Negroes were investigated for doubtful loyalty and communism. One was found to be 'intensely interested' in problems of the Negro; others were interested in 'elevating the status of the Negro race.' One Yoeman third class was 'extremely dissatisfied with the inability of Negroes to advance in the Navy.' Investigation led to the transfer of a few Negroes. Intelligence Office records, however, reveal nothing to be alarmed about. It appears that white regiments could not very well have assayed less in the way of subversive ideas (GLH, 270).

TRAINING AND EXPECTATIONS

Recruits were trained at Great Lakes for two to three months before being shipped out for regular duty. According to my informants, the training at Camp Smalls included training in personal hygiene, cleaning of the barracks, marching and drilling, and practice on the rifle range. Those who were selected for the service schools also received training in specialized ratings. There was also an athletics program in which the recruits participated, including swimming and rowing. There was no training in ammunition handling.

Most of the young recruits arrived at Great Lakes full of curiosity and enthusiasm. Most of them also expected to be trained to go to sea, to become sailors. But this expectation was not to be met for the vast majority of the

early recruits. As several informants pointed out, the training consisted mostly of marching and drilling and standing guard duty, with little or no preparation for going to sea. Moreover, some of the northern recruits were immediately disillusioned by the practice of segregation at Great Lakes. "This was where I first ran into discrimination," recalled one man who grew up in Chicago. "When we went to eat, they had a big white house out there where we went. There was two lines. Obviously you stood in one line because all your friends was in this line. So you look around there and there's another line over there that's all white. They were going to eat upstairs on the main floor. All the blacks were going downstairs. It dawned on me that these people were discriminating against me. You see, I grew up in the black belt of Chicago where I wasn't affected by it as much. This was my first experience of racial prejudice in the Navy."

After completion of their basic training the men were shipped out for regular duty. Most would be shipped to ammunition bases, but none of them knew this. In fact, the men had no idea where they were being shipped. The war time situation made secrecy absolutely necessary. "A slip of the lip will sink a ship," they were told.

ANALYTIC SUMMARY

From a social-psychological perspective it will be useful to summarize the foregoing discussion in terms of (1) social structural conditions encountered, (2) expectations and definitions of the situation, and (3) emergent processes of interaction.

Social structural conditions. The men entering the Navy after the outbreak of the war in the Pacific encountered a situation of wartime mobilization, with the need for rapid build-up of manpower and secrecy of operations. The urgent need for manpower led the Navy to accept blacks for general service and for the first time large numbers of blacks were drafted into the Navy. However, this increased use of black men occurred within a system of completely segregated training and assignments. This policy of racial segregation, while not questioned by the officers, was to be a source of resentment among the black recruits.

The need for secrecy meant that recruits did not know where they would be assigned upon completion of training. Consequently there was much speculation about probable assignments, and a set of expectations developed which were to prove to be unrealistic.

Expectations/definitions. With black leaders and the black press calling for an end to racial segregation in the armed forces, the opening of general ratings in the navy to

black men in 1942 was favorably received in the black community. Indeed, the Navy received a flood of inquiries from black men requesting information about the new opportunities in the Navy (GLH, 269). Many men volunteered for service in the Navy with the expectation that they would be trained as sailors and sent to sea. Many draftees expressed the same hope. The notion was spreading that the Navy would provide a young man with training in a skilled trade, as well as the romance of sea duty.

But these hopes began to crumble when the recruits arrived at the Great Lakes training center. The first shock came when the men encountered the practice of southern-style segregation and discrimination which was the official policy at Great Lakes. Northern recruits especially resented the segregated barracks, training facilities and social activities.

Upon completion of their training the men were to come in for another rude surprise when most of them -- including many with specialized training -- ended up loading ammunition at segregated stations such as Port Chicago. All in all, instead of the broadening of opportunities which the men hoped for upon entering the Navy, what they actually experienced was a steady narrowing of options over time.

Interaction processes. Most of the black recruits attempted to accommodate themselves to the conditions they found at Great Lakes. For some men, living conditions at Great Lakes (and later Port Chicago) represented a

considerable improvement over the impoverished home situations from which they came. For these men the better living conditions effectively counter-balanced any grievances they might have about segregation. Other men were not so accommodating. For them the clash between expectations and the actual situation encountered was especially sharp, and occurred at a time when the black community generally was growing impatient with the practices of discrimination and segregation. Some of these men reacted angrily to the situation, either verbally or by engaging in acts of individual defiance. These reactions were handled as disciplinary problems by the officers, who regarded them as being due to recalcitrance or the influence of subversive ideas.

Interestingly, the conflict between expectations and reality and the interactions provoked by this conflict were commented upon by one of the first black officers to serve at Great Lakes. Commissioning of black officers began in March, 1944. In 1945 one of these officers, R.E. Goodwin, was interviewed by a Navy historian who recorded Goodwin's views:

> Goodwin believed... that in some quarters at least there was a tendency to make too many promises to the Negroes, which led inevitably to disillusionment and poor morale. He felt that Negroes should have been told that they would be Seamen Second Class eight or nine months, that their jobs would be hard and that many of them would handle ammunition. If told the truth, in advance, he said, the Negroes would have assumed responsibilities placed upon them with better spirit (GLH, 281-2).

Ironically, as will be seen, it was the rebelliousness of black recruits who went through Great Lakes during the first half of World War II which was partially responsible for promting the Navy to change its racial policies -- bringing the actual situation more in line with the men's original expectations. "Segregation seems to have been taken for granted in 1942," reports the official history of Great Lakes, "but no one had much to say for it in 1945 (GLH, 277). In accordance with a general change in Navy policy, integrated training was introduced at Great Lakes in the latter half of 1945.

What this summary points to is the engendering of discrepancies in social life when large, bureaucratic organizations, which partly reflect the environing society but which are slow to change, receive participants whose expectations differ from those of the organization. Training programs employed by the organization are in essence socialization processes whose purpose is to reshape the behavior of trainees and funnel their behavior into institutionally acceptable modes.

But as Merton has noted, aberrant behavior will occur when there is a "dissociation between culturally prescribed aspirations and socially structured avenues for realizing these aspirations" (Merton, 188). At a time when the expectations of the black community were undergoing rapid change, the Navy changed its racial policies only slowly and

in response to dire manpower needs. There was consequently a sharp disjuncture between the expectations of newly inducted black recruits and the reality they encountered. Under such circumstances, as Merton has noted (194), retreatism and rebellion are likely responses to this institutional funneling.

This study will extend Merton's analysis by examining the emergence of intervening processes which may give the appearance of conformity and postpone the outbreak of rebellion. In other words, a means/ends disjuncture may not result immediately in rebellion, especially when there are ever-arching goals (e.g. winning the war) and severe structural constraints (e.g. military authority) which affect all actors. In this situation, subgoals, as will be seen (e.g. ending discrimination and unsafe working conditions), may be temporarily subordinated to the main goal through the development of accommodating processes.

CHAPTER 2

WORKING AND COPING AT PORT CHICAGO

BACKGROUND OF PORT CHICAGO NAVAL MAGAZINE

Despite the disaster of 1944, by the end of World War II the U.S. Naval Magazine at Port Chicago had become "the principal ammunition loading port and storage point for ammunition and high explosives on the Pacific Coast" (PCH, 15). Since the beginning of operations in December, 1942, enlisted men at Port Chicago had loaded some 710,000 tons of ammunition and high explosives on vessels for shipment overseas (Ibid., 13). Port Chicago was enormously important to the war effort.

As the prospect of war with Japan loomed on the horizon and units of the U.S. Fleet were transferred to the Pacific, the need for additional ammunition shipping facilities on the West Coast became urgent. A board was appointed by the Commandant of the Twelfth Naval District, which included the San Francisco Bay Area, to survey all tidal areas of the Bay and determine the best location for a new naval magazine that could relieve the strain on the ammunition depot at Mare Island (COI, 869). Two days after the attack on Pearl Harbor the board issued its report. The site of Port Chicago was selected because of its remoteness from major population centers, accessibility to deep water, and two major railway lines were close at hand. The base was to be constructed on the site of an old shipyard less than two

miles from the quiet little town of Port Chicago.

Construction started in February, 1942, and on December 8, 1942, a year and a day after the attack on Pearl Harbor, the first ship arrived at the new base for ammunition loading.

SITUATIONAL CONSTRAINTS: PROBLEMS AND PRESSURES

Lack of Trained Officers

From the outset the new naval magazine was beset with difficulties. One of these was the lack of trained and experienced officers. In testimony before the naval court of inquiry that investigated the explosion it was revealed that many of the officers at Port Chicago had had no previous training or experience in shiploading, handling ammunition or commanding enlisted men (COI, 723, 751, 765, 778, 794, 814, 846, 888-896). Many of the officers were reservists called to active duty from civilian life and given only scanty training of any type. They, like the men under their command, had to "learn by doing" and this no doubt contributed to the likelihood of accidents occurring.

Lack of Trained Ammunition Loaders

The black enlisted men, who were the bulk of the labor force at Port Chicago, were also untrained for work they were expected to perform. Their training at Great Lakes had not included any instruction in ammunition loading. As new men arrived at the base the common practice was to assign a few experienced men to work with them until they had learned

their jobs.

There was no facility for giving winch operators special training until late in 1943 (PCH, 18). One man explained how he rather casually "picked up" the job of being a winch operator:

> Well, I was always adaptive with handling machines. Anything I saw anybody else do, after ten minutes I could pick it up myself. One day the winch operator got sick. He went down in the hold to sleep, and I just took over his job. When the petty officer came back he found me at the controls. 'Where's Harry?' he asked. 'Harry got sick.' He watched me for a few minutes, and that's how I got the job.

Another man, who was originally stationed at Mare Island, said that he was shipped to Port Chicago as a winch driver even though he had never operated a winch before. He simply held up his hand when an officer was taking names of men who could do storekeeping, carpentry and operate winches. Fortunately, he was able to learn to operate a winch before he was put to the test in an actual loading situation.

In this regard it is worth noting that weeks before the explosion the longshoreman's union reportedly warned the Navy that there would be a disaster if the Navy continued to use untrained seamen to load ammunition (Mutiny pamphlet, 7). The waterfront union would not allow a winch driver to handle ammunition unless he had had years of experience with other cargo. The union offered to send experienced longshoremen to train the Navy recruits in safe handling of ammunition but this offer was apparently ignored by the Navy.

Impact of Segregation on Morale

By 1942, as already noted in the first chapter, the Navy was modifying its racial policies under fire from civil rights groups and others. Blacks were still to be segregated but they were to be employed more widely in naval installations, particularly as laborers and industrial workers in shore facilities. Consequently, black enlisted personnel were assigned to Port Chicago to load ammunition. Captain Nelson Goss, the commanding officer of Mare Island of which Port Chicago was a subcommand, was not enthusiastic about receiving black personnel. In communications with higher authorities Gross had spelled out his personnel requirements. In the first place he opposed the use of contract stevedores on the grounds that they were too expensive, were subject to union rules regarding working conditions, were under the influence of union leaders, and might harbor saboteurs. The only other civilian laborers available, Goss noted, were Filipino and colored -- and "most of the men obtainable from these races do not compare favorably with those of the white race." Many of the available white civilians, he believed, were of "enemy alien descent" and therefore security risks. Consequently, Goss recommended that white enlisted personnel be employed at Port Chicago on grounds that they would be less expensive and more manageable than civilian stevedores (COI, 880-1, Exhibit 42).

Goss regarded the black enlisted men as a major

problem. He complained that the black recruits "arrived with a chip on their shoulder, if not, indeed, one on each shoulder." He concluded that the black recruits were under subversive influence because they "insisted they had volunteered for combat duty and they did definately resent being assigned to what they called 'laborer's work.'" Goss accused the black men of displaying a tendency to question or refuse to obey orders, which resulted in a high percentage of disciplinary actions against them. He also complained that the black personnel were poor workers, capable, in his opinion, of only 60 percent of the efficiency of white workers (COI, 881-2).

For their part many of the black enlisted men had an equally low opinion of the situation at Port Chicago. According to my informants, the men were disturbed by the racial discrimination evident in the organization of the base. They resented that only black men were assigned to what were essentially labor battalions charged with doing dangerous and back-breaking work. The men were also distressed by the fact that they could not get the ratings and promotions they thought they deserved. Aside from black petty officers, all the officers at Port Chicago were white. There was little room for upward mobility on a segregated base where it was not possible for a black man to become an officer, and there could be little lateral movement into specialized ratings because basically there was only one job to do -- load ammunition. Pay was another grievance. The

men knew that stevedores in civilian life earned considerably more than they were being paid. Finally, men complained about the lack of recreational facilities. There was little on the base itself (a recreation building was not completed until June, 1944, a month before the explosion), the town of Port Chicago was not friendly to blacks, and there was no military transportation from the base to Oakland or San Francisco, only a commercial bus.

Most men accommodated themselves as best they could to the situation. Some sought transfers to other stations. Others complained to petty officers or division officers. Still others vented their anger in acts of individual defiance, but such acts only further confirmed the officers in their habit of ignoring the men's grievances, treating them as simply disciplinary problems.

At least one group of Port Chicago men appealed for outside help: they drafted a letter in 1943 setting forth their grievances and pointing out that morale among the enlisted men had dropped to "an alarming depth." The men asked for a change in Navy policy so that they would have a fair chance to prove their capabilities. The letter ended prophetically: "We, the Negro sailors of the Naval Enlisted Barracks of Port Chicago, California, are waiting for a new deal. Will we wait in vain?" The letter was sent to Berkeley attorney Walter Gordon who forwarded it to NAACP headquarters where it joined a file of similar letters from other black men in the military (NAACP GOF).

Although the pier at Port Chicago was expected to handle two ships simultaneously it soon became apparent that the design was inadequate -- the loading platforms were too narrow for safe and efficient operation. For a period only one ship was loaded at a time. However, as the war in the Pacific expanded, Port Chicago was required to ship larger quantities of ammunition and explosives to the fighting forces (COI, 873). In its first year of operation, Port Chicago handled 142,261 tons of munitions, but by the end of the second year this figure had jumped to 220,316 tons.

Consequently, the decision was made to construct an additional pier to increase the loading capacity of Port Chicago. While the new pier was under construction "as an expedient to get two berths in operation at Pier #1 in the shortest possible time, it was concluded to widen both the inboard and outboard berths ten feet each, thereby permitting 20 feet loading platforms at each berth and enabling two ships to load simultaneously" (PCH, 9). In May 1944 the widening of the pier was completed and the workload on the pier was immediately doubled. Now two ships were being simultaneously loaded on either side of the pier, and twice as many men and considerably more ammunition were on the pier at a give time, leading to very crowded conditions (COI, 726, 737, 759, 790).

The pressures of the war also affected the pace of loading ammunition. Captain Goss determined that a goal of ten tons per hatch per hour should be the objective of the

loading crews (COI, 905-7). In practice this goal was seldom attained, and at the court of inquiry which investigated the explosion there would be considerable discussion of whether such an objective was unreasonably high and might have encouraged unsafe practices and rough handling in an effort to attain it.

For example, when Captain Merrill T. Kinne came on board as officer in charge of Port Chicago in April, 1944, he initiated the practice of posting daily average rates of loading for each division in the dock office (COI, 951). Kinne explained that he got the idea for the blackboard from the Navy practice of competition in target practice where scores are kept on the number of shots fired and hits made. "I have never felt," he stated "that it would be possible to maintain a satisfactory loading rate with the type of enlisted personnel assigned to Port Chicago unless every officer in a supervisory capacity keeps continually in mind the necessity for getting this ammunition out" (Ibid.).

It also came out during the court of inquiry that junior officers, according to one of them, "had received some rather sharp letters [from superiors] concerning our lack of efficiency from the standpoint of lack of tonnage" (COI, 731, 748, 754). Such criticism, combined with Kinne's blackboard, encouraged the junior officers to promote competition in loading ammunition between the various work divisions. When asked if the posting of tonnage figures encouraged competition and undue haste, the officer above

replied: "I would say there is a tendency to be a little rough in order to be a little quicker in stowing" (COI, 749). The officer added that at one time the divisions with highest efficiency in loading were rewarded with free movies (Ibid.). Several other junior officers agreed that competition between divisions existed and some admitted that the practice led to rough and unsafe handling of ammunition (COI, 770-2, 784, 808-813, 821-824, 850, 859, 866).

In general, the issue of safety of procedures was quite problematic at Port Chicago. To begin with, during the entire course of the war the Navy had no loading manual for the guidance of personnel engaged in handling high explosives. Instead, officers at Port Chicago relied on the so-called "Red Book" which codified a set of safety regulations originally prepared by the Interstate Commerce Commission (ICC) and designed primarily for peace-time movement of small quantities of explosives. Many of its provisions were inapplicable to war-time conditions confronted by the Navy (PCH, 29).

Moreover, there was no organized system for assuring that officers at Port Chicago were familiar with existing safety regulations (COI, 634) beyond occasional informal lectures by the commanding officers (COI, 731, 736). Safety regulations were posted on the pier but not in the enlisted men's barracks because Captain Kinne did not believe the black seamen were capable of comprehending the regulations (COI, 641, 951). Apparently only two formal lectures on

safety were given to the enlisted men in the entire history of Port Chicago before the explosion (COI, 634).

The problem of safety was made worse by conflict between the Mare Island - Port Chicago command and the Coast Guard over who would enforce safety regulations. Existing policy required that a Coast Guard detail be present at the pier to insure that safe handling procedures were followed. But the Navy commanders felt that a Coast Guard detail was unnecessary and would create confusion and disrupt loading. In October, 1943, as an "experiment," a Coast Guard detail was allowed on the pier at Port Chicago (COI, 912). The experiment failed. In the first place, the Coast Guard detail objected to the common practice at Port Chicago of moving bombs by rolling them and dropping bombs (a short distance) into place in the ship's hold. Alternative methods suggested by the Coast Guard representatives were considered "ridiculous" by the cargo placement officers at Port Chicago. For his part, Captain Goss felt that the presence of the Coast Guard detail led to a divided command on the pier and confused the enlisted men. The situation was not helped by the fact that the white Coast Guardsmen in effect stood guard over the black Navy enlisted men while not themselves doing any work. After a very short while the Coast Guard detail was withdrawn and ammunition loading at Port Chicago was allowed to proceed in its accustomed manner (COI, 530, 546, 556-9, 911-13).

THE WORK ROUTINE

By July, 1944, there were 1,431 enlisted personnel at Port Chicago, 71 officers, and 106 Marines who guarded the base. In addition there were some 231 civilians who were mainly skilled workers such as carpenters, locomotive engineers, crane operators, etc. (PCH, 15). Most of the black enlisted personnel -- who were chiefly young draftees in their late teens or early twenties -- were organized into eight work divisions consisting of about 125 men each. Each division was headed by white lieutenants with black petty officers acting as foremen of the working gangs. The divisions were housed in two-storey wooden barracks located about a mile from the loading pier.

Loading went on around the clock in three shifts. Typically, a division would load ships for three consecutive days, seven hours per day. This would be followed by a "duty day" when the division would be assigned other work such as cleaning up the grounds or unloading dunnage (timber used in stowing bombs in boxcars and ships' holds). In the afternoon of the duty day there might be a lecture, an educational film or a drill, followed by some free time for the men to handle personal chores such as laundry, letter writing, etc. The men were required to stay at the base during duty day in case of emergency. The following day the division would resume loading for three more consecutive days, at the conclusion of which they would have a day's liberty during which they might leave the base.

Consequently, during an eight-day period a division would have six days of ammunition loading, a duty day, and one day of liberty (COI, 617-8, 949, 952).

On the loading pier the usual practice was to assign one work division to each ship being loaded. The division would be broken into five work gangs, one for each of the ship's hatches. The gangs in turn would be broken into two squads, one on the pier and one in the hold of the ship. In addition one man would be assigned to operate the winch for that hold and one man would act as hatch attendant to signal the winch operator (COI, 455). Men not actually employed in loading might be assigned as compartment cleaners or mess cooks (COI, 640).

