

**RACIAL INCIDENTS ONBOARD USS *KITTY HAWK* (CVA-63) AND
USS *CONSTELLATION* (CVA-64)
(1972)**

U.S. Congress. House. Committee on Armed Forces. *Report by the Special Subcommittee on Disciplinary Problems in the US Navy*. 92nd Cong., 2d sess., 1973, H.A.S.C. 92-81. Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1973.

January 2, 1973

[...]

Immediately following air operations aboard the *Kitty Hawk* on the evening of October 12, 1972, a series of incidents broke out wherein group of blacks, armed with chains, wrenches, bars, broomsticks and other dangerous weapons, went marauding through sections of the ship disobeying orders to cease, terrorizing the crew, and seeking out white personnel for senseless beating with fists and with weapons which resulted in extremely serious injury to three men and the medical treatment of many more, including some blacks. While engaged in this conduct some were heard to shout, "Kill the son-of-a-bitch; kill the white trash; wipe him out!" Others shouted, "They are killing our brothers."

Aboard the U.S.S. *Constellation*, during the period of November 3-4, 1972, what has been charitably described as "unrest" and as "sit-in" took place while the ship was underway for training exercises. The vast majority of the dissident sailors were black and were allegedly protesting several grievances they claimed were in need of correction.

These sailors were off-loaded as part of a "beach detachment", given liberty, refused to return to the ship, and were later processed only for this *minor* disciplinary infraction (6 hours of unauthorized absence) at Naval Air Station, North Island, near San Diego.

[...]

II. FINDINGS, OPINIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

A. FINDINGS

[...]

3. The subcommittee has been unable to determine any precipitous cause for rampage aboard U.S.S. *Kitty Hawk*. Not only was there not one case wherein racial discrimination could be pinpointed, but there is no evidence which indicated that the blacks who participated in that incident perceived racial discrimination, either in general or any specific, of such a nature as to justify belief that violent reaction was required.

4. The subcommittee finds that the incident aboard U.S.S. *Constellation* was the result of a carefully orchestrated demonstration of passive resistance wherein a small number of blacks, certainly no more than 20-25, in a well-organized campaign, willfully created among other blacks the belief that white racism existed in the Navy and aboard that ship. The subcommittee, again in this instance as with the incident aboard *Kitty Hawk*, found no specific example of racial discrimination. In this case, however, it is obvious that the participants perceived that racial discrimination existed. Several events were made to appear as examples of racial discrimination when, in fact, such was not the case.

5. Testimony revealed that one of the triggering devices for the dissident activity aboard *Constellation* was a misunderstanding, particularly among the young blacks, which led them to believe that in order to reduce the number of personnel aboard the ship to the authorized level, general discharges were about to be awarded to 250 black crew members.

In fact, the ship was in process of reducing its complement by 250 personnel in order to make room for air wing personnel who would embark prior to the forthcoming combat deployment. At the same time the captain had directed that certain records be reviewed and that those he considered to be troublemakers, if they qualified for administrative discharge, be notified of the ship's intent to commence processing of the required paperwork.

It is unfortunate that this latter discharge procedure was initiated against six crewmembers in one day without adequate explanation of the justification for such action--especially since all six were black and this promoted the feeling that racial discrimination was the cause. In addition, the lack of counselling pertaining to the poor performance marks received by those being considered for administrative discharge caused notification of pending discharge to serve as traumatic incidents to those who were to receive them.

There is strong evidence, however, that these misunderstandings were fostered and fanned by a small group of skilled agitators within the ranks of the young black seamen.

6. The subcommittee was informed that the review, conducted by Naval Personnel Research Activity, San Diego, has found no racial discrimination in the punishments awarded by the Commanding Officer, U.S.S. *Constellation*.

The subcommittee found no evidence that that conclusion was in error.

B. OPINIONS

1. The subcommittee is of the position that the riot on *Kitty Hawk* consisted of unprovoked assaults by a very few men, most of whom were below-average mental capacity, most of whom had been aboard for less than one year, and all of whom were black. This group, as a whole, acted as "thugs" which raises doubt as to whether they should ever have been accepted into military service in the first place. in the civil sector, military life now has a certain appeal based upon financial rewards. Certainly this aspect cannot be overlooked when considering the meaning of rising reenlistment rates.

[...]