



July 9, 2013

The Honorable G.K. Butterfield (NC-01)
U.S. House of Representatives
2305 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative Butterfield,

On behalf of the Association of the United States Navy (AUSN), we applaud and support your bill H.R. 1288, the World War II Merchant Mariner Service Act, which would establish methods to determine eligibility for and ascribe access to Veteran's benefits by bestowing Veteran status for coastwise merchant seamen in honorable service during World War II.

Access to Veteran's benefits under the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944 and subsequent GI Bills have offered benefits to servicemen and women who performed their duties in times of war. Although the United States Merchant Marine is considered an element of the United States Armed Forces in times of war, coastwise merchant seamen were excluded from the initial GI Bill. Upon signing the bill into law President Roosevelt stated, "I trust Congress will soon provide similar opportunities to members of the merchant marine who have risked their lives time and time again during war for the welfare of their country." While the GI Bill has now been made accessible to merchant seamen who served between 7 December 1941 and 31 December 1946, the documentation required to receive benefits was in many cases destroyed or forgotten, denying important recognition and benefits to many surviving mariners.

This bipartisan bill, H.R. 1288, would direct the Secretary of Homeland Security to consider alternative methods of documentation for mariners who served honorably during World War II for the purposes of the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to recognize them as Veterans of the Armed Forces. In the absence of shipping or discharge forms, ships logbooks, documents, or employment records, this legislation would receive such evidence as Social Security Administration records and validated testimony. This legislation also recognizes the authority of masters and other commanding officers to document an individual for purposes of hiring for the merchant marine. Finally this legislation considers any service so recognized as Active Duty service for purposes of Veterans' burial benefits and military commendations.

Thank you for taking an active role in such an important issue to the Armed Services community by introducing legislation that will help maintain the honor and sacrifice of our nation's mariners. Please feel free to contact me with any questions or concerns at 703-548-5800 or at Anthony.Wallis@ausn.org.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Anthony A. Wallis".

Anthony A. Wallis
Legislative Director, AUSN