Ammunition was brought onto the pier in railroad boxcars. One or two men would be assigned to "break out" the car, using a sledge hammer and pinch bar to remove dunnage that shored up the bombs* (COI, 467, 730, 748). The rest of the squad would then manhandle the bombs onto the pier -- large bombs would be rolled down an incline or removed by electric "mules," and small bombs and boxes of ammunition might be passed hand to hand or transported by handtrucks. The ammunition would be placed in nets or on pallets on the pier so it could be hoisted by the ships

*The men who broke open the boxcars had one extra reward for their efforts: They got the names and addresses of women workers at ammunition plants who sometimes wrote them on the dunnage. More than once a lively correspondence followed.

booms through the hatch and lowered into the hold where another squad stowed it away. The bombs would be stowed layer by layer, slowly rising from the bottom of the hold to the hatch. During these operations the pier would be jammed with boxcars, locomotives, tons of bombs and high explosives, and men scrambling about everywhere.

The types of ammunition handled included everything from small arms ammunition to artillery projectiles, depth charges, incendiary bombs, fragmentation bombs, and huge block-busters weighing as much as 2,000 pounds each.

Unloading boxcars and stowing bombs and explosives into ships' holds was back-breaking, heavy labor. Port Chicago was a "workhorse base," as one informant put it. "This was solid work," he continued. "You'd go down in that ship and you build yourself all the way up -- just packing until you find yourself way up on top." "We were a muleteam," another man said. Others described the work as hard common labor, rough work. Another man described Port Chicago as a "slave outfit," adding that "We were considered a cheap labor force from the beginning."

PACE OF WORK

Work did not proceed at a leisurely pace at Port Chicago. "We were pushed," one informant said. "The officers used to pit one division against the other, and the officers themselves used to bet on their division putting on more tonnage than the other divisions. I often heard them

argue over what division was beating the others. So we were pushed by the petty officers to get the tonnage in. They were in turn pushed by the officers."

Although no other informant mentioned betting among the officers, most agreed that the pace of work was fast and competition between the work divisions was fostered by the officers. "There was always a tonnage thing," one man said. "You always knew what the division did in front of you. If they put on x number of tons that meant you had to do more." Another man described the officers as "tonnage minded" and he reported that the officers pushed the men to work faster. Still another informant recalled that tonnage figures were posted on a blackboard.

The men were goaded into competition by threats of punishment or losing privileges. Two informants recalled that the division with the best loading record each we would be given a pennant to fly over their barracks. Another informant said the outstanding division might be rewarded with special recreational privileges*.

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*About the only forms of recreation available to the men on the base were ball games, card playing, reading and writing letters. The men had access to radios and newspapers, specifically the Pittsburgh Courier and the Afro-American

The chief relief men had from the drudgery of the work at Port Chicago was liberty -- free time when they could leave the base. Since the base had only very limited recreational facilities, liberty assumed even greater significance for the enlisted men. The threat of denial of liberty was used by the officers to goad the men into working faster.

The town of Port Chicago had little to offer so the men usually took a bus to Pittsburgh, Oakland or San Francisco in search of night clubs and female companionship. Popular locales included Black Diamond Street in Pittsburgh, Seventh Street in Oakland, and the Fillmore District in San Francisco. Clubs frequented by the men included Club Seven, Slim Jenkins, Club Alabama, Club Havana, Club Jet and Sweet's.

After a while some of the men got into the spirit of competition. "It got down to where it was a personal thing between the groups," an informant recalled. "We used to brag about how many boxcars we unloaded to the next group." Another informant reported that there would be banter between the work divisions as they changed shifts. "We'd have this little thing between us." For still others the whole thing became a kind of play.

COPING WITH RISK

The black enlisted men were certainly not unaware of the dangers inherent in the work of handling ammunition and high explosives. My respondents recounted several incidents which reveal their recognition of the risk involved and the ways they evolved for coping with risk. In particular the men developed various tactics for managing their awareness of the risk of an accidental explosion.

Individual Defiance

Occasionally a man might go AWOL or simply refuse to work. One respondent told the story of an enlisted man who supposedly never worked. "Any time you see him they're taking him to the brig. They cut your hair, so he was baldheaded. He never saw the inside of one of those ships. He wasn't going to do it. Time he come out of jail, they give him a couple of days to get straight, and when they come for him he just packed up his bag to go to jail. 'I ain't gonna get on those goddam ships,' he said."

Men who were regarded as causing disciplinary problems were punished by being locked in the brig and sometimes being restricted to bread and water. Most of the enlisted men were well aware of the punishments that could be meted out because the men made a practice of reading the Blue Jackets' Manual, the official Navy handbook for enlisted men. Indeed, the men were expected by the officers to be able to recite sections from the Blue Jackets' Manual, and failure to do so successfully could lead to punishment.

Confronting

Some enlisted men, seeing the danger in the work process, confronted the officers with the question of risk. For example, Joseph Small, said that he confronted superior officers "numerous times" about the danger of an explosion:

> I had told everybody in authority that I could get to that we were working dangerously, and one day that place would blow up. The lieutenant gave me a manual that contained a diagram of a 500-pound bomb that was supposed to be totally harmless without the detonator in it. We had a discussion about it. I said won't concussion blow this thing up? He said it's impossible -- it cannot blow up without this charge in the head of it. I didn't believe it. Every time we got in an argument over it, it wound up with him telling me that if it does blow up I wouldn't know anything about it.

Interestingly, in this situation the officer attempted to discount the risk by insisting that the bomb could not explode without a detonator.

Enlisted men sometimes confronted each other over the danger of an explosion. One man, who arrived at the base less than two months before the explosion, described an

incident he experienced in unloading a boxcar:

> I tell you this. Them guys didn't have the training; they didn't know what they were doing. I'm standing right up there and they got them big bombs, bombs you can't even get your arms around. You hook the winch on there and bring it out. Then the winch operator yanked it suddenly so it hit the sides of that steel railroad car, bam! bam! bam! I said, 'Goddam, man, can't you do better than that?' He says, 'Oh, man don't worry about that. I felt the same way when I first came here. But these things ain't got no fuses in them.' I said, 'I don't care about the fuse, they got TNT in them.

In this instance the winch operator, a veteran at the base, attempted to reassure the novice worker in the same way as the officer in the earlier incident -- discounting the risk on the grounds that the bomb was defused.

In both of these situations the confronters did not accept the discounting of risk that was proffered to them. However, for most of the enlisted men, discounting of risks was the major social psychological mechanism by means of which they coped with their recognition of danger.

Discounting

By discounting I mean the social process by which the men came to lower their estimation of the risks involved in ammunition loading. Most of the enlisted men, upon first arriving at Port Chicago, were quite fearful of the explosives they were expected to handle. Over time the men learned, through interaction with other men and the officers, to manage their fear through the discounting process. Contrary to the example above, some men readily accepted the officers assurances that the bombs could not

explode because they had no detonators. Others were influenced by the attitude of the veteran workers who obviously discounted the risk. Still others witnessed or were told about minor accidents which did not result in an explosion, and consequently they lowered their estimation of the risk. One respondent told of seeing two 16-inch projectiles that apparently had been damaged in transit without exploding. After a couple of experiences like that, he said, the men "never really felt it was really that dangerous." Another man described a frightening incident that he experienced:

> We had some funny experiences that we had to learn about things -- like 16-inch projectiles, that's one the battleship shoots. Well, each battleship has different color die in the nose of its projectiles. This is so that if two or three battleships shoot a target and one of them is off, they can tell by the color of the explosion which one is off. This dye is under pressure at the tip of the projectile. Well, if you but the nose, if you break the seal on it, it squirts out. And if you see a bomb sitting there going 'psssssst', it looks like it's going to explode. Now that happened to us one time. They should have told us about that; we should have gone to school or something to learn about something like this. The first time it happened three or four guys broke their legs trying to get out of that damned hold. We were down in the hold working and they dropped one of these things down there. You spin them around to get them in the hold and sometimes you lose control because they are wet, and this thing hit against the bulkhead and started going 'psssst'. Red stuff started coming out. Well, hell you had 10-12 guys trying to get out of the hold at the same time. You can't do it. It's funny now but it wasn't then. Some guys broke their legs trying to get out of that hold. And then the others laughed at us because we weren't familiar with the situation. Evidently it had happened before, see. It was a kind of funny joke to some people.

As is apparent, humor and joking emerged as another element in the process of discounting. Some men got to the point of being able to joke about the danger or tease each other about who would be the first or last out of the hold if something went wrong. In its most extreme form, discounting became total: some men completely disregarded the risk and for them the work became a form of play.

Through this process of interaction and evaluation among the enlisted men, and between the men and officers, the apparent risks of the work were gradually discounted, enabling the men to manage their fears and accommodate themselves to performing dangerous work.

COPING WITH GRIEVANCES

Aside from dangerous working conditions, the enlisted men at Port Chicago, as at other military installations, had a number of grievances that distressed them. Chief among these was racial discrimination -- the fact that all the commissioned officers at the base were white and all the men who actually did the heavy work of handling ammunition were black. Many men had expected to be sent to sea and they were angry over finding themselves instead assigned to a "labor battalion" at an ammunition depot. The men were also disturbed by the restrictions on ratings, promotions and transfers, the low pay (compared with civilian stevedores), and the lack of recreational facilities. Several processes emerged among the enlisted men for coping with there

grievances.

Confrontation

Enlisted men sometimes attempted to take their complaints through the chain of command, confronting petty officers and officers with their grievances. The result of this action, according to several respondents, was that their complaints were simply allowed to "get lost in the shuffle." No action was taken and the complaint simply "died."

Some men were particularly angered by what they regarded as the "incompetence" of the petty officers whom they viewed as "Uncle Toms" and "slave drivers" who were easily "handled" by the white officers. In their view the petty officers had fundamentally different interests from the enlisted men, and the two were sometimes in an antagonistic relationship that did not aid in resolving grievances.

Sometimes the enlisted men themselves took action to dramatize a particular complaint. Sever minor work slowdowns and stoppages had occurred in the past. As one respondent put it, "You couldn't strike, you couldn't quit, so you just slowed down." Slowdowns and stoppages had been prompted by dissatisfaction with food, to protest promotion policy, and to protest racist slurs directed at the enlisted men (COI, 961, 964, 965). There actions were a form of collective confrontation and were precursors of the work stoppage that occurred after the explosion.

Balancing

Often the enlisted men coped with their grievances by the mechanism of balancing. By balancing I mean the social process by which the men decided that certain grievances were offset by the perceived benefits of Navy life. For example, two respondents listed several grievances concerning racial practices during training and at Port Chicago, and then followed this list with the statement that the grievances were "balanced out a little" by the fact that black men were now being admitted to the seaman's branch of the Navy for the first time. Some of the men added: "Being in the Navy is being able to sleep between white sheets and have three square meals a day, hot meals; this was a privilege that black men hadn't enjoyed and so we didn't put up much of a squak about [grievances]." The men griped among themselves but that was generally where it ended. Another informant balanced his grievances against the opportunity to prove his worth as a black man by serving his country in time of war.

The process of balancing did not remove grievances; rather it was a coping tactic that acted to reduce tension and minimize confrontations between the enlisted men and the officers over grievances. Balancing, like discounting, was a mechanism that enabled the enlisted men to tolerate the stresses that they encountered at Port Chicago.

Apathy

Some men -- a perhaps many of the men at some time - simply fell into apathy, feeling the "nothing could be done" about their grievances. As one man put it: "We knew the situation shouldn't have been that way but it appeared that it was out of our reach." "There were a lot of complaints," said another, "but we were powerless to do anything about this."

ATTITUDES TOWARD THE WAR

The enlisted men's attitudes toward the war effort ranged from patriotism to indifference. The men's patriotism was often tied to their hopes of improving the situation of blacks in the U.S. One respondent, who volunteered for the Navy, said that he wanted to "get in there and help to prosecute the war." He added that he hoped to have a "hand in making this a better place for blacks to live in this country." He felt that many enlisted men were disappointed at being denied the "privilege" of combat duty. "We came to fight, Let us fight," was their attitude, he said.

A variation of this theme was reflected by another respondent, a draftee, who recalled a patriotic oration he delivered at his high school graduation:

> Remember Pearl Harbor. It was Dorie Miller* who was not trained to fight but picked up a gun and fought for his country. He proved himself capable. And when more black men are given the opportunity to serve their country they will prove themselves worthy of the trust placed in them.

> Give them a chance. Let previous condition of servitude be no hold back. A man is still a man. All our men are facing the same enemy under the same flag. America owes it to them to see that they come back to the same opportunity.

Another man, who was initially assigned as a mess attendant aboard a yard mine sweeper, voiced dissatisfaction with the Navy's earlier common practice of assigning black men to the Steward's Branch. "When I come to fight," he said, "I don't want to come fighting with pots and pans." Subsequently he requested a transfer to Great Lakes where he went to gunnery school and then, to his dismay, he ended up at Port Chicago loading ammunition.

For many of the men the war was remote, both physically and psychologically. "It wasn't discussed," one man said. "We weren't concerned about it. I mean, I wasn't. I knew that my job supported the war, but this was what I was expected to do in my job. It was my job and I did it. If the Japanese and the Americans got in trouble over in Iwo Jima or Okinawa or somewhere, we knew about it but we weren't concerned. I had no brothers over there; I had no close friends over there. We were more concerned about our own little clique, working, and not being punished for not doing enough work. We were just loading ammunition. My concern with the war started when a bomb came out of a boxcar and ended when I set it down in the hold of a ship."

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*Dorie Miller, a black Navy mess attendant, was one of the first heroes of the War. During the attack on Pearl Harbor, Miller manned a machine gun on the West Virginia and shot down four enemy planes. He was lateer awarded the Navy Cross for bravery (Mullen, 52; Buchanan, 128).

Thus, the attitudes of the enlisted men -- including those later charged with mutiny -- ran the gamut from patriotism to indifference. This is not surprising since such a range of views was to be found in the general black community at that time, and the Port Chicago men, through letters, radios and newspapers, were at least vaguely aware of the sentiments of the larger black community.

ANALYTIC SUMMARY

Structural conditions. The situation at Port Chicago was difficult. Both officers and men had to adapt to the stresses imposed by the wartime situation, especially the pressure to maintain and increase output. This was not made easier by the lack of trained officers and the lack of proper training for the ammunition loaders. The introduction of questionable practices, such as competition between the work gangs, made the situation even more unsafe. Moreover, the policy of segregation and discrimination was a source of continual tension.

Expectations/definitions. Many of the new recruits were surprised and angered upon arriving at Port Chicago. They had expected to be assigned sea duty in general service ratings. Instead they found themselves at a segregated shore facility doing back-breaking manual labor. Moreover, they were distressed that they could not get the ratings and promotions which they felt were their due. Increasingly, the men came to define their situation as one of racial

victimization; they were a "mule team," a "slave outfit."

Interaction processes. For the black enlisted men unsafe working conditions were compounded by the Navy's racially discriminatory practices. In response, the men sometimes engaged in acts of individual defiance or confrontations with the officers over working conditions and other grievances. More commonly, however, the men accommodated themselves to the situation by means of coping processes -- discounting of risks and balancing of grievances. Liberty provided another important release from the stresses of life and work at Port Chicago.

Although some of these men would later be charged with mutiny, there is no evidence to suggest that the attitudes of the "mutineers" were significantly different from those of other enlisted men at port Chicago, or indeed different from the attitudes generally prevalent in the black community. As we shall see, the "mutiny" or work stoppage arose from the internal dynamics of the situation at Port Chicago rather than being the result of external influences.

The previous chapter noted the analytic characteristics of the black enlisted men's life in the Navy as related to discrepancies between expectations and reality. These discrepancies became even sharper upon their arrival at Port Chicago and provided a context for action. What this chapter adds to that analytic perspective are the types of action which emerge in such a context which is characterized

by high degrees of stress and by a limited opportunity structure. Following Merton's means/ends paradigm, the means available to the enlisted men for achieving the goals of racial equity and safe working conditions were extremely circumscribed, and these goals were subordinated to the main institutional goal of increasing output in the effort to win the war. Moreover, the stakes involved in deviation from the main goal were manifested in the threat and reality of disciplinary action.

Under these conditions, the behavioral responses of the enlisted men were for the most part not rebellious, although some did confront the officers or engage in acts of individual defiance in an effort to create new options. The rebellious response was largely short-circuited by the emergence of intervening processes of discounting and balancing, which were sometimes introduced by the officers and sometimes emerged from the men's interactions with each other. These accommodating processes were in reaction to the institutional funneling of behavioral options. These processes enabled the men to manage the dissonant stresses encountered in the institutional setting and gave the appearance of conformity to institutional norms, but they also masked an underlying tension between the subgoals of the black enlisted men and the Navy's institutional norms.

Of critical importance here is the development of primary group allegiance among the enlisted men. Coates and Pellegrin have noted the importance of primary group

membership (squad, platoon, work division) in shaping the individual's commitment to broad institutional norms and goals (Coates & Pellegrin, 314-321). So long as there is a convergence between the informal values of the primary group and the formal values of the military institution, then allegiance to institutional goals will be strengthened. Indeed, one of the functions of the institutional funneling of behavior through incorporation into the military heirarchy is to insure such a convergence.

However, Coates and Pellegrin also point out that

> In the interaction between members of the military primary group, there is a strong tendency for members to demand of one another that loyalty to the informal values of their particular primary group override loyalty to the values of any other group in situations where such values conflict (319).

If a circumstance should arise in which the goals and norms of the military institution are perceived as threatening the existence of the primary group and its members, then primary group solidarity may lead to an open break with the values of the institution and its goals. The explosion at Port Chicago presented such a circumstance.

CHAPTER 3

THE EXPLOSION AND AFTERMATH

The fateful, moonless night of July 17, 1944, was clear and cool. Two cargo ships were tied up at the Port Chicago pier and under floodlights work was proceeding at full speed.

One of the ships, the E.A. BRYAN, a Liberty vessel owned by the War Shipping Administration, had been moored at Port Chicago for four days, taking on ammunition and explosives night and day. Some 98 men of Division Three were hard at work loading the BRYAN, and by 10 p.m. that night the ship was loaded with some 4,600 tons of ammunition and high explosives (COI, 1210-1211, 1213).

The loading of the BRYAN had been proceeding routinely but not without some problems. There had been trouble with the steam winches on the BRYAN. The crank bearing on the No. 2 winch had failed and was replaced (COI, 68, 584). The afternoon of July 17th a valve on the No. 4 winch had gone out and had to be repaired (COI 775-6, 805, 810, 820-1). There was also trouble with the No. 1 winch. The brake on the winch was reported stuck in the "off" position. The chief engineer was informed of the problem by the third mate, but it was not certain that the brake was repaired (COI, 57-60). Failure of one of the winches could be disastrous since it might result in the dropping of a load on the pier or into the hold of a ship.

The second ship, the QUINALT VICTORY, was brand new; it was preparing for its maiden voyage. The QUINALT VICTORY had moored at Port Chicago at about 6 p.m. on the evening of July 17th. Some 102 men of the Sixth Division, many of them only recently arrived at Port Chicago, were busy rigging the ship in preparation for loading. Loading of ammunition was due to begin by midnight (COI, 1209, 1213).

In addition to the enlisted men there were present nine Navy officers, 67 members of the crews of the two ships along with an Armed Guard detail of 29 men, five crew members of a Coast Guard fire barge, a Marine sentry, and a train crew of three civilians. The pier was congested with men, equipment, a locomotive and 16 railroad boxcars, and about 430 tons of bombs and projectiles waiting to be loaded (COI, 1213-4).

At about 9:30 p.m. Captain Kinne left the administrative offices and drove out to the pier to have a look at the new ship. At the pier he met Lt. Commander Holman, the loading officer, who informed him that the new ship was good and clean, having just arrived from the builders, and that the loading of the BRYAN was coming along satisfactorily. Kinne picked up Holman and the two drove to the Bachelor Officer Quarters (COI, 939). Meanwhile Lt. Commander Glen Ringquist, Holman's assistant, continued to observe the work. Ringquist had noticed that the propeller on the QUINALT VICTORY was slowly turning over and he advised another officer to be sure that it had stopped

before they started loading. Ringquist then walked over beside the BRYAN and watched the loading operation. In the No. 5 hold forty millimeter shells were being loaded. Fragmentation cluster bombs were being hoisted into the No. 4 hold. Huge 1,000 pound bombs were being placed in the No. 3 hold and depth bombs were being hoisted into the No. 2 hold. Incendiary bombs, weighing 650 pounds apiece were being loaded into the No. 1 hold. These bombs had their activating mechanisms installed. The men had had some trouble getting these bombs out of the boxcar because they were wedged in so tightly. After observing the work for a few minutes Ringquist started to return to the dock office. A base station wagon, making routine rounds, picked him up and he asked the driver to take him to Building A-1, which was off the pier some distance away (COI, 651, 685-6). The time was about 10:15; Ringquist and his driver were probably the last individuals to leave the pier before the explosion.

