

AN ACT CONCERNING THE AWARD OF THE CONNECTICUT WARTIME SERVICE MEDAL TO MEMBERS OF THE US MERCHANT MARINE

PROPOSED BILL No. 373

TO: COMMITTEE ON SELECT COMMITTEE ON VETERAN'S AFFAIRS

I stand in favor of this legislation with modification.

Over 1500 US Merchant Marine vessels were sunk in WWII. These men suffered the highest U.S. casualty rate of the war with 1 of every 26 dying. The US Marine Corps was next with 1 of every 34 dying. Most mariners were blown to death, incinerated, froze or starved to death in prison camps. Over 12,000 were wounded and 700 were prisoners of war. Of the 250,000 Merchant Mariners in WW II who served many were too young for the Armed Forces (16-17 ½ years), too old (over 45) or declared 4F (physically unfit). Many had 1 eye only, 1 leg etc. yet honored the call to serve their nation. Veteran status was never granted until 1988 by Congress even though over 500 Merchant Mariners are buried in our National Cemeteries in the fields of France. These men were denied all of the typical veterans benefits as we know them: VA Home loan, VA Education rights, VA Hospital rights etc and were even compelled to pay for their own war related medical expenses. Recently the US House of Representatives passed HR 23 granting a \$1000/mo stipend to those WW II Merchant Marine Veterans still alive today.

Let us not continue the national neglect that befell the WW II Merchant Marine veterans for those Connecticut Merchant Marine veterans who have served our country in the many follow-on wars: Korea, Vietnam, Desert Storm, Iraqi Freedom and Afghanistan.

Mariners serving in these theaters were and are all volunteers, subject to the Uniform Code of Military Justice, indebted to 1 year of service under Seaman's Articles, under command of the US Navy and or Military Sealift Command / Military Sea Transportation Service thru the Dept of Defense. Many gave their lives or were injured on the famous Long Tau River in Vietnam / harbors of Inchon and Pusan, Korea while taking hostile fire. Others have navigated the mine laden waters of the Straits of Hormuz and the Arabian Sea carrying the weaponry, fuel etc required to support our military in combat.

They all voluntarily put themselves at great risk for our nation in all of these theatres of war.

They deserve to be recognized as much as the WW II mariners and a medal to our Connecticut fellow citizens who served in this way is a small price to pay as a sign of appreciation and thanks.

I respectfully would suggest however that the language in the proposed law be modified to read "who served in time of war and who has confirmed active service with the United States

Merchant Marine in a war zone". This statement would be consistent with the language given by the US Maritime Administration for the awarding of various Merchant Marine medals.

Thank You

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US Merchant Marine Officer/ LT, USNR....1966-1970

SS Selma Victory, Republic of Vietnam, 1966-67

Past Member, Superintendent's Council, US Merchant Marine Academy

Past Director, Fort Schuyler Maritime Alumni Association

Past VP, USMMA Parents Association

Member, Catholic War Veterans, Danbury Post 1042

Lifetime Member, Navy League