

114TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

S. 1775

To direct the Secretary of Homeland Security to accept additional documentation when considering the application for veterans status of an individual who performed service as a coastwise merchant seaman during World War II, and for other purposes.

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

JULY 15, 2015

Mr. MURPHY (for himself, Ms. COLLINS, and Mr. BLUMENTHAL) introduced the following bill; which was read twice and referred to the Committee on Veterans' Affairs

A BILL

To direct the Secretary of Homeland Security to accept additional documentation when considering the application for veterans status of an individual who performed service as a coastwise merchant seaman during World War II, and for other purposes.

1 *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-*
2 *tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

3 **SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.**

4 This Act may be cited as the “World War II Mer-
5 chant Mariner Service Act”.

6 **SEC. 2. FINDINGS.**

7 Congress makes the following findings:

1 (1) The Merchant Marine Act, 1936 established
2 the United States Maritime Commission, and stated
3 as a matter of policy that the United States should
4 have a merchant marine that is “capable of serving
5 as a naval and military auxiliary in time of war or
6 national emergency”.

7 (2) The Social Security Act Amendments of
8 1939 (Public Law 76–379) expanded the definition
9 of employment to include service “on or in connec-
10 tion with an American vessel under contract of serv-
11 ice which is entered into within the United States or
12 during the performance of which the vessel touches
13 at a port in the United States, if the employee is
14 employed on and in connection with such vessel”.

15 (3) The Joint Resolution to repeal sections 2,
16 3, and 6 of the Neutrality Act of 1939, and for
17 other purposes (Public Law 77–294; 55 Stat. 764)
18 repealed section 6 of the Neutrality Act of 1939 (re-
19 lated to the arming of United States vessels) and
20 authorized the President during the national emer-
21 gency to arm or permit to arm any United States
22 vessel.

23 (4) On February 7, 1942, President Franklin
24 D. Roosevelt, through Executive Order Number
25 9054, established the War Shipping Administration

1 that was charged with building or purchasing, and
2 operating the civilian shipping vessels needed for the
3 war effort.

4 (5) During World War II, United States mer-
5 chant mariners transported goods and materials
6 through “contested waters” to the various combat
7 theaters.

8 (6) At the conclusion of World War II, United
9 States merchant mariners were responsible for
10 transporting several million members of the United
11 States Armed Forces back to the United States.

12 (7) The GI Bill Improvement Act of 1977
13 (Public Law 95–202) provided that the Secretary of
14 Defense could determine that service for the Armed
15 Forces by organized groups of civilians, or contrac-
16 tors, be considered “active service” for benefits ad-
17 ministered by the Veterans’ Administration.

18 (8) Department of Defense Directive 1000.20
19 directed that the determination be made by the Sec-
20 retary of the Air Force, and established the Civilian/
21 Military Service Review Board and Advisory Panel.

22 (9) In 1987, three merchant mariners along
23 with the AFL–CIO sued Edward C. Aldridge, Sec-
24 retary of the Air Force, challenging the denial of
25 their application for veterans status. In Schumacher

1 v. Aldridge (665 F. Supp. 41 (D.D.C. 1987)), the
2 Court determined that Secretary Aldridge had failed
3 to “articulate clear and intelligible criteria for the
4 administration” of the application approval process.

5 (10) During World War II, women were repeat-
6 edly denied issuance of official documentation af-
7 firming their merchant marine seamen status by the
8 War Shipping Administration.

9 (11) Coast Guard Information Sheet #77
10 (April 1992) identifies the following acceptable
11 forms of documentation for eligibility meeting the
12 requirements set forth in the GI Bill Improvement
13 Act of 1977 (Public Law 95–202) and the Veterans
14 Programs Enhancement Act of 1998 (Public Law
15 105–368):

16 (A) Certificate of shipping and discharge
17 forms.

18 (B) Continuous discharge books (ship’s
19 deck or engine logbooks).

20 (C) Company letters showing vessel names
21 and dates of voyages.

22 (12) Coast Guard Commandant Order of 20
23 March 1944 relieved masters of tugs, towboats, and
24 seagoing barges of the responsibility of submitting
25 reports of seamen shipped or discharged on forms,

1 meaning certificates of shipping and discharge forms
2 are not available to all eligible individuals seeking to
3 document their eligibility.

4 (13) Coast Guard Information Sheet #77
5 (April 1992) states that “deck logs were tradition-
6 ally considered to be the property of the owners of
7 the ships. After World War II, however, the deck
8 and engine logbooks of vessels operated by the War
9 Shipping Administration were turned over to that
10 agency by the ship owners, and were destroyed dur-
11 ing the 1970s”, meaning that continuous discharge
12 books are not available to all eligible individuals
13 seeking to document their eligibility.