THE EXPLOSION AND ITS AFTERMATH

In the enlisted men's barracks at 10:15 it was quiet; many men were in their bunks. Some had just recently returned from liberty. Shortly after 10:18 the disaster struck. One man described what happened in the next moments:

> I was sitting on the toilet -- I was reading a letter from home. Suddenly there were two explosions. The first one knocked me clean off... I found myself flying toward the wall. I just threw my hands up like this, then I hit the wall. Then the next one came right behind that, Phoom!

> Knocked me back on the other side. Men were screaming, the lights went out and glass was flying all over the place. I got out to the door. Everybody was... that thing had... the whole building was turned around, caving in. We were a mile and a half away from the ships. And so the first thing that came to my mind, I said, 'Jesus Christ, the Japs have hit!' I could have sworn they were out there pounding us with warships or bombing us or something. But one of the officers was shouting, 'It's the ships! It's the ships!' So we jumped in one of the trucks and we said let's go down there, see if we can help. We got halfway down there on the truck and stopped. Guys were shouting at the driver from the back of the truck, 'Go on down. What the hell are you staying up here for?' The driver says, 'Can't go no farther.' See, there wasn't no more docks. Wasn't no railroad. Wasn't no ships. And the water just came right up to... all the way back. The driver couldn't go no farther. Just as calm and peaceful. I didn't even see any smoke.

Another man, who was scheduled to do guard duty that night, had just walked into the administration building:

> I'm over there with the petty officer, sitting there in the window, telling him my name and all that. Then this damned thing happened. They talk about light traveling faster than sound.... Well, the first thing was this great big flash, and something must have hit me. I found myself outside of that building and I don't remember going out of no window or climbing out of it. But I was outside and with only one little scar on my arm. You're talking about torn up. Everybody felt at that point that it was another Pearl Harbor -- not that the ships had blown up, because you didn't think about that at that point, because of the building that you had been in and the barracks and all that -- caved in, windows busted out, blown out and all that kind of thing. People running and hollering. You know a bunch of guys were sleeping the the barracks. The barracks had a lot of windows, lower and upper deck, whole side was windows. And they were blown to pieces. Some guys lost their sight; others were badly cut. Finally they got the emergency lights together. Then some guys came by in a truck and we went down to the dock, but when we got there we didn't see not dock, no ship, no nothing.

One man who was blinded by the explosion described what happened:

> When taps was sounding that evening I put my writing gear away and went to wash up and put on my Noxema -- being a teenager I had some of those blemishes on my face. I came back and I was lying on my bunk. It would usually take about 20 minutes to quiet the men down after lights out. And shortly after, probably 10:20 p.m., there was this tremendous explosive sound. I was looking to my right, I had my head pillowed on my arm looking away from the explosion. I quickly jumped up to look and see what was going on and there was a second explosion -- all these tremendous beautiful flashed in the sky. That's when the flying glass hit my face and entered my eyes. It did it in such a strange way, inasmuch as I never felt any pain from it. It lacerated the left eye so badly that it was removed that night. The right eye had a laceration, just one laceration in the eye itself that traveled across part of the pupil and cornea allowing the vitriolic fluid to drain, which left me with split vision in that eye. They were able to put a suture in there. Of course, sutures leave permanent scar tissue, and the scar tissue eventually caused the sight to leave me completely.

Captain Kinne was in his room at the BOQ when the explosion occurred:

> I was sitting there reading when the first blast went off. The first blast impressed me more as the slamming of an enormous door. At any rate, it jarred me out of my chair or I jumped up, and started for the door. The lights, of course, had gone off, and before I got to the door I turned around and felt my way into my bedroom to find a flashlight. A second blast went off while I was going into the bedroom. The flashlight was missing, I started out through the door again and fell down through a hole made by a five-inch low order which was next morning found in an upholstered chair in the BOQ. I then made my way down the stairs, which faced toward Port Chicago, I noticed a fire burning out in the vicinity of the railroad tracks in Port Chicago.
>
> My first reaction, of course, was that there had been an explosion at the docks or in the ship, and

when I was this fire, and realized that the BOQ was still standing, I momentarily got the hope that it was a car of explosives which had gone off on the tracks outside of the magazine. I got in my car and drove to the main gate and asked the sentries on duty there what had happened. They said there had been an explosion at the dock. I asked what the fire was outside and they said it was nothing but a grass fire, so I headed my car for the dock, and as I went back past the BOQ I was hailed by Lt. Beck, duty officer for the barracks. He jumped in with me and at the same time one or two other officers got in the back seat. We started for the docks and found that no one had any lights. As we went past A-1 [administration building], one of the officers stated that he knew where there were some flashlights in A-1, so he got out to get them. I waited one or two minutes for him and he did not return and, seeing that A-1 was pretty well wrecked, I decided to waste no time... so Lt. Beck and I proceeded to the dock.

When we got there, by the lights of the lamps of the car, I was that the joiner shop at the end of the dock was completely demolished. A marine and a civilian, apparently rather badly cut, were coming out of the wreckage and said there were other men inside. I told them to jump in the car and left Lt. Beck there with some other officers who had arrived in other transportation, directed them to get portable flood lights on the joiner ship as soon as possible, and start taking the men out of the wreckage, said that I would take the two injured men to the dispensary and get a working party to help them. I drove the two injured men to the dispensary and found that Lt. Hodgen, executive officer of the barracks, and the division officer of the barracks, were taking care of the wounded with the assistance of Dr. Carson, the senior medical officer.

I found that the barracks had been evacuated, that the injured were being taken care of and the more seriously injured were being taken to hospitals outside of the magazine, while Dr. Carson was administering first aid on the lawn in front of the dispensary, that the uninjured personnel were being mustered and that there was no appearance of panic or disorder. I accordingly instructed Mr. Hodgen to have a working party of about 50 men sent to the dock to assist in clearing the debris from the joiner ship and locating any injured men there. I also found that a search was being made

> of all buildings in the barracks area to determine whether any injured were there. I then obtained a flashlight and returned to the dock, and went out on the pier as far as possible and found that there was no vestige of either the ship or of the ship loading pier left except for a little wreckage. I returned and found that flood lights had been installed, that there was light on the joiner ship, and the working party was going after the injured there, and found there was a bigger working party than was needed because the marines had also sent a working party down in the meantime. I consequently ordered approximately half the working party to return to barracks and left the rest there to continue their rescue operations. I returned to the barracks and found that everything there was in as good order as could be expected under the circumstances (COI, 939-40).

Lt. Commander Ringquist was in the base station wagon on the way to Building A-1 when he heard the first sound of trouble:

> Just prior to arriving at Building A-1, I heard a terrific crash...that sounded... it had a very metallic ring and sounded very hollow, followed by a noise that sounded of breaking timbers. [Ringquist would later testify that he thought this noise, which he heard before the first explosion, was caused by the falling of one of the jumbo booms on the ships (COI, 680-1, 699)]. This was immediately followed by a flash which appeared orange in color, and a very sharp report. The driver grabbed his ear and I thought he lost control of the car momentarily. But prior to this, a considerable pressure had been built up in the station wagon. I was sitting in the rear with the windows closed; the driver's window was open. I realized that this explosion had come from the dock. The sky was illuminated with a very yellow glow.
>
> I immediately asked the driver to stop the car, which I believed rolled for approximately fifty feet before he stopped, and I told him to get out of the car and follow me. I ran back hoping to be able to see the ship, but I realized that with the illumination increasing that the ship was going to blow shortly. I immediately sat down on the grass and I faced the ship and I perhaps.... it seemed

like about three minutes... prior to the blowing up of the ship... the E.A. BRYAN. This explosion... I could not observe it from the start as the building obstructed my view, but after the column seemed to have reached about sixteen hundred feet I could observe the smoke and it seemed to me at about 2,000 feet a red flame rolled out of this cloud. Prior to this I had noticed that a considerable flame shot off to my right from this column... this was in the direction of the town of Port Chicago. This flame and smoke appeared to me to rise to about three to four thousand feet and then darkness set in, and fragments started to fall, which appeared to me to be of a duration of approximately 30 seconds.

Upon hearing no more fragments fall, I got up and ran to where I could see the pier, which was in total darkness. I ran back to the station wagon and we drove slowly up by the box cars and barricades to look for fires. I observed no fires until I reached the barracks. There was one fire across the railway tracks. Men were coming out of the barracks and there were no lights at that time except we used the station wagon lights and turned the lights on from the various trucks, until such time that we brought out the portable trailer lights, which I assisted in setting those in position. Several men seemed to be seriously wounded. The doctors were taking care of these. Some civilian came to me... I believe he was working on the station... and he asked me what he thinks he should do. I told him to get in touch with the nearest telephone, notify Mare Island and the Twelfth Naval District and the Army, if they were in the vicinity; that we needed medical assistance, lights and water.

I then went over to the doctor and asked him if he needed any assistance and he stated that he thinks he could take care of the situation. I went over to the BOQ and, with the aid of matches, I discovered the linen locker and carried over an armload of clean linen for the medical department. In the meantime, I had noticed Captain Kinne in his car driving toward the piers. This man that I had sent out came back in about ten minutes and stated that there was one line clear in Port Chicago and the operator was notifying these various activities. I should judge that the first outside ambulances arrived in about 30 minutes. In the meantime, the wounded were being placed in trucks and station wagons and removed. A Greyhound bus was brought in and loaded down with

> the wounded and sent to the Army post, which I found out later (COI, 651-2).

According to testimony at the Navy's Court of Inquiry, seismographic records at the University of California, Berkeley, showed that two explosions occurred, about seven seconds apart, shortly before 10:19 p.m. The first explosion appeared to some witnesses to occur on the pier itself; this was followed by a cataclysmic blast as the E.A. BRYAN went off like one gigantic bomb, sending a column of fire and smoke 12,000 feet into the night sky, with hundreds of exploding bombs making it look like a huge fireworks display. An Army Air Force plane happened to be flying over at the time. The co-pilot described what he saw:

> We were flying the radio range from Oakland headed for Sacramento. We were flying on the right side of the radio range when this explosion occurred. I was flying at the time and looking straight ahead and at the ground when the explosion occurred. It seemed to me that there was a huge ring of fire spread out to all sides, first covering approximately three miles -- I would estimate it to be about three miles -- and then it seemed to come straight up. We were cruising at 9,000 feet above sea level and there were pieces of metal that were white and orange in color, hot, that went quite a ways above us. They were quite large. I would say they were as big as a house or a garage. They went up above our altitude. The entire explosion seemed to last about a minute. These pieces gradually disintegrated and fell to the ground in small pieces. The thing that struck me about it was that it was so spontaneous, seem to happen all at once, didn't seem to be any small explosions except in the air. There were pieces that flew off and exploded on all sides. A good many stars and looked like a fireworks display (COI, 319).

The E.A. BRYAN was literally blown to bits -- very

little of its wreckage was ever found. The QUINALT VICTORY was lifted clear out of the water by the blast, turned around and broken into pieces. The next morning the stern of the QUINALT VICTORY could be seen protuding upside down out of the water. Everyone on the pier and aboard the two ships was killed instantly -- some 320 men, 200 of whom were black enlisted men. Very few intact bodies were recovered. Another 390 military and civilian personnel were injured, including 233 black enlisted men (COI, 1216-1249). This single, stunning disaster accounted for more than 15% of all black naval casualties during World War II (Reddick, 217). Property damage, military and civilian, was estimated at more than $10 million (COI, 1254).

Rescue assistance was rushed from nearby towns and other military bases. The town of Port Chicago was heavily damaged by the explosion but fortunately none of its citizens were killed although many suffered injuries. The naval base itself was a shambles but there was no panic. The survivors assisted in rescue efforts and in putting out small fires started by flaming debris. One group of black enlisted men and officers bravely fought and extinguished a fire that had started in a box car loaded with explosives. If the box car had exploded it might well have set off a chain reaction of explosions in nearby box cars and possibly killed more men.

During the night and early morning the injured were removed to hospitals and many of the black enlisted men were

evacuated to nearby stations, mainly to Camp Shoemaker in Oakland (COI, 940). Others remained at Port Chicago to clear away debris and search for what could be found of bodies.

The search for bodies was grim work. One survivor recalled the experience:

> I was there the next morning. We went back to the dock. Man, it was awful; that was a sight. You'd see a shoe with a foot in it, and then you would remember how you'd joked about who was gonna be the first one out of the hold. You'd see a head floating across the water -- just the head, or an arm. Bodies... just awful. A piece of the ship the size of a table went into the concrete where the officers lived. We couldn't move it. That was quite an experience the next day. That thing kept you from sleeping at night. You had buddies of yours that left your division and were transferred to that division that worked on the ship that night. Then again this is just one of those tragedies of war. I'm saying that now. But it wasn't that way then -- it was awful.

Some 200 black enlisted men volunteered to remain at the base and help with the clean-up operation.

Three days after the disaster Captain Kinne issued a statement praising the black enlisted men for their behavior during the disaster. Stating that the men acquitted themselves with "great credit," he added: "Under those emergency conditions regular members of our complement and volunteers from Mare Island displayed creditable coolness and bravery."

Rear Admiral Carleton H. Wright, Commandant of the Twelfth Naval District, also commended the men:

> I am gratified to learn that, as was to be expected, Negro personnel attached to the Naval

> Magazine Port Chicago performed bravely and efficiently in the emergency at that station last Monday night. These men, in the months that they served at that command, did excellent work in an important segment of the District's overseas combat supply system. As real Navy men, they simply carried on in the crisis attendant on the explosion in accordance with our Service's highest traditions (PR).

Four Port Chicago men and one black enlisted man from Mare Island were awarded medals for their heroic conduct in fighting the ammunition boxcar fire that broke out after the explosion. These men were James A. Camper, Jr., William E. Anderson, Richard L. McTerre, Effus S. Allen, and John A. Haskins, Jr. Kinne himself was awarded a bronze star.

Meanwhile it was announced that memorial services for the dead would be held on July 30th, and in Washington steps were being taken to compensate the families of the victims. A proposal was presented in Congress to grant the families up to $5,000 in compensation. However, when Mississippi Representative John Rankin objected to the plan because most of the beneficiaries would be black, Congress in its wisdom reduced the maximum allowable grant to $3,000 (Chicago Defender, 9/16/44).

COURT OF INQUIRY

Four days after the Port Chicago disaster, on July 21, 1944, a Naval Court of Inquiry was convened to "inquire into the circumstances attending the explosion." The inquiry was to establish the facts of the situation and the court was to arrive at an opinion concerning the cause or causes of the

disaster. The court was comprised of three senior naval officers and a judge advocate who assembled evidence and witnesses for interrogation. Both Captain Goss and Captain Kinne were present throughout the proceedings as "interested parties," which meant that they would be allowed to present evidence and examine witnesses "in the same was as a defendant" (COI, 2).

The inquiry lasted 39 days and some 125* witnesses were called to testify. The court heard testimony from survivors and eye witnesses of the explosion, other Port Chicago personnel, ordnance experts, inspectors who checked the ships before loading, and others. The proceedings quickly became contentious as the key issue which emerged was the question of output versus safety. A sharp disagreement developed between the Navy brass, Goss and Kinne, and the Captain of the Port and the Port Director, who were responsible for the safe movement of vessels through San Francisco Bay. The heart of the dispute centered on whether unsafe loading practices were employed at Port Chicago, and why no Coast Guard loading detail was present the night of the explosion. Goss contended that the representatives of the Coast Guard and the Port Director's office were inexperienced personnel who were unable to properly supervise the loading operation and themselves created problems for the work (COI, 910, 912-3, 928).

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*Only five black witnesses were called to testify -- none from the group that would later be accused of mutiny.

However, Goss admitted that after the unsuccessful "experiment" with the presence of a Coast Guard detail in October, 1943, the Port Director told Captain Goss: "Conditions are bad up there [at Port Chicago]; you've got to do something about it... If you aren't careful, something's going to happen, and you'll be held responsible for it" (COI, 923). The Port Director recommended that contract stevedores be brought in to do the loading at Port Chicago. Goss responded that he already knew about the problematic conditions at Port Chicago, that he needed experienced officers, and that contract stevedores were not available. The Captain of the Port, who was also present at this meeting, decided to withdraw the Coast Guard detail because conditions were so bad that he was unwilling to take responsibility for it (COI, 924). Goss persisted in his view that enlisted personnel should be able to equal the work of professional stevedores. (Apparently, contract stevedores were used at all Bay Area Navy facilities with the exception of Port Chicago and Mare Island (COI, 976).) This debate was rehearsed at the court of inquiry, with each side attempting to pin the blame on the other.

The question of Captain Kinne's tonnage figures blackboard and the competition it encouraged also came up during the proceedings. Kinne attempted to justify this practice as simply an extension of the Navy's practice of competition in target practice. He contended that it did not negatively impact on safety, and implied that junior

officers who said it did, did not know what they were talking about (COI, 951-2).

The court also heard testimony concerning the fueling of the vessels, possible sabotage, defects in the bombs, problems with the winches and other equipment, rough handling by the enlisted men, and organizational problems at Port Chicago. But the specific cause of the explosion was never established by the court of inquiry -- anyone in a position to have actually seen what caused the explosion did not live to tell about it.

Nevertheless, the court was charged with offering an opinion on the cause of the explosion, and something or someone must be held responsible for the awful tragedy. In his summation of the testimony the Judge Advocate dismissed sabotage as a possible cause on the grounds that an investigation by the District Intelligence Office had failed to turn up any evidence of sabotage. Inherent defects in the bombs might have been a "contributory cause," he said, "but there must have been some overt act to cause the bomb to actually explode." As for equipment problems and procedures employed, the Judge Advocate said the testimony was inconclusive: some witnesses testified that the equipment and methods used at Port Chicago were as safe as those employed at other naval magazines; other witnesses disagreed.

This brought the Judge Advocate to the question of the role of the black enlisted personnel:

> The consensus of opinion of the witnesses -- and practically admitted by the interested parties -- is that the colored enlisted personnel are neither temperamentally or intellectually capable of handling high explosives. As one witness has stated, sixty percent of the lowest intellectual strata of the men sent out of Great Lakes were sent to Port Chicago. These men, it is testified, could not understand the orders which were given to them and the only way they could be made to understand what they should do was by actual demonstration.... It is an admitted fact, supported by the testimony of the witnesses, that there was rough and careless handling of the explosives being loaded aboard ships at Port Chicago (COI, 1187).

The Judge Advocate concluded his summation by briefly noting the organizational problems that existed at Port Chicago and the absence of a Coast Guard detail the night of the explosion -- these matters deserved some consideration by the court, he said.

In its findings, the court, for the most part, accepted the analysis of the Judge Advocate. The court listed the problem causes of the initial explosion in the order of probability as follows:

> a. Presence of a supersensitive element which was detonated in the course of handling.
>
> b. Rough handling by an individual or individuals. This may have occurred at any stage of the loading process from the breaking out of the cars to final stowage in the holds.
>
> c. Failure of handling gear, such as the falling of a boom, failure of a block or hook, parting of a whip, etc.
>
> d. Collision of the switch engine with an explosive loaded car, probably in the process of unloading.
>
> e. An accident incident to the carrying away of the mooring lines of the QUINALT VICTORY or the

> bollards to which the QUINALT VICTORY was moored, resulting in damage to an explosive component.
>
> f. The results of an act of sabotage. Although there is no evidence to support sabotage as a probable cause, it cannot be ignored as a possibility (COI, 1258).

Although there was testimony before the court about competition in loading, this was not listed by the court (or the Judge Advocate) as in any way a cause of the explosion (although the court saw fit to recommend that in future "the loading of explosives should never be a matter of competition" (COI, 1261) -- a small slap on the hands of the officers). Thus, the court of inquiry in effect cleared the officers of responsibility for the disaster, and in so far as any human cause was invoked the burden of blame was laid on the shoulders of the black enlisted men who died in the explosion.*

MEN IN SHOCK

After the explosion many of the surviving black sailors were transferred to nearby Camp Shoemaker where they remained until July 31st; then the Fourth and Eighth Divisions were transferred to naval barracks in Vallejo near

*Recently, there has been a renewed controversy over the cause of the explosion at Port Chicago. An independent investigator, Peter Vogel, has reviewed the evidence and contends that there was only one huge explosion at Port Chicago. Moreover, Vogel argues from a variety of circumstantial evidence that the explosion may have been nuclear in origin. (See Peter Vogel, "The Last Wave From Port Chicago," The Black Scholar, Summer, 1982.)

