

STATEMENT

Of

IAN T. ALLISON
P. O. Box 1705
Santa Rosa, CA 95402
Telephone: (707) 545-4171

On

HR23

Belated Thank You to the Merchant Mariners of World War II Act of 2005

House Committee on Veteran's Affairs

Subcommittee on Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs

April 6, 2006

Mr. Chairman:

My name is Ian T. Allison and I strongly encourage the passage of HR23, the Belated Thank You to the Merchant Mariners of World War II Act of 2005. I represent 6,300 or more Merchant Marine Veterans of World War II who are seeking their recognition and benefits under the 1944 G. I. Bill of Rights. This group is a non-profit unincorporated committee of Veterans registered with the Internal Revenue Service as the Just Compensation Committee. The J. C. C. has asked me to appear today before this Sub-committee to represent their interests. The statements made here today have been supplied to me by various members of our committee for your enlightenment. I am requesting that the statements of Stanley Willner, Bruce Felknor, Perry Adams and Burt Young be introduced into the records.

Passage of HR23 would be the final chapter of what has been a ragged response by the government to men who placed their lives in danger as they served their country. There might be some Members in Congress who are not historically informed in what happened to some 230,000 seamen, both black and white, from the end of World War II to the present and perhaps I can help present the issue. The Merchant Mariners of World War II was the only service that was not segregated.

It has been said that when one dies, so dies one's influence and power. An so it was that when President Franklin Roosevelt died, his directions to his advisors that the Merchant Seamen of World War II should be accorded benefits like veterans of other services also died. The influence of dissenting Members and some of the animosities left over after the war from competing services and civilian service groups prevented benefits

being given to Merchant Seamen. Many service people who might have dug ditches in Louisiana and never stepped outside the United States got the full GI Bill, GI loans, and much more; but those who sailed the Murmansk Run, were sunk in burning oil, or frigid waters of the North Atlantic, got nothing. In fact, their pay, which has been reviewed countless times, stopped the moment they went into the water.

It was not until Senator Barry Goldwater in 1977 made the effort to recognize the women pilots with Veteran recognition did the same bill, PL 95-202, permit Merchant Seamen to apply for Veteran recognition. Thus began the constant misinformation and countless examples of hatred for the Merchant Seamen's efforts to secure Veterans recognition. There was a growing lack of concern for Congress to do what was right, recognize the Merchant Marine Veterans of World War II.

The first stage of recognition efforts by the seamen came after a bitter court battle between the Maritime Trades Unions and the Pentagon. A Federal Court Judge, In 1986, ruled against the Pentagon, stating that the Merchant Seamen had been discriminated against. He wrote in his finding that the Navy and certain Veteran's groups bitterly opposed any recognition. While the Federal Court recognized the majority of Merchant Seamen as qualified, these men only received a tombstone, a flag a discharge and limited medical attention. Those who went to sea after August 15, 1945 to December 31, 1946, the official end of the war, received nothing. They became the Denied Seamen. The Defense Department went to war against this group.

This started phase two of official Congressional denial. It took ten years of effort on the part of the Merchant Mariners Fairness Committee, through 5 sessions of Congress, until finally HR1126 with Rep. Lane Evans as sponsor and 337 of his fellow

members as Co-sponsors, to recognize the Denied Seamen with a veteran's discharge. A discharge that they had to pay \$30.00 to buy, had to pay for their medals, and received only a tombstone, a flag and a piece of paper. Nothing else as a benefit. We are most fortunate that many of the Co-sponsors of HR1126 are still members of the House of Representatives, members of the Veteran's Committee and members of this Subcommittee.

They do not have knowledge of how slanderous misinformation was continually sent to House members by various military liaison stating that Merchant Seamen were unqualified to be Veterans as they went on strike during the war. The story by Walter Winchell about Merchant Seamen refusing to unload munitions and cargo at Guadalcanal on a Sunday was repudiated and the reporter was in disgrace. No ship was ever delayed in the war because of any labor problems. It is so hard to counter lies, especially when many Members had no direct knowledge of the history of the war. Today we call it "bad-mouthing" your opposition.

Of the 230,000 men in the Merchant Marine in 1945, probably less than 10,000 are still alive. The youngest who joined the service in 1945 are now 78-79 years old, many in poor health. The majority are men in their mid-80s, as myself. I am 86 dedicating 100% of my time to see the record set right by passage of HR23. There is still time for a grateful nation to say Thank You to a thinning rank of men.

We are now at stage three. Sixty years is a long time for any service person to wait for proper recognition. Sixty years is a long time to spend trying to correct history written to denigrate what we thought was service to our country.

They say America is strong because of the will of the people and their concern for each other. Passage of HR23 will go a long way in proving this to be so.

Please recommend that HR23 be passed and let's clean up the record. These blemishes should not be part of our country's record.

Respectfully,

IAN T. ALLISON