

TP 5908



THE SECRETARY OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

WASHINGTON

June 26, 2008

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The Honorable Daniel K. Akaka
Chairman
Committee on Veterans' Affairs
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Mr. Chairman:

I am responding to your letter regarding Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) outreach to Merchant Mariners and other groups of individuals with active military service during World War II as established under Public Law 95-202.

The Veterans Benefits Administration contacted the Commanding Officer at the U.S. Coast Guard National Maritime Center to coordinate our efforts in finding the most effective ways to reach out to Merchant Mariners about VA benefits they have earned through their service. VA is now seeking points of contact for those other groups of individuals who have active military service during World War II as established under Public Law 95-202. VA will also work with Veterans Service Organizations that have Merchant Mariners and other groups that have achieved veteran status under Public Law 95-202 as part of their constituency to identify those veterans for outreach services.

On the VA Web site, <http://www.vba.va.gov/bln/21/Benefits>, there is a detailed fact sheet that describes the benefits that may be available to certain Merchant Mariners, what constitutes "qualified service" for benefit eligibility purposes, and how to obtain documentation of such service. A copy of this fact sheet is enclosed for your review. In addition, VA's annually revised booklet, *Federal Benefits for Veterans and Dependents*, contains specific benefits eligibility information for Merchant Mariners and other groups who have provided military-related service. This booklet is available in hardcopy and on our Web site.

I hope this information is helpful to you. A similar response was provided to Senator Burr.

Sincerely yours,

James B. Peake, M.D.

Enclosure

Benefits for Merchant Marines

On January 19, 1988, the Secretary of the Air Force declared certain Merchant Marine service as qualifying for Veterans benefits. Merchant seamen who served in active oceangoing service from December 7, 1941 to August 15, 1945 are considered to be veterans. Also eligible are Civil Service crewmembers serving aboard U.S. Army Transport Service and Naval Transportation Service vessels in oceangoing service. **If you wish to be considered for VA benefits, you should apply for a discharge certificate (DD Form 214) by completing DD Form 2168 (Application For Discharge of Member or Survivor of Member of Group Certified To Have Performed Active Duty With the Armed Services of the United States) and sending it to:**

**Commanding Officer (NMC-42)
National Maritime Center
100 Forbes Drive
Martinsburg, WV 25404
Main Inquiry Line: 1-888-I-ASK-NMC (1-888-427-5662)
Alternate Line: 1-304-433-3400**

The discharge certificate issued by the Coast Guard will reflect dates of all wartime voyages. The remark section will show inclusive dates of each voyage. Each voyage will be considered a separate period of active service in determining eligibility for benefits and services.

In general, merchant marine veterans who obtain discharge certificates and their survivors may be eligible for the following benefits from the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA):

Disability Compensation – The VA pays compensation for disabilities incurred or aggravated during military service. It is of primary importance to list information on the application form showing dates and places of medical treatment received in service which relate to the condition for which you are claiming service connection. If medical records are available, please include them with your application. If not, the VA will make every effort to obtain the records. **Use VA Form 21-526 to apply.**

Dependency and Indemnity Compensation – Payments are authorized for surviving spouses, unmarried children under 18 (as well as certain helpless children and those between 18 and 23 if attending a VA-approved school) and certain parents of veterans who died from service connected disabilities. Surviving spouses and children **use VA Form 21-534 to apply.** Dependent parents use VA Form 21-535.

Disability Pension – For wartime veterans, surviving spouses and children with limited incomes. Veterans who are permanently and totally disabled because of nonservice-connected disability may be eligible. Veterans **use VA Form 21-526 to apply;** survivors **use VA Form 21-534.**

Medical Care – VA provides a comprehensive medical benefits package for all enrolled veterans. The enrollment system is based on priority groups to ensure that health care benefits are readily available to all enrolled veterans. Veterans eligible to be enrolled will be assigned into 1 of 8 Priority Groups with 1 being the highest and Priority Group 8 the lowest. Veterans can apply for enrollment on-line or by reporting to a local VA health care facility.

Dental Treatment – Treatment is available for veterans with dental disabilities resulting from combat wounds or service injuries.

Home Loan Guaranty – The VA will guarantee your loan for the purchase of a home, manufactured home or condominium. **Apply for a certificate of eligibility on VA Form 26-1880.**

Burial Benefits – The VA provides certain burial benefits, including interment in a national cemetery, a headstone or marker, partial reimbursement for burial expenses and a burial flag. Postmortem requests for burial in a national cemetery should be made to the director of the cemetery in which burial is desired. **Application for the burial allowance should be made on VA Form 21-530, for a headstone or marker on VA Form 40-1330, and for a burial flag on VA Form 21-2008.**

GI Insurance – Life insurance (up to \$10,000) is available for veterans with service-connected disabilities.

Vocational Rehabilitation – In limited circumstances, eligibility for vocational rehabilitation may be established. Basic eligibility requires a service-connected disability rated by VA at 20%, however there are certain exceptions and eligibility will be determined on the merits of individual cases. If eligibility is established, the VA will pay tuition, books, tools or other expenses and provide a monthly living allowance. Employment assistance is also available to help a rehabilitated veteran get a job. **Use VA Form 28-1900 to apply.**

IMPORTANT NOTE: Section 402 of P.L. 105-368, “Veterans Programs Enhancement Act of 1998”, amended title 46, United States Code, by adding chapter 112, which provides that the “qualified service” of certain merchant mariners between August 16, 1945, and December 31, 1946, would be deemed active duty service for purposes of benefits eligibility under chapters 23 (Burial Benefits) and 24 (National Cemeteries and Memorials) of title 38, United States Code. Depending on the type of merchant marine service, certification of “qualified service” must come from the Department of Transportation or the Department of Defense.

Basic eligibility has thus been extended to covered merchant mariners for the following benefits: burial flags, burial allowance for certain indigent wartime veterans, plot allowance payable to a State for burial in certain “state owned” cemeteries or cemetery sections, headstones and markers, internment in national cemeteries, markers in memorial areas of national cemeteries, and markers in memorial areas of Arlington National Cemetery. In general, benefits may be

provided only for deaths occurring after November 11, 1998. However, in the case of an initial burial or columbarium placement in a national cemetery after November 11, 1998, benefits incident to burial and the provision of a headstone or marker are authorized regardless of the date of death.

For further information, please consult the following list of VA toll-free numbers for the number which applies to your specific needs or circumstances:

Nationwide 1-800-827-1000

VA Life Insurance 1-800-669-8477

**Telecommunications
Device for Deaf 1-800-829-4833**

Health Benefits 1-877-222-8387

Or you may visit us at our web site: www.va.gov

You may also apply for benefits on-line at: <http://vabenefits.vba.va.gov>

Application forms may be downloaded at: <http://www.vba.va.gov/pubs/forms1.htm>

This information was updated in July 2007 by the Compensation and Pension Service, Outreach Staff.