Mare Island. During this period the men were assigned barracks duties but no ship loading. Another group, the Second Division, which was also at Camp Shoemaker until the 31st, returned to Port Chicago to help with the cleaning up and rebuilding of the base.

Many of the men were in a state of shock, troubled by the vivid memory of the horrible explosion in which so many of their friends had died. All were extremely nervous and jumpy. "Everybody was scared," one survivor recalled. "If somebody dropped a box or slammed a door, people be jumping around like crazy. Everybody was still nervous." Another man who arrived at Port Chicago the day of the explosion wrote home to his family: "It was something I'll never forget. I am in a pretty nervous condition now. Every loud noise I hear makes me jump and my heart flutters" (NAACP GOF).

One man was not above exploiting the situation for the sake of a laugh. "He was a practical joker," a survivor recalled.

> We had large Honeywell heaters in the barracks, one at each end. He would come in at three in the morning. There was a big fan behind the heater. He would stick a newspaper in the fan to make a sudden noise and then laugh when the men would bust out of their bunks and rush to the door. This was immediately after the explosion. He would stand there and laugh. Or he would suddenly turn on all the lights and holler 'fire'. I mean this was all a joke to him. One night he really upset me. We had an ironing board sitting near the heater with a sheet over it to iron on. I laid in my bunk and watched him slide that sheet off and guide it until it got caught in the fan. He jumped back behind the heater. There was, I think, 38 men in the barracks and all of them

> headed for that door at the same time. And several of them got hurt pretty bad. And he's standing there laughing. So that next morning I requested that he be moved out of our barracks. They moved him out.

DISRUPTION OF DISCOUNTING AND BALANCING PROCESSES

The men's anxiety was probably made worse by the fact that they did not know what caused the explosion. Rumor and speculation were rife. Some thought it was caused by an accident, some suspected sabotage, others did not know what to think. Apparently the men were not informed that the Navy was conducting an investigation -- certainly none of those who would later be involved in the work stoppage were called to testify at the court of inquiry. Thus the men attempted to evaluate their situation in the absence of any definite information, and gradually their conversations focused more on the work process and the ammunition itself. It was no longer possible to blithely discount the risks of ammunition handling. "They assured me that it couldn't happen," one man reflected. "Without that detonator and the cap it it, it was supposed to be innocent. It couldn't explode. I don't know what caused the initial explosion but that so-called innocent ammunition is what did most of the damage."

Another survivor said: "Put me on a ship and let me fight out there, take my chances there. Why lose your life on somebody else's negligence?"

Given the conditions under which the men worked the

question that loomed ever larger was: If it happened once what was to prevent it from happening again? To this no satisfactory answer was ever offered.

The men talked among themselves. They had not yet been ordered back to their regular duty and no one knew what would happen next, but many of them hoped they would be transferred to other stations or to ships. One man asked his lieutenant for a transfer to overseas duty, thinking to himself: "Man, I got a chance over there with the enemy, but I ain't got no chance in that hold." It was the same individual who recalled how before the explosion the men sometimes joked about who would be first out of the hold in case of trouble. Now joking did not help; the reality was too awful.

Many of the survivors expected to be granted survivors' leaves to visit their families before being re-assigned to regular duty. But such leaves were not granted, creating a major grievance -- and one which could not be balanced by the rapidly diminishing benefits of Navy life. A survivor recalled what happened: "When we got back together before we had to go back to work, I think the talk was going home -- we're all talking about going home. We thought we were entitled to go home. So we just decided that if they wouldn't let us go home, we wasn't going to work." Then he added: "I guess all your little grievances come out that built up long before. A lot of things you didn't like before, you just didn't do anything about them. But now

they're all piled up."

Another man who worked on the clean-up crew said: "This is what made the guys mad after they done that work around there getting things straightened out and then they turned them down. They said, 'No, you cannot have that 30-day leave.'"

Even some men who had been hospitalized with injuries were not granted leaves.

ANALYTIC SUMMARY

Structural conditions. The powerful explosion of July 17th hit without warning, doing great damage and causing many deaths and injuries. The suddenness and magnitude of the disaster led many witnesses to believe initially that there had been an enemy attack or sabotage of the ships. Significantly, the specific cause of the explosion was never established and was a subject of much speculation. (The Court of Inquiry, failing to find a specific cause, generally held the black ammunition loaders to blame for the disaster.)

Expectations/definitions. Although there was little or no panic during the disaster, the survivors were left in a state of shock and uncertainty. Rumors circulated concerning the possible causes of the explosion and what could be expected in the future. Most of the men hoped that they would be transferred to other stations or to ships. Many also expected that they would be granted 30-day

survivors' leaves to visit their families before returning to regular duty. But there were no transfers and no leaves were granted, further fueling resentment.

Interaction processes. The explosion and its aftermath undermined the coping processes that had allowed the enlisted men to tolerate the stresses of and dangerous and difficult working environment. It was no longer possible to blithely discount risks or to balance grievances. The breakdown of these processes would in turn play an important part in the development of the work stoppage. Unlike the civilian employees of the Port Chicago naval station -- 10 percent of whom quit their jobs after the disaster (COI, 956) -- the enlisted men could not simply walk off the job. As the men began discussing the situation among themselves, a new definition of the situation emerged. A confrontation became inevitable unless the Navy moved quickly to change its policies on the loading of ammunition. If it did not -- and it didn't -- then inexorably the drama would move to the next stage of confrontation and the presentation of narrowing options by the Navy.

Analytically, a context of high stress and limited information results in a situation of great ambiguity. The trauma of the explosion and the lack of any official explanation of its cause prompted individuals to create meanings (rumors) for themselves in an effort to make sense of what had happened. Importantly, the explosion also

created a context which called into question the official values and norms of the military hierarchy at Port Chicago. Not only were there renewed doubts about the safety of the work procedures, but the implicit assumption that the Navy as an institution was committed to the well-being of its members was further undermined by the refusal to grant the men survivors' leaves.

Ambiguity, therefore, emerges as the first step in the detachment of the enlisted men's primary group from allegiance to the institutional values of the Navy. In effect, the explosion removed the mask which had concealed the conflict between primary group goals and institutional norms, and thereby undercut the accommodating process that had previously blocked a rebellious response. However, for a rebellious response to develop a new definition of the situation must emerge within the primary group of enlisted men. Individual and group intolerance of ambiguity prompted the search for a new definition and a new course of action. The processes involved in this search and the resulting action will be examined in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 4

THE WORK STOPPAGE

TALKING IT OVER

By the time the Fourth and Eighth Divisions were transferred to the Ryder Street Naval Barracks at Vallejo on July 31st, some of the enlisted men were already talking among themselves about whether they would go back to work loading ammunition. Indeed, with the transfer to Vallejo the men were informed by officers that they were going to be loading ammunition at the Mare Island Ammunition Depot (GCM, 1349). It was now clear that there would be no transfer to other bases, as some had hoped; there would be no 30-day survivors' leaves; the men were going to be sent back to loading ammunition under the same officers as before.

Fearful of another explosion, angry at the treatment accorded them, the men began talking of not going back to work. For many the risk of another explosion was uppermost in their minds. One survivor recalled: "We didn't want no more loading ammunition because of what happened at Port Chicago. No more loading anywhere." Some felt that even combat duty was less risky. At least there was a chance of survival; in the hold of a ship there was no chance if another explosion occurred. Other men were not only concerned about the risks -- they now found their treatment by the Navy not only unjust but intolerable. One man recalled his attitude: "I just said: No, I ain't going

back on that damn thing [ship loading]. Why don't they get some whiteys and put them down there. I said, hell, I'm a gunneryman. They taught me how to fire guns; I'm supposed to be on a ship. Now they got me working as a stevedore. And I'm not getting stevedore's pay."

Several men recalled the denial of survivors' leaves as a particular source of dissatisfaction and anger. One respondent said the men were talking "about how they didn't want to go back to work under those conditions because they hadn't treated us right, see, and that they were letting them white boys go home for 30-day leaves and we wasn't getting nothing."

Some men linked the cause of the explosion to the working conditions on the pier. For them the thought of returning to the same working conditions -- competition, rushing, etc. -- under the same officers was intolerable. "I was a winch operator on the ship," recounted one man, "and I missed killing a man on the average of once a day -- killing or permanently injuring a man. And it was all because of rushing, speed. I didn't want to go back into this. This was my reason for refusing to go back to work -- to get the working conditions changed. I realized that I had to work. I wasn't trying to shirk work. I don't think these other men were trying to shirk work. But to go back to work under the same conditions, with no improvements, no changes, the same group of officers that we had, was just -- we thought there was a better alternative, that's all."

At some point several men approached one of their number, Joseph Small, who was a kind of informal leader and highly respected by the others. They asked him what he intended to do. Small made it plain that he did not intend to go back to loading ammunition. Some also approached another man who was considered knowledgeable, with the same question. He responded that he didn't care what anyone else did, but he wasn't going back to loading. Other men also expressed their opposition to returning to loading ammunition. Gradually the notion of a collective work stoppage -- a strike if you will -- began to take shape. Indeed, some in the group came to believe that if all or the overwhelming majority of the enlisted men refused to handle ammunition then the Navy would be compelled to change the working conditions or transfer the men to other stations.

Interestingly, not everyone who was to join the work stoppage participated in these early discussions. One man had been injured in the explosion and hospitalized for some days afterwards. By the time he was released he had already decided not to return to work: "I didn't talk to nobody. I didn't conspire with nobody. I just made up my mind I was tired of it. I wanted to be a sailor."

Someone came up with the idea of drawing up a petition, a list of all the men who were unwilling to continue handling ammunition and wanted a transfer of duty (GCM, 1391). Some 50 or 60 men signed the petition; others refused to sign; and still others thought the petition was

useless. Joe Small thought the petition was a bad idea and he destroyed it. In an interview he explained:

> Well, I knew -- I guess mostly from instinct -- that anything in writing is more damaging to you than a verbal conversation. And when you put your name on a list, then you become a supporting part of whatever that list stands for. And there's very little chance of your changing your mind even if you wanted to.

Small was also aware that some kind of letter of protest had been sent out by Port chicago men in 1943 and apparently nothing had come of it. Finally, Small was convinced that he and the other men were justified in not going back to work. "I knew that situation under which we worked hadn't been changed. I had made up my mind that I wasn't going back to work under these conditions."

No other options were forthcoming, and Small's decision not to go back to work was to be crucially important for he would be among the first men ordered back to work.

Both the enlisted men and the officers recognized that Joe Small was the informal leader of the Fourth Division. A largely self-taught man who was used to handling men and equipment, Small had been a lieutenant in the Civilian Conservation Corps before being drafted into the Navy. Small felt that leadership was thrust upon him. In the Navy it began with him being selected cadence caller:

> I remember one day we had a petty officer calling cadence. We were on the drill field, and they had to separate some of the men. Somebody said, 'Small can call cadence,' and that's where it started. I had about three men, I think, and we were marching up and down the drill field. And then a couple of days later the petty officer was

> late getting back or something like that, and they asked me to call cadence. I was in the ranks calling cadence and then somebody said, 'I can't hear him, let him get outside.' I stepped outside the ranks and from then on I was the official cadence caller for the division. I could have refused it, but I rather enjoyed marching outside of the ranks and calling cadence.

Gradually, Small assumed more of the duties of the petty officers. "I was always an early riser, I was always the first one up in the morning. It became my expected job to wake the men up and get them out of there." Increasingly the men came to Small when they had problems rather than going to the petty officers. And the officers used Small as a go-between: "They used to call me from the quarter deck, in place of the petty officers, if there was some business to transact with the division. It was thrust on me because -- well, without sounding silly -- I had the ability. They recognized it, but they wouldn't give me the rank. My lieutenant said I was too young to be a petty officer."

Small also had an ability with machines. He used to watch the winch operators and on his lunch break he practiced operating the machine. Shortly he became a relief winch driver, and it wasn't long before he took over the job on a regular basis.

Small also developed a reputation as a man who would stand up to the officers on behalf of the enlisted men. For example, in the weeks before the disaster it was Small who confronted the officers about the danger of an explosion because of the way the men had to rush. Small was certainly

outspoken and he would eventually come to think of himself as a "spokesman" for the work refusers; the officers would label him the "ringleader" of a mutiny.

THE INITIAL WORK STOPPAGE

The idea of a work stoppage was a desperate gamble, and from the beginning there were problems. In the first place not everyone was willing to go along with the work stoppage: Some men, fearing punishment, were willing to go back to work. Attempts to convince everyone to stick together and maintain the unity essential to success sometimes led to arguments and threats (GCM, 1350). Each man had to decide whether he would be loyal to the group in its resistance, or whether he would disavow the resistance and return to work. This was obviously an emotionally charged time as the men talked and argued among themselves and considered what to do. As it turned out each man had to decide not once but several time what he would do.

The first choices had to be made on August 9th, three weeks after the Port Chicago explosion. Earlier that week work gloves were distributed to the men of the Fourth Division. Someone quipped, "If these are for handling ammunition, chief, I never touch the stuff," but all the men took the gloves (GCM, 1393). Unknown to the men a ship was arriving at Mare Island to be loaded with ammunition. The Fourth, Eighth, and Second divisions were scheduled to load. After chow on the 9th the fourth division men were ordered

to fall in for work. Joe Small assisted the petty officers in taking muster, then the division was ordered to march off. The men still did not know for certain where they were going, but they did know that at a certain juncture in the road they could be ordered to turn right, which would take them to the parade ground, or they could be ordered to turn left, which would take them to a ferry that crossed the river to the ammunition loading dock. Joe Small, who was calling cadence, described what happened next:

> I was marching on the left-hand side of the ranks. When the lieutenant gave the command, 'Column left,' everybody stopped dead, boom, just like that. He said, 'Forward march -- column left!' Nobody moved. So he got up on a platform and he said 'Small, front and center.' I walked up and crossed to the front, stopped in front of him. He said, 'I'm going to give you a direct order to go back to work. Will you obey that order?' And I told him, 'No, sir.' Then somebody over in the ranks said, 'If Small don't go, we're not going, either.' Well, that put me in the forefront of everything, made me the spokesman for the whole group.

Lieutenant Delucchi went to the administration building to report the matter to his superiors. The base Chaplain, Lt. Commander Flowers, was then sent over to talk to the men:

> I walked up and called them around me. I told them I wanted to talk to them and to gather there around me. They came forward and gathered around me, and I asked them what the trouble was, and they said they didn't want to go over and load ammunition or handle ammunition. I tried to persuade them that it was their duty to do so. They still persisted, saying they would not handle ammunition. Then I appealed to their race pride and mentioned the fact that they were letting down the loyal men of their race and their friends as well, if they didn't, and all to no avail; they

> still said that they would obey any other order but they would not handle ammunition, that they were afraid to do so. (GCM, 103).

The Chaplain and some officers attempted to shame the men into returning to work by appealing to race pride or patriotism. When this failed some of the officers offered to share the risk with the men by being present while they worked (GCM, 103, 122, 126). The Chaplain, for example, told the men he was also afraid of ammunition but that he would "go with them if they would go" (GCM, 103). But the men were skeptical. As one of them recounted: "We knew that they weren't going to stay there with us. All the officers, they get you down there and then as soon as you start working, they're gone." The men's response to the Chaplain was to ask if they were not entitled to survivors' leaves (GCM, 104). Interestingly, at least one of the officers attempted to re-introduce the discounting process by telling the men that the ammunition they were scheduled to handle was not as hazardous as the ammunition they had loaded at Port chicago (GCM, 126). This tactic also did not succeed. Thus, shaming, sharing and renewed discounting failed as tactics to get the men back to work.

The fourth division men were then ordered to the recreation building where they were to be interviewed one by one about their willingness to work and told they could face severe penalties. Some agreed to return to work; most did not. However, the interviews were interrupted before all men were talked to. Meanwhile the officers of divisions two

and eight were instructed to order their men to work. It was not certain whether the men were given direct orders or were simply asked if they were willing to work (GCM, 1363, 1395-6). In any case, most of the men balked. This process took up most of thee afternoon. The men who continued to express an unwillingness to handle ammunition were confined to a barge until the officers could decide what to do. Of 325 men in the three divisions, 257 were imprisoned on the barge. Meanwhile, civilian contract stevedores were hurriedly recruited to load the ship (GCM, 124).

THE BARGE MEETING

The men were confined to the cramped quarters of the barge for three days. Tensions were high. Officers had told the men they faced serious charges. There were also conflicts with the guards and some of the enlisted men assembled makeshift weapons to defend themselves. Others wanted to forget about the resistance and go back to work. Small recalled an encounter with one such man.

> He was a little fellow, young, about 17 years old. He wanted to go back to work, and he asked me could he leave the barge to go back to work. I told him, 'You can, but I wouldn't advise it.' I advised him to stay with the men and we'd all see this through together. If we go back as a unit, then that's one thing. But if we go back one at a time, the one that goes back will be looked down on by the others as a traitor and a deserter.

Everyone was on edge. Men were angry and fearful, and almost in a state of panic. Arguments were frequent, and more than one fight broke out as men disagreed over whether

they should return to work.

One group of men contacted their division officer and told him they were willing to go back to work. The officer told them it was too late, and they were left on the barge (GCM, 1368).

The men were marched from the barge to the chow hall for meals. On August 10th a fight broke out in the chow hall. The men were not permitted to smoke on the barge or in the chow hall, but apparently someone started to smoke and this led to a fight with one of the guards. The fight was broken up, but maintaining the unity and discipline of the group was proving more and more difficult.

That evening Joe Small talked with some of the other enlisted men who had been assigned to keep order on the barge. It was agreed to call a meeting of all the men. In an interview, Small explained his reasoning:

> There was a general state of rebellion on the barge. That's why I called the meeting. The men were arming themselves with homemade knives, spoons that were turned into knives, things like that. It was a pretty hairy situation and I got into it to try to offset a disaster that I saw coming, which was some of the men getting shot or some of the Marines getting hurt. If a Marine had come on that barge and the men decided to do something to him there was no escape for him. By the same token, if they started shooting on that barge there's no way possible to hit any one particular man because we were too packed on there. And fights had broken out over differences of opinion. Two men would get to fighting right there on the barge because one thought that he should go back to duty and another thought he shouldn't. And if five men got to fighting on that barge, ten or twelve could get killed. That's how densely packed we were. So, with me to bring them down to one way of thinking, because as long as there was division on the barge there was

> a chance of a riot. So it was in my interest, being one of those imprisoned on that barge, it was in my interest to offset any violence that might occur. I thought about calling a meeting and talking to the men to quell their anger a little, cool them down. This is what I was attempting to do.

Small called the meeting and spoke to the men. He urged the men to "knock off the horseplay" and obey the guards. He stressed that the men should avoid getting into trouble. "That is just what the officers want us to do; they want us to mess up. The officers want us to do something so they can mess us up, so they will have something on us. If we obey the shore patrol and the officers and don't get into any trouble, they can't do anything to us. If we do get into trouble, they are liable to call in the Marines." Then he told the men: "We've got the officers by the balls -- they can do nothing to us if we don't do anything to them. If we stick together, they can't do anything to us."

The meeting lasted only a few minutes. It seemed to have the desired effect; some of the men applauded when Small finished speaking. Whatever may have been Small's motives, the fact that a meeting took place on the barge later became known to the officers (some of the men suspected there was a snitch in their group), and during the mutiny trial this fact was presented by the prosecution as evidence that Small had organized a mutinous conspiracy among the men.

According to another enlisted man, Small also organized

the men to handle their meals and to minimize problems in the chow hall. Some men cooked, others served, and others cleaned the kitchen. The level heads among the men were anxious to encourage cooperation and to show the officers that the men were willing to obey all orders except to load ammunition. "In other words, what we was doing, we was avoiding trouble," one man recalled. "We was setting up a system where they couldn't say, 'Heck, they don't want to do nothing.' Anything they wanted done, we did it."