14 (14) Coast Guard Information Sheet #77
15 (April 1992) states “some World War II period log
16 books do not name ports visited during the voyage
17 due to wartime security restrictions”, meaning that
18 company letters showing vessel names and dates of
19 voyages are not available to all eligible individuals
20 seeking to document their eligibility.

21 **SEC. 3. METHODS FOR VALIDATING CERTAIN SERVICE**
22 **CONSIDERED TO BE ACTIVE SERVICE BY THE**
23 **SECRETARY OF VETERANS AFFAIRS.**

24 (a) IN GENERAL.—For the purposes of verifying that
25 an individual performed service under honorable condi-

1 tions that satisfies the requirements of a coastwise mer-
2 chant seaman who is recognized pursuant to section 401
3 of the GI Bill Improvement Act of 1977 (Public Law 95–
4 202; 38 U.S.C. 106 note) as having performed active duty
5 service for the purposes described in subsection (c)(1), the
6 Secretary of Homeland Security shall accept the following:

7 (1) In the case of an individual who served on
8 a coastwise merchant vessel seeking such recognition
9 for whom no applicable Coast Guard shipping or dis-
10 charge form, ship logbook, merchant mariner’s docu-
11 ment or Z-card, or other official employment record
12 is available, the Secretary shall provide such recogni-
13 tion on the basis of applicable Social Security Ad-
14 ministration records submitted for or by the indi-
15 vidual, together with validated testimony given by
16 the individual or the primary next of kin of the indi-
17 vidual that the individual performed such service
18 during the period beginning on December 7, 1941,
19 and ending on December 31, 1946.

20 (2) In the case of an individual who served on
21 a coastwise merchant vessel seeking such recognition
22 for whom the applicable Coast Guard shipping or
23 discharge form, ship logbook, merchant mariner’s
24 document or Z-card, or other official employment
25 record has been destroyed or otherwise become un-

1 available by reason of any action committed by a
2 person responsible for the control and maintenance
3 of such form, logbook, or record, the Secretary shall
4 accept other official documentation demonstrating
5 that the individual performed such service during pe-
6 riod beginning on December 7, 1941, and ending on
7 December 31, 1946.

8 (3) For the purpose of determining whether to
9 recognize service allegedly performed during the pe-
10 riod beginning on December 7, 1941, and ending on
11 December 31, 1946, the Secretary shall recognize
12 masters of seagoing vessels or other officers in com-
13 mand of similarly organized groups as agents of the
14 United States who were authorized to document any
15 individual for purposes of hiring the individual to
16 perform service in the merchant marine or dis-
17 charging an individual from such service.

18 (b) TREATMENT OF OTHER DOCUMENTATION.—
19 Other documentation accepted by the Secretary of Home-
20 land Security pursuant to subsection (a)(2) shall satisfy
21 all requirements for eligibility of service during the period
22 beginning on December 7, 1941, and ending on December
23 31, 1946.

24 (c) BENEFITS ALLOWED.—

1 (1) BURIAL BENEFITS ELIGIBILITY.—Service of
2 an individual that is considered active duty pursuant
3 to subsection (a) shall be considered as active duty
4 service with respect to providing burial benefits
5 under chapters 23 and 24 of title 38, United States
6 Code, to the individual.

7 (2) MEDALS, RIBBONS, AND DECORATIONS.—
8 An individual whose service is recognized as active
9 duty pursuant to subsection (a) may be awarded an
10 appropriate medal, ribbon, or other military decora-
11 tion based on such service.

12 (3) STATUS OF VETERAN.—An individual whose
13 service is recognized as active duty pursuant to sub-
14 section (a) shall be honored as a veteran but shall
15 not be entitled by reason of such recognized service
16 to any benefit that is not described in this sub-
17 section.

18 (d) DETERMINATION OF COASTWISE MERCHANT
19 SEAMAN.—The Secretary of Homeland Security shall
20 verify that an individual performed service under honor-
21 able conditions that satisfies the requirements of a coast-
22 wise merchant seaman pursuant to this section without
23 regard to the sex, age, or disability of the individual dur-
24 ing the period in which the individual served as such a
25 coastwise merchant seaman.

1 (e) PRIMARY NEXT OF KIN DEFINED.—In this sec-
2 tion, the term “primary next of kin” means, with respect
3 to an individual seeking recognition for service under this
4 section, the closest living relative of the individual who was
5 alive during the period of such service.

6 (f) EFFECTIVE DATE.—This section shall take effect
7 90 days after the date of the enactment of this Act.

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