

Hi, Fred Nelson for Community Comment,

This commentary was meant for Memorial Day but when I think about it, any day is the proper day to honor all Veterans who have given their lives to defend our freedoms and the American way of life. We think of them as Army soldiers, Marines, Navy sailors, Coastguardsmen and Air Force members, mere youngsters who never had a chance 'live' life. Don't forget those who were 'old men' serving as career service members long before the war started, who left behind wives and growing families, deprived of a husband and father's love and devotion. Another group, ignored in many cases, is the merchant seamen of World War Two. These men did not belong to a military organization, they were unarmed, and some of them did not qualify to join the Armed Forces due to physical problems and or age with ages ranging from fifteen to seventy yet they bled when wounded and died as any other human. They were known to many as 'draft dodgers' who made 'big money'. Think a minute, 'draft dodger'? Not when you put yourself on the line knowing that you might never see tomorrow's sun because of the chance of your ship being hit by an enemy torpedo. Your compensation was on a scale according to the risk involved in a designated "War Zone" of which there were three. In other words, you were given hazard pay if you happened to be in or near a battle zone. You were on a ship controlled by the government with a civilian captain and crew, paid by the steam ship company who owned the ship. In the U.S. Navy, if your ship was sunk and you were a survivor, you were rescued and cared for by the navy who either reassigned or discharged you, depending on your physical condition. If you were a merchant seaman and your ship was sunk, your pay stopped upon the ship sinking. You, the survivor would be cared for by your rescuers to a point. Many times, under varying circumstances, you were left to find and pay your own way home. You as a merchant seaman knew of these circumstances and you were free to resign your job when a voyage was completed. There was nothing to indicate that you had to continue sailing yet these men kept right on sailing, hoping for the best, asking their maker to leave their name off the next incoming torpedo. President Franklin Roosevelt wanted Congress to include the Mariners in the G.I. Bill of Rights but congress said no. In 1988 the government was forced to recognize World War Two Mariners as veterans due to a class action lawsuit. That allowed them access to Veteran's hospitals and a burial flag. Sixteen hundred ships were sunk and damaged with one out of every twenty six Mariners killed. Please don't forget them and thanks locally to Ocean View Cemetery and the Southwest Rotary for remembering.

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