The men were still uncertain as to what their fate would be. The optimists thought that if they stuck together they might be transferred to other duty, or given dishonorable discharges. Some thought they might be imprisoned for a while. No one expected they would be charged with mutiny. "We didn't even know what mutiny meant," one man recounted. "We thought mutiny was something like when you kill people or take over something. We didn't know you could define disobeying orders as being mutiny. We thought mutiny could only happen on a ship." "As far as we were concerned mutiny could only be committed on the high seas," Small would later say. "And we weren't on the high seas. I, for one, didn't consider refusing to go to work mutiny. We didn't try to take over anything. We didn't try to take command of the base. We didn't try to replace any officers; we didn't try to assume an officer's position. How could they call it mutiny?"

But call it mutiny they did.

SELECTING THE 50 "MUTINEERS"

The following day, August 11th, the men from the barge were marched to the baseball diamond and assembled in a "U" formation, under heavy armed guard. Shortly, Admiral C.H. Wright arrived in a jeep and addressed the men. One of them recalled the admiral's words:

> Just in case you don't know who I am, my name is Admiral Wright and I am the commandant of the Twelfth Naval District. They tell me that some of you men want to go to sea. I believe that's a goddam lie. I don't believe any of you have enough guts too go to sea. I handled ammunition for approximately thirty years and I'm still here. I have a healthy respect for ammunition; anybody who doesn't is crazy. But I want to remind you men that mutinous conduct in time of war carries the death sentence, and the hazards of facing a firing squad are far greater than the hazards of handling ammunition.

The death threat made by the admiral came as a shock to the men. Most were stunned, but some couldn't believe it and tried to discount the threat. One man muttered: "Man, this guy can't have nobody shot. We ain't fighting no war here. They can't do this. They'd have to have an act of congress to shoot somebody in the United States." But this thin hope could not be sustained.

In effect, Admiral Wright raised the stakes in the confrontation. The risks of continued resistance had been made painfully evident and could no longer be discounted. The choice between returning to ammunition work or continuing to refuse appeared now to be a choice between possible death and certain death. It was a terrible choice and emotional tensions reached their highest level as the

men considered their options.

The admiral spoke briefly with some of the men individually, then departed. After the admiral left the men were ordered by their division officers to fall into two groups -- those willing to obey all orders and those not willing. It was an incredibly difficult moment: Several men wept openly as they chose one side or the other; two brothers separated and took opposite positions; many men vacillated, going first to one group then to the other. Some men protested that they were still afraid of ammunition and they were assigned to the unwilling group (GCM, 1400). Another man essayed some gallows humor and teased his partner: "What you gonna do? You gonna let them shoot you blindfolded or you gonna be looking at them."

In the end, all of the Eighth Division indicated their willingness to work and all but 44 men in the other two divisions found themselves in the willing group. The 44 were taken away under guard. The next day they were joined by six other men from the Second and Fourth Divisions who had indicated they were willing to work but who failed to show up for work duty (GCM, 1371).

Among the 50 men were some of those whom the officers considered the "ringleaders" of the mutiny, such as Joe Small. However, some men who actively encouraged others not to work, for example by circulating petitions, were not in the group of 50 -- at the last moment they agreed to go back to work, creating much ill will among those they had

recruited to resist. Joe Small described the 50 as "loudmouths and fighters," the "most nervy men" who stood up for themselves. But this description also did not accurately characterize the group.

Some of the 50 were certainly men who refused to be cowed by the officers. Others may simply have had the misfortune to be disliked by their division officers for other reasons and therefore found themselves among the mutineers. For example, two men were permanently assigned as mess cooks -- one because he had a nervous condition that made him a hazard to others on the pier, the other because he was underweight. Yet these two were now ordered to load ammunition and when they hesitated, they were thrown in with the mutineers. Another man had fractured his wrist in an accident on August 8th, and even though his arm was in a cast, he too was ordered to work. When he protested he found himself placed with the mutineers (GCM, 1401-2). Thus, the 50 men were not necessarily "ringleaders" nor were they all "loudmouths and fighters." Some were simply victims of the whims of their commanding officers. Put another way, some men selected themselves by their active involvement in the resistance; others were arbitrarily selected by the officers for reasons having little or nothing to do with the work stoppage. Indeed, when we compare those who were selected to be tried for mutiny with those who were not, the arbitrariness of the selection process stands out as its key feature.

INTERROGATION

The 50 men were taken to the brig at Camp Shoemaker, California. Small was placed in solitary confinement while the others were interrogated. Meanwhile, the 208 men who were considered willing to work did not do so; instead they were also brought to Camp Shoemaker for interrogation and summary court-martials. Thus all of the men were now faced with another hard choice: whether they would give evidence against each other during the ensuing investigation. The men were questioned without benefit of counsel; indeed several of them thought that the interrogators were their defense lawyers. The investigation continued through the month of August, and statements were obtained from almost all of the 258 men. Armed guards were present when at least some of the statements were taken, and it became a point of contention at the mutiny trial as to whether the statements were obtained voluntarily or under duress.

The interrogating officers were particularly anxious to gain evidence concerning the "ringleaders" of the alleged mutiny, especially Joe Small, and they freely used threats and tricks to get the evidence they wanted. Everyone was threatened with a general court martial. One man recalled that as soon as he went in for questioning he was told that he could be sentences to 7½ to 15 years. Then he was asked about the meeting on the prison barge -- who spoke and what was said. He denied knowing about the meeting. Another man described how the interrogators attempted to turn him

against Small and Sheppard by suggesting that since they were from the North and had a little education "they don't mean you no good." "What they wanted you to do," this respondent recalled, "they wanted you to hand numbers on Small." When asked by officers if Small was the leader, he answered no. "He said, well somebody has got to be the leader, everybody needs a leader. I said nobody made me do nothing. I said we don't need a leader if you know what's going on on that base."

When direct questioning and threats didn't work, then "tricks" were tried. "I remember being interviewed by an officer that I knew from Port Chicago, who said he was my friend and all this kind of thing," a respondent recalled.

> He said, 'Jack, I'm here to help you. You're in trouble and I'm here to help you.' I said 'Yeah, it looks like I'm in trouble -- I got a big P on me.' He said, 'Tell me what happened on the barge.' I said, 'Lieutenant, I don't know what went on on the barge. I was a scared jack rabbit on the barge.' He said, 'Now Jack you know what went on on that barge.' Well, we had this fellow, Linton (fictional name), in our division -- an unintelligent country boy who would try to please anyone, say anything they wanted, if they claimed to be his friend. Linton was questioned before me. So the lieutenant told me, 'Jack, you're not being very cooperative. Linton told me you spoke at the meeting, and that you were one of the guards.' 'Me?' I said, 'Not me. I was too scarred to move. I thought certain that any minute the Marines were gonna call me out and shoot me.' I'm just telling the lieutenant this because I know damn well that he wasn't my friend. He was wearing a uniform and he was a lieutenant in the Navy. I was wearing a P and I was a prisoner. He wasn't there to help me. So I wasn't cooperative, I didn't say the things he wanted to hear. That made the marine guard so mad I thought he was going to beat me up when I came out of there.

Another man, who described himself as coming "out of a gang oriented situation in Chicago," said that he refused to name the so-called leaders in the mistaken belief that if no one was named then all would be released -- which was apparently the practice of the Chicago police when they arrested youth gang members. This man also commented that just because someone was outspoken at a meeting did not mean that they were the leader of the group. Apparently his concept of leadership, based on his gang experience, was quite different.

In any case, with 258 men to question it was inevitable that some, for whatever reasons, would identify Joe Small as having spoken at the barge meeting and name others as having encouraged the men not to return to work. For his part, Small never denied having spoken at the meeting, although at the trial he would deny having used certain language which, in fact, he had used.

The interrogators drafted written statements based on what the men told them and each man was called to sign such a statement. Some men balked, saying the statements were not their own words and did not accurately reflect what they said. A very few men refused to sign the written statements, but most did so in the belief that they had no choice.

ANALYTIC SUMMARY

Structural conditions. The enlisted men were confronted with a situation of great uncertainty. They did not know what caused the terrible explosion and they did not know what would be their fate in the aftermath of the disaster. In effect, the men, individually and collectively, had to decide on a course of action in a situation whose primary structural characteristic was absence of information. This absence of information in turn contributed to a redefining of the situation by the men as they interacted with each other.

Expectations definitions. The men continued to hope to be transferred to other duty, but this was not in the offing. As the men talked over their situation, what emerged was a feeling that they could no longer discount the risk of another explosion, especially if they were required to go back into virtually the same unsafe working situation under the same officers. Moreover, the denial of survivors' leaves angered the men and focused attention on other unresolved grievances concerning racial discrimination and unsatisfactory working conditions. In the process of discussion a consensus gradually emerged -- that the men would not return to ammunition handling. In effect, an aggregate of individuals was slowly taking shape as a self-conscious collectivity capable of taking joint action. There had been spontaneous work slow-downs and even brief work stoppages in the past.

These probably provided a model of action for the men, and helped shape their expectation of a positive outcome. Some of the men recalled an incident in the summer of 1943 when the officers of a ship being loaded put up signs over the ship's toilets (heads) which read: "No niggers allowed to use these heads." These racist signs provoked an immediate work stoppage until the Port Chicago officers demanded that they be removed. The men then went back to work and apparently none of them was punished (COI, 964-5). Incidents such as these, in which collective action was successfully undertaken, bolstered the men's hope that a work stoppage now could be an effective way of bringing about change. (The fact that a few men may have decided not to return to work without having talked with others does not negate the importance of the discussion process in the emergence of a new definition of the situation. It seems clear that most of the men expected that only collective action would make any impact on the situation or protect them from reprisals.)

Interaction processes. After the initial work refusal the officers attempted unsuccessfully to re-impose their definition of the situation and get the men to return to work. At least some of the officers recognized that a contradictory viewpoint was emerging among the enlisted men. These officers attempted to suppress this contradictory definition and get the men back to work by shaming them (appealing to race pride and patriotism), offering to share

the risk by being present during the loading, and attempting to re-introduce the discounting process by suggesting that the ammunition they were to handle was less hazardous than the ammunition handled at Port Chicago.

Shaming as a tactic of social interraction assumes adherence to a common set of norms and values. Otherwise the person accused would feel no shame. However, in the eyes of the enlisted men the officers had discredited themselves by what appeared to be deceptiveness concerning the risks of the work. The bridge of common norms and values, shaky from the start, was now destroyed.

The same could be said for the offer to share the risk and the attempted re-introduction of discounting. Sharing and discounting can be considered as two tactics of managing the awareness of risk. Sharing acknowledges the existence of risk but implies that the risk is not so great as it may seem; otherwise there would be no offer to share the risk. Discounting, of course, directly minimizes the risk by constructing some reason to believe the risk is not great. But sharing also depends upon acceptance of a definition of the situation in which the integrity of the actors (officers, in this case) is not in doubt. However, the credibility of the officers is precisely what was called into question by the explosion at Port Chicago. Hence, the failure of these tactics to reassure the men and restore the normal work routine.

When these tactics failed the officers resorted to

outright threats. In effect, the officers raised the stakes. The men were threatened with long prison terms and possibly death.

The imprisonment on the barge and the threats from the officers created divisions among the work refusers. The developing consensus which supported the new definition of the situation (which affirmed that a collective work stoppage was a reasonable line of action) was badly shaken by the threats. Some wanted to abandon resistance and return to work. Other "hot heads" began arming themselves with makeshift weapons and vowed to defend themselves. A few "cool heads," Joe Small among them, saw another disaster coming and tried to avoid it by "cooling out" the hot heads and keeping the back-to-workers in the group. At the barge meeting Small was threading a very thin line between keeping order (as the defense would assert) and conspiring to mutiny (as the prosecution would argue). In any case, there can be little doubt that Small was attempting to influence the outcome of events by maintaining the unity and discipline of the group.

While encouraging resistance, Small also tried to avoid a situation of total non-cooperation in the hope of keeping the group's options open. With the exception of going back to ammunition loading, Small urged the men to obey all orders and to cooperate with the guards and officers. The subsequent organization of chow hall duties was partly aimed at showing the officers that the men were being cooperative

rather than recalcitrant. The men hoped that through the tactic of qualified cooperation they could demonstrate the specific and limited objectives of their work stoppage and thus gain their objective of a transfer of duty or change in safety of working conditions.

Instead the men experienced a further narrowing of options as severe sanctions were threatened to be imposed. After the meeting with Admiral Wright many of the men concluded that continued resistance was futile. The Admiral, representing top military authority, raised the stakes in a way that could not be discounted: The risk of facing a firing squad outweighed the risk of another explosion -- the former seemed a certainty, the latter only a possibility. In effect, the Admiral broke the resistance of most of the men by confronting them with a risk of the same magnitude as that which they encountered in ammunition loading.

What we find, then, is that the officers gradually escalated their threats until they matched the risks of ammunition work. Faced with this matching of risks, only a few men could continue with resistance. Most concluded that the calculus of risk management now required capitulation. Where absence of information had previously characterized the situation, the men now knew precisely what the stakes were. Where ambiguity had prevailed, the men now knew that continued resistance could well result in death.

From an analytic perspective, the data in this chapter reveal that two key features of institutional funneling are (1) option determination -- an institution's ability to define and narrow the behavioral options open to individuals, and (2) cost determination -- an institution's ability to impose sanctions for deviant behavior. By limiting behavioral options and imposing penalties for deviation, an institution is able to secure at least outward conformity by a majority of its members and to sanction those who do not conform (thus controlling them also). The option determination and cost determination capabilities of an institution may be high or low. In the military, a "total institution" (Goffman, 4-5), the institution's ability to determine options and costs is high; in a voluntary association institutional determination is generally low. However, as we have seen, the conformity imposed by a total institution may not spring from internalization of institutional values and norms, especially when there is a value conflict with primary groups which are a part of the institution. Given an appropriate stimulus, the latent value conflict may break into the open and present an overt challenge to the institution.

The work stoppage was an effort to break out of the process of institutional funneling and to forge new options. Indeed, for a short time the power of the institution was undermined as the men openly challenged the authority

structure. Conscious risk-taking replaced discounting and indifference as the primary group solidified around a spokesman who articulated the new group consensus. However, at each stage of the confrontation -- initial work stoppage, barge imprisonment, meeting with Admiral Wright -- additional individuals dropped out of the rebellion after recalculating the costs of resistance, while others were arbitrarily included in the rebellious group by the action of the officers. In any case, the process of institutional funneling was soon re-imposed on all the enlisted men, some returning to duty while others were channeled into a court martial.

The arbitrariness of the funneling process is also one of its salient features. The options available to the enlisted men and the costs imposed for deviation had little or nothing to do with their individual or collective goals, but were determined by the needs of the military. As in any bureaucracy, institutional norms and values in the Navy were codified in formal rules and regulations which minimize the importance of individual or situational variation. Thus, individuals or groups which differ with those norms and goals will be treated in a manner that they deem arbitrary and unfair because their specific subgoals have been ignored. The resolution of such value conflicts often requires the intervention of social forces outside the institution in question. However, there was still one more act to be played out in the Port Chicago drama before outside intervention would take place.

CHAPTER 5

TRIAL, IMPRISONMENT, RELEASE

In early September, 1944, Admiral Wright formally charged the 50 men with munity. The specification accused them of "having conspired each with the other to munity against the lawful authority of their superior naval officers duly set over them, by refusing to work in the operation of loading ammunition aboard ships and unloading ammunition from ships, did, on or about 11 August 1944, at said Naval Barracks, make a munity... in that they, having lawfully ordered by their commanding officer, Joseph R. Tobin, commander, U.S. Navy (Retired), to work in the operation of loading ammunition aboard ships and unloading ammunition from ships at the U.S. Naval Ammunition Depot, Mare Island, California, did then and there wilfully, concertedly and persistently refuse to obey, and did wilfully, concertedly and persistently disobey, disregard and defy said lawful order with a deliberate purpose and intent to override superior military authority; the United States then being in a state of war." Conviction for mutiny would mean long prison sentences, and possibly the death penalty for some.

A seven-member court was appointed to hear the evidence and decide a verdict in the case. The court, composed of senior naval officers, was headed by Rear Admiral Hugo W. Osterhaus, a forty-year career officer brought out of

retirement for the occasion. The prosecution team was to be headed by Lt. Commander James F. Coakley, who was previously an assistant district attorney in Alameda County, and a man who in the 1960s would achieve noteriety as the DA who prosecuted the Black Panthers. The defense team was headed by Lt. (j.g.) Gerald F. Veltmann, an undistinguished attorney.

The trial opened on September 14, 1944, at the Treasure Island naval station in San Francisco Bay. The case was given much fanfare by the Navy and the proceedings were covered by the press. Photos of the accused men were distributed to the press along with sensationalistic statements about the alleged mutiny. The court-martial was described as the first mutiny trial of World War II and the first mass mutiny trial in the history of the Navy. The Navy was anxious to have the trial publicized, perhaps to counter charges that it would be a kangaroo court and perhaps also to intimidate other dissident sailors. In any case, the prosecutor, judge advocate Coakley, was confident that he had an air-tight case against the 50 men.

Each of the accused men were called before the court and asked how they pleaded to the charges. All of them pleaded "Not guilty."

The prosecution then began its presentation. Judge advocate Coakley first called several officers to recount the events of the work stoppage and its aftermath. Commander Joseph R. Tobin, who was commanding officer of the

Ryder Street Naval Barracks, testified that on August 9th he received a report of a refusal to work on the part of the Fourth Division. He then ordered Lt. Delucchi, the division officer, to order the men to work. Subsequently, he ordered that the men be brought before him individually. He spoke with six or seven of the men, he said, and ordered them to work. The men responded that they were afraid to handle ammunition (GCM, 19). Tobin was then interrupted by a phone call informing him that the second and eighth divisions had also refused to work. Tobin instructed Lt. Carleton Morehouse, Eighth Division officer, and Lt. James Tobin, Second Division officer, to get their men back in formation and order them to work. Commander Tobin himself did not further talk with the enlisted men. Some 258 men still refused to work, Tobin testified, and they were then placed on a barge. In cross-examination the defense established that although 50 men were on trial for refusing to work, COmmander Tobin could not say from personal knowledge that any of them, with the exception of the six or seven he interviewed, were ever ordered to work (GCM, 30).

Next the prosecution called Lt. Ernest J. Delucchi, fourth division officer, to testify. Delucchi identified 25 of the accused men as members of his division and testified that on August 9th, while marching his division (including 22 of the accused) to work to load ammunition, he ordered one lagging man out of formation whereupon the men broke ranks. Delucchi stated that he ordered his division leader

to get the names of the men who were willing to work while he went to the main office to report the situation to his commanding officer. Delucchi also claimed that when his division was first mustered that he heard members of the eighth division say, "Don't go to work for the white mother-fuckers." (This was not corroborated by other witnesses (GCM, 1394).)

Delucchi then returned to his men and mustered them again to await the arrival of Commander Tobin. Meanwhile, Chaplain Jefferson M. FLowers showed up and talked to the men, and Delucchi contacted the naval barracks and requested that a shore patrol detail stand by.

Delucchi then addressed his men:

> I told the men that first of all we had never had any trouble like this at the base, certainly that they were letting the colored people down if they refused to work and I told them that they took an oath like I did to obey orders while they were in the service. I told them that there were a lot of people who were working for the negro (sic) people who also had sons and daughters and relatives on the other side that were fighting and that it wouldn't help the negro people any if those people withdrew their support when they found out about how these men were acting. I pointed out to them that some of them were over on Mare Island when a destroyer came in that was torpedoed amidships, and I also pointed out that they didn't see the men of the destroyer going over the side and quitting the ship.... (GCM, 45).

At this point Delucchi was interrupted by defense attorney Veltmann who objected to this line of testimony as being prejudicial and immaterial. Veltmann also observed that Delucchi's testimony did not indicate that a direct order to go to work was given to the men. Subsequently,

Delucchi admitted that only one of the accused men was ever ordered by him personally to go to work (GCM, 49). (Delucchi ordered other men back to work, and some refused but somehow they did not wind up among the "mutineers.") Meanwhile, Delucchi's petty officer had been collecting the names of the men who were willing to work -- eleven out of 105 men said they were willing to work.

Under cross-examination Delucchi admitted that some of the men said they were afraid, that they would do other things but not load ammunition. Delucchi also admitted that among the men who were ordered to work that day and the next was one man, Ollie Green, who had his arm in a sling due to an accident, and two other men whom Delucchi himself did not consider "Up to par;" indeed one of the men had a nervous condition and was not previously assigned to ammunition loading (GCM, 82, 89).

