

**Remarks for
Secretary Ray LaHood**

**Veterans Day Ceremony
National WWII Memorial**

November 11, 2009

I am honored to join Senator Akaka and other distinguished guests today as we remember the extraordinary service and sacrifice of our men and women in uniform.

We gather here to honor all the veterans who have defended freedom and democracy against the forces of tyranny and oppression around the world.

But today -- before their voices fade into history -- we especially want to recall the bravery, skill, and camaraderie of the generation who fought in the Second World War.

And of those, I would like to pay special tribute to the United States Merchant Marine.

Throughout our history, our Armed Forces could not fight a war overseas without the Merchant Marine and the commercial ships they commanded, filled with supplies.

In World War II, when our troops and their cargo needed overseas transport, the U.S. Merchant Marine was there – crossing hostile waters and sacrificing thousands of lives to complete their mission.

When critical evacuations were needed during the conflict with Korea, the U.S. Merchant Marine was there to rescue thousands of U.N. troops, refugees, cargo, and vehicles.

During the first Gulf War, when troops required four times as much equipment as the Normandy Invasion, the U.S. Merchant Marine was there to deliver life-saving tanks, armored vehicles, and helicopters.

Today, more than 85 percent of the supplies and equipment for the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan are carried aboard ships crewed by civilian mariners.

Today, we remember all these brave individuals who risked their lives crossing the Atlantic, the Pacific, the Persian Gulf, and many other seas to transport essential goods or bring soldiers and others out of harm's way.

General Dwight D. Eisenhower said it best:

“When final victory is ours, there is no organization that will share its credit more deservedly than the Merchant Marine.”

On behalf of everyone at the United States Department of Transportation and the Maritime Administration, I want to thank the U.S. Merchant Marine, and all of our veterans, for their selfless devotion to our country.

We must also acknowledge the men and women of the Armed Services who protect us today: soldiers, sailors, airmen, guardians, and marines who serve us in these times of conflict and are proudly and ably carrying on the legacy of the Greatest Generation.

Thank you.

And may God bless America and protect those in the Armed Services.