After the men were addressed by Lt. Delucchi they were marched to the recreation building where they were talked to by various officers, including Commander Tobin. Some of the men were ordered to load ammunition, and a list was drawn up of those who responded affirmatively or negatively.

Meanwhile, orders had gone out for the second and eighth divisions to be mustered for work. Lt. Carleton Morehouse, division officer of the Eighth Division, testified that confusion broke out when he mustered his division and attempted to order them to work. Morehouse reported his problem to Commander Tobin, and then held a

second muster where he ordered men individually to work. Most of the division refused. The men who refused were put aboard a barge with the other resisters from the Fourth Division (GCM, 113-4).

The Second Division had remained at Port Chicago after the explosion to help with the clean up operation. On August 9th they came down by bus to Mare Island to load ammunition. Upon arrival at Mare Island, the men were assembled and addressed by their division officer, Lt. James E. Tobin. Lt. Tobin told the men of the refusal to work by members of the other two divisions. He warned them of the serious consequences that could follow such a refusal, and then ordered his men to work. Most refused, some saying they were afraid to handle ammunition. The refusers were marched over to the prison barge.

Most of the remainder of the prosecution case was made up of testimony by enlisted men from the second, fourth and eighth divisions. At least some of these men were already convicted in summary court-martials for their involvement in the work refusal. In general these men testified that there had been much talk about not going back to work in the days leading up to August 9th, that a "don't work" list was circulated, and that Joe Small spoke at the barge meeting and urged the men to stick together, stating that they "had the officers by the balls."

THE DEFENSE

All of the accused men were called to take the stand in their own defense. In general they testified that they were willing to obey orders, but they were afraid to handle ammunition, particularly since the July 17th explosion. Many of them contended that they were not given direct orders to load ammunition but rather were asked whether or not they were willing to obey all orders that might be given; because of their fear they failed to join, or remain in, the willing group. They asserted that they did not try to influence anyone not to work nor were they so influenced by others. Upon cross-examination many of them denied the accuracy of the statements taken while they were at Camp Shoemaker before the trial.

The most extensive testimony was by Joe Small, the man the prosecution accused of being a "ring leader" of the mutiny. Small recounted the explosion and the men's fearfulness and nervousness in its aftermath. He then told of the muster on August 9th and the fact that the men stopped marching when they were given the "Column left" order by Lt. Delucchi. Small said he was confronted by Delucchi. "I told him I would obey any order except the order to load ammunition" (GCM, 367). Small explained that he was afraid of ammunition. Small testified that the men were subsequently ordered to the barge and that Delucchi put him and three other men in charge of the division 9GCM, 372). Small admitted that he spoke at the barge meeting on

the evening of August 10th, but he denied having urged the men to stick together or having made a statement about having "the officers by the balls." (In an interview with me, Small said the defense attorney advised him to deny having made these statements.)

The defense strategy was to deny that there was a mutinous conspiracy and instead to argue that the men were in a state of shock; that fear caused by the explosion was behind their reluctance to return to ammunition handling. "These fifty men had been at Port Chicago for from three to twenty-five months prior to the date of the explosion," defense attorney Veltmann said.

> They had loaded ammunition, handling all types of explosives, large and small, in their daily work... They were all subjected to the danger and the uncertainty of that work without an opportunity to fight back when and if the danger should rear its head and strike without warning, and strike without warning it did on the 17th of July... The repercussions from that catastrophe linger in this court today -- the damage wrought by that explosion is well known and the lives lost have been counted as a matter of public knowledge. the confusion, the terror and shock were new experiences to these men and one they could not know was coming. When you cannot see or hear the danger until after it bursts in your face, until after the flames envelop your surroundings, until after the concussion has shaken your world and wiped out the lives of your fellow workers without warning, when you see them picked up in baskets and pieces -- an arm, a leg, or a head and shoulder -- or you help pick up the remnants of human bodies, as some of these men did, when you can't see or hear your opponent in battle you must fear him -- fear him the more for the reason he can wipe your name from the slate of life with one sweep and you are powerless to resist his move. Certainly, genuine fear can be engendered from the type of duty that these men had -- without undergoing the experience of a blast practically unprecedented in history. Certainly, fear is the

> logical result of such an experience, an uncontrollable fear, a fear actually that controls your actions and influences your normal reasoning beyond your ability to handle it" (GCM, 1383, 1387-8).

To support the contention the defense called upon a Navy psychiatrist, Richard H. Pembroke. Pembroke testified that indeed the experience of a huge explosion would generate fear and that "fear is a condition which prepares the body organism for impending or anticipated action protective in nature" (GCM, 1034).

With regard to the prosecution charge that there had been mutinous talk among the men prior to the August 9th work refusal, the defense responded: "There was talk of ammunition at Shoemaker, so the prosecution insists -- yes, the probably was, but there is no reliable recorded evidence of the type of talk that the prosecution would have you believe took place. There was no talk of refusing to load ammunition; there was no talk of joining minds and forces to usurp, subvert, or override superior military authority. If there was conversation among the men, it must have been of the specific incident of the explosion. The damage that it took and the fear that it imposed in the minds of the men, as individuals -- what would be more natural for these men and others in their division to exchange comments along these lines? Have you ever discussed with a friend, with whom you witnessed an unusual scene or accident, the details involved? Did you exchange opinions as to how it might have happened; didn't you gentlemen, in fact, discuss with your

acquaintances the explosion at Port Chicago? I did -- and I feel certain that you have done the same. And what would be more natural that the discussion and exchange of views by the men that underwent that experience? That is not conspiracy; that is not scheming; that does not provide the essential elements of mutiny or conspiracy; nor even lay the groundwork therefore" (GCM, 1389).

As to the list that was circulated, the defense replied that the men were simply exercising their right to petition for a change of duty. "What was the list for? It was a list of men who didn't want to handle ammunition, and can you wonder at that? The evidence on that matter points to the fact that the list was to be handed to Lt. Delucchi, the division officer of the Fourth Division... Now I ask you if this is true -- and it must be fore therein lies the only reason for the existence of any such paper -- would the men who intended to present their desires to their division officer through the list place anything on the list, or originate it for a purpose that would be contrary to the existence of such a list itself -- and by labeling the list with the statement that it contained the names of men afraid of ammunition and those desiring a change of duty, those not wanting to handle ammunition -- are such men guilty of conspiracy to mutiny, or were they following what they had known to be the democratic way of life which incorporates the right to petition and freedom of expression of desires?" (GCM, 1391-2).

Finally, as to the prosecution contention that the August 10th meeting on the barge was a mutinous conspiracy led by Joe Small, Veltmann answered: "Yes, Small talked at that meeting, apparently he was the only one and the meeting lasted at the outset from four to five minutes... Small talked for a few minutes and in so doing fulfilled what to him, he considered, his duty and responsibility under legitimate appointment by superior authority." Veltmann argued that Small called the meeting to keep order and maintain discipline. "And it is submitted that the meeting on the barge at which Small urged cooperation and observation of the rules under which the men lived was greatly responsible for the highly acceptable order and discipline that was maintained" (GCM, 1399).

The defense, handled by young Navy lieutenants, made no mention of the working conditions at Port Chicago nor the men's grievances. Indeed, when one of the defendants, Ollie Green, blurted out that the officers had raced the divisions against each other in an effort to put on more tonnage, this startling revelation was ignored by the defense team (GCM, 348). The defense was not anxious to challenge the working procedures employed by the officers at Port Chicago.

From the outset of the court-martial proceeding the defense strongly objected to the mutiny charge, pointing out that the legal definition of mutiny was a concerted effort to usurp, subvert or override military authority. The defense contended that there had been no such attempt in

this case -- that the men were orderly and obeyed all orders, with the exception of orders to load ammunition. (On this latter point the defense also argued that no direct orders to load ammunition were ever issued, at least not to all the accused men. Even if such orders were issued, the defense argued, refusal to obey an order does not constitute mutiny (GCM, 1395-8).)

In his summation at the conclusion of the trial attorney Veltmann went into detail about the law of mutiny as defined in Naval Courts and Boards (naval military code). Mutiny consists, according to this code, in an unlawful opposition or resistance to or defiance of superior military authority, with a deliberate purpose to usurp, subvert or override such authority. Simple violence without proof of purpose to usurp, subvert or override authority is not mutiny, he contended. Quoting the code, Veltmann pointed out that "specific intent is an essential element" (GCM, 1378). Veltmann cited many cases and legal references to support his contention concerning the necessity of intent.

Continuing his argument, Veltmann asserted that simultaniety of action did not prove that the individuals involved acted in concert. "It is submitted that the simulataneous act of more than one person is not indicative of concerted action unless it is proved beyond any reasonable doubt that the action by all at the same moment is the result of mutual communication of opinion or proposition or a plan or system to be pursued as the result

of conference or agreement" (GCM, 1383). Such had not been proved by the prosecution, he concluded.

The prosecution responded that intent was established by the men's actions. Turning to Winthrop's Military Law and Precedents (2nd ed.), a legal reference cited by the defense, prosecutor Coakley quoted a citation: "The intent may be openly declared in words or acts done, or it may be gathered from a variety of circumstances, no one of which perhaps would of itself along have justified the inference. But the fact of combination -- that the opposition or resistance is the proceeding of a number of individuals acting together apparently with a common purpose -- is, though not conclusive, the most significant and most usual evidence of the existence of the intent in question" (GCM, 1404-5). Summing up his position Coakley asserted, "If one man by himself refused to obey a lawful order, it wouldn't be mutiny, if that is all he did, but where you have two or three or more, a large number, as you have in this case, acting simultaneously and collectively together in a mass or group refusal to obey an order, you have an evidentiary case of conspiracy, you have an evidentiary case of mutiny, and you satisfy the requirements of the law with reference to specific intent."

In effect, the defense position was that the work stoppage was due to an aggregate of actions by individuals who acted out of fear because of their common experience of the explosion at Port Chicago. There was no deliberate

conspiracy to usurp, subvert or override military authority. The prosecution, on the other hand, argued that testimony about the men talking of not returning to work prior to August 9th, and the barge meeting on August 10th at which Joe Small spoke, all was evidence of a deliberate conspiracy to mutiny. Moreover, since all of the men refused to return to work more or less simultaneously this was further evidence of intentional collective resistance. Collective insubordination is mutiny, Coakley concluded (GCM, 1407).

As the trial went into its final days the accused men reflected upon their fate. They were not optimistic. "The trial was just procedure," one of them told me in an interview. "We knew before the trial's end what it was going to be like. We knew we was going to be found guilty, no matter what we said, because we were told that we couldn't say certain things or that it had been covered, and you knew full well it wasn't covered." Commenting on the defense strategy, Joe Small said in an interview: "I thing they tried to show me as a dedicated Navy man and the rest of them [the accused] as inexperienced boys, and me trying to control them in the best way I knew who. But they admitted that we were going to get some time, because it is a written law that you don't get away with nothing in the Navy. Regardless of your defense, you can expect to be found guilty." Another man expected that the defendants would be found guilty and then be sentenced to be shot.

On October 24, 1944, after only 80 minutes of

deliberation by the court, all 50 of the accused men were found guilty of mutiny. The next month they were sentenced. The -- including "ring leaders such as Joe Small -- were sentenced to 15 years in prison; 24 were sentenced to 12 years; 11 were sentenced to ten years; and five were sentenced to eight years. All were to be dishonorably discharged from the Navy.

By the end of November, the 50 men were serving their sentences at the Terminal Island prison near Los Angeles.

APPEAL AND RELEASE

The mutiny trial was widely covered by the local Bay Area press, and by nationally circulated black newspapers such as the Chicago Defender and the Pittsburgh Courier. Early in the trial an official of the Vallejo branch of the NAACP sent a letter and clippings on the trial to the national office of the NAACP in New York. A short time later Thurgood Marshall, who was then special counsel for the NAACP and who had handled many military cases, arrived on the West Coast to observe the trial for 12 days. Marshall met with the accused men and learned of the conditions at Port Chicago. He voiced outrage over what he was at the trial and heard from the men. He told reporters that "these men are being tried from mutiny solely because of their race and color." Later he described the case as "one of the worst 'frame-ups' we have come across in a long time. It was deliberately planned and staged by certain

officers to discredit Negro seamen." Upon his return to New York Marshall fired off a letter to Secretary of the Navy James Forrestal. He commended the naval defense team for good work in defending the men "within the limitations of Navy rules." But Marshall knew very well that the men's grievances had not been presented at the trial, and he proceeded to outline some of these in his letter to Forrestal in the form of questions. Marshall asked why only blacks were loading ammunition at Port Chicago, and why the men were not given survivors leaves after the explosion, among other questions (JRF).

Forrestal refused to answer the questions on training and competition on the grounds that they were based on "conjecture." As to discrimination in ammunition handling, Forrestal replied blandly that since Port Chicago was manned predominantly by black enlisted personnel then "Naturally, therefore, the only Naval personnel loading ammunition regularly were Negroes." He also said there were other ammunition depots manned by white personnel. If there is discrimination, it must be against whites as well as blacks, he wrote. As for the lack of ratings Forrestal described the men's tenure at Port Chicago as a "trial period... during which the men considered most capable of assuming added responsibilities can be selected." Finally, Forrestal asserted that previous experience had shown the "requiring men to immediately return to handling ammunition, after an explosion, is the preferred method of preventing them from

building up mental and emotional barriers which, if allowed to accumulate, become increasingly difficult to overcome."

Forrestal sought to semantically liquidate the question of racial discrimination in handling ammunition. But the explosion and the ensuing publicity about the work force at Port Chicago had made the Navy sensitive to the discrimination issue. Moreover, 1944 was a presidential election year and the Rooselvelt administration was eagerly cultivating the black vote. Memoranda circulating in the Navy department expressed concern about possible adverse reaction to the discrimination question, and as early as September, 1944 orders went out requiring the formation of two white loading divisions to work at Port Chicago. Thus while Forrestal and his staff were trying to evade the discrimination issue, they were taking steps to head off criticism. But they acted too late.

The explosion and the highly publicized trial focused public attention on racial discrimination in the Navy and provoked an angry reaction from the black community and liberal white groups throughout the country. The protest began spontaneously as a few people, learning of the trial, wrote letters objecting to the treatment of the men and the sentences. Sensing the importance of the case, the NAACP by December 1944 had begun preparing a publicity pamphlet on the case and was planning to represent the men in the appeal process. A two-prong strategy was worked out by the NAACP: First a mass campaign would be organized to publicize the

case and build popular pressure for the release of the men; second, the NAACP Legal Defense Fund would intercede on behalf of the men and file an appeal brief.

Beginning in January 1945 editorials on the case appeared in the Crisis and other black publications. Over the next several months thousands of names were collected on petitions, numerous black labor and civil liberties organizations issued statements, protest meetings were held in several cities, and prominent individuals such as Eleanor Roosevelt and Lester Granger were encouraged to take an interest in the case (JRF). The mass campaign continued throughout most of 1945 and was felt in many regions of the country. It was one of the largest popular campaigns u until that time on behalf of black men who had run afoul of military justice.

Thurgood Marshall drafted an appeal brief and in April 1945 he made a personal appearance at the Navy's Judge Advocate General's office in Washington to present his arguments. Marshall contended that no direct order to load ammunition was given to the 50 defendants; that there was no mutiny even if an order was given ("I can't understand why, whenever more than one Negro disobeys an order, it is mutiny," he said.); and finally he accused the trial judge advocate of deliberately misleading the court on the law of mutiny and introducing inadmissible evidence. "The accused were made scapegoats in a situation brought about by a combination of circumstances," Marshall wrote in the brief.

"Justice can only be done in this case by a complete reversal of findings."

But the findings were not reversed; the convictions were upheld. Sentences for some of the men were reduced, but no one was released from prison. During the summer 1945 the NAACP urged all its branches and other supporters to send another wave of protest letters to the Navy.

Meanwhile, instances of mass resistance such as occurred at Port Chicago, Guam and the Seabees case had persuaded some of the Navy bureaucracy that Jim Crow was an unwise policy, not only because of its unjustness and economic inefficiency, but also because it concentrated blacks together in groups and made collective action by black servicemen possible. Better to disperse black sailors in the Navy by mixing them in with the whites. Navy officials who in the past had opposed racial integration now found themselves advocated of this "enlightened" new policy. In June 1945 the Navy announced it was discontinuing segregation in training camps and other programs. To herald its new policy, the Navy borrowed Lester Granger, executive director of the National Urban League, to become special advisor to the Secretary of the Navy. In this capacity Granger made three tours of Navy basses in the U.S. and overseas, including Port Chicago. In November 1945 Granger made his report and recommendations. He noted instances of continuing discrimination but he praised the Navy, declaring that "the Navy means business about revising its racial

policy and making it possible for every member of the service to give his best efforts in his nation's cause without hinder and without discrimination." In special reports on the Port Chicago and Guam situations, Granger urged the Navy to relax the severe sentences imposed (NUL).

In January 1946 Forrestal's office announced that 47 of the Port Chicago men were being released from prison. (Two remained for a time in the hospital and a third was not released because of a bad conduct record.) With the war over, some 1,700 imprisoned servicemen were given clemency, including the Guam and Port Chicago groups (JBF). The Port Chicago men were released from prison but not from the Navy. They were divided into small groups of three or four and then sent overseas for a period of "rehabilitation." Finally, over the course of the next year the men made their way back from exile and returned to their families and their private lives in the United States.

ANALYTIC SUMMARY

Structural conditions. Charging the 50 men with mutiny effectively re-asserted military authority. The men's fate was now in the hands of a military court. The unfolding of the struggle between the men and the officers was at an end. The men could no longer hope to influence the outcome of events by their present actions. Their options were closed. The outcome now depended upon how their previous actions would be interpreted by the court. But the scope of

possible interpretations was constrained by the fact that the defense attorneys were junior Navy officers who could not or would not choose to expose the improprieties of the officers at Port Chicago, such as promoting competition. Thus, the men's grievances about working conditions were effectively excluded from the deliberations as possible mitigating circumstances.

Expectations/definitions. The men had not expected to be charged with mutiny. However, once they were formally charged they realized that their effort to challenge, redefine and change the situation had failed. As the trial developed they expected the worst -- that they would be found guilty and imprisoned or shot. They could not only sit and observe as the locus of struggle shifted to the clash between prosecution and defense at the court-martial.

Interaction processes. The trial was in essence a process of struggle between two interpretations of the enlisted men's actions leading up to and after the work stoppage. The prosecution contended that the men, under the leadership of Joe Small, deliberately conspired to refuse to work, and that this collective refusal constituted mutiny. The defense argued that the men were not guilty of mutiny because it was never their intent to usurp, subvert or override the authority of the officers. At most, some of the men were guilty of refusing to obey an order -- but otherwise the entire group was orderly and obedient, the defense maintained. Having experienced the horror of the

terrible explosion, the defense contended that the men were understandably fearful and in shock, and that this was why they all were reluctant to return to handling ammunition. In other words, there was no collective decision to refuse to work; rather an aggregate of individuals acted similarly because of common fear.

As we have seen, some of the men may have decided entirely on their own not to return to work. Others were thrown in with the "mutineers" because of the whims of their officers. But many of the men were certainly influenced by discussions held before the work stoppage, and, later, by Small's urging of the group to stick together. What was happening, from a social-psychological perspective, is that an aggregate of individuals was evolving into a collective capable of taking joint action. In effect, the Port Chicago rebellion was a spontaneous strike that threatened to become a self-conscious resistance movement. Such resistance was intolerable to the Navy and extreme action, in the form of the mutiny court-martial, was taken by military authorities to squash the resistance before it developed further. The work stoppage was indeed a challenge to the legitimacy of military authority for it implicitly raised the question of whether men were bound to follow orders regardless of the risks involved. In civilian life the answer to that question might be "no," but in the Navy during war-time no challenge to military authority -- especially by lowly black enlistees -- could be tolerated. Seen in this light, the

outcome of the court-martial, as several of the defendants were aware, was a foregone conclusion.

The mutiny trial and imprisonment constituted the ultimate steps in institutional funneling in so far as maximum sanctions were imposed to secure conformity with institutional values and norms. All other options for negotiation or maneuvering by the enlisted men were closed off. They were now labeled as mutineers who attempted to usurp legitimate military authority. Hence, their punishment was justified in the eyes of the military bureaucracy, and this represented the triumph of institutional values and norms over those of the primary group. Nevertheless, the fact that a group of the men remained loyal to their informal leader and the values he articulated showed the tenacity of primary group solidarity.

Significantly, it was only when the arena of struggle was enlarged beyond the Navy that the process of institutional funneling was finally halted in so far as the Navy chose the less drastic option of scattering the men through bases in the pacific rather than continued imprisonment. The intervention of another institution (NAACP LDF) and the development of a mass campaign on behalf of the men eventually halted the funneling process and enabled them to return to civilian life.

CHAPTER 6

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

INSTITUTIONAL FUNNELING

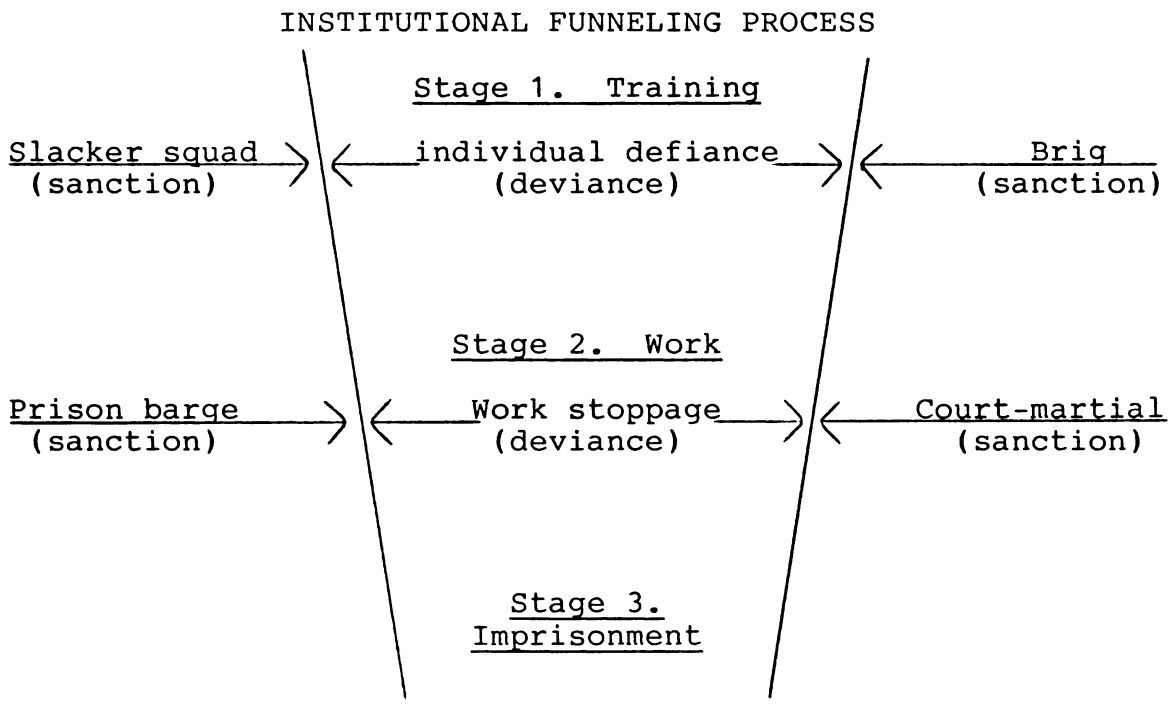
In this study institutional funneling has emerged as an important property of the situation which the Port Chicago enlisted men experienced. The concept of funneling was developed by Marsha Rosenbaum in a study of women heroin addicts. Rosenbaum found that the careers of women addicts were characterized by a narrowing of life options over time, a funneling process, which ended with the addict being "incarcerated in an invisible prison" (Rosenbaum, 11, 128-136). This process not only manifests itself in addict careers, it may also be structured into social institutions, such as the military.

Institutional funneling may be regarded as a process by which an institution secures conformity to its norms and values. Funneling may involve socialization, but it differs from socialization in that it does not require the internalization of the institution's norms and values, only outward conformity. Thus, where socialization brings about genuine conformity based on shared values, institutional funneling may achieve only a superficial conformity based on fear of sanctions. In terms of Merton's means/ends paradigm, institutional funneling may mask a fundamental value conflict and thereby postpone the rebellious response which his model predicts. In such circumstances rebellion

may not occur until something happens to call into question the prevailing institutional norms and goals.

Two aspects of institutional funneling are option determination and cost determination. By specifying and limiting behavioral options, the institution defines what is acceptable behavior. One of the main functions of military training is to acquaint inductees with the range of acceptable behavioral options. The institution also makes known the cost of deviant behavior. In the Navy this was done by requiring recruits to study the Blue Jackets' Manual. An institution may have a greater or lesser ability to specify options and determine costs; in the military these dimensions are maximized because the institution has control over all aspects of its participants' lives.

Figure 1 presents the funneling process as it affected the Port Chicago men:



At each stage (training, work, post-explosion) the diagram shows the role of sanctions in limiting deviance and narrowing the range of acceptable behavioral options. At certain points, through individual acts (defiance) or collective acts (work stoppage), the men attempted to break out of the funneling process and expand their options. But each deviant act was countered by institutional sanctions of increasing severity which ultimately imposed conformity to institutional norms.

Rebellion, however, was not the immediate response of most of the enlisted men to the situation, nor did they necessarily internalize the values and norms of the Navy as an institution. Their conformity was based instead on the emergence of the accommodating processes of discounting and balancing, to which we now turn our attention.

DISCOUNTING AND BALANCING AS COPING STRATEGIES

The major social-psychological finding of this study is that in certain situations of collective stress, discounting and balancing will emerge as important coping strategies. These strategies allow individuals to function in situations that might otherwise be considered intolerable. However, these coping strategies may be disrupted by what Blumer has called an "exciting event" (Blumer, 178) -- for example, an explosion -- with the result that a new response to the stressful situation emerges -- for example, a work stoppage.

Balancing and discounting emerge in situations where

individuals experience cognitive dissonance, that is, where they find themselves in some kind of "double bind." For example, in this study we noted that balancing developed in a situation where the black enlisted men (1) perceived a number of racial inequities in the Port Chicago situation, but (2) they also believed that "nothing could be done" to change the situation because of the obstinacy of the military authorities. Consequently, some of these men coped with this dissonance by balancing their grievances against what they regarded as the benefits of Navy life. In this manner, they accommodated themselves to a disagreeable situation.

We may note that in situations of racial accommodation, some form of balancing is often the mechanism by which the victims of racial discrimination accommodate themselves to their condition. Thus, in Booker T. Washington's famous Atlanta Exposition address in 1895 in which he announced his formula for accommodation, Washington in effect urged blacks to balance the acceptance of racial segregation against the presumed economic benefits they would achieve by "casting down their buckets" in the South. In the face of increased racial violence and lynchings, Washington's proposal seemed to many a reasonable way of coping with the collective stress of brutally enforced racial subordination.

Turning to the process of discounting, we found in this study that discounting emerged in a mandatory work situation where workers (1) knew or suspected that the potential for

disaster existed, but (2) the officers (authority) denied the danger and otherwise prevented the situation from being changed. Consequently, some of the enlisted men responded to this dissonance by discounting the risk of explosion -- minimizing the danger or blotting it entirely from their minds so that they could work as if no danger existed.

Discounting is often encountered in other situations where people must live with the threat of disaster. Coal miners, for example, live with the constant threat of death. One 50-year veteran of the mines explained how he coped with this stress as follows:

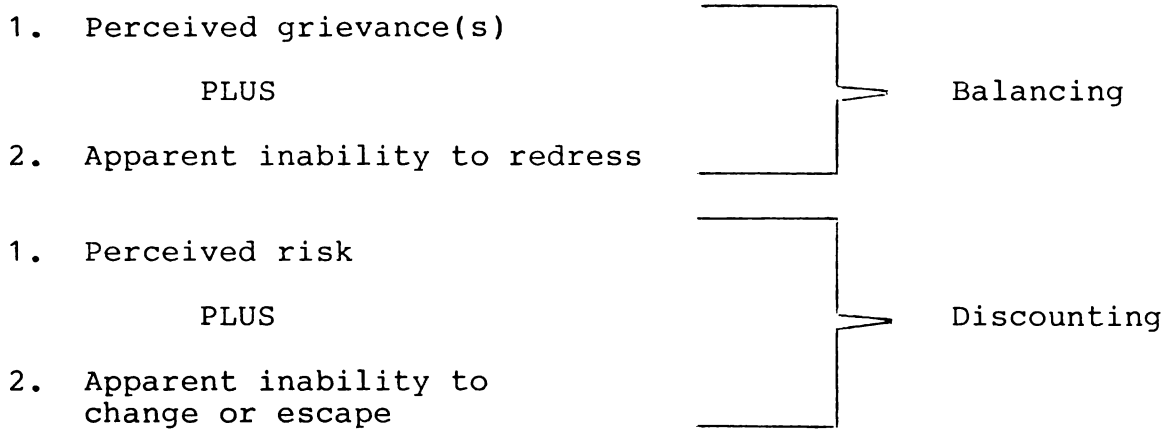
> That slate, it don't have any respect for persons. It'll fall on anybody. It comes to you that the man working right besides you gets killed, say. For a day or two it bothers you, and after that, why, you know you've got a living to make so you go back and try to forget. But I think that 90 percent of the coal miners are scared to death all the time they're in there. You get hurt, you dread going back in there, but you try to forget it -- or at least I did, and I don't think anyone is different from what I was (Quoted in Erikson, 104).

In Figure 2 I have attempted to summarize this discussion of situations in which balancing and discounting emerge as mechanisms for coping with stress.

At Port Chicago the explosion constituted a precipitating event which disrupted the coping processes of discounting and balancing, and opened the way for new responses to the situation. In the aftermath of the explosion the men were in a state of shock and, as is common in such situations, there was a widespread fear of a

recurrence of the disaster (Wolfenstein, 151). The disaster shattered their coping strategies and left them feeling terrified and demoralized. None of this is unusual. What was unusual about the Port Chicago disaster was that in its aftermath the enlisted men, under the leadership of Joe Small, refused to resume the normal work routine and in effect challenged the military power structure. The implications of these developments for disaster theory and the theory of social power will be examined in the sections that follow.

FIGURE 2



DISASTERS AND COLLECTIVE STRESS

It will be useful to review the literature on disaster studies to better understand the Port Chicago incident. The concept of disaster has been utilized in diverse and sometimes confusing ways. However, in behavioral science writings there appears to be a convergence in

conceptualizations of disaster. Thus, Form and Loomis state that "Disasters usually affect entire communities or large segments of communities and are present when the established social systems of the community abruptly cease to operate" (Form & Loomis, 180). Moore characterizes a disaster situation as due to an irresistible force resulting in acute social disorganization (Moore, 733). Somewhat more elaborate is Sjoberg's definition of disaster as "a severe, relatively sudden, and frequently unexpected disruption of normal structural arrangements within a social system, or subsystem, resulting from a force, 'natural' or 'social', 'internal' to a system or 'external' to it, over which the system has no firm 'control'" (Sjoberg, 357). The convergent aspects of these conceptualizations of disaster are underscored by Robert Merton who describes disaster as "a sudden and acute form of collective stress..." (Merton in Barton, xxiv-xxv).

Common elements in these definitions are the notions of suddenness, acuteness and collective stress. Barton defines collective stress as referring to situations where "many members of a social system fail to receive expected conditions of life from the system. These conditions of life include the safety of the physical environment, protection from attack, provision of food, shelter, and income, and guidance and information necessary to carry on normal activities" (Barton, 38). There can be little doubt that the events at Port Chicago "fit" this conceptualization

of disasters.

What kinds of social behavior emerge in disaster situations? The dominant model of disaster behavior in the literature is a sequential model based on structural-functional theory, and the key concept of social equilibrium. Sjoberg spelled out the implications of this concept for disaster behavior theory:

> ... A system does seek to sustain some link of working equilibrium among its component parts and/or with respect to its external environment, which includes other systems. And actors in the system generally share some notion of what is normality for it. Yet considerable empirical evidence supports the proposition that both scientists and actors in a system find it exceedingly difficult, often impossible, to discern precisely when and if the system is in equilibrium. Only in extreme situations, when a disaster leads to dramatic deviations from the traditional patterns, will the consensus among actors be that the system is clearly out of kilter (Sjoberg, 359).

Implicit here is a theory of action in disaster situations: actors become aware that the "system" is clearly out of kilter" and they take collective action to restore the social equilibrium. In the case of Port Chicago, we may recall the various tactics employed by the officers -- threatening, shaming, re-introducing discounting -- in an effort to get the enlisted men to return to work and thereby re-establish the social equilibrium.

The emphasis on restoration of social equilibrium in structural-functional disaster theory led to the development of a time-sequential model for understanding disaster behavior. This model was first worked out in 1952 by J.W.

Powell. The model has been widely employed in disaster studies since then, although some researchers, such as Barton, have modified or compressed it. Chapman summarizes the seven phases or periods in the model as follows:

1. WARNING -- during which there arises some apprehension based on conditions out of which danger may arise.

2. THREAT -- during which people are exposed to communications from others, or to signs, indicating specific, imminent danger.

3. IMPACT -- during which the disaster strikes, with consequent death, injury and destruction.

4. INVENTORY -- during which those exposed to the disaster begin to form a preliminary picture of what has happened and of their own condition.

5. RESCUE -- in which activity turns to immediate help for survivors, first aid for the wounded, freeing trapped victims, fighting fires, etc.

6. REMEDY -- during which more deliberate and formal activities are undertaken toward relieving the stricken and their community, both by the survivors and by outside relief agencies that have now moved onto the scene.

7. RECOVERY -- during which, for an extended period, the community and the individuals in it either recover their former stability or achieve a stable adaptation to the changed conditions which the disaster brought about (Baker & Chapman, 359).

It is apparent that the first six periods of this model can be "applied" -- with some modification -- to the Port Chicago disaster. However, it is equally obvious that recovery (of the social equilibrium) did not take place. Rather, a <u>period of confrontation</u> ensued (the work stoppage, court-martial, appeals campaign) which eventually resulted

in significant social change (desegregation of labor force, establishment of new safety regulations). How and why a period of confrontation may be initiated cannot be explained by the sequential model. Indeed, the sequential model is subject to a criticism that has been made of structural-functional theory in general: it cannot account for social change except as a residual category. The sequential model deals with the social crisis engendered by disaster, but it suggests no processes or mechanisms of disaster behavior which may lead to social change. Change is simply what is left after everything else is explained.

DISASTERS AND SOCIAL CONFRONTATION

This study of the Port Chicago disaster has suggested an important modification of the theory of the social outcome of disaster: A disaster, as a situation of extreme collective stress, may lead to a social crisis which intensifies existing social conflicts or provokes latent conflicts to break into open confrontations. A redefinition of the situation by the survivors of the disaster takes place so that a return to "normality" is precluded.

In the Port Chicago incident a social-psychological crisis was engendered by the traumatic shock of the explosion. Before the explosion the enlisted men had been faced with the stresses of a dangerous and undesirable working situation. These stresses, however, were routinized and made tolerable by the processes of discounting and

balancing. The explosion and its aftermath created extreme stresses -- a crisis -- by disrupting these processes. Through interaction a new definition of the situation emerged among these men asserted (1) that fear of another explosion due to unsafe working conditions was sufficient reason not to go back to work, and (2) that the officers could not punish the work refusers if everybody "stuck together." The emergence of this new definition of the situation was important in developing solidarity among the enlisted men after the shock and demoralization that followed the explosion. Moreover, this new definition was a major factor in the men's resistance to returning to loading ammunition.

Rue Bucher, in a study of blame and hostility in disasters (Bucher, 1957), has argued that blaming occurs when people are convinced that the responsible agents will not of their own volition take action to prevent a recurrence of the disaster. In the "talking it over" period that followed the Port Chicago disaster, some of the enlisted men came to blame the officers for creating the unsafe working conditions that may have led to the explosion. Many men were also blaming the ammunition itself, the danger of which had been previously discounted. The lack of any official explanation of the cause of the disaster and the failure of the officers to suggest that any changes might be made in the working conditions, or to respond to other grievances, contributed to the blaming

process.

Blaming may be regarded, in turn, as part of the larger process of redefining the situation. In The Derelicts of Company K: A Sociological Study of Demoralization, Shibutani had presented a relevant model of this process and its outcome:

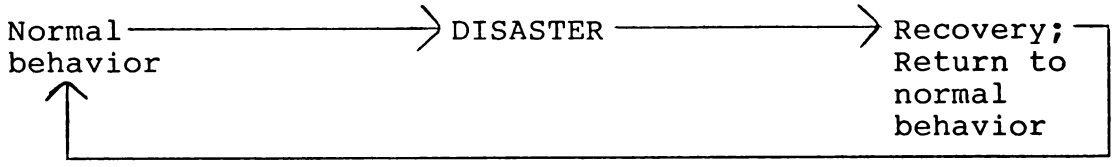
> 1. Encounter with a problematic situation that calls into question the prevailing institutional norms and definitions.
>
> 2. Collective deliberation by the affected group, during which alternative definitions are put forward and a consensus and common orientation emerge.
>
> 3. Coordinated action, based on the new definition, is taken to resolve the problem (426-430).

For the enlisted men at Port Chicago the problematic situation was whether to return to ammunition loading. There was much informal discussion of this problem and there emerged a common orientation not to return to this work. The views expressed by a respected individual (Joe Small) carried special weight in the deliberations. The collective work stoppage was an informally coordinated action taken in hopes of resolving the problem (See figure 3). Actually the process was somewhat more complicated due to its extension in time. There are tantalizing hints in the research of a complex interplay between deliberation and action as the work stoppage unfolded over several days and the 50 "mutineers" were singled out. It was not simply a matter of deliberation leading to action; sometimes a defiant act --

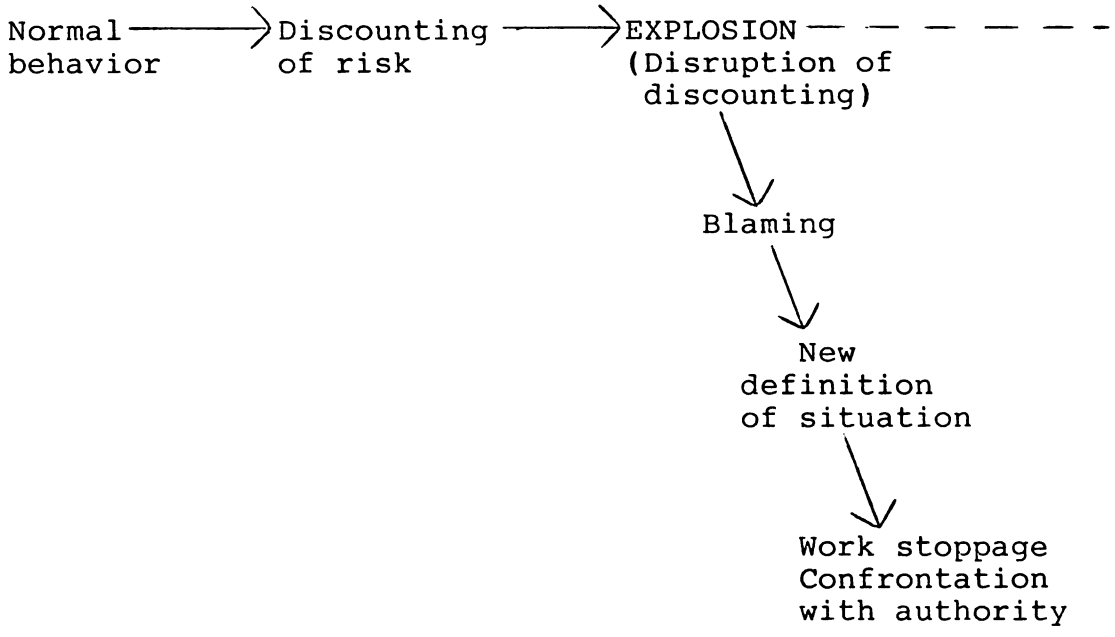
such as the smoking incident in the chow hall -- might provoke further discussion and attempts at arriving at (or maintaining) a consensus.

FIGURE 3
DISASTER BEHAVIOR TRAJECTORIES

I. Trajectory predicted by Sequential Model:



II. Trajectory in Port Chicago disaster:



Shibutani developed his model in an effort to conceptualize the process of demoralization in a military unit. He states that demoralization is indicated by the breakdown of discipline within a group and its inability to sustain coordinated action in achieving a goal (2-4). From the standpoint of the officers it could be argued that

discipline had broken down among the Port Chicago men and they were consequently unable to get on with the job of loading ammunition. But from the standpoint of the enlisted men themselves it could be argued that a new discipline was emerging in an effort to achieve a newly defined goal -- a successful work stoppage. Indeed, there is evidence that as the confrontation intensified morale among those who continued to resist steadily improved. The prolonged process of struggle shaped an aggregate of demoralized individuals into a self-conscious group capable of taking disciplined action. The members of that group came to be known as "The Port Chicago Boys," a label which symbolized and encapsulated the conflict between the enlisted men and the Port Chicago bureaucracy.

SOCIAL POWER IN THE MILITARY

The Port Chicago rebellion also provides an important insight into the nature of social power. In his famous essay, "Class, Status and Party," Max Weber has defined power as "the chance of a man or a number of men to realize their own will in communal action even against the resistance of others who are participating in the action." He adds that law exists "when there is a probability that an order will be upheld by a specific staff of men who will use physical or psychical [ideological] compulsion with the intention of obtaining conformity with the order, or of inflicting sanctions for infringement of it." Power,

therefore, appears to totally inhere in the structure and organization of society and its subunits.

However, the Port Chicago rebellion reveals a situation in which the power of the authorities is eroded and a countervailing locus of power emerges (temporarily) among the enlisted men during the process of social interaction.

At first sight, military or police power appear to be the ultimate form of brute power based on physical force. However a military (or police) unit is effective only so long as the chain of command is intact. That is, orders are issued by those in command and obeyed by those in the ranks. So long as the right of those in command to issue orders is not challenged -- or so long as their orders are not viewed as unreasonable -- then the chain of command remains intact and orders are obeyed. But this implies that each individual in the chain must at least acquiesce to a definition of the situation that regards specific orders as reasonable and that affirms the right of those higher in the hierarchy to issue commands and have them obeyed.

Fear of sanctions, as Weber suggests, is often the motive for such acquiescence. But even here we must note that there must be a belief that sanctions can and will be applied in order for fear to become a motive for compliance. What happens when the definition of the situation changes so that there is no longer the belief that sanctions can or will be applied? In that case, as happened in the Port Chicago rebellion, the chain of command breaks down, and

with it the effective power of the officers.

Eventually, the officers succeeded in re-establishing the chain of command in a series of confrontations with the enlisted men in which the majority of the men finally came to believe that strong sanctions would be applied to them if they continued their refusal to return to work. Those who did continue to refuse were, in fact, sanctioned by being court-martialed. The power of the officers was thereby restored.

Power, therefore, only partially inheres in the social structure; it also is socially constructed during the process of social interaction which defines the situation for actors. When an event occurs which provokes a redefining of the situation, then there may follow a dramatic shift in the locus of power. Indeed, a fundamental and permanent change in the definition of the situation may result in a social movement that effectively changes the social structure (Berger & Luckmann, 92-128). This was the challenge posed by the Port Chicago rebellion, and this possibly explains why extreme sanctions -- a mutiny court-martial -- were employed in suppressing it.

MENTAL HEALTH AND COLLECTIVE STRESS

The ability of human beings to cope effectively with situations of extreme stress and crisis has long been of interest to mental health specialists. A number of studies have been made of coping in extreme situations, including

Nazi concentration camps (Bettelheim), prisoner of war camps (Biderman), the aftermath of atomic attacks (Janis), and natural disasters (Wolfenstein). These studies reveal the great range of coping strategies which individuals and primary groups may adopt to preserve their mental health in the fact of inordinate stresses.

This study of the Port Chicago incident raises questions with regard to the effectiveness of the men's pre-explosion coping processes, and the immediate and long-term mental health effects of the explosion itself. Caplan has identified seven characteristics of effective coping behavior:

1. Active exploration of reality issues and search for information.

2. Free expression of both positive and negative feelings and a tolerance of frustration.

3. Active invoking of help from others.

4. Breaking problems down into manageable bits and working them through one at a time.

5. Awareness of fatigue and tendencies toward disorganization with pacing of efforts and maintenance of control in as many areas of functioning as possible.

6. Active mastery of feelings where possible and acceptance of inevitability where not. Flexibility and willingness to change.

7. Basic trust in oneself and others and basic optimism about outcome (Caplan, 14).

By this yardstick the efficacy of discounting and balancing must be questioned since these processes mask reality and constitute a kind of self-deception. On the

other hand, these processes psychologically removed the actors and insulated them from the stress-producing factors, thus enabling them to function normally in a stressful environment. Bruno Bettelheim has argued that denial strategies are functionally adaptive in that they are often effective in shielding the individual from a complete realization of the shock in extreme situations (Bettelheim, 48-83). By employing such strategies individuals are able to work and function normally despite the dangers and difficulties they encounter. Indeed, such strategies were of critical importance in "normalizing" the situation at Port Chicago and protecting the enlisted men from massive psychological deterioration and demoralization.

Psychologist Martha Wolfenstein suggests that in predisaster situations minimization of the danger is a normal response. However, she also points out that individuals who have a realistic appreciation of the danger are more likely to survive a disaster with least harm to their mental health (Wolfenstein, 146-7). In this regard, it is noteworthy that the individual (Joseph Small) who was able to unite and mobilize the survivors after the explosion was also the individual who several times confronted the officers about the risk of an explosion before the disaster. Because he recognized the danger, perhaps Joe Small was better prepared psychologically to survive and respond to the explosion than those who discounted the danger. By experiencing feelings appropriate to the disaster before it

occurred, he was protected from being overwhelmed by its impact.

As is normal in the aftermath of traumatic disasters, many of the survivors experienced shock and disorientation. Fear of recurrence of the disaster was another common (and normal) reaction. However, these reactions were not so severe as to prevent the men from aiding the injured and helping in clearing away debris from the stricken base. There were no recorded instances of nervous breakdown following the explosion, and within days most of the men were back at work with routine barracks chores.

Due to the small size of my sample it is not possible to make generalizations with regard to the long-term effects of the disaster. Among the men I interviewed I did find some indications of "concentration camp syndrome" (irritability, restlessness, apprehensiveness), which affected survivors of Nazi atrocities (Chodoff, 345-348), but I found little evidence of the "survivor guilt" syndrome, which afflicted people who survived atomic disasters (Janis, 377-381). Some respondents were at first reluctant to discuss their experiences with me and expressed concern about possible repercussions to themselves or their families, but given that they were in fact imprisoned for their actions, we must regard this concern as in part reality-based, and not necessarily a sign of psychological imbalance.

Indeed, what is surprising about the men I interviewed

is the extent to which they appear not to have been psychically impaired by the trauma they experienced. It is possible that the confrontation (work stoppage) which followed the explosion effectively released tensions and fears which otherwise might have festered and produced mental health problems. Most of the respondents stated that they felt their actions were justified under the circumstances, and that they had no guilt or other misgivings about what they had done. Thus, the confrontation may have been protective of their mental health.

EPILOGUE

The Port Chicago incident was a crucible. At one level it was a severe test of character for the black enlisted men whose lives it touched and nearly destroyed. They faced double-jeopardy: To go back to work was dangerous and unacceptable, but to refuse to work was to risk imprisonment and even death. They believed that their hope lay in a collective refusal to work, yet collective action could be, and was, construed as mutiny. The men grappled with this dilemma and were torn by conflicting hopes and fears as they struggled to forge a collective response to what had become an intolerable situation. Each had to decide not once but several times whether to resist or capitulate. In effect, the Port Chicago rebellion was an attempt to transform an aggregate of individuals into a self-conscious collectivity. It was a spontaneous strike that threatened to become a full-fledged resistance movement.

Viewed from the perspective of institutional change the Port Chicago rebellion and other mass resistance struggles by black servicemen during World War II were instrumental in prompting the Navy to desegregate and to take steps to democratize the deployment of manpower in its various branches. Large, bureaucratic institutions are generally conservative and slow to change. Institutional change in such circumstances often requires both internal conflict and external pressure. The enlisted men's rebellion and the

pressures of outside community groups and political elites converged to bring about a fundamental change in the racial policies of the U.S. Navy. Thus, the Port Chicago "mutiny", which at first appeared to be a dismal failure, ultimately contributed to significant progressive change in a major social institution.

Today the remaining survivors of the Port Chicago disaster whom I interviewed are living quiet lives -- some still working, some unemployed, some retired. Many others are dead. Those still living are in their 50s and 60s. The men I interviewed still don't know what caused the explosion, and their feelings about the work stoppage are complex. Several men expressed pride at their act of resistance and the fact that the 50 accused men stuck together throughout their trial and imprisonment. Others were more circumspect, expressing concern about possible negative repercussions to themselves or their families even at this late date. At least one of the men, Martin Bordenave, has been working with the NAACP attorney, Marion Hill, in trying to get the case re-opened and the men's names cleared.

The town of Port Chicago no longer exists. Although damaged, the town survived the explosion, but in the late 1960s the town was razed to the ground in order to facilitate the expansion of the base. By then the base was busily involved in shipping ammunition and explosives to American forces in Vietnam, and it was also the target of

several anti-war demonstrations.

Most recently the base has come into the news again. Now renamed the Concord Naval Weapons Station, it was the subject of an award-winning documentary report, Broken Arrow, produced in 1980 by investigative reporter Stephen Talbot and aired on KQED-TV in San Francisco. Talbot asserted that the base is now a nuclear weapons storage and trans-shipment facility, and that there is evidence of unsafe handling procedures being employed. Needless to say, a disaster at the base now would make the Port Chicago explosion seem like a firecracker.

METHODOLOGICAL APPENDIX

Data Gathering

In reviewing data gathering strategies it soon became apparent that this was a methodological problem of some complexity which might necessitate a variety of approaches, what Denzin refers to as "triangulation" (Denzin, 26-27). As I weighed and rejected these, I first considered locating and interviewing a cross-sectional sample of the enlisted men and officers. This appeared to be the most efficacious way of obtaining in-depth materials from those who were present during the event. However, given that the events in question occurred more than 30 years ago and the overwhelming majority of the participants were discharged from service immediately after the war, it became evident that the time and costs involved in identifying and locating a truly representative cross-section would be prohibitive. Instead, I decided to focus my data-gathering efforts on the men who had taken part in the work stoppage, especially the 50 who were accused of mutiny.

The extensive documentation which I had accumulated would provide another point of entry for data collection and analysis. By treating the documents as though they were interviews I was able to code and analyze them in much the same manner as was done with the actual interviews I collected. The documents were especially helpful in providing information on the officers' behavior and

perspectives.

The task of locating survivors to interview proved to be quite challenging. From the transcript of the mutiny court-martial I complied a list of the 50 "mutineers". I began checking this list against local Bay Area telephone directories in the hope that some of the men might have settled in this area. I found what appeared to be the names of several of the men, but after talking with them I learned that they were not the individuals I was seeking; none of them had been at Port Chicago or in the Navy.

Since the Navy Judge Advocate General's office had been helpful in furnishing me with a copy of the trial transcript I took my problem to them. They informed me that any addresses that the Navy might have in its personnel files were not available for public scrutiny. However, after checking with the Navy's Bureau of Personnel, I was informed that if I provided them with a list of the individuals I wished to locate, and prepared a mailing consisting of an unaddressed outer envelope, a cover letter and a self-addressed return envelope, then the Bureau of Personnel would address the envelopes and mail them to the last known address for each individual on file. I prepared such a mailing for the 50 names and sent it to the Navy Department. Three weeks later I received the first response from a man living in New York City. Excitedly, I telephoned him and confirmed that he was indeed a Port Chicago survivor who had been involved in the work stoppage and trial. I asked if I

might visit him to conduct an interview and he agreed. Over the next few weeks I received three more responses from the mailing, all of which were followed up with telephone calls and requests for interviews. These men were new living in Washington, D.C., Charleston, S.C., and Montgomery, Ala.

Meanwhile, I had placed advertisements in several veterans publications and Newspapers, and I continued perusing telephone directories of other cities in hopes of locating additional survivors. After following up several false leads, I eventually located another survivor who was listed in a New Jersey telephone book. He also agreed to an interview.

I wrote to U.S. Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall to ask for an interview, but he declined, saying he remembered few details of the event. Fortunately, I was later able to track down the NAACP Legal Defense Fund files in a dusty old warehouse in Manhattan where I found copies of Marshall's appeal brief and a verbatim transcript of a meeting he had had with Navy officials about the case.

The Guggenheim Foundation had awarded me a grant to conduct the Port Chicago study, so I flew to New York, purchased an unlimited-mileage Greyhound bus ticket and spent two weeks traveling from New York to New Jersey to Washington and then south to Charleston and Montgomery. I visited the men at their homes and conducted structured but open-ended interviews with them. The interviews concentrated on descriptions of their experiences at Port

Chicago in the period before the explosion, the explosion itself, and the ensuing work stoppage and court martial. The interviews were tape-recorded and generally lasted from 1½ to two hours. Several interviews were conducted with one man, Joseph R. Small, the alleged "leader" of the mutiny.

Some months later the Veterans Administration agreed to do a similar blind mailing for me. Through this mailing I located four additional survivors, one of whom in turn led me to a tenth survivor. Three of these men lived in Los Angeles, two in New York. All of them agreed to be interviewed.

Meanwhile, the Navy department informed me that at least 12 of the 50 men accused of mutiny were now deceased and many others could not be located and were possibly also deceased. Given that the events in question occurred more than three decades ago, and given the high mortality rate among black males, I was not surprised to discover that many of the Port Chicago survivors were now dead. I felt fortunate to have been able to locate 10 survivors, nine of whom I was able to interview. All of these men (except one who was seriously injured in the explosion) had taken part in the work stoppage, and therefore had personal knowledge of the events leading up to that dramatic confrontation.

Interviewing

All of the men were curious about how I had located them and what my purpose was. Indeed, they were more than curious, they were suspicious, thinking that I had some

connection with the Navy or the government. Several expressed concern about possible repercussions to themselves or their families as a result of my research. One man asked that the interview not be conducted at his home since he was concerned that his son might overhear us and learn that he had been convicted of mutiny. Another man refused to accept my assurances of confidentiality and declined to be interviewed after having initially agreed.

I was not without misgivings myself. After the first interview (with the respondent who did not want his son to overhear us), I wrote a long, agonizing memo questioning my own motives. What right had I to pry into these men's lives, to expose them and their painful memories to public scrutiny? Was my motive really anything more than curiosity camouflaged as scholarly interest? Did I have some axe to grind? (I had been a draft resister during the Vietnam war.) Was I not exploiting their suffering? I had no satisfactory answers to these questions, and they haunted me through the entire research process.

But as more interviews took place I also came to believe that the interview experience itself was therapeutic, that the men were relieved to unburden themselves to a sympathetic listener. Moreover, I and my respondents became bonded by a common desire to "tell the world the truth" about what had transpired at Port Chicago. No monetary or other compensation was offered to my respondents, but for most of them I think that having the

opportunity to finally tell their story in full was its own reward.

In conducting each interview, two important problems had to be confronted. First, there was the problem of gaining the confidence of the respondents. Since most of the respondents had been labeled as "mutineers" and imprisoned for the activities I was asking them to describe, there was, naturally, some hesitancy on their part to be completely open and candid. How could they be sure that I was not a government agent trying to make more trouble for them? Although I had stressed my university affiliation and the provision for confidentiality of their responses, these facts were not especially reassuring to the men. However, their anxiety was reduced somewhat by the fact that I was black and that I had previously published writings on race relations. (I gave them samples of my work.) Nevertheless, it was still necessary for me to explicitly and frequently disavow any connection with the Navy.

Second, there was the problem of the validity of the responses. Cicourel observes that basic explanatory variables are located in the actor's social scene rather than the actor's personality (Cicourel, 95), but since the social scene in question was more than 30 years in the past, how could I be sure that I was not being presented with a distorted reconstruction of that scene? Several methods were employed to check the validity of responses. In the first place, certain recounted facts could be checked

against the documents in my possession. By checking several such facts for each interview I was able to establish the general reliability of each respondent. However, since the interviews covered much material that was not recorded in the documents, other means of verification of data had to be developed. Working on the assumption that a frequent "rehashing" of the events would have led to a reshaping of meanings and data, I tried to determine the extent of contact between interviewees since 1944, or other occasions at which the story might have been recounted. Fortunately, most of the interviewees had had no contact with each other since they were released from prison and discharged from the Navy. Moreover, all of the respondents told me that I was the first person with whom they had had any serious discussion of the event since it happened. Consequently, I concluded that cross-checking one respondent's statements with those of another provided a reliable method of verification.

This still left me with certain statements that could not be verified by cross-checking. In these cases I looked for internal consistency within the interview. Was the statement in question consistent with other statements in the interview? For example, if a respondent reported that he confronted an officer, I looked for evidence that this was consistent with his behavior in other situations. Finding consistency, I felt confident in accepting such statements at face value.

The interviews generally took the form of a chronology of the respondent's experiences from the time they entered the Navy until their discharge, probing for critical events and processes. I also asked them about family and social background, and their present situation and health. Ironically, as noted in the Introduction, the key processes of discounting and balancing were not discovered until the analysis phase following the interviews. Fortunately, the interview protocol included several questions about the men's grievances and their attitudes toward the work. These questions elicited descriptions of discounting and balancing, as came to be seen in the following two interview extracts.

Interviewer: How did the men feel about the danger of the work itself?

Respondent: I don't think that anybody really took this serious. They knew that this was explosive stuff, but nobody had ever seen any of it go off. So, therefore, they never really felt that it was really that dangerous. Because from time to time you would have accidents. For example, once I saw the noses of two 16-inch projectiles bent, which was just a cap. That cap would be removed before that shell would be fired and the fuse then would be attached. So naturally when you see a thing like that, and nothing happens, maybe it shakes you up momentarily. Or you would have, say, a net of five-inch projectiles that drops and falls all the way down and, of course, again nothing happens. So, really there wasn't that apprehension among the crews.

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Interviewer: Did the men have any specific grievances?

Respondent: Yeah, we had plenty of grievances. I mean eating conditions, recreational facilities, there was nothing there. We had plenty of grievances. We talked about it among ourselves, but it was never brought to any demonstration.

Interviewer: There was no possibility of bringing it to higher authority or getting any kind of changes?

Respondent: Well, I'll tell you something. At the time we considered our position as almost the norm. I mean the Navy up to that time had no black people in it. And being in the Navy and being able to sleep between white sheets and have three square meals a day, hot meals, this was a privilege that the black man hadn't enjoyed, and so we didn't put up much of a squawk about it.

Coding and Analysis

Immediately upon completion all taped inteviews were listened to and summarized with an eye to emergent categories for coding. Subsequently, all interviews were transcribed and more formally coded using annotations in the margins. Documents were similarly coded.

As the coding proceeded, analytic and methodological memos were prepared which discussed the significant theoretical findings and methodological implications of the research. These memos, when used in conjunction with a detailed research log, helped to identify and clarify analytic and methodological problems in the research.

Because of the large mass of the interview and

documentary material I had collected, I decided to use a loose-leaf binder with separators to organize the research material. The binder was arranged chronologically by experiential categories -- those events and experiences which the interviews and documents revealed as significant. These included entry and training, work, grievances, relations with officers, the explosion and aftermath, the work stoppage, barge imprisonment, interrogation, trial and outcome. Entries in the binder indexed incidents reported in the interviews and documents, and coded these in terms of conceptual categories. In this manner the organizational binder proved to be extremely helpful. It enabled me to organize the huge mass of historical and oral data I had collected and integrate this with the unfolding sociological analysis.

ABBREVIATIONS USED IN CITATIONS
(See Primary Sources)

COI -- Record of Proceedings of Court of Inquiry

GCM -- Trial Transcript, General Court Martial, "Case of Julius J. Allen, et al."

GLH -- "U.S. Training Center, Great Lakes, Illinois"

JBF -- General Correspondence Files, Secretary of the Navy James B. Forrestal

LDF -- General Office Files, NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund

NAACP GOF -- General Office Files, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People

NUL -- General Office Files (Executive Director), National Urban League

PCH -- "War Time History of U.S. Naval Magazine, Port Chicago, California"

PR -- Press Releases, 1944, Twelfth Naval District

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